

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 16, 2012

The Importance of God's Word as a Tool for Growth

by Dan Trygg

"...like newborn babies, long for the unadulterated milk of the word, so that by it you may grow unto salvation," I Peter 2:1

"Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.' ³⁴ ...'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁶ ...So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'" John 8:31,32,34,36

"...be transformed by the renewing of your minds..."

Romans 12:2

"...you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Hebrews 5:11-14

If you were to ask me, "What is the most important thing I can do to grow in my Christian life?", without question, my first response would be, "Establish a regular pattern of taking in the pure, unmixed word of God into your life." The farther along I go in my Christian walk, and in my experiences working with people, I would have to say that this is the most significant and strategic investment that anyone can make toward developing moral and spiritual change. **If I am regularly reading or listening to the word of God, I not only begin to understand the story behind God's plan to save me, but the truth begins to reshape my entire perception of the world around me.** I begin to *see things as God sees them*. As I become acquainted with the lives of the men and women recorded in this book, **I learn what to expect from this personal God** who interacted with them. I begin to *find promises that relate to my life*, and thus begin to call on Him to work in my life according to His words. **I begin to understand what He expects of me**, ... what is acceptable and pleasing to Him, and what is *not*. I start to grasp what it is that He *has done* for me, ... and what He *wants to do* with my life. I begin to *recognize His activity* in my life, and in the lives of others. **I start to see that my life is significant**, and that God desires to use me to benefit others and to accomplish His purposes in the world. **I begin to perceive that He has provided power and resources to enable me not only to grow and change, but also to accomplish great things for His Kingdom.** *My perception of what my life is all about is radically transformed.*

The word of God is a powerful resource. Jesus likened it to seed, which can sprout up within a good, honest and ready heart to produce an abundance of good fruit (Mk. 4:1-20). It is like a sharp scalpel, able to expose the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12). **It has been especially prepared and given by God for our spiritual growth.** It is useful for teaching us, calling us on the carpet for our sins, or for errors in our thinking, ... beneficial for correcting us, and for consistently training us, so that we will become mature and be thoroughly equipped to do whatever God has in mind for us to do (II Tim. 3:16,17). Jesus indicated that those who continue in it will find freedom from the dominating power of sin (Jn. 8:31-36). It is a critical foundation for developing spiritual discernment, and for building a new spiritual perspective of the world around us (Heb. 5:11-14; Rom. 12:2).

We should not be surprised, then, that Peter would tell new converts to "long for the unadulterated milk of the word, so that by it you may grow unto salvation." What is better for a newborn baby than milk? **Note that there are two qualifiers here: "of the word" and "unadulterated". Let's briefly consider each of these:**

The phrase, "of the word" is an attempt to translate one Greek word, *logikon*. The root of this word is from the same root as "logos", which means, "word, message or thought". There are two main Greek words for "word", *logos*, and *rhēma*. *Rhēma* refers more to the *act of speaking*, rather than the *content* of what is spoken. It has to do with a "personal word" or "directive" spoken to an individual on a given occasion. By contrast, *logos* refers more to the *content* of what is spoken, ... the truth or thought expressed. This truth or content is what is important, not the method of communication. It is not that these two ideas are in conflict. In fact, often they work together. *Rhēma* occurs only 68 times in the NT, while *logos* occurs 330 times. Hearing from God is good and important, but **God wants us to long for the pure, unadulterated milk that pertains to the *logos* of God, the content, message and mind of God. Why? Because God wants to educate us.** He wants us to become established in *understanding*. He wants a relationship with us, yes, but He gave us brains so that we would grow in knowledge (II Pet. 3:18) and be able to discern right from wrong in most situations. How tragic it would be to have a fully grown child who needed to be *told* what to do in common, everyday circumstances! Spiritual maturity is no different. **God wants to educate us in general truths so that we develop "spiritual common sense", as well as the ability to investigate and discern in questionable or unique circumstances. Furthermore, the *logos* will give us the ability to evaluate the inner thoughts we have in our heads.** We all have our own personal inner thoughts in our mind, and

we also have God and the enemy speaking to us. Usually the communication from God or the enemy sounds no different than our own inner thoughts. (God doesn't use a deeper, booming voice!) So, **how do we discern when it is God, or the enemy, or our own selfish flesh? We need to examine *what is being suggested in light of God's revealed word, the logos*.** If it is contradictory to the teachings or principles of that *content*, then we know it is *not* of God. The Bible tells us that we must take such thoughts captive, bringing them unto obedience to Christ (II Cor.10:5). **How sad that there are Christians who have been believers for years, yet they still lack the "common sense" that comes with being educated by the *logos*.**

The other qualifying word from I Pet. 2:1 was "unadulterated". Most English versions just translate this word as "pure", but **the Greek word is a negated form of the word for "deceit, fraud, bait or trap". In other words, we are to long for the word that is unmixed with error, deception or manipulation.** On a practical level, what that means is that we ought to be ingesting the *logos* by itself. So many people get all their Bible understanding from their preacher, or some television or radio program. **Be aware that there are many people out there who mix in their own philosophy or understanding of the word as they preach. If we are not studying the word for ourselves, we tend to swallow this mixture down, and don't even realize that our spiritual milk has been "spiked".** Unlearned or unstable people will distort and twist the scriptures to make them fit their own agenda (II Pet. 3:16-18). **The more we familiarize ourselves with the *content (logos)* of what the Bible *actually says*, the better prepared we will be to detect these errors. The more careful we are to "handle accurately the word (*logos*) of the truth", the more equipped we will be to discern and refute these distortions.** How do we learn to do this? We must "study to show ourselves approved" (II Tim. 2:15). **The word, "study", implies an investment of time, effort and disciplined work in order to become skilled at understanding and interpreting the word of God.**

Good Bible interpretation is *both* a skill and an art. There *are* fundamental principles which must be learned and followed, to avoid error and to correctly grasp the meaning of a passage. The phrase, "handling accurately" is from a word that means "cutting straight". This is a great word picture! We have all seen little kids try to work a pair of scissors, or even try to draw a straight line. They don't do so well, initially. Given enough care, guidance and practice, however, they will become able to draw and cut accurately. **As we *develop interpretive skills* and as we *learn the content* of the scriptures, we will begin to recognize more easily when others are "fudging",** i.e., when they are *not* interpreting accurately. **We will recognize that something they are saying appears to be "off", and it won't take us long to figure out what it is. As a result, we will no longer be gullible children that can easily be manipulated or deceived.** We will no longer be blown about by every wind of doctrine, or tossed about by whatever fad that seems to come along. **Instead, we will become able to encourage, instruct and admonish others with sound words of truth** (Eph. 4:13-16), words rooted in and informed by the revealed thoughts of God.

Jesus told those who came to trust in Him that *if they would continue in His word (logos), then they would truly be His disciples, and they would come to know the truth that leads to freedom from slavery to sin.* There are so many Christians who struggle year after year with the same sin issues. They do not know what the Bible teaches regarding what God has made available in Christ to give them victory in these areas. They are either *ignorant*, or they are *not applying* what the word plainly says. They are not abiding in Christ's word, or His Spirit. Instead, they continue to live in the beliefs, patterns and principles of their pre-Christian lives. **How do we begin to undo the strangle-hold of sin in our lives? Jesus tells us to get into the *logos*!** As we do this, we will begin to experience reality, and this reality will liberate us. This was not a new concept, either. David experienced the same reality a 1,000 years earlier, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. ... Your word I have hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psa. 119:9,11). How many verses have *you* memorized?

Finally, the passage from Hebrews indicates that there is an expectation that we should grow up to a place where we are able and active in teaching others. The Greek is quite strong, "...being *obligated* to be teachers, on account of the time..." (vs. 12). In reading the passage, it is apparent that **if we are not growing, we tend to slip back into spiritual dullness, and our ability to understand even the basic things becomes limited. What do we do, if we find ourselves in such a state?** We must repent of such laziness and become people who are, once again, customarily ingesting the *logos* into our lives. **We must go back to the basics.** As we partake of the "spiritual milk", and work to apply it into our lives, our ability to discern and implement truth will increase. We need to spiritually "work out" our capacity to discern good from evil, by developing our understanding of God, His character and His ways, as revealed in the *logos*. **Then we need to be sure we go beyond the elementary teachings to press on to maturity.** Note the list of "elementary teachings" in Hebrews 6:1,2. They are the "first things" and the "last things", about how to become a Christian, and about Jesus' return. People tend to get caught pondering and debating these issues, and never grow up! Theological debate and discussing controversial questions can be a fruitless, and even dangerous, distraction. The Bible tells us to avoid it (Tit. 3:9; II Tim. 2:14; I Cor. 8:1). **Maturity is not about knowing theological curiosities. It is about walking the walk, ...about walking in the love and truth of Christ.**