

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Keep Investing in People

by Dan Trygg

“But the sting of death is sin, but the power of sin is the law; ⁵⁷ but thanks (grace) to the God, the One continually-giving us the victory by means of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ So that, my beloved brothers and sisters, come to be established/firmed-up/steadfast, undislodgable/immovable, continually-abounding/overflowing in the work of the Lord at-every-then-time/always, knowing/observing that the labor/toil/hard-work/hardship/troublesome-work/bothersome-work of-y'all is not empty/vain/useless/unproductive in the Lord.”

I Corinthians 15:56-58

“Do not be-deceived/led astray, God is not mocked. For what-thing if ever a person might sow, this he will also reap/harvest; ⁸ because the one sowing unto/toward the flesh of him/herself, out from the flesh he/she will reap/harvest corruption/rottenness/decay, but the one sowing unto/toward the Spirit, out from the Spirit he/she will reap/harvest eternal/‘age-type’ life. ⁹ But continually-doing the good/fitting/honorable/beautiful thing, not might-we-lose-heart/become-sick-within, for in its own time we will reap/harvest, not giving-up/giving-out/fainting. ¹⁰ Consequently, wherefore, as we have opportunity/season, we might-continually-work the good/profitable/useful/fitting/beneficial thing toward/with all, but especially toward/with the house-members of the faith.”

Galatians 6:7-10

Christianity is intensely practical. Not only did God provide deliverance and blessing *for our eternal future*, but also *for the here and now*. The product of a healthy faith, and the fruit of a healthy community of believers, is not measured by religious experiences, or the number or size of meetings, at least not if we measure by NT standards. **The recognizable mark of sound and mature believers is the self-giving, hang-in-there-with-you kind of love of which Jesus spoke.** Biblical love is not just “warm fuzzies” or positive feelings. **Agapē-love is “good will in action”.** It is *visible, tangible, and, therefore, noticeable*. It is seen in the time, energy, heart-felt concern and good deeds of God’s people investing in other people’s lives. **Such love will attract and win hearts.**

One of the first steps toward correctly understanding any part of a text or letter is to *read the portion under consideration in the larger context of what precedes and follows it*. It is interesting to see *the context* of I Cor. 15:58. The first words of the verse, “so that”, almost *scream* at us to examine the context. They indicate that the exhortation that follows is *a result or conclusion* from the previous verses. I Corinthians 15 has been called the “resurrection chapter”. It starts with a brief declaration of the Gospel message (vss. 3,4), then marshals evidence to show the *fact* and *significance* of this historical event. *Everything* hangs on this one event, ...that Jesus actually rose from the dead. Paul goes on to explain the significance of this. Since we have understood and believed in the Good News, **God through Jesus Christ has delivered us, not only from the penalty of sin, but also from our broken humanity,** ...AND, by Jesus' resurrection power, **God has set in motion a transformation which will make those who trust in Him to become like Him** in His character and glory, therefore death no longer need intimidate us. *****The Greek in verse 57 is a present participle, emphasizing the ongoing-present process of receiving and experiencing deliverance and victory – “Thanks be to God, the One giving (present continual process) to us the victory by means of Jesus Christ.”***** *Since God is giving us victory over both sin and death in Jesus, therefore the result* Paul directs us toward, in verse 58, *is to become firmed-up, resolute and immovable* in this our hope and promise, *and be devoting ourselves to the Lord's work* in this world.

The phrase, “come to be firmed-up and undislodgable”, implies that we don't start out that way! We may *begin* our Christian journey somewhat wishy-washy, unsure of ourselves and what it means to follow Christ. This is not unlike a new-born in the natural world. Almost every new creature starts out somewhat unsteady and vulnerable. The same is true for us spiritually, so **Paul's admonition is to get ourselves spiritually established,** ...strong, clear-minded and impervious to attacks of deception or doubt. This is a return to the theme which he had mentioned in chapters 2 and 3, concerning people's varying levels of understanding and maturity. **A second observation is that there is a process of development involved in our becoming steadfast and undislodgable.** It is not just *intellectual*, but also *experiential*. The only way character can become “firmed-up” or “steadfast” is by a process of testing or exercise. “Steadfastness” implies consistency in the face of a storm, or an opposing or distracting force. “Remaining true” implies that there are situations we will encounter that will test our resolve. Becoming “undislodgeable” only becomes *evident* as we *endure* trials and pressures directed at dislodging us. **A third observation is that Paul's use of a command means we are responsible to make this happen.** Our spiritual depth and integrity are *our* responsibility. Our spiritual growth ultimately is determined by *us*, by *our* focus, *our* choices, *our* investments of time and attention. **A corollary of this is that it will evidently not simply “happen to us”, if we do not take initiative.** *The Bible knows nothing of a passive spiritual maturity.* Those who would know God intimately must *seek* after Him. In the same way, those who would become spiritually strong and mature must

exercise themselves to attain that stability and maturity. **A fourth observation is that “always abounding in the work of the Lord” is another aspect of what we are to “come to be”. In other words, God does not want us to just “hunker down” and protect ourselves. Rather, we are to actively be reaching out to serve.** Paul does not present this as a negotiable aspect of our spiritual journey. It is part and parcel of what God wants for us. **Not only are we to become sound and rock-solid to weather the storms that come against us, we are also to be continually involved in doing the “work of the Lord”.** If *this* is true, one of the first questions we may want to ask is **“What does the ‘work of the Lord’ entail?”** Paul does not go into detail, but in the next phrase he gives some clues, “...knowing that the toilsome-labor/hardship/troublesome-work is not empty”. Clearly, **the word Paul chose to describe the “work” of the Lord in this context does not make one think of fun, ease, comfort, or even safety.** The word portrays exhaustion, inconvenience, difficulty, self-sacrifice and going-out-of-one’s comfort zone -- and He wants us to be doing this *continually, ...even abundantly!* **Why invest in “the Lord’s work”? Because it produces something of great value!** It is about *setting people free* from the bondage and debilitating effects of sin and the devil, *to help them discover* the power and health of God’s will for their lives. *The work of the Lord is a good investment. It will never be wasted effort.* **Even when we do not see tangible results, God is using our obedience to bring Him glory** (Eph. 3:8-12), **as well as to make us like Him** (II Cor. 9:11; Matt. 5:43-48).

Let’s look briefly at the Galatians passage: The first part of verse 7, and verses 9,10 are *written to the group* (you plural). He tells them, “Do not be deceived”. Apparently, they were in danger of being led astray, here. The second part of verse 7, and all of verse 8, are *written to state a general principle* in support of Paul’s argument (i.e., “the one sowing...”). **Why does he say, “God is not mocked”? Paul is warning against the false belief that we could cheat life (same as “cheat God”) in some way.** Apparently, some people were thinking that they could have their spiritual well-being *at no cost to themselves*. Others may have thought that *their ministry would grow automatically*, that somehow they were exempt from the need to work hard at investing in people (cf. II Tim. 2:3-7). **Paul uses a familiar idea, the principle of sowing and reaping, to demonstrate that a person will receive back according to what investments he or she makes.** If he or she *values* spiritual things, and *invests effort and resources there*, that person *will receive a harvest*. The opposite is true as well. Those who are *self-interested*, and invest their time, energy and resources *on themselves*, will gain only the corruption and rottenness that comes with selfishness and sin.

The exhortation, in verse 9, to invest in spiritual things by “doing good” is a critical logical step to understand. “Doing good” to others *goes directly against the grain of selfishness*, especially when done out of love and responsiveness to God. We can expect good fruit to result. On a *personal* level, *serving others will change and mature* our spiritual character. **“Doing good” to others is likened to “sowing to the Spirit”.** Remember that Paul was writing to *the group*? **He says, “We, as a group, will benefit as we invest in others by serving them.”** Not only will this *bring praise to God* (cf. Matt. 5:16), but *it will open up opportunities* to share *why* we do what we do (I Pet. 3:8-16). This gives us the opening to testify about Jesus, and what He has done in our lives. Not only will *we* be benefited in our own personal growth, but our testimony can lead to *others* coming to know Jesus. Thus, the “harvest” will not only be spiritual maturity, but also expanding the influence and adding numbers to our church community.

Paul recognizes another danger, however, which he specifically addresses. This danger involves “becoming-sick-within” (the literal meaning for the word translated here as “grow weary”), **which in turn tends to produce a half-heartedness in one’s attitude and effort.** Paul does not delineate what kind of inner-sicknesses there may be, but certainly frustration, discouragement, or even anger and resentment, can fester against those who do not seem to be responding to our efforts to help them. These are easy “soul-sicknesses” to catch. **This reveals an underlying self-interest in the outcome, not a wholehearted willingness to do good to others out of a grace-filled heart.** Again, looking back to verse 7, we should not be surprised to see that *wrong motives will lead to inner dis-ease and decay.*

The apostle attempts to counteract the *infection of discouragement* by bringing us back to the general principle he had stated. He reminds us that, **at the right time we will reap, ...IF we do not give up.** Consistent sowing *will* eventually produce a harvest. It is a natural and spiritual law. It is a principle built into the very creation itself. **However, if we give up, we will miss the very harvest for which we have labored!** How often has this happened in church history? The *ground work* has been *laid*, ...the *seeds* have been *sown*, ...but *no one is there to harvest* the souls who are hungry and ready to know God! In John 4:34-38, Jesus pointed this out to His disciples. Interestingly, He mentions that “*others* have labored”, but they were apparently *not present*, or *not able* to do the harvesting. The people were “*ripe* for harvest”. Furthermore, the disciples themselves *were oblivious* to this, and *would have missed the opportunity*, if Jesus did not reveal this to them. Let us be sure to stay on task, and not give up too soon. God’s promise is that *we will reap*, if we sow the seed of “well-doing” *and* we do *not* give up. Paul states, “So then, *as* we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those of the household of faith”. **God will open up the opportunities** (Eph. 2:10), **it is our job to be watchful for them, and to be faithful to serve when the opening comes.**