

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Putting Off The Old Life

by Dan Trygg

“But y’all did not learn-to-follow Christ in this manner, if indeed y’all heard Him and were taught by Him, according-as the truth is in Jesus, ...y’all to put aside (according to your former manner-of-living) the old person, the one being corrupted according to the strong-desires of deceitful-seduction...”

Ephesians 4:20-22

“Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God... ⁵ Therefore, put-to-death the earthly members of your body to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁷ ...and in these things you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and shameful speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you stripped-off the old self together-with its practices, ¹⁰ and have put on the new self who is being renewed unto true-knowledge, according to the image of the One who created him.”

Colossians 3:2,3,5,7-10

“...for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Romans 8:13

After three incredible chapters, describing to the Ephesians the expansive greatness of what God has done for us in Christ, and the incomprehensible privilege and destiny He has made available to us in Him, Paul turns his attention to the practical section. “I, therefore, ...entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you were called...” (Eph. 4:1). These potentialities and possibilities only become evident to those who will seriously pursue Christ and His purpose for their lives. **God wants to assemble a team of devoted, Spirit-led individuals who will become Christlike in their character and walk, and will express truth and love toward each other, so that we might display the power and beauty of His life before the watching world** (Eph. 4:2-16). It is an awesome plan. When God’s people get on board, and really work through His plan, all kinds of incredible things will happen. People’s lives are changed. Practical needs begin to get met. God’s power works to produce wonderful blessings (e.g., Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). Of course, **these things will not take place if God’s people are not engaged in seriously pursuing Him or in following His plan. That is why Paul admonished them to “no longer walk as the unbelievers walk”** (4:17). Living as *practical atheists*, ...*living as though God does not really exist*, ...*living apart from seeking Him or following His counsel*, ...*living by stuffing one’s inner pain or emptiness, and pursuing distracting pleasures*, will block the leading of the Spirit in the lives of God’s people. Because they are not maturing, **the lives of such fleshly-oriented Christians look little different than those around them** (1 Cor. 3:3).

The apostle *directly confronts* this departure from the Way, “But you did not learn-to-follow Christ in this manner” (Eph. 4:20). The word for “learn” in this verse is *not* just to *hear or understand information*. It is to *discover by practice and experience*. **You discover the real Jesus by actively following Him, by learning and living-in His teachings** (Jn. 8:31-36). It is not “belief *about* Jesus”, ...as though knowing facts *about* who He is and what He did is sufficient to produce change. It is *not*. **The real Jesus is experientially discovered through the application of what He did and taught.** Remember, He commissioned us to “make disciples”, active followers who will identify with Him and will *learn to do* all that He said (Matt. 28:19,20). Here, what that means is that we are to “*put aside the old person* (our pre-Christian self), ...*be renewed in our minds*, ...and *put on the new self* (that born-from-above, new-creation self which is holy and righteous like Jesus, because it is born-from and energized by His Spirit in us - Eph. 4:22-24). The word for “learn-to-follow” is the Greek word *manthanō*, closely related to the word for disciple, *mathētēs*, an active follower. **If we are going to “experientially-discover” Jesus, then we have to obey Him.** We have to be willing to do things *His way*, ...walk *where* and *how* He directs us. He initiates; we follow. We must *make room* in our minds, and the habit patterns of our lives, to *tune in to Him*, ...and then *give ourselves to doing His will*.

It begins with putting off the old person, ...the former self and its ways of operating. Note that you start by dealing with the things that were habitual patterns of your past life. **God wants to change our lives, and make us new.** Most of us accept that, and welcome the idea *as an abstract thought*. Now, however, the apostle begins to *break it down to us*. He says that, **in order for this to happen, we need to start with the customary ways we live.** Each part of our life must be up for grabs, open for the Lord to rework and renew. We have developed a way of navigating through each day, a cluster of habits we have accumulated and made our own. **If we are going to discover God’s will for us, we need to be willing to put aside any or all of these habits, and allow Him to direct us into new life patterns.** The old person, the former manner of living which we had developed, was life according to *our* preference, or according to *our* understanding. Not all of that is evil, of course, but **much of our lives have been designed around self-comfort and self-interest.** The life of our own making would keep us from emotional and spiritual

maturity. Much of how we live has to do with avoiding pain or unpleasantness, and choosing to pursue pleasure. We get ourselves into all kinds of habits that are foolish or wrong-headed. Remember the context? Paul is admonishing us to no longer live as the unbelievers live, in the futility of our minds. We lived as if God was not real, now we need to reorient our whole way of thinking and living. **We can't go on with the old self. Paul reminds us that the old self is continuing to be corrupted according to seductive, deceitful, lusts.** If we are not opening our lives to God to be redirected, we will be led into futility and small-minded self-destruction. Jesus had said, "For whoever might desire to save his life (self) will destroy it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, he shall save it" (Lk. 9:24). Because of selfishness, our attempts to save, preserve or protect ourselves will backfire, and we will ruin or destroy our potential. **We need to put our old ways of living aside, and allow God to guide us in developing a new life.**

If you look at the Colossians passage, you will see that **the underlying basis for these changes is that we died with Christ, and our future life is hidden together-with Him (3:3). When we chose Jesus, we chose a new direction and destiny. We chose to become something different.** God's plan and agenda is to conform us to the image of His Son, Jesus (Rom. 8:29; I Jn. 3:2). **The old self, and the old manner of living, stands in the way of that.** Paul tells us how to deal with these old practices. He says, "Put your members *to death* toward..." **We are to permanently cut off those old, unprofitable patterns of life.** We are to make ourselves to be dead toward them (vs. 5). We are to put them away from us (vs. 8). We are to strip them off like a set of dirty clothes (vs. 9). These are helpful images. **We distance ourselves from them, discard them, and totally cut them off from our future walk.**

In Romans 8:13, Paul again uses the image of "putting to death", using here a *different* Greek word than in Colossians 3. Here, he writes, "if you are living according to the flesh, you are about to die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." **Three observations here: (1.) Living by the flesh brings death.** This is a significant theme in Romans (6:21,23; 7:5; 8:4-6), and is repeated in Galatians 6:8, "the one sowing to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." Again, these behaviors and patterns of living hinder our spiritual walk, and get in the way of our moving into God's will. Peter wrote that "fleshly lusts ... wage war against the soul" (I Pet. 2:11). If we live by the flesh, we will soon experience the spiritual death and emptiness that follows. **(2.) Here, we are to put to death the deeds of the body, whereas Paul instructed the Colossians to put to death their own members, or limbs. We are to doubly bar the door!** Pay no attention toward, ... give no time or energy toward, ... invest no thought toward any of the *deeds* of the body; and, do not employ your hands, eyes, ears, minds, feet, or *any part of you* toward any involvement in any former sinful behaviors. Have nothing to do with these behaviors. Stay far away from getting involved with them. **(3.) Allow the Spirit to take the initiative to address the issues He sees as important. Depend upon Him for His power and His wisdom.** Don't just go on a crusade to clean up your life. If you go off in your own strength, you are likely to fail, ... or, even worse, establish another part of your life where you are living without God! No. You need to lay bare your heart to God. **Humble yourself, and ask Him to begin to lead you out of the mess you are in.** Ask Him to show you what needs to change, and to help you in the process. **Ask Him: (a.) to show you underlying issues,** "Why do I do this behavior? What is my 'payoff'? What do I get out of it? What emotional pain or emptiness am I trying to cover or hide by this behavior? Does this behavior really *solve* my underlying problem, or is it just *a distraction*?" Is there an emotional or physical deficit in my life that pushes me toward this behavior? Psychologists use the acrostic **HALT** to get people to think about what is really going on. Are you **Hungry**? Then, you really need appropriate nourishment. (You may also be *thirsty*, not hungry.) Are you **Angry**? Do you lash out at others, or hide in escapism, because *you* have unresolved anger issues? Maybe you need to listen to that anger, and learn to address the irritation in a healthy manner? Are you **Lonely**? Then you need healthy, satisfying, mutual interaction with people. You need to develop healthy friendships, not sulk in your loneliness, or cover up that empty feeling with other things that do not solve the problem. Are you **Tired**? Then you need a realistically healthy and appropriate amount of rest. It could be that you have come to rely on other things to give you a "bump" when you are feeling run down or exhausted. Or, maybe you need to re-energize your metabolism by getting some regular exercise. **(b.) regarding "the setup" for your behavior,** "Is there a ritual I go through when I 'use' this behavior? Do I do it in the same place, or at the same time of day, every day? Are there certain people I hang out with that encourage this behavior? Do I do this when I am 'with them'? Are there certain triggers that seem to precede my behavior? Do I choose this behavior when things are tight, or when I get paid? Does having money seem to *fuel* an addictive urge?" **(c.) to show you where, when and how to make changes.** Often, the change that brings freedom and victory must be made early on, *long before* the urge to 'use'. What would be some creative alternatives? **(d.) for the strength and resolve to "put to death" these old behaviors.** An aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Sometimes people use that as an excuse for their ongoing habit, "The Spirit hasn't given me the strength to quit." We need to be firm, and decisive. *We* are in charge of our bodies; no one else is (I Cor. 9:27). "Put to death" is not a soft, kind, friendly picture. We need to "kill" this behavior, not make a treaty or compromise with it.