

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: July 31, 2011

## Freedom: From Religion, For Relationship

by Dan Trygg

"For freedom Christ set us free; so keep standing firm and do not be entangled again in a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

"Therefore do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink or in a festival or new moon or a Sabbath day; which are a shadow of the things being about to come, but the solid-reality is of Christ. Let no one cheat you, delighting in self-abasement and worship of angels, claiming special status because of the (spiritual) things he has seen, thoughtlessly being puffed-up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head [Christ], out from whom the entire Body, being-supplied and being-knit-together through the joints and ligaments grows God's growth." Colossians 2:16-19

It never ceases to amaze me how twisted and misdirected our mindset has become regarding church, worship, the purpose for our meetings, what Christianity is all about, etc. We have developed a religious culture in the past 2000 years that has all but obscured the real purposes of God for sending Jesus to redeem a people for Himself. **That confused religious culture is all around us. It permeates the Christian media, ...books, magazines, radio, television, cd's, the internet..., and it presses in upon us relentlessly, trying to convince us that it correctly understands and portrays the intentions of God for His people.** Religious practices may vary somewhat in particulars, but **the overall program is basically the same in over 95% of the church meetings throughout our land.** Those who understand what the Bible advocates have to continually fight off the tendency to "fall in line", and take on the same religious expectations and understandings. Why? Because **these things pull us way away from the original intent of what Jesus was attempting to do in recruiting and training His twelve disciples, and building His own "gathered-people".** Jesus confronted the religious culture of *His* day, cutting through layers of tradition and sanctified-gobbledygook, to get to what really mattered, setting people free to know God and serve Him as their King. **Without a doubt, there is need for a radical confrontation of the religious culture of our day,** as well.

We do and expect very different things when we meet as "the church" today than what the Lord and His closest followers seem to have. **As I have sifted through the historical facts, and the biblical texts, I have come to see that what Jesus had in mind for the church is very different than what has become commonly practiced in our day and culture.** At first, it was hard to openly discuss these things, because they are so different than the "norm" I see around me, but now I am confident that *the facts simply speak for themselves.* It does not take a great deal of effort to show people what I am talking about, and convincing them of its basic soundness. Like many others in church history, God has given this small bit of insight to direct some of His people back toward the roots of the faith. The biblical prophets, and many of the people who have significantly impacted the direction of the church in its history, seemed to be quite outnumbered by those of their time who were in disagreement, but eventually the truth won out, and their corrective impact sent ripples that reached far beyond the scope of their own lives. Keeping that in mind, **the fact that 95% might not see what I see does not necessarily disqualify the insights which I believe God has shown to me,** nor should I be disheartened by being the "oddball" in comparison to the majority. Others have found themselves in similar circumstances. The truth of what they saw eventually was vindicated, and their contribution to the renewal of the church has been embraced, at least by a remnant of God's people.

So, what are these huge, dramatic insights that are worth all of the build-up? There are a number of them, but just to get at the core, **I think we have things all backwards when we gather together for church.** What do I mean? Well, this whole notion about "gathering for worshipping God", ...I don't see that in the NT. What I see is that **the early believers came together to build one another up. This is a huge paradigm shift, and it affects so much of what we do.** Is the church a community of believers gathered to offer something to God, ...or is it a group of people who meet together to bind up one another's wounds and equip one another to do God's will? **Are we trying to build God up, or each other?** Well, I see the latter idea repeatedly in the NT, but I do not see the former ever stated or implied as the purpose or focus of church meetings. Sure, "worship" is mentioned, but almost always it is the word which means to "give obeisance to", an act of expressing allegiance to God. This word certainly did not refer to an extended time of singing and praise, where we "stroke Him" with our praises or attempt to create an environment where He will come to visit us from afar. No. **What I see in the NT is that the focus of meeting was to help one another, to speak into one another's lives in order to strengthen and "build up" or equip one another.** The entire flow of a meeting like *that* moves in the opposite direction from most meetings of our time and culture, ...from God to man, not from man to God. As I Cor. 12 and 14 indicate, God works through His people, through their expressed interaction with each other in the meeting, to build *them* up. **The focus of the meeting is "the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good"** (I Cor. 12:7). **Gifts are given by God to be expressed by us to one another when we**

**come together**, for we are a Body that is linked together, interdependently. We need every part, and we need every person functioning healthily and fully. **We come together to help facilitate that process. We meet to give care to those members who are hurting and in need.** From there, Paul talks about how love is the more excellent way (I Cor. 13). Is he teaching us *how to love God*? No. He is telling us that *we need to learn to love each other!* Loving God is a by-product of our relationship with Him through every part of our lives. When we come together, the obvious thing that is different is that we *can* interact with each other, ...something we cannot do when we are apart. So **the focus of what we are to do when we gather is directed toward that very thing, ...to speak with one another, to share with one another.** In chapter 14, we are told that when we come together, "each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. *Let all things be done for edification.*" Is the focus on edifying God? No. **The focus is on edifying one another.**

**Do we see that they took time to "conjure up" a sense of God's presence? No.** There is no evidence of that. It is contradictory to the idea that the Holy Spirit is inside each of us. **Why would we need to get God to come? He is already here, and He will never leave us.** The focus should be on how we can serve and help one another. **The flow comes out from the God who is inside of us, and is expressed outwardly to others as we meet.**

**Obviously, there is communication going in both directions, here. In order to express what God is wanting us to say or do, we must learn to listen and respond to His nudges and direction.** That requires us to tune in. BUT, *that* is not the focus of the meeting. **There is no place that indicates that they took extended periods of time in song and praise to get "worked up" or "tuned in".** What we ought to be striving for is what we saw Jesus and the disciples do when they went about doing ministry. There are no descriptions of them coming across people in need and having to work themselves up in an extensive preparation to heal or deliver people. **Whatever preparation they spent was invested at other times. For example, we know that Jesus used to take time alone every day to pray and seek God on His own,** and he often did so immediately after significant events, or in preparation for significant decisions. **We never see Him, or the apostles, leading extended song services or praise meetings. If that was important, or the way it was to be done, don't you think we would have a description of that?** When we come together, we come as ones who have God *already* dwelling within us. *He* is never lacking. *He* is never in need. *He* never requires that we fill *Him* up, emotionally. *He* is always ready and able to work through us to strengthen others. Not that we get no emotional benefit from singing. We do, but that should not be our focus.

We see the balance in Eph. 5:18-22 and Col. 3:16. The contexts, in both examples, are definitely about Body-life and human interaction, both before and after the verses in question. The introductory thrust, in both examples, starts from a consciousness of building up one another, and then moves into the reality that we will be able to sing from the heart unto God. The Colossian passage offers a little more of a glimpse into what is going on. There is a strong parallel to I Cor. 12. We are instructed to allow the word or message of Christ to dwell in us (lit., "make its home in us") richly, in all skill teaching and reminding one another by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (the human focus). Then the focus shifts to what is happening inside of us. "...in the grace singing in your hearts to God (the Godward focus). It is interesting that Paul uses the phrase, "in the grace". It seems to allude to a provision of God's Spirit which is present. Could we assume, from I Cor. 12:7, that this is part of the "manifestation of the Spirit for the common good", which is available to enable us to overflow into each other's lives in ways that build one another up? So, then, **God gives the Spirit to enable us to minister, and as we minister, we experience God's grace rising up within us, both toward one another and toward Him. When we experience that, we are to express our thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, Who shares Himself with us in this way.** The interesting part, however, is that the focus begins with serving one another, not serving God.

**Why does all this matter? What is the point? First of all, if we think of our meetings as primarily focused on God, we never get around to the human need.** This is radically opposed to what the NT says *is* to be our focus! **Secondly, if we think we need to sing in order to get God's Spirit to come, then we become dependent upon a certain feeling, usually emotional, which we learn to identify with the presence of God.** Many times we will be called to minister to others when we will not feel that feeling. We need to be confident that God will enable us to meet needs, even when we are feeling empty. It is *not* about *our feelings*; it is about His powerful presence, which is *always* with us (Matt. 28:20; Jn. 14:16). **Thirdly, if we can get back into those early-church-style meetings, in their simplicity, we will not be manipulated into accepting religious formulas that are too cumbersome, complicated, or performance oriented.** In the end, it is "just us", called and gathered together by God to help one another grow. **Finally, by making our focus about God, we can show up and be largely passive.** How can we measure "worship" that is only directed toward God. How do we know if we are invested enough? How do we deal with distractions? **If our focus is on building up one another, we all have to take responsibility to invest in our relationship with God, as well as to interact with one another. We also have a tangible way of measuring if we are successful. If no one is built up, or grows up, then how have we been effective?**