

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Radically Transformational Living

By Dan Trygg

“Bless the ones persecuting you; bless and curse not. ¹⁵ To rejoice with the ones rejoicing, and weep with the weeping. ¹⁶ Being of the same mind toward one another; not being haughty in mind, but associating with the lowly. Do not become wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ To no one paying back evil for evil. Perceiving-beforehand good-things in the sight of all people. ¹⁸ If possible, on your part, being at peace with all people. ¹⁹ Not avenging yourselves, beloved, rather give place for the wrath [of God], for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. ²⁰ ‘Rather if ever your enemy might be hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire upon his head.’ ²¹ Do not be overcome by the evil-and-unsound, rather overcome the evil-and-unsound with the good-and-sound.”
Romans 12:14 - 21

We have been working through the beginning of the “practical section” of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Paul initially called us to “come alongside” and to individually “stand our bodies alongside” one another to become a single “living sacrifice”. We are to somehow join forces to become a single unit. (Save that thought.) Interestingly, in order for that to happen as God intends, we are *not* to become just like everyone else. We are *not* to compromise ourselves, and conform ourselves to the surrounding culture, ...or ignore or hide our new born-again selves in order to fit in, and to get along with others we associate with. We are **not to choose to let external pressures dictate who we are. Instead, we are to pursue transformation from the inside-out**, ...a radical, deep inner change that will express itself outwardly in dramatic ways. This transformation comes about as our understanding, world-view and perceptions begin to change, ...and we *act on those* new perceptions and insights. In order to become different, we will have to think differently, see differently, process things differently, and try to follow the new ideas, insights and promptings revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. **If we want to change, we have to choose to change what we do, ...how we approach life, ...what we do with our time, ...the investments we make, ...and we must be willing to risk, to try new things.** It is only as we choose to *express* this inner renewal, ...the inner awareness, fresh insights, new perceptions, and spiritual promptings..., *in outward actions* that we will learn to discover God’s working and purpose in our lives.

Then, in a further break from conformity (the world’s way to *contain* and *diminish* the creative work of God), **we are to carefully evaluate who we are.** Can you recognize the unique ways God works in your life? Don’t inflate who you are. That would not be helpful. **Instead, think with sound, healthy evaluation about how the grace of God operates in your life.** You see, the team, the “single unit” that God wants to create out of those He calls together, is not comprised of identical, nameless “cogs in a machine”. No. **God brings together a team of “specialists”.** We are not *supposed* to be like everyone else. We are to become what God uniquely intends for each one of us. **We ARE all to grow and mature in the fruit of the Spirit** (Gal. 5:22,23), **and become like Jesus in our character and our walk** (Eph. 4:13; 1 Jn. 2:6). **We are NOT, however, to all function in the same way in the Body.** We are like limbs, organs, or parts of a living spiritual Body. We ARE all members one of another, but **God has given us individual giftings, and has called us out of unique life-histories, so that we could be specially-prepared and fitted to accomplish things as no one else does, or could do.** He does not want us to *conform* to others. He has uniquely fashioned us for good works that He will bring to us to accomplish, as we are ready and responsive to Him (Eph. 2:10).

Paul loves to use dependent clauses in his writing. **In the first 8 verses, there are actually only two imperative verbs: “do not conform” and “be transformed”.** All the other verbal words are participles (“-ing” words) and infinitives (“to-” words). What this does is help us see what is really important in his mind. It is about this *inner-transformation*. **Now, we have the next imperative: “Let agapē-love be unhypocritical”** (vs. 9). Then, he composes one long sentence in Greek (vss. 9-13), describing what this would look like. There is nothing phony or fake about the *agapē-love* God calls for us to have and express toward one another in the Body of Christ. **If we are going to be a team together, we need to have this kind of commitment, affirmation and support for one another** that Paul describes. **This kind of love is supposed to be uncommon, out-standing, amazing.** Jesus said that people will take note. **If we live out this unhypocritical agapē-love, people will know that we are His followers.** This love is *not* “business as usual.”

Beginning in verse 14, Paul’s writing style changes. In these eight verses there are seven imperatives, or commands. Again, in the context, Paul is exhorting us to not live in conformity to worldly standards and practices, but to live in a radically different way. The unhypocritical love in the previous verses goes far beyond what is normal in society, but its focus is *within the Body*. In these next eight verses, **transformational living takes us to new expressions of radical living in our dealings with people also outside of the Body.**

“Bless the ones persecuting you; bless and curse not” (vs. 9). The focus of this verse is definitely outside of the community of believers. Persecution was a very real danger for the Christians of that time, and could mean imprisonment, confiscation of property, beatings and even death. Nevertheless, this transformed inner life and mind of the Spirit causes us to see all of this differently. The word “bless”, here, means to “speak well of”. In this context, it refers to speaking well of that person to God, instead of cursing them, or asking for God’s wrath to be poured out on their persecutors. Paul had seen this firsthand when, as a young man, he witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen (Act 7). Stephen asked that God not hold this sin against them. In history, it has been this very reaction by Christians under persecution that has powerfully broken down the opposition, and has been used by the Spirit to convict their hearts.

“To rejoice with the ones rejoicing, and to weep with the weeping” (vs. 15). There are no commands here, yet a further description of what this transformed, unselfish life would look like. We will come alongside others in their joy or sorrow, and identify with them in what is important to them. The opposite would be to not care about others, but to just focus on our own well-being or present experience.

“Being of the same mind toward one another; not being haughty in mind, but associating with the lowly. Do not become wise in your own estimation” (vs. 16). Note the “-ing” words? These are descriptions, not commands. Our transformed minds will value all people, and will humbly associate with everyone. The one imperative here is “do not become wise in your own estimation”. In other words, do not think you are better (or smarter) than others. Again, think of how uncommon this is in most of society. To have an entire group of people who are gracious, accepting and who clearly value everyone, regardless of status or condition, would definitely stand out.

“To no one paying back evil for evil. Perceiving-beforehand good-things in the sight of all people” (vs. 17). Again, note the “-ing” words. Those who know God, and are in tune with His Spirit, will not be conspiring to pay back evil for evil. Instead, they give thought to what would be seen as good by others, and choose to do that.

“If possible, on your part, being at peace with all people” (vs. 18). Again, no imperatives. The transformed person will be a peace-loving individual. Peace is part of what the Spirit produces in us, and is characteristic of the wisdom that comes from above (Gal. 5:22,23; Jas. 3:17,18). Of course, we can only control *our* side of any relationship. We are to do what we can to be at peace, but *we are not responsible for what other people choose*.

“Not avenging yourselves, beloved, rather give place for the wrath [of God], for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (vs. 19). Note the “-ing”? “Not avenging yourself” is characteristic of the Spirit transformed life. There *is* an imperative here, however: “give”, in this case, “give place”. This is presented as an alternative choice. Instead of taking your justice, your vindication, your revenge into your own hands, give room for God to act. If you step in, He may choose not to. The word for “wrath” here is not the explosive judgment of God. It is the word, *orgē*, the mental bent or determination to make right what is unfair, invasive or unjust. The word for “vengeance” is a derivative of the word for justice. It means to “see to it that justice is done” or “justice is brought forth”. In our flesh, we might want to retaliate against the offender, but God may have other ways to bring about what is just or right. Paul commands us to give God room to set things right.

“Rather if ever your enemy might be hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire upon his head” (vs. 20). This is a quote from Proverbs 25:21,22. The end of that verse reads “...and Yahweh will reward you”. We have two imperatives in this verse: “feed him” and “give him a drink”. Again, think of how much this goes against the grain of our selfish human tendencies! The person with a renewed and transformed perception will recognize a larger picture that simply “*my* interaction with *my* enemy”. He or she will recognize that God can use this situation to reveal Himself, by my choice to show mercy and grace instead of bitterness and hardness. The word picture, “heap coals of fire upon his head” was a well-known metaphorical picture for the burning feeling of shame or conviction”. In other words, by choosing to show grace, you are disarming the other person by your unexpected behavior. This can be used by God to bring that person to repentance.

“Do not be overcome by the evil-and-unsound, rather overcome the evil-and-unsound with the good-and-sound” (vs. 21). We have the final two imperatives of this section in this verse: “Do not be overcome” and “overcome”. **We have a choice to allow what is evil, unsound and unhealthy to defeat us, ...or we can choose to use good-and-healthy things to overcome the evil pressing-in against us. Note that we do not overcome evil just by “white-knuckling it”. We replace the lies with the truth.** We replace the inclinations of the flesh with the mind and heart of the Spirit. **The word “overcome” implies the victory that comes at the end of a struggle. The life in the Spirit is not without struggle.** We must continually choose to put the mind of the flesh to death, so that the mind of the Spirit may have opportunity to be expressed in us. **It is not enough to stop the evil thoughts. Remember we are trying to live a new life, not just stop old behaviors.** There *is* a new life to *discover* and *bring to expression*. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 Jn. 5:4). Faith is trusting in a hope, a promise, and choosing to act on that hope. **We are transformed as we act on the new insights and perceptions God reveals to us through the Spirit.**