

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Valor On The Battlefield

by Dan Trygg

“And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain-- <sup>3</sup> ...giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, <sup>4</sup> but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, <sup>5</sup> in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, <sup>6</sup> by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by unhypocritical agape-love, <sup>7</sup> by the word of truth, by the power of God; through the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, <sup>8</sup> through glory and dishonor, through evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”

2 Corinthians 6:1,3-10

“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. <sup>13</sup> ...Therefore, take up the full armor of God, in order that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.”

Ephesians 6:10,11,13

This is the third study examining the differences between the apostle Paul's style and experience of ministry, and the claims and expectations of those who had come in after he left to spread the gospel in other places. The picture of ministry work that Paul experienced and described was very different than what these “super-apostles” were claiming for themselves. They claimed to be “wise in this age”. In Christ, they “reigned as kings” and were “already rich”. They liked to come off as “distinguished” and “prudent” (I Cor. 4:8,10). While they were busy comparing themselves against one another, boasting in their connections and credentials (II Cor. 3:1; 10:12), Paul was busy preaching the gospel in *new* areas, taking risks and making sacrifices to get the message out and establish *new* groups. While the Corinthians were taken in by these false apostles, who were lording it over them, taking advantage of them, treating them with high-handed abuse (II Cor. 11:19,20), Paul was laboring in the trenches, experiencing hardship and struggling against all kinds of opposition to patiently, graciously, tenderly convey the good news of freedom through Christ to people bound up in the despair of idolatry and superstition (Acts 20:17-35). While the pseudo-apostles in Corinth were charging people money to hear what they taught, Paul was spreading the gospel far and wide, offering it freely to all who would listen. As we determined in the last two studies, Paul's ministry looked more like that of Jesus and the other apostles, than did that of the religious opportunists at Corinth. They looked more like the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were a hyper-religious party within Judaism. They were generally middle-class Jews who focused on “separating” themselves from religious defilement in order to devote themselves to God. Although the movement had initially been well-intended by genuine, God-loving Jews, by Jesus' time it had become riddled with “religionists”. These were people who kept the outward forms of religion, but whose hearts were not humble and pure. Like the false teachers in Corinth, many of the Pharisees had come to be people who were arrogant, thinking they were better, “higher” and holier than others (Matt. 23; Lk. 11:37-54; 16:14). They disregarded and downgraded others, not only mocking them, but insulting and mistreating them. They loved being treated as important, looking for respectful greetings in the marketplace, seats of honor at social and religious gatherings, and advancing themselves into positions of importance and authority over others. They made much of their outward expressions of religion, desiring to be noticed by others, but inwardly they were like ravenous wolves. They were lovers of money, and took advantage of the innocent and vulnerable to enrich themselves. While keeping up an appearance of righteousness and propriety, they distanced themselves from the poor and “impure”. They ignored causes such as social justice, mercy and works of compassion, focusing instead on religious rituals and practices that had little practical benefit to people in need. They fashioned themselves to be “gate-keepers” of the kingdom of God. In reality, Jesus said that they weren't really entering in as obedient subjects to the King, and they were diverting others away from a genuine relationship with Him. They claimed for themselves the “chair of Moses”, appointing themselves to be teachers of the Law. They piled up heavy loads on those who listened to them, but did nothing to help them. They distanced themselves from the everyday lives of average people, ...especially from the squalor and brokenness of the poor..., holing themselves up in the halls of learning and religious institutions. Jesus said they were like white-washed tombs – outwardly they looked good, well-dressed, living proper, respectable, even self-indulgent lives, but inwardly they were full of greed, pride, hypocrisy, lawlessness and spiritual uncleanness. They lived in safety and glory in their well-appointed houses, far from the real needs of everyday people.

By contrast, Paul was living in the trenches. He was in the neighborhoods, marketplaces, and houses of those very people the religious leaders disdained, just like Jesus Himself had been. Jesus scandalized the religious establishment by eating with tax collectors and known sinners. When questioned about this, He pointed out that *these*

were the ones who needed the help (Matt. 9:9-13). The early Christian movement spread most rapidly among the lower social classes, the slaves and “untouchables” that were despised by the “proper” religious establishment. It was a rag-tag bunch, “...not many wise according to the flesh, not many powerful, not many well-born”, said Paul, “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the things without-strength of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the things of ‘no-birth’ in the eyes of the world, even the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no one should boast before God” (I Cor. 1:26-29). Over 60% of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves in the first century, and it was among *these* people, who were largely without any substantial means, or even long-range hope for their futures, that the gospel was most welcome and widely received. To be sure, there were others who were of the educated, wealthier classes of free people and even nobility who heard and responded to the claims of Christ, but these were less common. As a result, Paul spent most of his time ministering in the markets, squares, streets, and in the hovels of the poor.

Some people join the military because they are impressed with the crisp uniforms, the precision marches, and the respect commanded by the physical presence of soldiers with weapons at hand. They hear of the benefits of serving their country, of military pensions, and medical care. They forget that there is a hard reality to soldiering. There is danger, risk, sweat, fear, pain, deprivation of sleep and provisions, the actual chaos of battle, the struggle and exhaustion of long marches, hand-to-hand combat, wounds, loss, death. Life in the trenches is not at all like life on the parade ground. It is not neat and orderly, controlled and predictable. It is messy, uncomfortable. Normality has to be put on hold, and you have to adjust to the reality of what you are facing. Read again the verses at the top of this study. Does it sound like Paul is in some safe, sterile environment, ...an office, or religious meeting house..., or does it sound like he has been in the midst of battle? He is a veteran soldier for Christ. He knows how to take territory for Jesus. He knows how to approach the battle line. He has been in the midst of spiritual chaos and struggle to win the hearts of people. He has tasted hardship, distresses, exhaustion, ...even the lash..., in his quest to advance the Kingdom. He testified, “I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus” (Gal. 6:17), referring to the scars he had endured at the hands of his many persecutors. Paul was not some rear-echelon schmoozer or complainer, he was a front-line warrior. He knew his battle was not a physical one, but a spiritual one. People were not his enemies, though they could be pushed into becoming his antagonists. His battle was not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers, demonic and evil forces of wickedness, who were entrenched against him. They tried to block his advance and stir up trouble against him, or to distract, defeat or discourage those who he seemed to be affecting.

***Gather up the practical lessons Paul shared from his vast experiences in ministry/spiritual combat:***

**(1.) “Working together with Him” – Keep in step with God.** Partner with Him. Allow Him to lead and direct. Don’t venture off to do your own thing; do what He is doing (Jn. 5:19). **(2.) “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain” – God’s empowering grace is given to do work.** It is meant to flow through you to others. Don’t waste it, or be unproductive with it. Also, watch for it, take it, when it is available, and put it into action (Acts 1:8). **(3.) “Give no cause for offense in anything” – Be protective of the ministry.** Give no cause for it to be discredited. **(4.) “In everything showing yourselves to be servants of God” – All of your life is on display; live as Christ’s servants all the time!** Just as war does not take stop for coffee breaks or days off, we can’t have double lives. We can’t be part-time Christians. In order to be effective, we must always be at the ready to serve God and others. **(5.) “By purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness” – We need to walk with integrity and purity of heart.** We must not have mixed motives. We must live up to what we know. We must be consistent under pressure, and be kind to others, even when tested. Our heart intent and knowledge will be tried and tested in the crucible of life circumstances and relationships. *That* is where the battle is. **(6.) “By the Holy Spirit, by unhypocritical agape-love, by the word of truth, by the power of God” – Our lives must be prompted, motivated, directed and energized by God.** Note that God provides all we need. We can disregard His provision, or attempt to “fake it” on our own. That will bring instant defeat. Victory comes through unity, agreement and coordinated action with Him. **(7.) “Through...” – We will have to go through all kinds of things, ...good experiences and bad, fair and unfair..., and we must be consistent.** We will be misunderstood, misperceived, mistreated, but we can overcome and be a blessing in spite of all (I Cor. 4:12; I Pet. 2:21-23). **(8.) “Weapons of righteousness” – God has equipped us for battle. We need to utilize the armor and weapons He makes available to us.** Note that there are weapons for “both hands”. We are commanded to “take up the whole armor of God”. We must study to understand and utilize the equipment for war God has given to us. Note that there are going to be “evil days”. Expect it. We are at war. Christians are the target of Satan’s attack. To think that things will always be rosy is a pipe dream. It is not reality. It is not consistent with what the Bible teaches. Evil will come. **The armor is given to us to resist and stand firm when under attack.**

Paul endured much more than described here (cf. II Cor. 11:23-33). There is not much glory in such a place as the trenches, where Paul was ministering. He wasn’t out for the accolades of men on the parade ground, playing soldier far from any real mess or threat. He was serving Christ with valor and distinction on the real battlefield.