

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Thinking About One Another's Strengths and Interests

by Dan Trygg

**“Do nothing from self-promotion or vain-thinking, rather with humility of mind considering one another surpassing beyond yourselves; not each one watching the things of themselves, rather each one also the things of others.”** Philippians 2:3,4

It is amazing to see how **these two verses sum up the entire flow of thought in the first two chapters** of the letter to the Philippians.

**In the first part of chapter one, we have Paul thanking God for them, and praying on their behalf,** ...literally devoting *his* time to bring *their* needs to the Father in prayer (vss. 2-4). He has *them* in his heart, and longs *for them* with genuine affection as joint-sharers of the grace of Jesus (vs. 7,8). Then, he prays for *their* growth, maturity, ministry effectiveness, and the fruit *they* could produce for God's glory (vss. 9-11). He briefly speaks of his imprisonment, but only to point out how even *that* is being used by God to spread the gospel. Some believers have received confidence and boldness to speak the word of God without fear (vss. 12-14). Some preach from mixed motives, but Paul rejoices that Christ is being preached, regardless. He expects to be released. In one respect, he would like to go to be with Christ, but to remain here is more beneficial *for them*, so he anticipates being able to help *them* grow, and to bring *them* joy and confidence in his coming to them again (vss. 15-26).

**In 1:27, he begins to challenge them to live in a manner that is worthy of the good news of Christ, namely that they should stand firm, striving together in one spirit for the faith.** Their *united* fearlessness in the face of opposition is a sign that their ultimate victory is sure, as is the judgment of those who oppose Christ. God has given them a taste of the same kind of conflict that Paul himself sees on a daily basis (vss. 27-30). Since this is the case, **Paul uses a number of rhetorical conditions to emphasize how they need to pull together in love and unity:** “*If* there is any encouragement in Christ (and there *is!*), *if* there is any comfort from the *agapē*-love of God (and there *is!*), *if* there is any communion and partnership from the Spirit (and there *is!*), *if* any feelings of affection and compassion for one another in Christ (and there *are!*), then fill up my joy in order that you might think the *same* way, having the *same* *agapē*-love, ‘joined-together souls’ (the *ultimate* communion and partnership!), thinking the *one-thing*” (2:1,2). Do you see the parallels between the “*if*’s” in the first part of the sentence, and the fulfillment of these in the last part of the sentence? **Unity, one-ness, together-ness, coordinated cooperation and partnership, deep identification with one another emotionally and spiritually are the common themes.** It is clear that these *are* possible in Christ, through the *agapē*-love of God and the working of the Spirit, as *we* choose to establish our minds, hearts and spirits in Him.

All of this has been the setup preceding the verses for today's study. In order to bring about the kind of unity, support and coordinated partnership he has been describing, we cannot do anything out of selfish promotion or rivalry. **Rivalry, competition, and “me-first thinking” are incompatible with the unity and “serving-others mindset” Paul has been describing. So is arrogant, inflated self-importance.** Such “empty” or “vain” thinking is based upon an inaccurate perception of yourself, and a disregard for God and others. In Romans 12:3, Paul exhorted us to not think of ourselves “beyond what is *necessary* to think”. **Instead, we are to evaluate ourselves with sound, healthy judgment,** as God has given to each of us a measure of faith. In other words, **healthy self-evaluation is not self-deprecation,** either. **It recognizes that each of us does have gifts, abilities and skills to bring to the Body, to help in the work and to build one another up.** We need to take risks and try things in order to discover our abilities. Self-promotion, however, and “empty-conceit” are *not* innocent attempts at self-discovery. They are selfish attempts to feel important, or may even represent a desire to have control over other people. Their motivations are attention-seeking, self-serving, or power over others. Even in its most innocent forms, however, inflated self-perception can be harmful. For example, if we try to take on more than we are equipped for or gifted for in Christ, we will not be able to do what we had hoped to do. This will leave others in the lurch, with needs unaddressed, and it is possible that our failure could even expose others to unwarranted danger. There is a fine line between being willing-to-serve, and testing-out-by-trial-to-discover the will of God in my life (Rom. 12:2), versus doing things from “vain-glory” or “empty-conceit”. **God will oppose the proud, but give grace to the humble** (Jas. 4:6; I Pet. 5:5). **He will expose and bring down the hyper-inflated, but will help and support those who are humble and willing to serve.** The humble person will get the job done, with God's help, but may also learn that this is *not* his or her area of giftedness.

Instead of rivalry or self-promotion, or inflated self-importance, Paul instructs us to move ahead with humility of mind. **Instead of “great-mindedness” or “high-mindedness”, with “lowly-mindedness” we are to “be thinking of others”,** as Paul has done throughout the passage. **We are to “be considering, meditating on, evaluating by a**

**deliberate process of weighing and comparing external observations and facts” one another.** That’s right, the Bible is telling us we *ought to* be forming opinions, evaluations and judgments of one another, ...but there is *more*. We are *not* to be judging or evaluating one another’s failings or shortcomings, here. NO! We are to be considering one another as “having beyond ourselves”. What does *that* mean? **We are to see, consider and evaluate one another as having abilities, strengths and needs beyond what we have.** They are teammates with other special skills and abilities than what I have. They, too, have been uniquely designed, created, called, redeemed, and spiritually equipped by God to bring Him glory and accomplish His purposes in this world. They are a treasure to be discovered, a gift to be unwrapped, a diamond in the rough, a precious brother or sister in Christ in the process of maturing, a prince or princess of the King. **This is the “one-another responsibility” of this lesson. We are to “consider one another surpassing beyond ourselves”.**

**Again, “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun, which means I am to do this toward you, and you are to do this toward me.** I am supposed to be thinking of you in light of the facts of what Christ has done for and in you, observing and weighing what I see to discover and grasp who you are and what you bring to the table. Meanwhile, you are also to be thinking of me in light of the facts of what Christ has done for and in me, observing and weighing what you see in my life to evaluate and discover who I am, so that you can see what I can bring to our joint mission in the Kingdom of God. **We are to consider, discern and appreciate the strengths and abilities of one another, and see each other as valuable,** ...as being able to do more than we can, go where we cannot go, serve in ways we cannot serve. I don’t like the translation of verse 4 that says “consider others more important than yourselves”, because that makes it sound like I am *less* important. This doesn’t make sense. We are *all* precious and important. I get the sentiment, however. The translator is trying to get us to “get over yourselves” and see that others have needs, too. Value others, and put their needs before yours. If we did this, the world *would* be a better place, wouldn’t it? If the needs of others are more important than mine, where do mine come in? Do I give and give, until there is nothing left for me? That can get unhealthy, even destructive, in a hurry. True, most people are selfish enough that they never go to “that extreme”. No. What Paul actually is saying is that we *all* are valuable. Others are *not* more valuable than me, nor am I more valuable than they. We are all God’s children, whom He loves and redeemed. What Paul is trying to do is get us to see that we are *all* valuable. Yes, **God wants me to learn to get past my selfish thinking to begin to see and appreciate my brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**The application is clarified in the next verse, “not each one looking out for the things of himself, but also the things of the others”.** The word translated as “looking out for” is the Greek word, *skopeō*. We get the word, “scope” from this. So, “looking out for, watching out for, noticing, considering, keeping your eyes on” are all good translation options. **We are given the responsibility of looking out for the “things” of our brothers and sisters in Christ.** What these “things” are is not defined. It could be needs, interests, or even growth or ministry opportunities. The whole thrust of the previous verb was that we were to recognize the unique potential of others. Then we are told to look out for the things that pertain to them. **It would seem that we are to be watching to see how we can help, serve and benefit others, especially with the special insights we can glean through the process of evaluating who they really are in Christ.**

**Paul moves on to the supreme example of humility and service for the benefit of others, Jesus Himself.** The apostle tells us to “think this among you which also was in Christ Jesus”. **He had everything, being in the form of God. Nevertheless, He was willing to empty Himself, taking the form of a slave.** (Instead of the “empty-glory” or the “pretension” of vs. 3, He actually “emptied Himself” of the *true* glory he really *did* possess.) **He was willing to set aside His privilege and use His power to serve others, us. He became obedient to the will of the Father, even as far as giving Himself to die on our behalf** (vss. 5-8). Because of His obedience and willing sacrifice, God will exalt Him, and make His name to be honored above all others (vss. 9-11).

**As a result, Paul calls us to work out our salvation, by being obedient,** knowing that God is at work in us, as well. As we serve without grumbling or complaining, we will come to be blameless, innocent and without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation. **By our joy and service, we will shine as lights in a dark world,** holding tightly to the message of Life (cf. Matt. 5:14-16). Paul Himself was willingly, joyfully pouring out his life in service to their faith, and he urges them to walk in this same joy. **Timothy, is another example** of one who has a kindred spirit. **He, too, is genuinely concerned about them, their growth and their welfare.** So many others are seeking only the things of themselves, not the things of Jesus Christ. **Epaphroditus was yet another one who risked his life to serve Paul and others. He exhorts us to honor such people.**

**How about you? Are you willing to humble yourself, and begin to prayerfully consider one another? Are you willing to invest time praying for the needs of others, thinking about them, their abilities and their needs? Are you willing to do what you can to help and serve them, so they can fulfill God’s will in their lives?**