

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Raise Up The Standard – A Call To Maturity

by Dan Trygg

“...to the saints God desired to make known among the nations what is the extremely-great-extent of the glory of this previously-hidden-mystery, which is ‘Christ in you’, the hope of the glory. ²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, in order that we may present every person mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, diligently-striving according to His energy, which operates within me in power.” Colossians 1:27-29

“Epaphras greets you, one out from you, a slave of Christ Jesus, always diligently-striving on your behalf in his prayers, in order that you may be established *as* mature and having-been-brought-to-full-measure in all the will of God.” Colossians 4:12

“...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...” Ephesians 4:13,14

Without question, we in America live in a culture that is in moral and spiritual decline. The visible church, the churches most people see as organized representations of Christianity, have been virtually powerless to stem the tide of moral chaos and the erosive beat-down of wave after wave of relativistic thinking. Our prophets have become entertainers and talk show hosts, who interview guests and banter with callers to their programs, mixing together the opinions of everyone into some kind of murky soup. Of course, the media kings generally have the last word, since they tend to direct the discussion, and control and limit the responses of those they talk with. Our heroes have become entertainers, sports figures, and reality tv stars, or possibly some business magnate. **For the religious, the heroes are generally those with large followings, ...often those with television ministries..., dressed up and presented with fancy clothes, promises of prosperity, success and luxury, with self-help answers for nearly every topic imaginable.** Many are drawn by the moving, entertaining experience generated by worship teams and top-of-the-line sound equipment. Helpful as any of this might be, **to the non-religious all of this has little attraction. They are not “into” religion. They don’t mind, as long as the religious people leave them alone, and don’t try to impose their values and expectations on them. Besides, it doesn’t seem like the religious people are all that different, ...except that a lot of them become judgmental. Those who are the “religious extremists” are not known for the amazing, *positive* things they are doing. They are known for being backward, ultra-conservative, fear-mongering purveyors of hate and condemnation.**

What is the problem? Why is it that what was one of the most “Christian” nations in modern history has produced such poor results? **The problem is same as it *always* has been in history, *we have not done what God asked us to do!* We have abandoned His plan, His way of doing things, because *we thought we had a better plan, ...a quicker and easier method.* That was the original temptation in the garden of Eden, wasn’t it? Satan proposed a *quicker, easier* way. That was the same approach the tempter took with Jesus, as well. While Adam and Eve bought the lie, Jesus did *not*. **We have fallen into *the same trap* religious people throughout the ages have been caught up in. We want only a *surface* touch of religion. We don’t want to *go deep*. We have found ways to propagate a religion that is a mile wide, and an inch deep. What this inevitably produces, however, is the *demise* of the true impact of the gospel.** A surface gospel does not radically transform lives. A surface gospel does not produce a vibrant, healthy church community. A surface gospel does not stir up relentless seekers after God. A surface gospel does not stimulate sacrificial service of others for Christ. A surface gospel does not expect much from people or God, ...and gets little from either. A surface gospel does not spawn serious soldiers for spiritual warfare. A surface gospel does not provoke people to maturity in character and godly behavior. **A surface gospel settles for much less than God expects, and accepts compromise, sin and apathy as normative.** We get what we *expect*, i.e., what we *really* believe. **In reality, we are *not* presenting the same message as the Bible is, at all. We use many of the same words, but we are *really not* proclaiming what Jesus and the apostles proclaimed.** We have preserved the outward forms of religion but we are not expecting the level of commitment God insisted on, nor the change that He expected His people to make. **We proclaim a “God that is for people”, but we overlook the part that says that “*God is calling out a people who will live for Him*”.** We preach a “me-centered” faith, while the Bible calls us to a “God-centered” walk. **It is not surprising, then, that the fruit produced by the surface, “easy-believe-ism” approach we are promoting is not at all of the same quality and flavor as that produced by the *genuine* message, call and methodology described in the Bible.****

Again, it is important to see that this is *not* new to history. The history of the people of God is filled with compromise, apathy, hypocrisy and substandard living. God sent prophets and apostles, even *angels* at times, to rebuke and correct the error and excesses of His people. He has used consequences and judgments to discipline them,

and wake them up to the reality of their unfaithfulness, and spur them to return to Him and the true call of God on His people. **Many times throughout history, it has seemed that God had withdrawn from His people, and left them to their own devices, until things became bad enough for a remnant to begin to call out to Him, and to pursue reformation. I believe we are living at such a time. Spirituality is at a low ebb tide, and we need to call upon God for awakening and revival. We are living at such an anemic, substandard level, we must insist on more!**

The passages at the top of this study all talk about maturity. **It is very clear that the apostle Paul worked very hard to attempt to prod people on to grow up in their faith, to become all they could be in Christ.** In Colossians 1, he spoke of a “mystery”, a truth which had been hidden for generations, but now had been revealed. This mystery was nothing less than the possibility of Christ living inside of each believer. **“Christ in you” is the basis and hope for “glory”.** What “glory”? Paul is referring to **the radiance or visible expression of the life of God Himself living within the life of the one abiding in Christ.** It is the righteousness, love and goodness of God’s heart *experienced by* and *expressed through* the believer. It refers to love like God’s, ...moral righteousness like God’s, ...the peace and confident joy of one filled with God’s heart, ...acts of kindness and sacrificial service consistent with God’s heart for people. **How is this possible? Because Christ Himself lives inside those who are truly His.** The potential for a life like Jesus’ own character and heart is available to *all* who are His, *because* His Spirit lives inside them. Now **this does not come to full experience or expression automatically. It must be sought for, pursued and cultivated by believers who know this is a possibility.** This is *available* to every Christian, but it is only the “mature”, the ones fully developed or completely grown, who experience this. In this passage, Paul “admonishes” or “reminds” the believers, and teaches them in order to move them toward maturity. This is important, because it indicates that **believers need to gain information and insight, and must apply what they learn in their day-to-day lives.** The admonishing or reminding aspect implies, again, that **growth to maturity requires conscious application.**

The second passage in Colossians describes how Epaphras diligently strove or “wrestled” in his prayers for these believers, in order that God might establish them in maturity and they might be completely fulfilled in all the desire of God for their lives. What does *that* look like? The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23), keeping the commandments of God (I Jn. 2:3-6), walking in love toward others (I Jn. 2:8-10), and experiencing the reality of God working within their lives (I Jn. 2:20,21,26,27; Rom. 8:14). **Again, this is the result of a process. It is not something that happens automatically.** We see in Epaphras a man who understood how important this was, and agonized in prayer for the believers, calling out to God to work in order to bring this about in the lives of His people. The hours and intensity of intercession of people like Paul and Epaphras were instrumental in bringing about the movement of the Spirit in the lives of the people of God to move them toward maturity and the fruitful fulfillment of God’s will in their lives. Where are these prayer warriors in *our* day? Are they at their post? Are they giving God no rest, until He answers them and *causes* His people to be a praise to His name in the earth? If God responds to His intercessors this way (Isa. 62:6,7), how about when *we* diligently pray for *our own* spiritual walk, and the filling of His Spirit? (Lk. 11:13) *Knowing this* is not the same as *doing it.* **We need the desperate, yearning, wrestling prayer that Epaphras demonstrated.**

The third passage, from Ephesians 4 indicates that **it is God’s intention that the interactive community of the church work together to push and encourage every one of us to come to maturity in Christ.** What does that mean? It means **we will be like Jesus. His life is the standard, because His life inside of us is the basis for even thinking or hoping we could ever become like Him.** Note that **we start out as children, and maturity is the end result of a growth process.** The important thing to emphasize is that **this is a real, attainable goal.** This is God’s *plan*, that *every* Christian might become as righteous, loving, filled with power and willing to serve as Jesus Himself was and is. If we would just stop excusing our low level of spiritual expectation and experience, ...if we would stop excusing ourselves for living in sin and selfishness..., and if we would seriously devote ourselves to pursuing the inheritance God has made available to us, ...“Christ in you”, the hope of the glory..., we would break through the spiritual dullness that plagues so many of us here in America. We would discover that **God has way more for us than we ever thought was possible.** We would begin to see breakthroughs in our own lives, and we would advance in our spiritual understanding, our experiences of God, our victory over sin, and in our apprehension of the will and power of God. God does *not* want us to remain children, tossed to and fro by false and deceptive teachings, or living a substandard Christian life. **God wants to lead us in His triumph in Christ Jesus, and demonstrate Himself mightily through our lives.** “...the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His” (II Chron. 16:9).