

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Helping One Another Stay Filled With The Lord

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise people, but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is unthinking-wastefulness, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”
Ephesians 5:15-21

When most people read a letter like Ephesians, they tend to see it in pieces. They tend to see a few theological truths and declarations, followed by "the practical section", which they perceive as a list of behaviors Christians are to either avoid or to pursue. **Our paradigm**, our way of organizing the information we receive in life in order to make sense of it, **determines to a large extent what it is that we notice, and what escapes our examination.** How we perceive the context causes us to *anticipate* and *expect* certain things that fit with our understanding of the context. **This tendency to expect certain things often causes us to overlook other things, which we did not expect, ...or to expand and heighten those things we do anticipate.** Sometimes this can reach the extreme case where we are thinking we are seeing things that aren't really there, or where we are totally oblivious to something that is readily apparent to others. **If we have a "doctrine and performance" paradigm, then we will notice the statements that are descriptive of God, or are about what to believe about the nature of Christian life. We will categorize things into "believe this", or "do this", kinds of messages, and we will miss other parts of the letter that may be indicating an entirely different way of looking at these statements. The "believe-this'-and-'do-this'" paradigm is very black and white, very defined, very "closed", with little room for individual variation in expression. The beliefs, behaviors, and experiences people have should basically work out to be the same for everybody. It all makes perfectly good sense from that point of view.**

There are other ways of putting the pieces together, however, that will yield very different results. Instead of a paradigm of doctrine and performance, **I think Paul is advocating more of a paradigm of discovery and maturity.** This *does* have some clear parameters, but *it is much more open-ended and undefined* in terms of what the end result will "look like". It allows for a wide variety of individual experiences and expressions within an overall composite unity. **It is much less black and white, much more "let's see what's out there" in its approach.** Instead of describing a well-defined "end-point", Paul lays a safe, solid foundation to build upon, but then encourages us to experiment. The "end-point" is nowhere in sight. In fact, no one, except God Himself, could begin to know what it would look like, other than that it will be consistent with His character. **The maturity component of this paradigm implies process, not just performance. It implies learning new skills, growing up to take on new responsibilities, ...learning to deal more effectively and responsibly with ourselves, one another, and the world around us.** In light of this, in conjunction with putting off old ways of dealing with life, Paul encourages us to "...rather be (being) fulfilled/be (being) completed in spirit...". What he means is that **instead of wasting ourselves in self-medication, i.e., "intoxicating (for yourselves) in wine", we ought to "rather be filling (yourselves) in spirit", i.e., our spirit. The contrast is in throwing our lives away in "numbing ourselves out" versus getting to the real heart of the matter and fulfilling ourselves within, i.e., filling up the emptiness, completing the feelings of inadequacy or "lacking-ness", fulfilling what is missing.**

How do we do this? First of all, it is important to see that, if we are in Christ, God has put this new potential within us, a new life, a new power, a new dynamic, through our new birth "from above" (John 3:3). We are not just playing mind games. There is something about us that is different. We are not just talking ourselves into something that really has no basis in reality. Instead, we are learning to tap into new resources we never had before. We are learning to manage our emotions, and refocus our view of the world, in light of these new resources. To illustrate, Romans 3:23 says "for all have sinned and fall short of (literally, the Greek is "they lack", or "are in need of") the glory of God". Later on in the book, after talking about God's provision in Christ, not only to make us acceptable, but also to *enable us to live life by a new power* (i.e., of the Holy Spirit), Paul sums up by saying that **we have been "justified, and ...glorified"** (Rom. 8:30). **What does it mean to be glorified? It means we now have the glory of God within us** by means of the indwelling Christ (Col. 1:25-27) through the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 3:1-4:7). **Does this mean that automatically all our emotional problems are solved, that the power of the indwelling glory of God will just "take over"?** No. **God does not wish to operate in this fashion in our lives, over the long term. He desires that we "partner" with Him, i.e., we voluntarily learn to tap in to this inner**

strength, and choose to abide there. We have an *active* role to play in this process. That is why there is so much in the NT written about facing difficulties, trials of faith, sufferings, and persecutions. God knows that *we need to understand enough to choose to put our trust in Him*. He knows that we need to be made aware that life will not always be kind. In fact, we can *expect* trouble while we are here (Jn. 16:33; II Tim. 3:12; I Pet. 5:6-11; Phil. 1:29,30; Col. 1:24; Rom. 5:1-5; II Cor 4:6-18). **Being a Christian does not mean that God will erase all of our problems. It means that He will give us the grace to persevere through them, if we cling to Him** (Heb. 11:36-40; II Cor. 12:7-10). And even if we lose faith, and lose our mental and emotional grip on His presence with us, *He will never abandon us nor neglect us* (Heb. 13:5). He will remain faithful to us, though we abandon our hope and trust in Him (II Tim. 2:13). As we learn to weather these storms, **our hope and trust will give powerful testimony that there is something radically different about us, ...something quiet, gracious and strong. This faith causes others to sit up and take notice, and may be the beginning of their shift to faith.**

What of Eph. 5:19-21? Following are some observations from this passage:

"...be fulfilled in spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms (instrumental music from the Hebrew word "to pluck") and hymns (songs of praise) and spiritual songs, singing and making melody (music without words – a verbal form of "psalm") in the heart of y'all to the Lord, giving thanks at every-then-time/always on behalf of all to the God and Father in the name of our Lord Jesus [the] Anointed-King, ordering (for yourselves) under to one another in the fear of Christ."

1.) **"speaking to yourselves"** -- The phrase is translated as "to one another" in the NASB and NIV. This is a different word in Greek from other "one another" instances. The word literally means "to *yourselves*". The word normally translated as "one another" usually implies reciprocal action, i.e., that the action goes both ways. The word used here, however, does not have that nuance. The difference is that here **we are to do this to ourselves first, not just to others**. It is an important tool for emotional self-management. **Then, we are also to do this to others in the group**. We are to do this to and for each other, not necessarily expecting anything in return. This distinction makes sense if we are helping someone who is depressed, or grieving. Our ministry to them may be appreciated and helpful, but *they may not be in an emotional state to respond in kind*. **Also, the word "speaking" indicates actual verbalization, not just in thought**. The activity of actually "doing it" would be more effective than thoughts alone.

2.) **Note the emphasis on music, ...and the care taken to delineate different kinds and expressions of music related to worship and edification**. It is well known that *music can reach us emotionally in ways that mere thoughts or logic cannot*. Furthermore, **the act of singing (or even "humming") enables us to give expression in ways that release or cultivate emotion**. Sometimes, we can "get out of ourselves", and our depression, if we can "get into" a melody that is upbeat and positive. Some songs enable us to find ways to release our emotional pain or sorrow, and can be helpful to reduce the "backlog" of our hurt, or inner turmoil.

3.) **"singing and making melody in the heart of y'all to the Lord"** -- This phrase is usually understood personally, interpreting "making melody in *your* heart" as if it were referring only to my personal heart. The underlying Greek, however, is very interesting in that it is clearly "the heart (singular) of y'all (plural)". Is this just an idiomatic expression for "the personal hearts of everyone", or did Paul somehow think there was a "group heart"? Certainly, as they met together regularly, there would be a "group identity" that would develop as they sang, worshipped and shared together. **Being part of a group that has common bonds and interaction can be very fulfilling, especially when you feel accepted, valued, and you can freely participate**. Again, the letter was written to them *as a group*, not just to individuals. The Body is never far from Paul's mind as he writes. **The phrase, "to the Lord", defines the singing as relating to God, not just entertainment**. Worshipping together in this way can be very edifying to us, and draws our attention to God as our Source.

4.) **"giving thanks on behalf of all"** -- The translation "for all things" (NASB) is misleading. The preposition is normally "on behalf of", not "because of". Certainly, **Paul is not saying we are to thank God for all things, good and evil. That notion is never taught in the Scriptures**. We can thank God *in* evil times (because He is our hope and deliverer), but not *for* evil. Again, note the context, we are to be speaking "to ourselves", ...outwardly verbalizing positive, God centered messages in song to ourselves and others in the Body. Then, the latter part of the verse is about yielding to one another. Clearly, the context is about the people we are with! **A better translation would seem to be to "always be giving thanks to God on behalf of these other brothers and sisters in our lives"**. We are to be verbally expressing words of blessing *to them*, calling down God's blessing *on* them, and bringing our own hearts into the presence of God on their behalf. We see Paul doing this same thing for them in 1:16, "I do not cease giving thanks on behalf of you, making mention of you in my prayers". **We are not only to minister to one another, to build each other up, but we are to bring these brothers and sisters to God in prayer**. Do you think it would be edifying if others expressed gratitude to God for *you*? **Let's do what we can to help one another stay filled with the Spirit**.