

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtmnc.org Today's Date: March 30, 2014

Making Jesus Visible

by Dan Trygg

“But thanks be to God, the One always leading us in victory in Christ, and manifesting through us the sweet aroma of the experiential-knowledge of Him in every place. ...And who is adequate for these things?” II Corinthians 2:14,16b

“You are our letter, ...being known and read by all people; being manifested that you are Christ’s letter, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on human hearts.” II Corinthians 3:2,3

“But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways, not walking in craftiness or tampering with God’s word, but by the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.” II Corinthians 4:2

“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” II Corinthians 4:11

I recently read through II Corinthians in my daily devotional reading. I was struck by the number of times the word, “manifest”, was used in the translation I was working through. When I checked on the Greek usage, I discovered that the underlying Greek verb, *phaneroō*, was used 9 times in this book, and the noun form, *phanerōsis*, was also used in 4:2. The verb is used 49 total times in the NT. The other author that tends to favor this word is John. He used it 9 times in his gospel (Jn. 1:31; 2:11; 3:21; 7:4; 9:3; 17:6; 21:1 [2x]; 21:14), and 9 more times in his first epistle (I Jn. 1:2 [2x]; 2:19,26; 3:2 [2x]; 3:5,8; 4:9). The word means “to make known, to make visible, to reveal, to appear or cause to appear, to disclose, announce, or communicate by outwardly showing or expressing something”. It is making something known by what is *seen* or *experienced*, rather than primarily by words. **Observers will know by what we show, rather than having to depend on what we tell.**

The first occurrence of this word is in a word picture Paul describes in 2:14, where he says that **the experiential knowledge of God is made evident through us like a sweet smell. Our life exudes an aroma that comes from God’s life operating within us.** Note that this is not saying that everyone who *claims* to be a Christian will have this impact, nor is this even something that all born-from-above believers will necessarily produce. **The sweet savor comes from the experiential-knowledge of Christ in us.** It is not just intellectual knowledge, or theological knowledge, or what we know only in our minds. It is knowledge that has been incorporated into our own lives. **It describes a “knowing” that opens up the life-flow of the Holy Spirit within us.** It is an awareness and trust in God’s presence and care in our lives. Those who really know God in this way will walk in the peace and assurance of His sufficiency and faithfulness. They know and experience the confidence and joy of His care and His availability to them, no matter what comes their way. They have tasted of God’s love and compassion for them, and it has transformed them into a loving, gracious, compassionate people toward others. In contrast to the putrid stench of sin and selfishness, the bitter smell of death produced by the diminishing, dehumanizing, destructive actions and attitudes of our attempts at self-medication, self-protection, or self-advancement, ...or the acrid odor of empty religious ritualism or straight-backed, judgmental moralism..., **the fragrance of Christ is filled with the sweetness and vitality of life, graciousness, joy and freedom.** There is something about those who experientially know Jesus in this way that others can detect, ...and it is sweet and good. **To many, it brings refreshment, hope and draws them toward God. Others, however, want no part of it. They recoil from its savor, much like those accustomed to darkness recoil from a bright light. They certainly can detect it, but they react against it. It reminds them of their willful choices to go their own way.** They are *already* moving away from God, and the smell of His presence momentarily exposes the bitterness of their chosen path. **They prefer to hide their activities under the covering of incenses and perfumes, and block out any breeze that reminds them of a God to whom they must answer.**

The second occurrence is another word picture where **Paul says we are like a letter that people can read** (3:2,3). It is like the saying, “Your life is an open book.” That describes a person who is open and honest. Such a person is easy to “read”. Paul first says that the Corinthian believers were a letter produced by Paul and his team. Then, he seems to switch, and say that they were Christ’s letter. Which is it? Well, both were actually true in this case. God was using Paul and his team to minister among the Corinthians. They first brought the gospel to them, and were responsible for their spiritual foundational training. In *that* sense, Paul and his team *were* the authors of what the Corinthians came to be. **In the context, he is saying that he didn’t need any letters of reference from other important people to give him credibility.** Their very spiritual existence was his letter of reference. **Anyone who met them could quickly discern a great deal about Paul and his ministry team.** They reflected his teaching, his values, his understanding of church life. **They were his letter of commendation and his best advertisement.** More than that, however, **Paul insists that they were actually Christ’s letter.** He and his team were just servants

commissioned by the Master to help them grow and mature. **Paul carefully defers to Christ as the true Source of their spirituality and power for living.** What they have become is because of the new covenant which has transformed their hearts and is changing them more and more to be like Jesus each day. **It is “manifested”, “evident”, “visible” that they are a letter of Christ to be “read” by everyone they meet. Their lives visibly portray and express Jesus in ways that others cannot help but see.**

The next occurrence, in 4:2, is Paul’s application of this principle to his own life. **There were many false teachers, charlatans and self-proclaimed spiritual leaders. Some people built and promoted their ministries by using questionable or even dishonest means.** They employed underhanded schemes to discredit others and bring attention to themselves. Some were immoral, and brought disgrace to “the ministry” by their moral failures or abusive practices. Some dealt in lies, plotting elaborate schemes to gain money or power. Many were guilty of distorting Biblical teaching, or manipulating it toward personal gain. **Paul and his team renounced such methodology. Instead they made every effort to simply live out the truth of God. They purposed to walk the walk in ways that others could see clearly made Christ visible.** More than just to quietly live their own lives with integrity, **they made it their aim to clearly demonstrate Jesus by how they lived.** It doesn’t say what exactly they did, but, if they followed the example of the early church, they were actively ministering to the poor, as well as praying for the sick, casting out demons, etc. We know Paul was relentless in teaching and preaching the word, and he was devoted to prayer. He would go wherever he could to find people to talk to about Jesus. No one could seriously accuse him of getting rich off the gospel. He lived a simple life, devoted to preaching the word. He endured difficulty, hardship and persecution to proclaim the gospel. **Most of these other false teachers were not interested in really getting their hands dirty, or spending time with those who have no power or prestige.** They were looking for recognition and reputation, wealth and honor. **The lives of Paul and his team visibly expressed a whole different set of values than what these other religious figures modeled by their lives.** Moreover, the power of God was clearly evident in the lives of Paul and his team. **Their outward walk of faith and service made Jesus visible to other people, ...to any who would care to look..., and many did notice. Their consciences were pricked, and they recognized the truth.**

The final reference above takes this another step deeper. **In spite of the fact that their lives demonstrated clearly the heart and life of Jesus, not all people were able to see it.** Satan blinded their minds so as to be unable to see the reality of Jesus in them. Nevertheless, **God has shone in our hearts to produce the enlightenment of the experiential-knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We were just like clay pots, but God has filled us with light. This is to demonstrate that the power to transform lives is from God, not from our own efforts.** We will go through afflictions, faith-challenges and persecutions as we follow Christ. These are within limits which God permits. **As we share in the sufferings of Christ, Paul says we bear in our bodies the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may be made visible within us. God’s purpose is to reveal Jesus through us, as we react to these difficulties by trusting in Him. In Paul’s case this was to encourage the Corinthians!** Paul’s example of grace, perseverance and patience under trial was *the visible expression of Jesus’ life at work* in him. **As the Corinthians watched Paul, and saw God’s grace operating within him to give him this victory, it actually stirred them up in life.** Death to the flesh was working in Paul, but more than just bringing about an opportunity for the inner life of Jesus to support *him* and give *him* victory, **it was also stimulating faith and life within those who witnessed the working of God in his life.** He said, “So the death works *in us*, but the life *in you*” (4:12), and “For it is all for *your* sake, in order that the grace, increasing through more and more people, might cause thanksgiving to overflow unto the glory of God” (4:15). The lesson which we can take away from this is that, **others who observe the overcoming life of the Spirit in us will be encouraged and revitalized in their faith.** As we persevere through hardship, confusion, difficulty and persecution for Christ, not only are *we* being stripped of the flesh and growing in the new life of the Spirit. **Others who see the manifested life of Jesus in us will praise God for the victories, and will be empowered and encouraged to thank God and to share Christ all the more.** For Paul, **the net effect was that the grace was multiplying and spreading, and God was being glorified.** Even though not all will respond to Christ, God’s work does not stop. Even in the face of rejection and opposition, God continues to reveal Himself, and the work spreads.

Paul had asked a question, way back in the beginning of this description of how God makes Jesus visible in us. He said, **“Who is adequate for these things?”** The word for “adequate” means to be “strong, capable, able, sufficient”. **In one sense, it is a rhetorical question. The assumed answer is, “No one.” But wait...!** Paul writes, “Not that we are able in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but **our ability is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant,** not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit makes alive” (2 Cor. 3:5-6). God’s whole strategy here is not some religious system to promote, or a code of conduct to which we try adhere. **God’s entire strategy is to put the life of Jesus within us by the Holy Spirit, so that we can experience and demonstrate that life outwardly to others. God Himself enables us to make Jesus visible!**