

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Maturity: Fully Carrying Out the Word of God

“And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged 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 dislodged from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister (*diakonos* – servant). ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions. ²⁵ Of this church I was made a minister (*diakonos* – servant) according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the word of God, ²⁶ the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.”

Col. 1:21-29

This section of Scripture is interesting from the standpoint of the number of players involved. **There are four perspectives presented in this passage**, any of which we could follow and find instructive. **There is the perspective of the believers in Christ at Colossae**, the recipients of God's grace in Christ whom Paul seeks to serve and help to mature. **There is the perspective of Christ**, who gave Himself on behalf of human beings to reconcile us to God, and to present us before Him holy, blameless, and irreproachable. **There is the perspective of God**, who is behind this redemptive work, has prepared the way for it for centuries, and who has now taken action to make known the hidden message of His heart to all people. **And, finally, there is the expression of Paul's own heart**, who has been given a stewardship by God as a servant of the good news of Jesus' coming to fully carry out its implications among human beings from all nations, serving them by proclamation, education, and even admonition to the end that they might grow up to the full potential of what God desires for them in Christ, who lives within them. **What can we learn by approaching this from the vantage point of the apostle who has shared with us here a bit of himself?**

(1.) Paul saw himself as having been given a stewardship from God (cf. Eph. 3:1). *He called himself a servant (Gk. -- diakonos) of the gospel*, the good news of the salvation brought about in Christ (Col. 1: 23; cf. Eph. 3:7). In I Cor. 9:16, he said that **he felt a necessity, compulsion or constraint having been laid upon him, by virtue of his calling and gifting** (Acts 26:14-18; Eph. 3:1-13). This was not an obsession, where he could not stop from doing it. Rather, he saw this as a responsibility, a trust, which he was given, and concerning which he would someday be required to give an account. He could do it eagerly, or begrudgingly. That was up to him. In either case, the point was that **he had a job to do, and he was responsible to get it done**. He had a clear sense of this trust and responsibility. *He also saw himself as a servant (diakonos) of the Church*, in that it was his role to "fulfill, complete, carry out" the message of God. How did this work? **He had a clear understanding of how Christ could live in His people, and of God's purposes for them, ...and he intended to do whatever it took to bring this potential to pass in actual experience.**

In both cases, by using the Greek word *diakonos*, Paul was seeing himself in a supportive, assisting role, being "at the ready" to serve in practical ways the two-fold interests of the gospel message: (a.) the *proclamation and spread of the message*; and (b.) the *implementation and activation of the message in the learning laboratories of the local meetings of the saints*. Both parts needed to be done. Neither dimension can effectively be done without the other. **Diakonos was not a religious word. It was a hands-on, practical, "get it done" kind of word.** It was a "table waiter", "domestic servant" type of label. It had no connotation of "religious worker", or of "clergy" versus layperson, or of a "professional religious vocation". If anything, it was more a "blue collar" type of term that emphasized making oneself available to do whatever it took to get the job done.

*******First application: What is the stewardship God has placed on you?** He has gifted and placed you in the Body of Christ *to fulfill a function, to get a job done*. Is that not a stewardship, a trust? Is that not a responsibility? **Will you have to give an account for what you have been entrusted with?** Are you seeing that clearly, and living accordingly? Does it matter if you don't *want* to do what you are asked to do? Will you be any *less* responsible? Furthermore, will your action or inaction *affect anybody else*? Does it *matter* if you "opt out"? Also, based upon the word background, would you expect "ministry" (*diakonia*) to be a gloriously fun and immediately rewarding experience all the time? About as fun as mopping the floor, changing diapers, or serving others while they eat, right? **Are you willing to make yourself available to do whatever it takes to get the job done that God has assigned to you?*******

(2.) As Paul tried to walk out his calling, he often met with *obstacles and resistance*. (a.) As a servant (*diakonos*), one who lived for others, *he repeatedly experienced inconvenience to himself*. In choosing to love others, *their* interests will often run counter to our own. If it were not so, everybody would be loving. The truth is, that *we cannot consider the interests of others as more important than our own, and not experience sacrifice at some point* (cf. Phil. 2:1-11). **Paul chose to put aside the inner resistance of self-interest in order to serve others. **(b.) Paul also experienced resistance in others**. They did not *want to change, or be changed*. Their growth and change would require Paul's attentive involvement in their lives as a change-agent. They *needed to be taught* about how the good-news of Jesus' death and resurrection could be applied to their lives, *they needed to be reminded* of these truths, and *they needed to be held accountable* for growth. **Resistance from other believers** is not a new thing. Paul dealt with it repeatedly. *Inertia is as much a factor in human growth as it is in the laws of physics. Count on it. If you want to be a change-agent, persistence is required*. Forgiveness and endless repetition come with the territory. Admonishment and confrontation are also necessary, if we are to truly be able to help one another mature. **(c.) There will be obstacles in both the natural and the supernatural realms**. Some of this is the result of the limitations of our human existence in this world. Paul did not have a "money tree". To do what he did required that he give up some creature comforts and security. He couldn't "have it all", ...and God did not change the rules just for him. To devote himself and his resources for the sake of the Kingdom generally meant that his resources and energy *were gone*, ...no longer available for other things. In other words, **he sacrificed in order to do God's will. He experienced both suffering and afflictions in choosing to do what God was asking of him**. He also experienced persecution, ridicule and harassment from people, in addition to, or in conjunction with, the spiritual opposition he faced.**

*******Second application: Don't be surprised that the way is hard, or that there are dry times, or that people don't seem to "get it", or don't want to change. Expect it. You are going against the grain.** Did you ever have to go to work when you didn't feel like it? This is only for a temporal responsibility. How much *more* should we "press on" when the outcome clearly is eternal, in that it is Kingdom business?*****

(3.) Paul clearly and passionately knew what he was trying to accomplish. He was trying to *proclaim and implement the "glory-giving" of God among believers*. The "mystery" which had been hidden, but now is made known, is that God would come to *dwell inside* His people, "Christ *in you*, the hope of the glory". What is this "hope of the glory" business? Well, in Rom. 3:23, Paul tells us that part of the fallen human state is that we "lack the glory of God". Jesus, in Heb. 1:3, is described as the radiance ["outflashing"] of God's glory. This is re-emphasized in John 1:14, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, ...full of grace and truth". **Jesus was full of the glory of God, meaning that He radiated God's character and likeness from His life, and it was seen by others**. Humanity was made in the image of God, and we still bear that likeness in some fashion, but it is like a light bulb, or electrical appliance, without an adequate power source. The old batteries, the remnant of God's creative life that remains with us apart from Him, are not enough to fully energize our capabilities to express the imprint of the design of God, which is part of our makeup. **The "glory of God", the "new covenant glory" that Paul said belonged to every Christian is the indwelling presence of the Spirit of Christ** (Rom. 8:9-17), and is much greater than the outward luminescence seen on Moses' face (II Cor. 3:5-4:6). So, in essence, what God has done for us in Christ, is to place an unlimited power source inside of us, so that we could also radiate His glory. **There are three aspects to this "glory-giving"**. **(a.) It is a one-time event that comes to us the moment we are born from above, and we receive the Holy Spirit**. From that moment on, we are no longer children of darkness. We are sons and daughters of light (Eph. 5:7-21; Jn. 12:36; Mt. 5:14-16). **(b.) There is an ongoing process of learning to respond to and express that inner light of God's Spirit outwardly to the surrounding world**. Our job is to learn to be filled with the power of that indwelling Spirit, and to clearly, faithfully and effectively radiate what He has put inside of us in accordance with our God-designed nature. Our job is also to help our brothers and sisters in Christ to grow in their capacity and willingness to be "light-shiners". **(c.) There is a future hope of complete deliverance from every obstacle and misalignment**. When Jesus returns, then the sons and daughters of glory *will* be revealed (Rom. 8:18-25). They *will* "shine forth as the sun" (Matt. 13:43). There will no longer be any darkness of sin within us to obscure the inner light.

*******Third application: Are you giving yourself diligently to "plugging in" to the indwelling power source of the Holy Spirit? Are you responding to His promptings, His initiatives of energy and guidance, that desire to express His inner life through you? If not, you will not experience the power flow, and you will not experience the freedom and joy of being empowered and liberated to be the real inner you that God has designed.*******

(4.) Paul would not let up on these people. He was *determined* to see them come to maturity. Are you willing to be as insistent with others? Will you allow people to be as insistent about *your* growth and maturity?