

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Considering One Another In Order To "Sharpen"

by Dan Trygg

**“And we might consider one another unto sharpening of love and of good actions,
not neglecting the gathering together of yourselves, according as is the practice with some,
rather encouraging,
and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”**

Hebrews 10:24,25

As a member of the Body of Christ, God has given us the privilege and responsibility of being active participants in His work of building up His people. Some questions that may come to mind are, “What do You want me to do, God?” or, “How do I go about this?”

As you can imagine, with all the millions of Christians who have ever lived, **God was not able to write a specific game plan for you in His written revelation.** There are *some* specific directions given (e.g., the twenty-one “one another” ministrations we are given to help us begin to understand what interactive ministry might look like), but even the most direct, and minute command given is still only very generally defined. We are not specifically told what we should say or do. We are left to discover that for ourselves. **This may seem quite obvious, but it needs to be pointed out. Sometimes we hold back because we feel uncertain as to how to proceed, or what exactly we should do.** Even something as safe and understandable as “pray for one another” is open-ended. What do I pray *for*? Generally, *we can only find out specific areas of need if we talk to one another*, ...because the problems and issues each of us faces can vary so much from person to person. The very nature of writing a communication to millions of people spread across the globe over centuries of time means that it is virtually impossible to write specific words to most of these people. Instead, **the scriptures give only general statements of direction, a skeleton or framework of instruction. We are left to work out the details of how that skeleton is “fleshed out” in our own personal discovery-walk with God and each other.** For example, we are told to “be hospitable to one another” (I Pet. 4:9), not “invite Bill and Joan over for dinner Friday night”. The general direction is “be hospitable”, but *how, when, and where* that is done is left up to us to discover and implement. That may seem to be such a ridiculously obvious observation to make, that it would appear to be silly to even state it out loud. Yet, I think sometimes we sit around twiddling our thumbs, knowing we should be doing *something*, ...but not perceiving *what* exactly it is, or *how* to go about it. We are *waiting* for a more specific understanding than we have, not realizing that God has *already revealed* to us what He intended. Consequently, we do *nothing*! Let me say it clearly, **“The specific ministry that God wants you to be involved in, and the specific ways to go about it, will usually only be discovered by personal experimentation”** (Rom. 12:2).

I have come to see Hebrews 10:24,25 as a practical method for beginning to uncover how we are to do Body life in practical, personally-applicable ways. In this passage, God has given us a general procedure to follow in order to begin to take note of particular things we might be able to do or say to one another to “build one another up”. Let us take a closer look at these verses from this perspective:

(1.) “We might contemplate” -- **We are to ponder.** The verb is often translated as “consider”. It is a compound from a root word meaning “to notice, think, perceive, understand” and a preposition meaning “according to”. Adding that preposition to the root *intensifies* and *specifies*, ...or more finely describes..., the type of action. In combination, this word comes to mean, “to consider, ponder, observe, perceive, fix one's mind upon, take note of”. The combination really emphasizes rooting one's thoughts there for an extended period of time, as well as trying to guide one's thinking *in accordance with the nature of* the person or object being considered. Instead of imposing some outside thought to the object being considered, the idea is to attempt to see what is in accordance with the object itself, and to think about what flows out from, or what would be in accordance with, its real inner nature. **Instead of imposing a preconceived agenda upon someone or something, this kind of pondering attempts to perceive the real nature, abilities, problems, and potential of the person, or object, and makes plans in light of those observations.** For example, if you heard that you inherited a house, a million and one thoughts might go through your mind, as you imagine the house of your dreams. When you actually visit the house, however, you can see the layout of the land and neighborhood, the dimensions, design and floor plan of the house, the materials it is made of, etc., and you begin to modify your imaginings to fit the *actual* site and building you were given. Some of your original ideas may be impossible in that setting, and will have to be discarded. Other options you could not have imagined will become evident as you ponder, observe and meditate on the home. In the same way, thoughts concerning Christians in general will be radically different from what we begin to think about when specific individuals come before our

mind's eye. As we direct our thoughts according to the *unique* situations, personalities, and gifts of each person, different sets of needs, areas of growth, personal strengths and opportunities for ministry will become evident.

(2.) “one another” -- **We are to consider *people*.** Often the translation is presented in a very distorted way. For example, the NASB rendering is, “And let us consider how to stimulate one another”. The focus of the verb appears to be “how to stimulate”. **In the Greek, however, it is very clear that the object of the verb is “one another”.** **We are to ponder *people*, i.e., we are to think about *each other*.** We are to observe, perceive, fix our minds upon, and take note of one another and direct our thinking in accordance with the unique nature and circumstances of each individual's case. Calling each person before our mind's eye, pondering and making mental notes concerning his or her strengths, unique qualities, growth areas, needs, hurts, progress toward maturity, etc. is a mental tool or discipline that we can use to help us in the work of learning how to edify one another in practical ways. Most of the ingredients that comprise each person's “profile” will differ drastically as we move from one to the next.

(3.) “unto sharpening” -- **We are to think in order to *provoke*.** This prepositional phrase gives focus and direction to our thinking about each other. We are not just to daydream about one another. The writer is not encouraging us to let our thoughts run on willy-nilly about each other. **There is a *purpose* to our cogitations: We are to ponder people in order to *provoke* them, ...or for us to be *provoked* ourselves.** Actually, the Greek could lend itself to *either* interpretation. The preposition itself is “unto” or “towards”. It communicates the idea of direction or purpose. The object of the preposition, translated here as “sharpening” is the Greek word, *paroxusmos*, meaning “an inciting, a stimulation, a spurring on, urging or agitation, an irritation, provocation or arousal (usually either to anger or action)”. [One of the English derivatives, “paroxysm”, refers to a “sudden attack, or recurrence of symptoms of a disease, like a convulsion”; or, a “sudden violent emotion or action”. Although the idea of the *stimulus* that *caused* the physical response, or emotional outburst, has been lost over the centuries, the strength of the word picture is very clear, and helps to emphasize and illustrate the “prodding, provoking, urging-to-response” nature of the original Greek word.] We can often do this in a manner that is kind or pleasant. It does not *require* a negative experience from us, necessarily, to motivate someone into action, although some of the meanings would certainly seem to allow for some “in-your-face” kinds of interaction. Remember, however, we are to be “truthing *in love*”, not just *truthing*. The *purpose* is to *edify*, ...to “build-up”, not to “beat-up”.

If we look at this primarily in regard to *ourselves*, the writer may be indicating that our pondering of one another's hurts and needs will provoke *us*, ...it will cause a violent, positive arousal-to-action in our *own* hearts. In the Gospels, we see this principle at work in Jesus' life, as He saw needs that aroused His active compassion (e.g., Matt. 14:14). I Jn. 3:17,18 seems to be about someone *not* responding to this stimulus-to-action. By “closing his heart against him”, the selfish person cuts off the positive effect of the awareness of the other's need. Instead of “pondering one another”, this selfish person focuses only upon his own comforts, shutting out all else.

(4.) “of love and good actions” – **We are to ponder people in order to provoke them to *produce* love and good deeds.** The focus of this phrase is on *production*, or the end result which we are after. These few words give clarification and definition to our “agitation” of one another. **We are to ponder people to provoke the production of love and beneficial action.** The word for love is *agapē*. It means to esteem, value, and care for others, and to *treat* them in ways consistent with this perspective. The word for “good” refers not only to what is morally righteous, but also to what is beneficial, suitable to the need, beautiful and commendable. **The goal is not just good *feelings*, but down-to-earth, helpful, problem-solving *action*.**

(5.) “not *neglecting* the gathering together of yourselves, ...rather *encouraging*” – **We are to *persevere in positively participating in one another's lives*.** Verse 25 gives further clarification of the entire process described in vs. 24. By the use of these two participles, the writer describes the ongoing positive interaction required in order to make this effective. The obvious principle of verse 25 is that if we stop meeting with each other, we will not be interacting enough to have much valuable input to put into our “ponderer”. **Participation is imperative for optimal, productive pondering.** [The word translated as “gathering together” is not a word for a formal church gathering. It just refers to any meeting together at a point in time. The verse, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together”, is not about “don't miss church”. Without the *interactive participation*, ...which does *not* happen in most typical church meetings today..., the rest of 24 and 25 really does not *apply*.] We must *stay connected* and *involved with each other* in order to *do* what verse 24 suggests. Otherwise, we won't know each other well enough to encourage growth in practical ways that fit one another's lives personally. We need to remain involved in a honest, open fellowship with others, if we are going to be able to speak effectively into each other's lives.

**We are to *ponder people* to provoke,
by positive persevering participation,
the production of love and beneficial action.**