

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Learning To Yield To One Another

by Dan Trygg

“On account of this, do not become unthinking, but piece-together what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation (wasteful-thoughtless-recklessness), but be filled (fill-yourselves) with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks on behalf of all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ ordering (for yourselves) under to one another in the fear/respect of Christ.”
Ephesians 5:17-21

“What is it then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and one must interpret; ²⁸ but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰ But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject (ordered-under) to prophets; ³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”
1 Corinthians 14:26-33

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger...” James 1:19

It is interesting to put these first two passages next to each other, to see the common themes. We do not always think of the Ephesians passage in terms of Body-life, because we tend to hear verse 18 lifted from its context. **Both passages are, in fact, descriptive of what is to happen when the Body of Christ gathers, and both end with a plea for *learning to defer to one another*** in the eager, vying-to-share interaction of the first century church meeting. In our culture, much of that eagerness to share has been schooled out of us in the public school system. We often initially have difficulty getting people to open up and talk. **Many of us are not comfortable with sharing our own inner thoughts or personal experiences, and many of us also have not developed the skill of being a good and respectful listener. Both skills are needed if healthy and effective Body life is to happen.**

Part of the reason that these early Christians had things to share is that they were actively pursuing and expressing their spirituality in their daily lives. They were attempting to *discover the will of God, and do it.* That meant *both* investing in their inner walk with God, as well as watching for His activity and leading in their lives each day. **God is present and active in our lives today, and He has things for us to do. Many of us just haven't learned how to tune into that, or we are distracted by the multitude of demands on our time and attention.** “The *good*” can be the worst enemy of “the *best*”. Good things, fun things, nice things, will steal away our time and resources so that we never get around to actually doing the most important things, the things God has for us to do.

From the I Corinthians passage, you certainly get the feeling that a meeting there would be like the Oklahoma land rush. The problem there was that *everyone had a tendency to be talking at once.* There was no lack of things to share, but ***no one was being clearly and carefully heard.*** The benefit that could be gained from what each person brought to the meeting was being missed, because someone else wanted to share. **It was like a free-for-all, with certain people dominating** (while others were trampled), **certain gifts and spiritual experiences being highlighted** (while others were virtually ignored), **and a general disregard for one another in the clamor to be heard.** It was another manifestation of the selfishness of that particular group of people, which had caused them serious problems before (I Cor. 11:17-34). **What we find from the Ephesians passage, however, is that *they were not that far off.* The Corinthian church, for all its self-striving, was at least *attempting to follow the plan.* They were *doing* interactive **Body-life, ...they were just not doing it well.** They were doing the *same* activities described in the Ephesian passage, confirmed also by Paul's instruction to the Colossians (3:16). When you expand your grasp of the context of each of these passages, you see that **the larger emphasis is on Body-life, which has to do with intimate, honest sharing, bearing with one another's faults, forgiving one another, loving one another, etc. The early church was interactive through and through.** If we return to the basic blueprint of Acts 2:42-47, **the use of the spiritual gifts must have grown out of the sharing which happened around the table,** as needs were heard and people were led to respond. Sharing and praying would have easily arisen in such an environment. Soon, the excitement of answered prayers, active ministry, the spiritual breakthroughs and revelations which people were gaining, etc., began to bubble up in *many* people's lives, and there was *much* to share. At some point, there was not time to hear everyone's story, or exercise everyone's gift, in every meeting, especially as the group got larger. So, Paul laid out some ground rules.**

Following are some things that Paul shared which are helpful for us for healthy interaction:

(1.) Let *all things* be done for edification (“house-building”) of the Body. Share those things which will be *helpful to others.* Interestingly enough, in I Cor. some of the activities which Paul has to limit are those that are

edifying to the ones doing them, but do not readily benefit others (14:2-4). **You cannot always use your own experience as the judge of what will benefit others.** What you may enjoy may not be helpful to everyone. **Things that everyone can share in, or which concern everyone, should be the focus.**

(2.) **Don't monopolize the time.** Just as Paul limited the number of tongue-speakers, so we need to be respectful that others will need time to give their input. That may mean we need to limit what we share.

(3.) **Keep balanced.** Just as too much tongue-speaking, or too many prophets can be counter-productive, so too much teaching, or too many songs, or *anything else* can become an unhealthy emphasis.

(4.) **Take turns.** Don't all talk at once, or battle to be heard. **Be respectful of others.**

(5.) **Defer to others,** especially to the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. This can be difficult. Note that there are several examples in I Cor. 14 where someone has a gift which they would like to share, ...a legitimate, Spirit-enabled ability..., nevertheless, **they must choose to keep quiet for the sake of the common good.** In the case of the prophet who is sharing, and then is interrupted by another prophet receiving a revelation, the first prophet is to give place to the second, who has a more recent, complete, or explanatory revelation. This could be difficult, but it is part of the discipline of Body-life. In other words, **sometimes our plans, or our perceptions of how we think things should be are disrupted by the Spirit.** This is also readily apparent when we start to share our thoughts with someone, and they tell us that we are misunderstanding the situation. A word in season is applicable, fitting, helpful and beneficial (Prov. 25:11). A word that is not "in season", ...because it is not applicable to the current situation, or the person is not in a place where they can receive it..., is *not* helpful. **When someone objects to what we are saying because they feel we are not understanding the situation, we must stop, listen to them, adjust our approach, or remain silent.** To continue, against their wishes, is more about *us* wanting to get *our* thoughts out than about loving *them*.

Let's look into this idea of "being subject to one another", or choosing to defer or yield to others in the Body.

First of all, note that "being subject to one another" is part and parcel of the whole thought from Eph. 5:18-21. The main verb is "be filled with [the] Spirit", or "fill-up (for yourself) in the Spirit", the remainder of the sentence is about *how* that is done. **There are five participles ("-ing" words) which further clarify the main verb** ("fill, fill up, complete, fulfill"). **These are: (a.) speaking** (the outward action of verbalizing to one another); **(b.) singing;** **(c.) psalming** (i.e., "making-music", which can include music without words, or instrumental music); **(d.) giving thanks; and** **(e.) ordering-(for yourselves)-under.** **This last participle means to voluntarily "arrange yourself under someone else",** i.e., to defer to them, to yield to them, to let them go first, to follow their lead, to willingly go along with them.

Secondly, it is unfortunate that we have such a history of abuse associated with "be subject" or to "submit". Our English words do not adequately communicate the real meaning of the Greek word. The word, "subject" comes from the Latin words "sub" ("down"), and "jaceō" ("to throw"), hence, the verb "subject" meant "to throw someone down", usually by force, and to "be subject" is to "be in a conquered state of compliance". "Submit" also has a similar history. From "sub" and "mittō" ("to send"), submit meant "to send someone to a lower position" (again, usually by force or power). **Both of these words convey connotations that are degrading and dehumanizing, and have often been used to force or pressure people into compliance.** The Greek word used here is interesting. It is in the middle voice, which means that instead of being passive (where the subject is acted upon by someone else), **the subject here is voluntarily choosing to arrange or come under someone else for a greater good.** The important thing is that **the person is not in any sense diminished by this free choice.** He or she is not "thrown down" or "sent down" to a lower place. Instead, **they choose to take a less prominent role in this scenario, in order to accomplish or facilitate something larger than their own immediate self-interest.** (Thus, we see that even though Jesus knew who He was at age 12, He ordered Himself under His earthly parents for the next 18 years – Lk. 2:42-51. He was still being prepared for His mission. We see the same attitude in Jn. 13, when He washed the disciples' feet.) The middle voice communicates not only that the subject is *making the choice*, but that somehow *the choice intensely affects him or her.* He is intensely involved in the action, or the action limits or directly impacts him in some way. *The chooser freely accepts this sacrifice for the higher good.*

Thirdly, this deferring to one another is a reciprocal, reflexive action. It is done by everyone to each other at some time in the group. There are no exempt classes or personages who are not expected to yield to others. Further, there are *no* groups which are "higher" than other groups in the Body-life interaction described here. Men will "order themselves under" women and children, at times. Leaders must be examples to the flock, here, and be willing to be "least of all, and servant of all" (Mk. 9:35), and be "as the younger" (Lk. 22:26) by "ordering themselves under" others.

Fourth, we are to "yield to one another in fear/respect/awe of Christ". What we are to be doing in Body-life is (a.) to give place to, or facilitate, the activity of the Spirit of Christ; and, (b.) to show esteem, love and value to those whom He loves. **If we selfishly dominate the time, so others do not have opportunity to share, or to have their needs addressed, then we are not honoring Jesus.** He has called us to minister to one another. To do that, sometimes we must defer to another who has a more urgent need, or a more "fresh" and timely revelation for the Body.