



Preparing the Bride....Yet, A Nation of People Who Reject Preparation?

By Barbara L. Klika, MSW

Undershepherd

www.Set-Apart-Ministries.org

September 13, 2013

I have something different this season as we continue to address the need for the Bride to prepare herself. We do know that it is always necessary to begin personally during this season of Teshuvah in order to have clean hands and a pure heart. Yet we know, too, that we are often shortsighted or even blind to our own weaknesses and failings. How does the Bride become prepared to meet Him when many do not know or appear to want to endure the preparation process? Our Messiah echoed those who came before in His concern that people will be harried and helpless without a shepherd, yet most people do not really understand what a shepherd offers, nor are they feeling very comfortable to try to find out!

On the other hand, when one does find someone who is interested in personal and spiritual maturity, it is unusual! Such people often struggle with isolation. Few are deeply seeking Him. This is not a new thing, just sad...especially in light of increasing challenges, difficulties: famine, disease, wars and rumors of wars, signs in the heavens. And those who *are* doing so often find themselves in the minority, ostracized.

In our little community, we have focused on the development of maturity as part of preparing Messiah's Bride. For some this has been an amazing blessing and their growth has been of great joy to them and others. For some, it has appeared to be harsh or demanding or judgmental. In the *What Shepherds Need to Know* series, my introduction includes observations that it is not possible to shepherd someone without their willing consent. Even when people give consent in theory, or as long as it applies to others, when it comes to themselves, great fear, defensiveness or anger often arise...and the easiest person to target is whoever is speaking about something they don't want to hear!

I have wondered if those in the Messianic movement might be a little harder to reach than the general "churched" population. My reasoning was that they may have shown more tenacity and individual strength to break out of the "mold" of tradition or institutional authority and thus be more resistant to accepting direction. I thought, too, that many have been hurt by previous misuses or abuses of spiritual authority, thus making them unlikely to be ready to trust leadership in new situations. While these observations may be accurate, they do not seem to be the whole story. There is simply an unwillingness

of many to tolerate direction, even at the same time that we see a few lonely people who are serious about their faith.

Where do you think the Bride is to be found?

Recently, I randomly came across several articles of interest. These articles seem to confirm and exemplify our concern and recognition of the need for teaching on maturity. With brief descriptions, I will include the links to them for your review.

These first two excerpts and the final one were written by A. W. Tozer, a man of great spiritual perception.

The Loneliness of the Christian

The loneliness of the Christian results from his walk with God in an ungodly world, a walk that must often take him away from the fellowship of good Christians as well as from that of the unregenerate world. His God-given instincts cry out for companionship with others of his kind, others who can understand his longings, his aspirations, his absorption in the love of Christ; and because within his circle of friends there are so few who share his inner experiences he is forced to walk alone. The unsatisfied longings of the prophets for human understanding caused them to cry out in their complaint, and even our Lord Himself suffered in the same way./p>

The man [or woman] who has passed on into the divine Presence in actual inner experience will not find many who understand him. He finds few who care to talk about that which is the supreme object of his interest, so he is often silent and preoccupied in the midst of noisy religious shoptalk. For this he earns the reputation of being dull and over-serious, so he is avoided and the gulf between him and society widens. He searches for friends upon whose garments he can detect the smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces, and finding few or none he, like Mary of old, keeps these things in his heart.

It is this very loneliness that throws him back upon God. His inability to find human companionship drives him to seek in God what he can find nowhere else.

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." (Revelation 12:11)

<http://awildernessvoice.com/Lonely.htm>

Do Not Hope to Win the Lost by Being Agreeable

by A.W. Tozer, Renewed Day By Day, September 3

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. 1 Corinthians 16:13

IN OUR DAY, RELIGION MAY BE VERY PRECIOUS to some persons, but hardly important enough to cause division or risk hurting anyone's feelings!

In all our discussions there must never be any trace of intolerance, we are reminded; but obviously we forget that the most fervent devotees of tolerance are invariably intolerant of everyone who speaks about God with certainty. And there must be no bigotry—which is the name given to spiritual assurance by those who do not enjoy it!

The desire to please may be commendable enough under certain circumstances, but when pleasing men means displeasing God it is an unqualified evil and should have no place in the Christian's heart. To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men. This is such a common truth that one hesitates to mention it, yet it appears to have been overlooked by the majority of Christians today.

There is a notion abroad that to win a man we must agree with him. Actually, the exact opposite is true!

The man who is going in a wrong direction will never be set right by the affable religionist who falls into step beside him and goes the same way. Someone must place himself across the path and insist that the straying man turn around and go in the right direction.

<http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/tozer10.html>

And this study by the Barna Group seems to nail down a crucial issue: Only 5% of Christian believers have experienced any kind of accountability from their faith group/leaders. Resistance is speculated to be due to privacy concerns, fear of being rejected, fear of being perceived as judgmental, lack of knowledge to discern between judgment and discernment/exhortation.

The opening paragraph of the following link is as follows:

November 29, 2010 - Many of the exhortations in the Bible are not popular in today's world.

But a new study by the Barna Group indicates that one of the least favorite biblical principles might well be "Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow" (Hebrews 13:17, NLT).

The Extent of Accountability

Because the underlying theme of the Christian life is one of being transformed from a selfish and self-driven individual to one who lives for and surrenders control of one's life to God, the practice of accountability for life choices and behavior is central to that process of transformation. Yet, a national survey by the Barna Group among people who describe themselves as Christian and involved in a church discovered that only 5% indicated that their church does anything to hold them accountable for integrating biblical beliefs and principles into their life.

<https://www.barna.org/congregations-articles/454-study-describes-christian-accountability-provided-by-churches>

<http://www.mnnonline.org/article/15058> regarding Barna Study

<http://mikebreen.wordpress.com/2010/12/04/discipleship-without-accountability/> Comments on the Barna Study and how it affects discipleship

And, finally, some additional words of wisdom from Dr. Tozer.

The Unknown Saints

by A.W. Tozer, *Man: The Dwelling Place Of God*, pg. 95-99
(c) 1966 Christian Publications

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH IN *A FINE PASSAGE* states his belief that there are many more poets in the world than we suppose,

*"... men endowed with highest gifts,
The vision and the faculty divine,"*

but who are unknown because they lacked or failed to cultivate the gift of versification.

Then he sums up his belief in a sentence that suggests truth far beyond any that he had in mind at the time:

*"Strongest minds
Are often those of whom the noisy world
Hears least."*

Most of us in our soberer moments would admit the soundness of this observation, but the hard fact is that for the average person it is not the findings of the sober moment that determine our total working philosophy; rather it is the shallow and deceptive notions pressed upon us by the "noisy world." Human society generally (and especially in the United States) has fallen into the error of assuming that greatness and fame are synonymous. Americans appear to take for granted that each generation provides a certain number of superior men and the democratic processes unerringly find those men and set them in a place of prominence. How wrong can people get!

We have but to become acquainted with, or even listen to, the big names of our times to discover how wretchedly inferior most of them are. Many appear to have arrived at their present eminence by pull, brass, nerve, gall and lucky accident. We turn away from them sick to our stomach and wonder for a discouraged moment if this is the best the human race can produce. But we gain our self-possession again by the simple expedient of recalling some of the

plain men we know, who live unheralded and unsung, and who are made of stuff infinitely finer than the hoarse voiced braggarts who occupy too many of the highest offices in the land.

If we would see life steadily and see it whole we must make a stern effort to break away from the power of that false philosophy that equates greatness with fame. The two may be and often are oceans and continents apart.

If the church were a body wholly unaffected by the world we could toss the above problem over to the secular philosophers and go about our business; but the truth is that the church also suffers from this evil notion. Christians have fallen into the habit of accepting the noisiest and most notorious among them as the best and the greatest. They too have learned to equate popularity with excellence, and in open defiance of the Sermon on the Mount they have given their approval not to the meek but to the self-assertive; not to the mourner but to the self-assured; not to the pure in heart who see God but to the publicity hunter who seeks headlines.

If we might paraphrase Wordsworth we could make his lines run,

*"Purest saints
Are often those of whom the noisy church
Hears least,"*

and the words would be true, deeply, wonderfully true.

After more than thirty years of observing the religious scene I have been forced to conclude that saintliness and church leadership are not often synonymous. I have on many occasions preached to grateful Christians who had gone so much farther than I had into the sweet mysteries of God that I actually felt unworthy to tie their shoe laces. Yet they sat meekly listening while one inferior to them stood in the place of prominence and declared imperfectly truths with which they had long been familiar by intimate and beautiful experience. They must have known and felt how much of theory and how little of real heart knowledge there was in the sermon, but they said nothing and no doubt appreciated what little of good there was in the message.

Were the church a pure and Spirit-filled body, wholly led and directed by spiritual considerations, certainly the purest and the saintliest men and women would be the ones most appreciated and most honored; but the opposite is true. Godliness is no longer valued, except for the very old or the very dead. The saintly souls are forgotten in the whirl of religious activity. The noisy, the self-assertive, the entertaining are sought after and rewarded in every way, with gifts, crowds, offerings and publicity. The Christlike, the self-forgetting, the other-worldly are jostled aside to make room for the latest converted playboy who is usually not too well converted and still very much of a playboy.

The whole shortsighted philosophy that ignores eternal qualities and majors on trivialities is a form of unbelief. These Christians who embody such a philosophy are clamoring after present reward; they are too impatient to wait the Lord's time. They will not abide the day when Christ shall make known the secret of every man's heart and reward each one according to his deeds. The true saint sees farther than this; he cares little for passing values; he looks forward

eagerly to the day when eternal things shall come into their own and godliness will be found to be all that matters.

Strange as it may be, the holiest souls who have ever lived have earned the reputation for being pessimistic. Their smiling indifference to the world's attractions and their steady resistance to its temptations have been misunderstood by shallow thinkers and attributed to an unsocial spirit and a lack of love for mankind. What the world failed to see was that these peculiar men and women were beholding a city invisible; they were walking day by day in the light of another and eternal kingdom. They were already tasting the powers of the world to come and enjoying afar the triumph of Christ and the glories of the new creation.

No, the unknown saints are not pessimists, nor are they misanthropes or joy-killers. They are by virtue of their godly faith the world's only true optimists. Their creed was stated simply by Julian of Norwich when she said, "*But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.*" Though sin is in the world, she argued, a frightful visitation to be reckoned with, yet so perfect is the atonement that the time will come when all evil shall be eradicated and everything restored again to its pristine beauty in Christ. Then "all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

The wise Christian will be content to wait for that day. In the meantime, he will serve his generation in the will of God. If he should be overlooked in the religious popularity contests he will give it but small attention. He knows whom he is trying to please and he is willing to let the world think what it will of him. He will not be around much longer anyway, and where he is going men will be known not by their Hooper rating but by the holiness of their character.

<http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/unknown.html>

Abba Father, please show Your people how to proceed in our communities and in our relationships with one another! Confirm Your Presence in the hearts of those who seek You. Draw back those who have fallen away or victim to poor or false teachings. Restore us all to our right minds, that, like the Prodigal Son, we may wholeheartedly turn back to You and to Your paths! We ask this not because we deserve it, but because of Messiah's work on our behalf, and for Your Name's sake. Omayne!

If you found this article of encouragement, please consider checking out our website at www.set-apart-ministries.org for similar materials.