

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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What Are We Called To?

by Dan Trygg

“...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the consciousness of the Son of God, to a fully-grown person, to the standard of the maturity of the full-measure of Christ; in order that we may no longer be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, *even Christ*”

Ephesians 4:13-15

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:35

I had a conversation with a young friend the other day. He was very frustrated and disillusioned by many of his relationships and experiences with the church. Several people were bending his ear about the doctrinal distinctions of their particular group. They were trying to recruit him to their group, and their way of thinking. He was getting input from a number of divergent sources, and was getting confused. He decided he needed to step back and sort things out a bit. *He determined to follow Christ, and Christ alone.*

In my own spiritual journey, I also had to find my way through the menagerie of *theological opinions, church polity debates, worship styles, and the disturbing inconsistencies of the character and life-style choices of so many of those who claimed to be Christians.* I, too, was an idealistic young person, who happened to believe that we *should* be trying to follow Christ. In my mind, there was *no excusing sin.* I never even *considered* that it would be OK to *lower the standards of righteousness described in the Bible.* Sure, I was a sinner, saved by grace through faith, and I still *struggled* with areas of inconsistency and defeat, but I never considered lowering the standard of what God expected. Nor did I ever think that compromise was OK. **It is pretty clear that God expects that we can grow to a maturity in our spiritual lives characterized by both a clarity of understanding in doctrine, as well as by a moral walk that looked like Jesus.** I was *on fire* for Christ, and was excited about my faith. **I could not understand how so many other Christians could be so apparently *lifeless* or *bored* with their faith. Were they reading the same Bible I was?** I remember older believers telling me that I would eventually calm down, and that the fire I felt inside me would lose its heat and energy. I found their words to be *revolting!* Praise God, their predictions did *NOT* come to pass. **The most frustrating part of all was the immaturity of the spiritual leaders in my life.** These pastors, deacons and elders were held up *as role models* we were to look up to... but, in many ways, they were just *big kids!* They were more interested in hunting, fishing and sports, it seemed to me, than in their church responsibilities or their spiritual walk. They were into practical jokes, silliness, and gossip. Many of their opinions and decisions were informed more by worldly wisdom than by scriptural teachings or principles. **Because the pastor himself was very immature in his emotions and his spiritual experiences, he had no expectations that others would be any more mature than he was.** Consequently, the general level of spirituality in the church was very fleshly. Now, at the same time this was true, these were guys who *did* love Jesus. They still were *gifted and used by God to win others to Christ.* Unfortunately, their inconsistencies also drove people away, after a while. I was grieved by this, but when I tried to bring this problem up, they blew it off. **They didn't want to hear from “the new kid on the block”, even if what I shared was very Biblical.** Eventually, like my friend, I decided to step back to re-evaluate what church was all about, ...and whether this group was doing what the church was *supposed* to do.

Actually, for myself, it took about six years for me to come to this crisis of faith. Fortunately, since the time I had given my future into God's hands in 1971, I had made the choice to devote myself to regular study in the word of God and to prayer. I had also met other, single minded, devoted followers of Christ who were an encouragement and example to me. **I knew enough to know that what I was seeing in the church I was attending was not all that could be expected out of the Christian life. There were others, both my contemporaries as well as older Christians, who retained the zeal and fire I felt inside of my heart.** They had not caved-in, or compromised with the world. They were pressing on after Jesus, and were discovering growth, developing maturity in character, and experiencing the power of God's Spirit flowing through them to effectively reach others. This growth, depth and empowerment came *because* they had a regular, purposeful relationship with Christ. They kept me from despair, rekindling my hope and zeal for God. **In fact, from my earliest days as a Christian, I had always been connected with such people. They were more normative to me as Christians than these lackluster believers I was struggling with in the church.** These were *true* disciples, ones continuing in and abiding in the word of God, ...and they were experiencing the growth and freedom Jesus and the apostles had spoken of (Jn. 8:31-36; II Tim. 3:16,17). **My problem, my crisis of faith, was not with “the faith” itself.** I knew that what God's word was saying was true. **The disappointment I was dealing with was with people,** ...those people who had settled for compromise, immaturity

and powerlessness, ...those who would rather *go* to church than *be* the church, ...those who wanted to “play church” or who compartmentalized their lives into “sacred” and “secular”, and mostly lived in the secular, ...those who called Jesus, “Lord, Lord”, but did not do as He said, at least in this area of discipleship (Matt. 7:21-27; 28:18-20).

The question, then, is **“What can I reasonably expect that God has called me to pursue, experience, or become?”** It is important to see that Jesus called us to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:18-20). The goal is not to just recruit “church-goers”, but active followers of Jesus. As Jesus defined what this entailed, it meant to identify with Jesus through baptism, and learn to obey all He commanded. The Lord Jesus had begun His ministry proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come, and He was inviting people to be baptized as an act of faith and commitment (Mk. 1:14,15). It signified leaving one’s past life behind, and choosing to identify oneself with the reign, rule and people of God. To be baptized meant to become a follower of Jesus the Messiah. From that beginning, **Jesus clearly taught that He expected two things: (1.) that we would learn; and (2.) that we would obey. What were we to learn and obey? All that He taught.** From this most fundamental passage, we learn that the Christian life is a pursuit of knowledge and understanding, but not for the sake of knowing by itself. We are to learn *in order to* obey. We also see that Jesus expected us to be able to obey *everything* He taught, ...not just *some* things, or even *most* things, but *everything*.

We see this same emphasis in the Ephesians passage at the top of this study. **We are to come to a unity of the faith, a common understanding.** We should mature to the place where we are no longer easy prey to false teachers, or be misled by temporary theological fads. **We should also come to a recognition of the Son of God, ...a realization of who Jesus is for us,** ...a grasping of what He accomplished for us, as well as a consciousness of Christ’s activity and direction in our experience. **Finally, we should grow to become mature, which Paul defines as becoming like Jesus in our character.** This last point is repeated many, many times in the NT. The fruit of the Spirit is the production of God’s own character within us, by the power of His indwelling life (Gal. 5:22,23). Peter says we are to become “partakers of the Divine nature, escaping the corruption of the world caused by human desire” (II Pet. 1:4). The apostle John taught this same thing: abiding in Jesus will cause us to walk in victory, free from the domination of sin (I Jn. 3:5-8). Our walk should come to resemble His own life, more and more (I Jn. 2:6).

Paul tells us that **there are two very different sources for our lives.** We can choose to live by our own ability and understanding, which is tainted by sin and selfishness, ...or we can choose to live by the power of the Holy Spirit within us. **If we live by the power of the flesh, by our own desire and limited ability, we will continue to experience the same kind of lives we had known before we gave our lives to Christ.** We will look no different than most non-Christians. **Unfortunately, it seems that this is where most churchgoers in our culture seem to be at.** Jesus said, “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Mat. 7:17,18). If we try to live from a selfish orientation and power source, we will end up producing fruit that is self-centered and sin-tainted. Paul describes the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21. Because so many church-goers still are “fleshly” in their orientation, they produce these same kinds of works (I Cor. 3:1-3). **It is possible, however, to live by the mind and power of the Holy Spirit** (I Cor. 2:15,16; Rom. 8:14). **When we live by His leading and energy, we produce the life that is consistent with His heart and character,** “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22,23). **We will also have lives that demonstrate the reality and power of God’s presence in our lives.** There should be clear evidence of answered prayer and the work of the supernatural God of the universe at work in our lives. **The life of a Christian should be a spectacle to the world. It should radiate and demonstrate the grace and power of God.** We should be sacrificial, joyful and bold in our giving, and the use of our resources. **Our lives should be explainable only in terms of God.** We should easily do what others would not *dare* to do, because we know the magnanimous grace of God.

Jesus emphasized radical love as a special sign of the inner working of God’s power within us. He was not talking about warm, fuzzy emotional feelings. He was talking about a continuous attitude of valuing, giving and serving directed toward others, no matter what their response to us may be. **This is not something that can be produced and sustained by human energy alone. It is the result of being born from God, and having His power within us** (I Jn. 4:7,8). Therefore, it stands out as a unique, very noticeable characteristic of those who are filled with the heart and life of God’s Spirit. **Love is to be the quintessential, outstanding mark and evidence that we are followers of Jesus** (Jn. 13:34,35). Sadly, when the church is not pressing on after maturity, or filled with the Spirit, it is *not* characterized by this love. A church that lives out of fleshliness is characterized by divisiveness, arguing and a party-spirit (I Cor. 3:1-3). **God did not save us so that we would live in the flesh. He saved us so we could walk in the life, love and power of His Spirit. Only then can we represent Him well before a watching world. Only then will people see the real Jesus active in our lives.**

What are we called to? To discover and live a radical, God-empowered life by following Christ. So, to my friend, ...keep on keepin’ on..., but *don’t think you are alone.* God will show you who you can work with.