

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Activating the Grace and Giftings of God to Grow the Church

by Dan Trygg

“...you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; ³ that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. ...⁷ I was made a minister [of the gospel], according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. ⁸ To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ”
Ephesians 3:2,3,7,8

“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’... ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. ...¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into Him who is the head--Christ. ¹⁶ From Him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, makes the growth of the body for building up itself in love by the proper working of each individual part.”
Ephesians 4:7,8,11,12,15,16

“According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the standard of faith; ⁷ if service, in the service; if teaching, in the teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in the exhortation; the one giving, with generosity; the one leading, with diligence; the one showing mercy, with cheerfulness. ⁹ Love must be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Show family affection to one another with brotherly love. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not lack diligence; be fervent in spirit; serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. ¹³ Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. ¹⁸ If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”
Romans 12:6-18

There have been many strategies for church growth throughout history. I just completed a study of the words for “preach” and “evangelize” (proclaiming the good news) through the NT, and discovered that neither of these approaches to reach new believers are activities which *every* Christian was expected to be doing. **Preaching and evangelizing are not ever presented as the main thing Christians are to be engaged in.** We *are* all to support the proclaiming and evangelizing activities of those called and gifted to effectively do that kind of work, but **most of us will not be “proclaimers of the Word” or “good-news-ers”.** In fact, that was *never* God's intention. *God has a much different approach.* His approach is multi-faceted, and works on a number of different levels. In order for His plan to work well, *every one of us needs to do our part.* **We all have an important role in the over-all plan of God to expand His kingdom, even if we are not all gifted or called to be preachers or evangelists.**

When you examine carefully the regimen of the early church (Acts 2:42-47), the part that stands out as **unusual and unexpected is that the believers shared openly with each other.** As they did this, the needs and problems of one another's lives came to the surface, and **people began to help one another in practical and self-sacrificial ways.** Some people began to sell property and possessions in order to help the poor among them. **Such love and concern for each other was highly unusual, and caught the attention of non-believers** who witnessed or heard of these acts of service. **As a result, when the “proclaimers” and “good-news-ers” went out into the community to share the Word, the hearts of their listeners were already curious, interested and ready to inquire** as to what was behind this unusual practical service. As the author of Acts recorded, “...they had favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (2:47).

You may say, “Wait a minute, Dan, **what about all those passages that do talk about preaching and evangelizing?**” If you look carefully, they either describe the training and experiences of those who were, indeed, *specifically called* to this kind of ministry, or are admonitions and encouragements to those involved in this kind of work. Then, **if you carefully examine what Jesus and the apostles taught that was directed to everyone that would follow Christ, you will find that there is an emphasis on living radically for God, and about loving, serving and helping one another, ...but the idea that we are all to go out door to door to proclaim the gospel is clearly missing.** In fact, the majority of what Jesus and the apostles taught that was generic (i.e., it was directed toward all believers) had to do with developing and maintaining living relationships *with one another.* **The interactions of the people of God are meant to be the backdrop that creates fertile ground for evangelism.**

That is *not* to say that we will *never* be called on to speak up for Jesus. **We will, ...but it will most likely be an opportunity to testify from our own experiences and relationship with God, because people are asking us for an explanation for why we do what we do, ...not so much an attempt to preach or proclaim the gospel to people who know nothing about us, or are not interested.** Peter expressed it this way, “...always be ready to make a reasoned explanation to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with humility and respect”

(I Pet. 3:15). The preceding context is exactly as I mentioned, “To sum up, all of you should be like-minded and sympathetic, should love believers, and be compassionate and humble, ⁹ not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you can inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For the one who wants to love life and to see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, ¹¹ and he must turn away from evil and do good. He must seek peace and pursue it, ¹² because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their request. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. ¹³ And who will harm you if you are passionate for what is good?” (vss. 8-13). Clearly, this is about *winning the right* to be *heard*, not about cold-turkey, knock-on-your-door, evangelism. **The emphasis for the Body of Christ at large is that we are to “walk the walk”, ...not so much “talk the talk”. There is a time for talk, but generally, for most of us, it will come *after* people have *grown thirsty* from being exposed to the salt of the earth and are *attracted by* the light of the world that is the *unspoken witness* of our lives** (Matt. 5:13-16).

God’s strategy for church growth relies heavily on the *recognizable demonstration* of Jesus’ impact on the lives of those who claim to have relationship with Him. This is consistently expressed throughout the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. A relationship with the God of the universe *should* have a powerful, visible effect in the lives of His followers. If there is no significant impact, then something is missing. Jesus said as much, “If I am not doing My Father's works, don't believe Me. ³⁸ But if I am doing them and you don't believe Me, believe the works. This way you will know and understand that the Father is in Me and I in the Father” (Jn. 10:37-38). **It imperative that we look *qualitatively different*.** This is not to be a religious façade. It is to reflect a genuine change, the fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus commanded us to “make disciples”, active followers who we would teach to do *all* that Jesus commanded. Unless the followers of Jesus can *show* they have something that other people do not, ...unless they *demonstrate* positive change and growth..., the words we might want to say about Him have little or no credence. **There must be something *unusual*, ...even *amazing*..., about the people of God, or we have failed in our mission. Our lives must only be explainable if *God* lives in us!**

We see three ways in which this change is to be demonstrated in us: (1.) By a new desire and ability to live righteously, as evidenced by a change of character that is consistent with keeping the commandments of God. If we truly are indwelt by the Spirit of God, and are new creatures in Christ, this *should* become evident in our character, our speech and behavior (I Jn. 2:3-6; Gal. 5:22,23). **(2.) By a new desire and ability to love others.** Jesus said that *love was to be the premier evidence* of knowing and following Him. This is the mark that people *should* see in our lives, and recognize *could* only come from a relationship with Jesus (Jn.13:34,35; I Jn. 4:7,8). **(3.) By other evidences of God’s Spirit at work in our lives.** Some examples include (a.) answered prayers; (b.) unusual knowledge; or (c.) acts of power. **People should be able to *see* God in our lives, if He really *is* living in us.**

God’s plan is to demonstrate His presence not only in individual lives, but in the interactive community of believers, the church. This is where the application of early church teaching was focused. If you look closely at the early Jerusalem church regimen, they first applied their faith in the context of their relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ. This is also true of the later letters of Paul. The community of believers was to be a place where people built one another up, encouraged and counseled each other, pooled their resources to help each other, and expressed the power and love of God to each other. **There was no attempt to make everyone a preacher or evangelist. There was a clear understanding that God had gifted each person *differently*.** The Body of Christ was a *team of specialists*, where each person was *uniquely* empowered by God to express His supernatural leading and ability in *individual* ways. **No two people are *supposed* to be the same.** God distributes His abilities and gifts as He sees fit. **As these individuals interact according to the leading of the Spirit, God coordinates and expresses His grace to meet the needs of others in the Body. This adds another dimension to the evidence of God at work among His people.** A synergy can develop where God is *more clearly seen* than just through the lives of individual believers. **The Body of Christ, through all of its specialized members living life according to their gifts and the leadings of the Spirit, prepares the spiritual climate for evangelism.** Together, they create spiritual thirst by being the salt of the earth. They *show* the reality of Jesus in their lives, which creates credibility and interest in those who know them. They network with and pray for their friends and neighbors, building relationships that God uses to prepare their hearts for Him by the quality of their lives. **Often, God uses them to be the ones to actually lead these others to Christ, but at times the Lord will send someone else to reap the harvest they and others have sown in the lives of their friends** (Jn. 4:35-38).

Finally, God gifts, equips and sends forth apostles and evangelists to bring the message of Christ to places where people have not heard, or to gather in those God has already prepared. They are like pioneers who go out to establish a foothold in new areas, or they are like spiritual midwives who help bring to birth what is already in labor. **Not everyone is suited, or called, for that kind work.** We are to be good stewards of the grace God has given *to us*. **We are to focus on developing *our* walk with Christ, and faithfully carry out what He has *for us*.**