

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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The Company of the Committed

by Dan Trygg

“...*make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ *teaching them to obey* all that I commanded you...”
Matthew 28:19-20

“And why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and *do not do what I say?* ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to Me, and *hears My words, and acts upon them*, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who *dug deep* and laid a foundation upon the rock; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”
Luke 6:46-48

“This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, ‘God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.’ ⁶ If we *say* that we have fellowship with Him and *yet walk in the darkness*, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”
1 John 1:5-7

One thing about God: He makes His expectations very clear. There is no way you can read the Bible, either the Old Testament or the New Testament, and miss what He is looking for in people. **He is looking for people who are willing to devote themselves to honoring and serving Him. Serving Him means obeying Him.** It means doing things His way, and putting Him first. He is not to be an afterthought in our lives, or someone to whom we throw the leftover crumbs of our busy lives. **He expects to be the center, the rock foundation, the main focus for our lives. Everything is to somehow revolve around Him.**

These notions may seep into the outer layers of our heads, and we may give mental assent and even lip service to them, but they do not seem to penetrate very deeply throughout the lives of most who call themselves Christians in our culture today. **Faith, religion, and spirituality have somehow become commodities in our culture. We sample this, taste that, develop our preferences and attend when and where it is convenient, ...or we may even get our spiritual “fix” from the television! Most churches have designed their ministry to appeal to what would attract “attenders”, hoping that they would like what they experience enough to consider becoming “members”.** “Members” have taken the deeper step of identifying with a particular church community. They confess a certain creed and possibly share their “testimony”, their account of how they came to faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the One who died for their sins. In agreement with Jesus’ charge to His followers, many congregations demand that “members” be baptized as a sign of their faith commitment. These candidates for membership promise to support the congregation, and to become an active part of the faith community and of the ministry outreach. All of this is well and good, but **somehow the expectations of God, which call us to go higher and deeper, get lost. Instead, we lay out the minimum expectations we have for members, and we are pleased when people are willing to give us these very meager indications of devotion.**

The same namby-pamby religious game-playing was going on in biblical times. Whether the game was hyper-religious, as exemplified by the Pharisees or by false prophets, or whether it was the barely-religious faith of common people, neither group was really seeking to obey God. **The first group had all the religious trappings, the right clothes, the right books, religious art and paraphernalia. They made an outward show of piety, but were known for their arrogance, intolerance, and lack of compassion.** They found ways to manipulate God’s commands so that they could validate their own preferences and desires, and yet justify themselves in their own minds. **The second group generally acknowledged a belief in God, but did little to actively pursue Him.** In their case, they generally thought of themselves as religious failures, people whose lives were bad enough to be on the “outs” with God. Unfortunately, **they had little hope of resolving the distance they felt, and little expectation that things could be any different.** As the Proverb states, “the waywardness of the naïve shall kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them” (1:32). God sums it up, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). **Instead of finding out what God really expects, ...or would make available to them..., they accepted and settled for the standards of religious expression they saw in the culture around them.**

Is it no wonder that gospel preaching in the NT began with, “Repent.”? The Greek word is *metanoete*, and it means “change your mind” or “change your perception”. The OT Hebrew word translated as “repent” meant to “turn back”, which was appropriate for what God was addressing *there*. They had *turned away* from keeping their covenant with God. They had *turned away* to serve other gods, and had *turned away* from following His commands. The focus of this word is on the behavior. *Turn back* from serving other gods, and living in disregard of Yahweh. *Turn back* to renew your covenant commitment. *Return* to serving and obeying God. Unfortunately, many preachers take the meaning from the OT word and impose it on the NT word, which really

means something very different. *Metanoēō* refers to an inner change of the mind and heart. It is “seeing things differently” and embracing this new perception. **What was the message being preached? “The Kingdom of God is at hand.”** God’s dominion, His rulership, His reign and accountability are here. **What John, Jesus and the apostles were preaching was the need for a radical change of mind, a new insight and realization about what life was all about, and a new commitment to start fresh with God** (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 6:12; Acts 2:38). The “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” was an opportunity for a fresh start with God, and a renewed commitment to serve Him as King. **Forgiveness was not preached without the “Kingdom message”. They were inseparable. Forgiveness was not offered to those who did not want to serve and obey God.** There was an expectation that this new perspective would lead to a change in behavior. John said, “Therefore, bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance...” and “the axe is already laid at the foot of the trees, every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Lk. 3:3-14). **This was not at all a religious game, it was a fresh start for those interested in serving God. A new beginning at obedience.**

It is not surprising that those who responded most vigorously were those who had felt they were at a distance from God. Those who were playing the religious game did not *like* the message, because it simplified things too much, and gave the impression that God would accept even the riff raff. Of course, that was more than just an impression, ...that *was* the message! **God would accept the riff raff, the broken, the defeated, the poor, the disenfranchised, even the unclean, if they would repent** (change their perspective on God and their life choices), **believe the good news** (that God’s leadership and involvement in their lives was presently available to them), **and start fresh with a resolve to follow and serve God. Wait! There is more!** After Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, He made available *an important additional promise* of the Father to all who would trust in the good news and take up allegiance to follow Jesus as their King. **Three additional truths were added to the gospel of the Kingdom: (1.) God had made Jesus both Lord and Christ** (Acts 2:36). What does this mean? Jesus is the promised son of David, the messiah. He is the King who reigns over the people of God. **(2.) Forgiveness of sins is proclaimed in His name** (Lk. 24:47; Acts 13:38). The phrase “in His name” means “in His authority”. Jesus came to pay for the sins of the world. Forgiveness of sins is offered to all those who will believe this, and who will identify with Him as their King. Before, John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles had preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Now the apostles are proclaiming that forgiveness of sins comes to those who are baptized in Jesus’ name (Acts 2:38). Why is that? At that time, baptism represented not only immersion into some fluid, as in washing, but also signified a consecration. It was a symbolic death to one’s old life and a resurrection to a new life and identity. So, to be baptized in Jesus’ name meant to die to your old self-life, and to rise to a new life as a person identified with and consecrated to serve Jesus. It meant switching teams. Instead of living for sin or selfishness, to be baptized in Jesus’ name meant that you were committing to be on the Jesus’ team. **(3.) The gift of the Holy Spirit of God will be given to those who identify with Jesus.** Peter says this is a promise for everyone who comes to God through Jesus the messiah (Acts 2:38,39). *The coming of the Holy Spirit changes everything!* Before the Spirit came, the people of God had no ability to overcome sin. They still had their ability to choose, but they were empty inside and were drawn toward fleshly and selfish things. They had no inner life to help them in this battle. For us, however, there an entirely new dynamic which comes with the Holy Spirit. He creates a new life, a new person within us. This new person is in the image of God, and wants to do what is right, good, loving and true. We still experience the old self, and the old fleshly and selfish leadings and desires, but the Spirit in us opposes those sinful desires and will enable us to live an entirely different quality of life, if we learn to cooperate with Him (Gal. 5:16,17). **Note that God’s expectation has not changed. He still wants and expects us to obey Him. He has given us a new ability to do that through the activity of the Spirit in our lives.**

This brings us to “the company of the committed”. That is what the church should be. If you are really a part of the true, spiritual church of Jesus Christ, you only were included because at some time your heart sincerely *wanted* to be reconciled to God and obey Him. You heard the good news, and you chose to commit yourself to Jesus as your Savior and Lord. You identified yourself with Him, and called on His name for forgiveness. God, in His grace, accepted you, removed your sin, created a new “you” and sealed that new self with the Holy Spirit in your heart. He has a mighty purpose for your life, which can only be fully realized as you learn to walk in partnership with the Spirit. God is holy. He is light. There is no darkness in Him. If we choose to walk in the darkness, we exclude Him. **Part of the purpose of the church is to help one another remember how important it is to keep moving on toward maturity, and to put aside those “deeds of darkness”** (Rom. 13:8-14). We all struggle with the bad and the good, the flesh and the Spirit. None of us is exempt. **We have a responsibility to keep our commitments and objectives clear. God expects us to grow, change, mature and obey. We should expect that of one another, as well.** We should keep that standard high, in front of our eyes. **We are to teach one another to obey all that He commands.**