

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Unstable Souls

by Dan Trygg

“They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, ¹⁴ having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children” II Peter 2:13-14

“Among them are those entering into houses and captivating immature-women having-been-weighed-down with sins, led on by various impulses, ⁷ always searching-for-answers and never able to come to a recognition of reality.” II Timothy 3:6,7

“...regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, ¹⁸ but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.” II Peter 3:15-18

I think we would all agree that **there are people that seem to be less stable than others**. In our common speech, this instability or unsteadiness can be manifested as volatile emotions, or inconsistency in behavior or beliefs. People are thought of as unstable when they are unreliable, unpredictable, or seem to change opinions willy-nilly, especially if their inconsistencies affect their ability to function successfully in everyday life. When they can't sleep regularly, ...or they can't make it to work on time, ...or when they are friendly one day, and grouchy the next, ...or if they are up and down, emotionally, ...or they have one relationship after another, ...or when they regularly medicate themselves with drugs or alcohol, gambling or other addictions, we would probably agree that their lives are getting out of control or are unhealthy. **We think of stability as consistency, dependability, steadiness and sufficiency. Instability is inconsistency, unreliability, volatility and uncertainty. Stability sounds safe and strong; instability sounds risky and fragile. A stable person is a healthy person; an unstable person is unhealthy or unpredictable.**

In the passages above, the phrase “unstable souls” is used by Peter to describe people who are especially susceptible to being deceived and manipulated by false teachers and predatory types of people. The “immature-women” in II Timothy also seem to be unstable people, susceptible to being “taken-captive” by unscrupulous, smooth-talking false teachers. **The word, “unstable”, is the negated form of the word for “firmly set, established, fixed”. These are people who are wishy-washy about life, about themselves, even about God.** They have not arrived at a sound, strong, well-founded sense of self, of what they believe, or of what their boundaries in life are. **Their beliefs, opinions and even their moral standards are not clear and firmly set.** They can easily go along with whatever crowd they are with, in order to fit in. **Predatory people or manipulators can easily take advantage of them by luring them outside of their normal beliefs and behaviors,** and convincing them to try things they may not, if left to themselves. They may even know they are getting in over their heads, but they go along for the sake of approval, or the rush of excitement. **They do not have a clear and definitive “No!”**, so over time they will cave in to the attentions and appeals of people who are pressuring them. Instead of firm boundaries, beliefs and standards, theirs are semi-permeable and changeable. (E.g., they let the false teachers *into their houses!*) What meant “no” yesterday may change to “yes” tomorrow. **Those who prey on them know how to approach them with flattery and special attention to disarm them, and then draw them into their agenda.** Some predators can even pick easy “marks” out of a crowd.

What makes people unstable? There are some interesting clues here. The word I translated as “immature-women” is actually a *diminutive form* of the word for woman. It would literally be “little women”. It implies that they are not fully-developed, healthy, complete individuals. They are somehow “less than” whole, like they were somehow crippled, or developmentally-delayed. That would make sense. **If stability is a by-product of healthy maturity, then it should not be surprising to find that those who are unstable have some missing parts, some aspects of themselves that did not develop as they should.** Paul goes on to describe them as women “having-been-weighed-down-with sins”. **These people may have “piled up sins” in their own lives, and instability is a result of their behaviors.** Sin is usually perceived to be a short cut, ...but short cuts (sins) have a cost, too. For example, the person who cheats on the test may get the *grade*, but not the *education*. **Or, the Greek could be indicating that someone else piled up sins upon them.** They may have been sinned *against* by others. This had wounded and diminished them, so that they were now not as strong and firm within themselves as they otherwise should be. They had been victimized by others, and as a result did not have the inner strength or clearness of mind to stand firm against other predators. Both of these alternatives can be supported by psychological studies. People who do things they know are wrong, often experience guilt, anxiety and depression. Addiction is often an attempt to medicate inner pain, but it usually costs more than it comforts. **People who are victims of abuse often find themselves in other abusive**

relationships. They seem to lack the normal healthy sense of boundaries that others have developed. They can be overly passive and trusting, or overly impulsive. In either case, they can lack the proper self-control to protect themselves from either invasive people or risky behaviors. In this passage, Paul mentions diminished *women*, but the same dynamics can affect *men*, as well. Emotional and physical abuse can be just as damaging to them.

In II Peter 3:16, the apostle links the unstable with those who are “untaught”. That word is the negated form of the kind of step-by-step learning and training involved in discipleship. The Greek word for “disciple” is *mathētēs*. You can see that the first four letters are from the same root as mathematics. It describes a step-by-step process of learning and doing, whereby you master the fundamental skills and then build upon them with higher levels of complexity. **This is more than academic training. It is developing life skills, character, discernment and practical wisdom, ...in a word, “obedience”.** Didn’t Jesus tell us to “make disciples, ...teaching them to *keep* all that I said” (Matt. 28:19,20). Jesus’ brother, James, pointed out the danger of merely *hearing* (or, reading) the word of God, but not *doing* it (Jas. 1:22). **People who are just taking in the word of God, but not acting upon it, deceive themselves.** They comfort themselves with the thought that they are investing in their spiritual lives by exposing themselves to the scriptures, or going to church. The truth, however, is that their time is *wasted*, because they do not incorporate it into their lives. **They deceive themselves by faulty, misguided reasoning. Their thought process is, “If I just study and learn more, I will become mature.”** Isn’t this almost the same thing that Paul said about the diminished, unstable souls of II Timothy 3? They are “always learning, but never coming to a recognition of the truth”. **They learn the information, but their understanding and application of it are misguided, or non-existent.** They are “untaught” in that they do not know how to recognize and apply truth into their lives in practical ways.

The kind of deception in James and II Timothy is the same as Jesus talked about in Luke 6, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” Everyone who comes to Me, and hears My words, and *acts* upon them, I will show you whom he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who *dug deep* and *laid a foundation upon the rock*; and when a flood rose, the torrent burst against that house and *could not shake it*, because *it had been well built*. ⁴⁹ But the one who has heard, and has *not* acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house upon the ground without *any* foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great” (vss. 46-49). This is a word picture addressing the very topic of our study. **If we want to be stable, we have to dig deep, uncover, remove and address any issues that leave us vulnerable or impulsive.** For most of us, this has to deal with emotional hurts or patterns of sin. Until we deal with *them*, they will affect everything we try to build in our lives. **It is important to get as honest and real about our thoughts and emotions as possible.** Often, we don’t even monitor what goes on in our heads. **Ask the Holy Spirit to help you begin to perceive the areas where you are shutting off your inner pain, or where you are not living in reality.** Ask Him to show you where you are not following through in obedience. **Ask Him to help you do the hard and painful work of digging deep to get to the Solid Rock of Jesus as your foundation. In the safety of His love and grace you can get truly honest.**

Peter finishes his letter by warning us to be on our guard against being led astray by unprincipled (lawless) people, lest we fall out of our steadfastness. We have been forewarned, so we have no excuse. **The steadfastness he is talking about is the opposite of the word for “unstable”.** It refers to the “fixed-ness”, the “firm-foundation”, the steady and consistent walk we can have in the Holy Spirit. Don’t let anyone pull you out of that peaceful, joyful, life-giving fellowship with Him. **Instead, grow or increase in grace and experiential-knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The life in the Spirit is a life of grace, and experiencing Jesus!**

In II Corinthians 10, Paul talked about “tearing down strongholds”. Paul defines these “strongholds” as arguments, reasonings or thoughts that are raised up against the experiential-knowledge of God. Again, we could be the culprits, erecting these high-minded strategies to keep us from having to deal with God, ...or, we may be victims of the painful, shameful and debilitating messages from *others* that make us feel worthless and unredeemable before Him. We are very creative in finding refuge in things that seem to offer a temporary escape from dealing with our real pain (Eph. 4:17-19). On a practical level, we run to these things instead of to God for our hope and deliverance. They are idols we have created that keep us from getting to know God Himself. They seem to offer us an answer, but they actually block us from digging deep enough to find Him who is the real solution to our need. **Paul says we need to disassemble the constructed web of beliefs, reasonings and arguments that divert us from God, so that we can discover Him experientially.** Peter is saying the same thing. **Grace is the open door to this experiential-knowledge of God.** It is His invitation for you to come. **Jesus is the expression of God’s grace. He is the open door to knowing God** (Jn. 14:6; Rom 5:2; Eph. 3:11,12; Heb. 4:16). Knowing that God is *for* you, and you are *accepted* in Him is the greatest foundational truth. **Take apart the disinformation. Dig deep to discover a better foundation for life, a firm setting in the bedrock of God’s love. Get to know grace. Grow in knowing Him. Trust and obey Him.** Build in truth and integrity upon *that* firm, unmovable footing, and **He will be the stability of your life** (Isa. 33:6).