

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: May 17, 2015

Paul the Builder and Servant

by Dan Trygg

“He is also head of the body, the gathered-assembly; and He is first-cause, firstborn out-from the corpses, in order that He might come to have first place in everything, ¹⁹ because in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and by means of Him to reconcile all things unto Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross, whether the things on earth or the things in heaven. ²¹ And y'all, formerly alienated-away-ones and hostile in outlook in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved (dislodged, or shifted) away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a servant. ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and I complete the things lacking of the afflictions of the Christ in my flesh on behalf of His body, which is the gathered-assembly, of which I became a servant according to the stewardship of God given to me toward y'all to fulfill the message of God...”

Colossians 1:18-25

We talked last time about how Jesus, being the creator and sustainer of all things, nevertheless chose to give His life in order to reconcile us to God. His great purpose for doing this has been, and is, to present us before the Father as dedicated-ones, ones with no blemish or accusation against us. This is not a “hoop” that we have to “jump through” in order to come to God. It is a righteousness, holiness and wholeness which He has purchased for us that describes, at the same time, (1.) a covering of Christ's grace that, at the point of our faith, cleanses us and opens the way for fellowshiping with the Father (cf. Rom. 3:23-26; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:19-22); (2.) an inworking provision which presently and ongoingly actively heals, restores and develops us toward maturity (Eph. 4:11-24; I Jn. 1:7; Tit. 2:11-14; Rom. 8:9-14; Gal. 5:13-25); and, (3.) the endpoint, or objective, in all aspects of our life of the full fruition of His working within us, which will ultimately be realized at His return from Heaven on our behalf (I Jn. 3:1-3; Phil. 3:20,21; Rom. 8:16-25; I Cor. 15:20-28,35-58). There is a past, present and future reality of His grace, which He would like us to understand, share in, and enjoy. Of course, the past has already been accomplished for us, at His initiative. He acted on our behalf, without waiting for our consent or partnership (Rom. 5:6-10).

Nevertheless, for this to become effective in our experience, we must *act* (Jn. 1:10-12; Rom. 5:17; Col. 2:6,7; Eph. 5:8-10; cf. II Thess. 2:10; Jn. 3:16-18,36). We must *trust* (a verb) in His graceful provision by (a.) accepting that what He says He has done for us is real, (b.) choosing to take the gift which He offers to us and apply it to our own selves, and (c.) living as if this transaction has, in fact, taken place, and that we have been set free from our past in order to be devoted in service to Him. The emphasis of Paul's teaching in this paragraph of Colossians is to remain steadfast, to not be moved away or dislodged from the hope we have in the good-message we heard concerning what God has made available for us in Christ. We are exhorted to “remain on” or “continue to live in” the faith. This verb has, as its root, a Greek word meaning “to live in, dwell, abide, stay or remain”. This particular form is intensified by the addition of a prefix meaning “upon”. The resulting word picture is like someone staking a claim and stubbornly holding onto their homestead, in spite of hardship, trials and pressure from others. The word translated as “firmly established” in the NASB, or “established” in the NIV, describes a foundation having been dug and laid. The work has been done, and still remains there as a foundation to build one's dwelling upon. The next word, “steadfast” (NASB), or “firm” (NIV), refers to the soundness of this foundation. It is “set”, firmly and solidly in place.

Metaphorically, these word pictures are applied, ...not to our *faith*, as if to describe a trust that is well-founded (i.e., built upon something real and secure, something that is not wishy-washy or moveable), but to *us*, “having-been-founded-ones and firmly-set-ones”. *Are* we ones who are well-founded and firmly-set in faith? *Will* we continue to dwell upon the faith-foundation within us, or will we be washed out, starved out, scared out, lured away, distracted from our hope in Jesus to pursue some false hope somewhere else? If we are not confident as to how firmly founded we are, we need to dig ourselves in a little deeper, and get cemented into place, in order to prepare for the storms and tests of life, ...for they *will* come. Seeing our own lives, and that of others, as “houses-being-built” works two ways: First, for us as individual believers, the thrust is that we ought to do what we can to get ourselves ready for the long term, to take the time to dig deep to make ourselves (as intelligent, self-aware buildings) solidly and firmly established in our faith. This has not only to do with understanding, but also with obedience. Jesus said that the one who “hears My words, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does *not* act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall” (Matt. 7:24-27). The lessons from Jesus' story are: (1.)

invest the time and effort to lay a good foundation; (2.) the time to build is in the time of *good* weather, not the time of the *storm*; (3.) without a good foundation, the ruin of one's life will be disastrous, and very costly; (4.) the kind of foundation-building Jesus advised was *obedience to His word*.

The second application of the word picture of us as "houses-being-built" has to do with those who are leaders, teachers, and "builders" in our lives. Actually, we all have some responsibility for this, since God has designed the Body of Christ so that we are all to be "over-seeing" one another (Heb. 12:15 uses this very word in a plural form, implying that we all are "watching-over-ones" in regard to one another). We are *all* to be concerned for *one another*, and to take initiative and responsibility to speak and act truthfully and lovingly to help one another grow (Eph. 4:15). Therefore, we ought to all be concerned that our brothers and sisters be well founded in faith, and well supplied to meet the needs of life. *Their* spiritual health and success will be *our* spiritual health and success, at least in part. There are some of us, however, who have a special calling and responsibility to be builders, equippers and trainers in the Body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). God has gifted us to specifically help others get established and soundly on their way in their walk in Christ. In I Cor. 3:5-15, Paul describes himself, and others in leadership, as "builders". There, the language indicates that he is thinking of construction on a group level, not only on a one-to-one basis. Nevertheless, one cannot escape that the health and success of the faith-walk of the group will be dependent upon the health and success of the faith-walk of each individual in the group. Consequently, to make certain that the people are *all* "well-founded and firmly-set" is an important part of the process of "building" a healthy, functioning church. Taking the time to lay a good foundation here is just as important as in an individual's life. Many churches have ended in disaster because they did not get their people established, well-founded, firmly-set, and well-prepared for the storms of life. Often the influx of a large number of new people, or a rapid, steady flow of new converts, can tax any natural process of relational discipleship. There must be an *intentional, disciplined effort* to make sure people get themselves firmly grounded and off to a good, healthy start.

Paul saw himself as a servant, a servant of *God* (Tit. 1:1), a servant of the *gospel-message* (Col. 1:23), and a servant of the *church* (II Cor. 3:3; Col. 1:24,25). This was not a conflicting set of allegiances. Rather, they coincided in a coordinated effort. He was given a stewardship to, as he says in verse 25, "fulfill the message of God". He was a servant on assignment. He was to proclaim, represent, and fulfill the word of God. He did this by preaching and gathering people to start assemblies of believers, and then encouraging them to grow up into maturity in Christ. As a servant, he thought of the needs of those he served before his own comforts (Lk. 17:1-10; Phil. 2:1-8). In a somewhat controversial passage, he refers to the sufferings he endured as "doing my share on behalf of His Body (which is the church) in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (vs. 24). In *Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*, the commentator notes, in regard to Paul "doing [his] share" that the verb is a rare verb, meaning to "fill up in turn", "It is now Paul's 'turn' at bat, to use a baseball figure. Christ had his 'turn', the grandest of all, and suffered for us all in a sense *not* true of anyone else. ...And *yet* Christ did not cause suffering to cease. There is plenty left for Paul and for each of us in his time." The "things lacking of Christ's afflictions" are *not* redemptive suffering, in the sense that it pays for the sins of any person. Rather it refers to the "leftovers" of sufferings that still remain if we are to carry out the mission of the gospel in a broken and hostile world. It is referring especially to hardship and suffering faced in the efforts of helping others to hear the message of Christ, or in causing them to grow up into maturity. Hence, it is referred to as suffering "on behalf of His Body (which is the church)".

Paul had his turn "at bat", so to speak, but it is important to see that *we are all called to take our turn*, as well. Jesus' words, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Lk. 9:23), ring across the centuries to our own time. Like Paul, *we* are called to be *servants of God, servants of the gospel, servants of the Body of Christ*. To effectively do this, *we will* face opposition and hardship. We will need to make sure that *we* are firmly grounded and established. We, too, will be called upon to consider the needs of others before ourselves, and set aside comforts in order to help others. We, too, will be called upon to make sacrifices. Just as we learn to make sacrifices for our children, in the same way we can willingly make such sacrifices without resentment, if we do it for the good of the other person. The enemy will attempt to distract us from investing in others in this way, because the love and glory of God will be seen in us when we do this. He will use harassment and ease, pain and pleasure, fear and distraction to pull us away from our foundation and calling. Remain true. Persevere. Keep your head and perspective clear. We are here to *occupy, to conquer new territory* and to *plunder the house* of the "strong man", who has been defeated by our King (cf. Col. 2:15; Matt. 12:29). We are here for the long haul. The faith-walk is not a sprint; it is a marathon. We must prepare ourselves mentally and spiritually for a struggle that will not stop until we leave this life. If we find that there is no struggle, no spiritual battle going on around us, then we have wandered *away* from the action. Whatever we are serving, it is no longer God, the gospel, or the Body of Christ. Our lives have either become irrelevant, in that we are no threat, ...or we may actually have become a detriment to the God we claim to serve.