

This Isn't Boot Camp

(09/10/03)

To the Church That Meets at Betsy's House,

Ordinarily I just write a letter every other week but for this one week I will make an exception. The reason for this letter is to remind you that we will now be meeting every week! Within the next couple of weeks we will also be moving the meeting place, probably to a restaurant near Betsy's. I will keep you updated.

This past week I've been engaged in a rather extended, and sometimes emotional exchange, with a brother in Christ. He has taken issue with some things I believe to be very important and we have exchanged several emails.

What struck me about the whole exchange was that he would never respond to my challenges to defend his position with Scripture. What he did do, primarily, was to attack me on a personal level. He kept trying to draw me into an emotional argument about me, how bad I am etc. The bottom line is that, by God's grace, I was able to not fall prey to that tactic. By the way, I don't believe he was intentionally trying to do that, it was just his "way". It was what he did by default.

I mention this for a couple of reasons of which the first is----the more you take a solid, clear and stated position the more you will draw fire. Now, as humans, we don't like to "draw fire". Our natural inclination is to look for ways that don't arouse passionate disagreements. We don't like ripples on our ponds. We have the unbiblical view that "getting along" is the ultimate criteria for being a good Christian.

The apostle Paul would certainly fail to meet that criteria. He was one disturbing character. It seems like everywhere he went there was some kind of riot. He did not, however, go looking to create a riot but what he taught was the catalyst. We need to be reminded that the Bible is the "sword" of the Spirit. Elsewhere we learn that "all Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness". (II Tim 3:16) All of those imply the necessity of change. We do not like to be challenged, in that, we are usually pretty comfortable in our present state. Any who would seek to rouse us out of our slumber are seen as unloving and harsh.

I remember back when I was young buck, just barely turned 18. Since I had nothing else to do, I enlisted in the Navy. "Join the Navy and see the world" blared the recruiting poster. Wow, what a rude awakening I was about to have. As we rolled into Camp Nimitz in San Diego I was already having that sinking feeling that I may not have done the best thing.

As I, and the rest of the busload of "boots", rolled past a company of "old salts" (the had been there for a month or so), and they called out "you'll be sorry", my sinking feeling began to grow. Then they shaved off our hair, took our clothes and cut off all communication with the outside world. Laying there in my bunk, without a pillow, I kept asking myself---"what have you done?" What I had done was join the service!

A word we Christians often use to communicate service is ministry, it is joining the service. Sometimes being in the service doesn't square with our own desires or feelings but when you are in you are in. You, as a private, seaman apprentice or whatever, have lost power over your own lives and it is a new place for many, if not all, of us.

In the book entitled "Money, Sex and Power", which gives a Biblical perspective on those deadly three, the author Richard Foster has this to say about power. "The idolatry of today is the idolatry of power.....The vow of obedience was the monastic response to the issue of power. They renounced power in order to learn service" He goes on to recount a story in which Saint Francis asked others to pray and seek the mind of God regarding his ministry. He then asked those who prayed for him, "What does my Lord Jesus Christ order me to do?" Obedience looks for orders, not suggestions to improve the state of the one being ordered.

Picture, if you will, a sergeant trying to wake up his troops. The battle is raging, the threats are coming closer and closer, their harm or death is eminent. The bullets are flying all around his slumbering fellow soldiers yet they seem oblivious to the dangers. He goes about from foxhole to foxhole trying to get them up. As he hears the bullets and smells the gun powder he becomes more and more animated.

Can you imagine him gently whispering in the ear of one of his charges, "Bobby, it's time to get up. I know you're tired and you had a busy day yesterday but we really must get up now. Come on now, it's time"

With that the soldier rolls over and responds, "I will, just give me a few more minutes".

The dialogue continues and the sleeper becomes more and more agitated as he is prodded by his sergeant.

Finally, the soldier gives the angry response, "Who put you in charge? You don't know what you're talking about. You're just making a big deal out of nothing. We're not in any real danger. Give it a rest old timer. If you keep on bugging me I'm going to find another place to sleep next time".

Disobedience always looks for a way out, to desert. It is not interested in hearing the orders, understanding the orders or anything relating to the orders. Self interest rules the day. The Lord is clear, "no man can serve two masters". We are all called into the service, His orders rule the day.

The sergeant's final response before moving on is, "This isn't boot camp, boy, this is the real thing!"

I'm sad to say that what I see is many believers whose sole purpose in this life is to have a safe and comfortable ride. The only thing that matters is their salvation. There is no concern for those who are being lost in the battle. No concern for spiritual growth. Their idea of spiritual growth is primarily found in "feeling good". Worship is singing some hymns and getting into the "spirit".

We have become a church of whimps who "go along to get along".

Proverbs 9:8 says "rebuke a wise man and he will love you". Elsewhere, "as many as I love I rebuke and chasten", (Rev 3:19). In Hebrews 12:11, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

A word of caution is good here as well, at least for me.

I must be very careful to keep a tight reign on my own emotionally laden responses. I must guard my words and myself against using the Word for retaliation, not instruction. I must admit that when I am hurt by a personal attack my first response is to hit back. I must also be aware that I, also, am very human. I must realize that my motives are not absolutely pure and take extra caution to mitigate against only wanting to fight back. As I review my responses I'm not without my own share of pain but in the end God prepares me for the next battle.

All in all it becomes an exercise in "training in righteousness" for all who will engage and submit. If we are to be useful tools in the hand of the Master we must be trained and become battle hardened. This world is still under Satan's control and we only kid ourselves if we don't acknowledge the danger and disaster that is presently going on. Those defeats aren't just in the unsaved world. I see them over and over again within the Body itself.

We need to pray for each other daily.

In His Love,

Tomme