

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: September 27, 2009

Being Set Free From Ways That Don't Work

by Dan Trygg

"...knowing that... you were redeemed/set-free-by-a-ransom-payment out-from your vain/empty/ineffective way-of-living..." I Peter 1:18
"In freedom Christ set us free; stand-strong therefore and do not again be subject to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

Often we have a significant disconnect between our belief in God, and the way we live day-to-day. Somehow, we compartmentalize our "religious life", and keep it separated from our "everyday life". Our faith, or our "exercise of religion", which happens when we go to church, or maybe even when we read our Bibles at home, can be a "feel good" kind of experience, ...an emotional release, ...or maybe the fulfillment of a duty, which we must do at certain times of the year, but most of the time we do not think about (Easter and Christmas church attenders). If, however, we do not have a walk with God that is real and personal *every day*, then we are missing the core of what Jesus came to make available to us. **God intended that our relationship with Him would affect all that we say and do.** If we have not considered that, or are not pursuing it, then we misunderstand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

So, what is faith all about? If we go back to the first four chapters of the Bible, we receive an introduction to the overview of what is going on. In chapter one and two, we are introduced to God, the Creator of all things, and to humankind, the pinnacle of His creation. **God made us to be like Him**, and set us in an idyllic place, surrounding us with all the good and pleasant things we might ever need. **He gave us a job to do**, to explore and order His creation, tilling and keeping it so that it might be beautiful and productive. In chapter three, however, we are introduced to a third player in this scenario, the Serpent, or Satan who took over the serpent's body to approach mankind. **The tempter came to set humankind against God by luring us into believing that we could be fulfilled through a way outside of God's will and purpose for us.** As Adam and Eve stepped out of innocence into disobedience **they discovered that, instead of the fulfillment which the tempter had promised, they experienced a feeling of loss.** For the first time they avoided meeting with God. **They experienced guilt and feelings of shame, and tried to hide from Him, and from each other.** When confronted with their sin, **they avoided personal ownership of their actions**, blaming others for the choices which they had made. The lines of personal responsibility were blurred within their own minds, even though clear to others. **Instead of God's blessing, the consequences of their choosing to depart from His ways resulted in a curse and hardships.** In chapter four, we see the deepening extent of evil, as one brother kills the other out of envy and jealousy. **Sin against other humans, or even ourselves, is the final outworking of a sinful disregard of God and His ways.** As the story progresses through the next few chapters, we find that sin spread across the globe, affecting not only people, but also bringing violence and perversion to even the animals (Gen. 6:11-13).

So, what is faith all about? It is about those who believed God when He promised that He would remove the curse and the ruination of sin, and call out a people to follow Him to a lifestyle of obedience that would be healthier, better, and would bring freedom and fulfillment. The writer of the book of Hebrews put it this way, "...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). In other words, **there is a benefit for following God.** Somehow, we will be better off for choosing to walk with Him, in agreement with His ways, instead of contrary to them. **God designed the universe so that good generally will be rewarded, and selfishness will be punished.** Since He will lead us in the good ways, if we follow Him we will experience the benefits that are built into the nature of things. If we disregard Him and His ways, we will experience the hurt and brokenness that results from trying to force things to work in ways that they were not designed to work.

The truth is that **we all have tried to live contrary to the design of God's creation.** We have all hurt ourselves discovering that the world does not adjust for us. It remains true to *its* nature. If we are to be happy within it, then we must accommodate ourselves to it. In the realm of physics and natural law, this is most apparent. All of us have bumped our knees, or wiped out trying to turn a corner too fast. By the time we are adults, most of us have learned to adjust our activities to the nature of things. The same principle is true with the human psyche, however, ...only the cause and effect nature is not always so immediate. Nevertheless, **those who follow God's prescriptions will find that their lives are happier and more rewarding than those who do not.** Just as we have all experimented with the physical world, when we choose to do things contrary to God's heart and the way He made us, we will experience the painful consequence. **Pain is built into us to let us know when something is not working.**

Besides our own personal experimentations, **we have also been given ideas and examples about life from our family and friends, which serve as a benchmark of what is "normal" and "appropriate". Some of these are accurate, good, and helpful. Others are inaccurate, misleading and destructive.** They do not really work, especially over the long haul. Unfortunately, because human beings are so complex, and individually different, we do not always get the immediate and predictable feedback that we usually receive when dealing with physical laws. **Sometimes we may actually get rewarded in the short term for something that is destructive in the long term** (cf. Heb. 11:25). This is where addiction, and repeated cycles of family dysfunction, fool people into thinking that everything is OK, when seeds are being planted which will yield a harvest of pain, brokenness and sorrow in the future. **Often the fruit of our actions is not clearly evident for some time.**

The apostle Peter was speaking of these kind of things when he wrote how Jesus came to *redeem us*. Redemption is an interesting word to use here. **Jesus did not simply come to teach us the right way to live, He came to buy us out of bondage, or slavery, to something that kept us captive.** More than just influencing us, the language indicates that in some way it "owned us", or at least "imprisoned us". Moreover, **securing our freedom came at no small price.** We could not be ransomed by gold, or silver, jewels or precious stones. Whatever held us captive was not interested in these things. **It took the shedding of Jesus' own blood to secure our freedom.** So, *what held us captive?* We were in bondage to sin, under obligation to the Law, slaves to "elemental spirits" (Rom. 6:6,16-22; 7:1-6; Gal. 4:1-11). Without getting into all kinds of detail, it is enough to see that

(1.) We were all in bondage;

(2.) There is a bondage to habitual ways of living life that do not work;

(3.) We learn these patterns from our families and surrounding culture;

(4.) This slavery is real, and a purchase price had to be paid for our release;

(5.) Jesus paid the price for our freedom; and

(6.) We need to choose to walk free, ...or we remain in bondage.

This last point is stated several times in the NT:

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, *you are slaves of the one whom you obey*, either of sin, resulting in death, or of obedience, resulting in righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16).

"Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, *everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin*" (Jn. 8:34).

"...promising [others] freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for *by what a person is overcome, by this he is enslaved*" (II Pet. 2:19).

Do you want freedom? Do you want to have God's best for you? You have to be willing to evaluate your whole life and worldview, and allow God to show you a better way. Then, when you can see that there *is* a better way, you need to adjust yourself to fit with that. Now, these are not just theoretical ideas I am talking about here. These are life habits, life patterns, life expectations, life methodology. Are you willing to learn to live your life differently, because you *believe* that God's way will work out *best* for you? **He is waiting for you to give Him permission to open your eyes and heart to Him and His ways. If you truly will seek Him, He will let you find Him** (e.g., Jer. 29:11-14). If you *want* to walk in His ways and be wise, *you will need to seek* God and His wisdom (Prov. 2:1-3:18).

This whole process needs to happen in all of our lives, on many fronts. **We all have lies and misperceptions in our lives which God desires to liberate us from.** This process is described as "renewing the mind" by Paul in Romans 12:2. One of the problems we have to deal with here is that *we only know what we know, and we don't know what we don't know*. In other words, in many areas we honestly *do not know* a better way of living. We are not aware of other options. In those cases, **the first step toward discovering a better way is the admission that what we have learned to do is not working.** Then, we can *begin to gather information*, from the Scriptures, from other believers or other sources, which can begin to supply new options. Next, we have to *implement what we learn*. We have to *choose to do it differently*. Otherwise, nothing changes if nothing changes. **Growth and change requires trying new things.** Of course, it will feel strange, and possibly awkward, because it is unfamiliar. Keep working with it, until you can determine what works for you.

Finally, we are not alone in this struggle. On the one hand, we have spiritual enemies who are trying to keep us in bondage, or ensnare us in other ways. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit works with us to give us understanding and wisdom. He will empower us to change. Fellow believers can be powerful allies in this process. They can share with us the insights and practical tools they have learned, and they can emotionally support us, and bathe us in prayer. **Remember, Jesus already paid the ransom, so we could be set free. The cell door is already unlocked. It is up to us to open it, and go outside** to the unfamiliar territory that will hopefully lead us to what is healthy and godly.