

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtmnc.org Today's Date: May 3, 2015

Keep Yourself Focused On Kingdom Activity

by Dan Trygg

“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”

Jn. 5:19

“Therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit...”

I Pet. 1:13

Frank Tillapaugh, in his book, *Unleashing the Church*, described a phenomenon of human nature that became evident during the Korean war. It was noticed that *there were two very different mindsets, and two distinct dynamics of human interaction*, between the troops located at the front, and those stationed a few miles back from the front. **Among the front line troops there was a noticeably greater camaraderie and team work, ...and much less picking at each other or arguing about differences**, whether about opinions or preferences. There was virtually no complaining about living conditions, or about the prudence of the general's orders, or about political opinions. *The focal point was the task at hand*: whether engaging the enemy in an offensive movement, or in digging in to hold a position against an assault from the other side. *The imminent demand of the situation made all other issues seem irrelevant*. Furthermore, the very survival of a given soldier depended upon the support of his fellows. The cause of survival, and the cause of the objective, outweighed every other concern. Pettiness and criticism fell away because of the surpassing, and urgent, need to work together in a common project. They were flexible and inventive, making due with lack of equipment or imperfect scenarios, because *they were motivated to find a way to make things work*.

Yet, just a few miles behind these troops, the dynamics were very different. **Among the rear echelon troops, griping, complaining, arguing, and even in-fighting were common place**. Morale was low. *The lack of a unified outward focus resulted in a deterioration of discipline, and attention drifted to what was irritating* about the circumstances and people in one's immediate surroundings.

Tillapaugh's point is that *these same two dynamics can also take place in a church setting*. Often *those who are significantly involved in real, active ministry are similar to the front-line troops*. They are flexible, inventive, willing to work together with very different people in order to get a job done. They overcome personality difficulties and disputes because of the higher importance of the service they are involved in. Denominational identities and minor theological disagreements are insignificant when compared with the task at hand. Unfortunately, *often a rear-echelon mindset can creep in among other believers who are not active on the "front line"*. Sometimes, committee members, administrators, or just “non-combatants” get entangled in petty differences, or policies. Or, even in preparatory training “camps” (e.g., schools), disputes, criticisms and arguments break out, ruining morale and splintering whatever unity there had been. Theological issues that seem insignificant at the “front”, suddenly become magnified all out of proportion, and become “hills to die on”, ...and infighting breaks out.

If the observations that Tillapaugh made have any merit, the words of the apostle Peter become the more significant, literally: “Consequently, girding up the loins of the perception of y'all, ...being self-controlled, completely hope upon the grace being brought to y'all in revelation of Jesus [the] Anointed-King. As children of obedience (hearing-under), not being ones conforming (yourselves) to the former (i.e., in the ignorance of y'all) lusts, ...rather, according to the Holy One calling y'all, also *become yourselves holy ones* in all your habitual conduct...” What is Peter talking about? **In the broad scope there are two messages: First, stop hoping in what you used to hope in for life**. Instead, hope in what God has laid up for you in Christ. Christ is our life (Col. 3:4). Fulfilling, abundant life comes from Him (Jn. 10:10). **Secondly, begin to see yourself as one dedicated to God's service**. That means *you can no longer live your own life according to the programming of your old family or culture*. Instead, *keep attentive to God's direction and leading, ready to go into action to serve Him*. To tie this paragraph to the preceding one: **The front line of ministry opportunity and spiritual warfare is always right around us. We must develop a front-line mentality, if we are to survive and be effective. A rear-echelon mentality has no place among us**. We cannot be picking on each other. *We must stay focused on our joint mission, and work together*.

What does it mean to “gird up the loins of your perception”? In Bible times, men often wore long robes or tunics for their everyday attire. If there was a need for strenuous action and/or speed, that type of clothing would tend to bind around the legs. It would not only become hot and uncomfortable, it could also limit one's motion. It could even inadvertently get stepped on, causing the person to stumble and fall. In war, long robes could be used to trip an opponent up and render him helpless. Therefore, whenever a man prepared to fight, or to run, or to work hard and quickly, he would either *strip for work* (Jn. 21:7), or he would fold or roll up the edges of his robe and tuck them into

his belt around his waist (I Kg. 18:46). “Girding the loins” was an old English phrase that still lingers in many modern translations. (A somewhat similar idiom from our own culture would be to “roll up your sleeves”, meaning to prepare to get to work with your hands.) **Basically, to “gird up your loins” meant to be on the alert, be prepared to act and act quickly.**

While the immediate context mentions “trials”, and being “tested by fire”, there is no suggestion of *spiritual* warfare as a threat until the very end of the book (1:6,7; 5:8,9). If you follow Peter’s argument, it would seem that ***we are to prepare ourselves more for the strenuous work involved in putting off old patterns of thinking that keep us stuck in former pre-Christian lusts and behaviors.*** It is *these* which wage war against the soul (2:11). (The fact that there *are* former lusts which we tend to be conformed by *does* sound very similar to the “strongholds”, or “reasonings raised up against the experiential knowledge of God”, mentioned by Paul in II Cor. 10:4,5, however.) Therefore, he specifically tells us to “gird up the loins of your perception”, i.e., the *faculty* of perception and intellect, the mind, comprehension, understanding. **He is saying, “Be mentally sharp and ready for action.”** The seriousness of the situation is reinforced by the next word, translated as “be sober”. The word literally means the opposite of what happens when a person is intoxicated. Instead of the confusion and loss of self-control that alcohol can bring, this word refers to a mental state free from every form of mental and spiritual excess or confusion. It means to **be clear-headed, self-possessed, well-composed in mind, avoiding rashness, irrationality, or excesses of passion that may promote poor judgment.**

One guiding light for all our thinking, a standard by which we are to evaluate and measure everything else, **is the grace being brought to us in revelation of Jesus our King.** Understanding who *He is*, and *what He has done for us*, gives us a hope that has substance and reality. **Peter tells us to fix our hope completely upon this wonderful grace.** It guides us through the darkness and the confusion of our past programming, *and* the siren calls of the surrounding world (Tit. 2:11,12). It also has made possible the relationship we can enjoy as children of God. The language indicates that **there is a growing understanding and appreciation of that.** The text describes the grace as “being borne to you in revelation (uncovering) of Jesus Christ” (vs. 13). There is no “the” in the Greek (No “*the* revelation”), so Peter is not talking here about an “end of times coming of Jesus and revelation of His grace and glory”. He is indicating that there is a process where **God will uncover and reveal to us more and more of His grace now, especially if we are asking and seeking him for it.** Paul describes the same kind of experience in Ephesians 1:17. There, he prays that God may give these believers a “spirit of wisdom (skill) and revelation (uncovering) in the true-knowledge of Him.” **Another important source of information to discern reality**, to put off the old ways and to walk as ones coming to be “separated from common use and consecrated for service to God” (i.e., “holy”), **is the voice of God to me.** The word translated as “hearing-under obedience” implies response to a message or spoken communication passed down by a higher authority. The etymology of the word communicates a relationship of speaking and hearing. **We are to be “children of hearing-under-obedience”. This implies we are to be hearing from God, in some way. Learning to discern His communication to us, and consistently responding to it, will lead us to freedom, maturity and fruitfulness.**

I want to highlight one aspect of this last thought, the “hearing-under obedience” to God. Although He was sinless, Christ Himself had to learn this kind of obedience through the things He suffered (Heb. 5:8). In other words, there is some degree to which this **“hearing-under” obedience will require trusting and obeying when it seems that God is telling you to go against the grain, or against common sense, or your comfort level.** There is another word for obedience which helps to illustrate this, a word meaning “I obey because I am persuaded”. Comparing these two concepts side-by-side, it becomes apparent that this latter obedience grows out of a sense of understanding and believing in the perceived outcome, while the former word depends almost entirely on trusting or respecting the person who is asking for your obedience. **It is not as difficult to cooperate and obey when you understand, as it is to respond in obedient trust simply on the reliability of the person who gives you direction,** especially when it is a difficult, risky, or even sacrificial thing we are being asked to do. **Jesus learned this “hearing-under obedience” by the experience of many such faith-experiments,** and He saw that His Father could be trusted.

John 5:19 is one small glimpse into Jesus’ own mental process. He said that the way He was directed by God to do His miraculous signs was that “the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” **The way Jesus operated was to engage in what He saw the hand of His Father involved in.** He would actively participate together with His Father, following the lead and method that He saw His Father using. **His perception was “girded for action”, in that He was always mentally alert to notice what He perceived as the activity of God, and He was ready to respond to whatever the Spirit would show Him as He pursued further involvement.** This little “rule of thumb” provides us a clue as to how we may “gird the loins of our perception” in order to overcome old ways of living, and discover God’s will in *our* lives, as well. Jesus said, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (Jn. 8:31). **God has not quit working. He is active all around us.** We need to begin to recognize what He is doing, and join Him, just as Jesus did. **We are on the “front line”, and we need to be tuned in and responsive to His leading.**