

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Recognizing, Discerning and Discovering Agapē

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“And this I pray, in order that the agapē-love of y'all might overflow yet more and more in true recognition and in all discernment, toward y'all to test-out-by-trial-to-discover the superior things, in order that y'all might be sincere and inoffensive unto the day of Christ, ones having been filled with fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Philippians 1:9-11

“I encourage you, brothers and sisters, by means of the mercies of God, to stand your bodies together alongside one another (as) a living sacrifice, set-apart, well-pleasing to God, the reasonable worship-service of y'all. And do not conform yourselves to this age, rather transform yourselves in the renewing of the perception, toward y'all to test-out-by-trial-to-discover what is the desire of God, that which is beneficial and well-pleasing and mature.”

Romans 12:1,2

It is clear that agapē-love comes *out from the power of the Holy Spirit* working within us. It is also clear that there is a *human element* to this. We are *commanded to love*. If agapē were *just* produced by the Spirit, there would be no need to direct us to do this, it would just happen naturally. Like so many other areas of our spiritual lives, **God has set things up so that there needs to be a *partnership* between His working and our implementation.** We cannot love in this unique way, except by the power of God; but His inworking power requires that we cooperate with Him in order for agapē-love to actually come to expression.

There are four important concepts in Philippians 1:9,10 that illustrate this important partnership in action.

(1.) **PRAYER.** Paul *prayed* or “asked-with-purpose” (*proseuchomai*) that their agapē-love would abound, overflow or increase. This is a human act, calling upon God to act, ...clearly a partnership.

(2.) As the love rises up within them, they need to **RECOGNIZE** what is happening. The word here is the Greek word *epignosis*, meaning a “flash of insight, a revelatory-experience and conscious-recognition of some truth or insight”. There is a partnership here as well. There is *the experience of insight*, and *the acknowledgement of the reality of what was perceived*.

(3.) The next important ingredient is **ALL DISCERNMENT**. This word (*aisthēsis*) refers to *the ability to recognize distinctions and to make decisions* in moral actions. It refers to a capacity to understand, and accurately perceive what is required in a given circumstance. This faculty of moral and spiritual discernment can be exercised and trained through practice and repeated use (Heb. 5:14), which brings us to the next key word in this sentence, ...

(4.) **TEST-AND-APPROVE.** Both Romans 12:2 and Philippians 1:10 contain this Greek word which, when clearly understood, can significantly change our perception of how God has designed our process of spiritual growth to develop. This can have some very dramatic ramifications, because if we have misperceptions about how our spiritual development is *supposed* to take place, we may find ourselves repeatedly attempting to make something work that God never designed to operate in that fashion. This is a formula for frustration, ineffectiveness, and continued immaturity that can be avoided if we readjust our expectations and approach to be in line with God's design. The Greek word in question, *dokimazō*, is translated as “prove” or “approve” in these verses. It literally means to “test-out-by-trial-to-discover”. The main thrust of the word is that it is a **process of experimentation in order to come to discern what works best.**

Dokimazō is a very interesting word. It blows away the idea that the Christian life is a straight path that is well-marked, and easily followed. There is more to it than simply being “good little boys and girls”, ...as though we would automatically know what that meant, or could succeed in doing it. There is no simple list of behaviors that a new believer could easily follow in order to “walk rightly” in every circumstance. God wants more from us than simple “performance machines”. **He wants us to experiment in order to learn, grow, and develop our unique relationship with Him.** Following are some implications of the experimentation paradigm suggested by this Greek word:

(a.) **God has not told us all we need to know.** There are situations that we will encounter that the Scripture has *not* given clear and specific guidance on. Sometimes there are situations where the Bible seems to actually give conflicting messages. While the Bible does give us clear, non-negotiable boundaries concerning what is God's will in certain areas, He never intended for us to simply “go by the Book”. There are situations where the desire or direction of God for us will not be obvious. Furthermore, the need to experiment also implies that God will not always tell us “the right way” in a given circumstance. **He is more interested in our learning lessons along the way, to develop discernment, wisdom (skill), and character through our stumbling, and fumbling, process, than He is about just getting us to do a particular behavior.** To put it differently, God seems to be OK with us making a mess along the

way in order for us to learn how to live life effectively. As we try things, and we mess up, He will patiently instruct us as to how we might do better the next time.

(b.) God expects us to make mistakes. This is a huge, extremely significant paradigm-shift for most of us to grasp. God is *expecting* mistakes, errors, lack of skill, poor choices, short-sightedness, stumblings, confusion, timidity, fear, lack of risk-taking, over-zealousness, recklessness, foolhardiness, as well as the spiritual-emotional-physical-relational bumps, bruises, scrapes, broken bones that come from our inadequate, and sometimes foolish, attempts to live out our faith. God is a Father who is raising children, ...and we are those children. **He is not surprised by any of this, ...in fact, He has made plenty of room for it.** He has given us parameters of wisdom and safety, which are spelled out in the Scriptures, and He surrounds us with other believers who can share their perspective and experiences with us to advise us. He Himself counsels us, to guide and encourage us along the way. **He doesn't want us to make mistakes, get hurt, or to hurt others, ...but He knows we will.**

(c.) There are some things that can only be learned by doing, or by "putting to the test".

(i.) Some truths will only be discovered by experimentation. For example, one of the usages of *dokimazō* involves discovering **peoples' character** by observing how they live and deal with situations (II Cor. 8:22; I Tim. 3:10). Sometimes people talk a good line, but their actions eventually reveal that they are inconsistent. Other times certain people will stand out as trustworthy, because they have been steadfast under trial. They are "approved", in that they evidenced their trustworthiness by their actions, and have earned a high rating in our estimation of them. In another passage, **strength and capability** of teams of oxen could be discerned by putting them to a test (Lk. 14:19), much like we might take a car on a test drive today. In another example, **God's will** is sometimes to be discovered by a testing-out process (Rom. 12:2).

(ii.) Developing skills requires experimentation. It involves *learning to do* something you have never done before. Learning *about* a skill is never adequate preparation for actually going through a real-life situation and having to make the wise choices. There is no substitute for experience, no way to fully prepare for the sensations and dynamics of real-life action, no way that untrained, undisciplined muscles can accomplish what those strengthened and fine-tuned by years of practice can do. **Moving from the theoretical to the experiential always involves an experiment.** Putting our bodies, minds or self-awareness to the test in either a simulation or a real-life situation is a trial episode, where we can see what we actually can do. In fact, the words "experiential" and "experimental" used to be almost synonyms, both referring to what was happening subjectively with the person. As we step out into a real-life situation, **we rapidly evaluate, adjust and adapt** our actions to attempt to accomplish whatever our goal is. We learn to try different approaches and tactics. God has made our minds and bodies to be incredibly adaptable. Sometimes the process of adaptation happens so quickly that we hardly notice at all, while at other times there is such strain and concentration involved that it is almost painful. **There is a progressive or cumulative dynamic to skill development**, as well. Something that requires great effort and concentration, initially, can come to be second nature, requiring virtually no conscious attention. This frees us up to concentrate on other aspects of the skill, or on other things of an entirely different part of life. (Remember how much concentration it took to learn to drive? Yet, after driving for a while, many of those skills that were once very difficult now have become second nature.) Living life is that way. Learning to love is that way, too.

So, to attempt to put this all together, **God is the Source of agapē-love** (1 Jn. 4:7). He *is* agapē-love, and this love is His very Spirit operating within those who have been born of Him and experientially-know Him. **In order to learn to love in this way is basically the same as learning to walk with Him in any other aspect of life.** It is getting ourselves in tune with Him, receiving and expressing the life-flow which comes from Him through our choices in response to what He is initiating within us. It is a by-product of abiding in and with Him.

Paul breaks this down for us in Philippians 1:9,10. He prays that our love would increase, grow, abound and overflow in our lives. We can and should be praying in a similar fashion. **The life of walking with the Spirit is not a passive proposition; it is an active partnership**, ...on *both* sides. Sometimes (often), it is God Himself who initiates this process. BUT, He allows us to also be initiators in our relationship with Him. He has given us the capacity, awareness and the opportunity to ASK Him to work within us. He also allows us to intercede on behalf of others, as Paul did here, to ask God to work agapē-love in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. How we desperately need God's people to cry out for the inworking of His Spirit in the lives of His people! Then, as God begins to work, **He will make us aware of His working.** He will give us a flash-of-insight, or a recognition of His operation within us, in some way. We will become aware of His prompting, and we also need to acknowledge that recognition. **Then, we must ask for a discernment to know what to do to express the heart of God** we sense at work within us. **Finally, we begin to make attempts in line with the discernment we seem to receive. As we experiment, we will find more clarity, and can adjust our "love-actions" with more effectiveness.** We will test-and-approve what works best.