

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 3, 2019

Earnest Continuance in Love

by Dan Trygg

“The aim of all things has come near; therefore, y’all think-soundly and be sober-minded toward prayers. Above all, having earnest-continuing love toward yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one received a gift, serving it up unto yourselves, as good stewards of the varied grace of God.” I Peter 4:7-10

As we think about the whole question of choosing to prefer someone, of deciding to esteem that person, ...and consequently to value what is in their best interest and well-being, it is easy to lose sight of the big picture of **“Why am I doing this?”** This is especially true when we are choosing-to-love someone who is selfish, difficult, disappointing, or unappreciative of our efforts. The selfish inclination from our flesh is to withdraw our affirmation and our service, ...to redirect our energy to someone more responsive, ...or to possibly even lash out at the offensive person in anger for their thick-headedness or offensiveness. Of course, this is not agapē. Agapē is not choosing to do something for someone in order to gain approval. Agapē does not serve in order to get; it is not conditional. Agapē gives out of the abundance of one's heart, out of the fullness of the God-fountain of resources within, *because it is needed, or, simply out of a desire to bless the other person*. **There can be disappointment in agapē**, a sadness that the other person did not receive the service or gift as it was intended, **but the will-to-benefit the other person is not offended. Agapē will not give up. It will try again.** By definition, as a choice to esteem and value the other person, it will attempt to communicate that esteem in other practical ways.

What am I doing this for? The question is of utmost importance. Are we to simply be a goody-goody club, a gathering of people who do nice things for each other? Is that what this is all about? Is that what will make the world sit up and take notice? No, no. There is much more. Christianity is much more than being kind and “sugary-sweet” to each other. It is much more than doing favors for each other, or being helpful. **If we lose sight of the bigger picture of what is going on in the cosmos, and how we fit in, we cannot possibly perceive the serious determination of agapē.** Without the larger perspective, the will-to-serve can easily be dissipated and overcome by petty offenses. What we might call “love” will fail, ...it will give out, because it is only “skin deep”. There is a sober-minded intention to mature agapē that gives it the resilience and “staying power” needed to press past human failings and disappointments in order to accomplish its mission. **This sober-mindedness, this self-restraint and self-discipline, grows out of a clear perception of the significance and urgency of our investments into one another’s lives.** We have a unique opportunity to accomplish something in each other’s lives for God. More than a mere opportunity, we have a job to do, a stewardship from God to help one another mature, become equipped, and to learn to be effective in the service of the King. “Without a vision, the people are undisciplined” (Prov. 29:18), was the observation of Solomon. Without the larger vision, we lose the motivation to persevere in love.

“The aim of all things has come near...” Many versions translate this phrase as “the end of all things is at hand”. Unfortunately, that gives us the wrong impression. That sounds like, “Whew! It’s almost over.” This was written almost 2,000 years ago. Guess what? That interpretation does not fit the facts! The word translated as “end” means “endpoint, goal, summation, fulfillment, purpose”. The verb, “has come near”, is in a form that means “it has arrived and is still here”. What does this mean? I think what Peter is saying is that **finally we have the opportunity to fulfill the plan and purposes of God.** Look back briefly in this letter, and you will find that the OT prophets (1:10-12) wanted to understand what they were preaching about, but that the fulfillment of their words came *to us*. In 1:13, Peter concludes from this, “therefore, gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit...” **This salvation which has come to us does not bring with it a time to rest, ...instead, it incites us to action! There is work to be done!** There is a battle to be waged. **There is an enterprise much bigger than ourselves that is dependent upon our efforts.** To tap into Jesus’ words regarding the mission of the Church, “the gates of Hades will not stand against it” (Matt. 16:18). There is a cosmic conflict, a war between spiritual kingdoms, and *we* are given the calling to be significant players in this struggle. I think what Peter is saying here is that **we are finally within striking distance.** Instead of saying, “It’s almost over, pull yourselves together to hang in there until the storm passes”, I think a more accurate translation would be, **“The target is within range, therefore be sound-minded and resolved”.**

What kind of warfare is this? As Paul pointed out in Ephesians 6, our warfare is not with flesh and blood, but it is spiritual, ...a contending with spiritual forces. **Our weapons are not like physical weapons** (II Cor. 10:3-5), **but are effective against the lies and deceit of the enemy**, from which he garners his power and holds people in bondage. Instead of lies; truth. Instead of selfish competition and manipulation; generous love. Instead of independent living; lives purposely devoted to God, dedicated to His purposes, and dependent upon His resources and

direction. Therefore, we see Peter first advocating *clear thinking*, “think soundly”. Then he directs us to *disciplined pursuit of God in prayer*. Next, it is *Body-life*, where we express truth to one another in love.

Why Body-life? Because we are the ground assault team! *Each of us* has a part to play in the advance of the Kingdom of God. *Each of us* is valuable and important to the team effort.

The enemy’s strategy is to keep us out of the action! He first tries to *keep us unaware* of God’s love, ...then, having failed in that, *he will attempt to sidetrack us* with various traps, bondages, lies, distractions and misdirections. *He works hard to keep us apart*, to keep us isolated and fractured. We are more vulnerable to his attacks in this condition, but more importantly, if he can *keep us from discovering who we are as a team*, he succeeds in keeping us from assembling the heavy firepower and synergy that can be generated when we come together.

So, what is God’s strategy? He intends the church to be proclaimers of His love, ...but, even more powerfully, He intends that we would be demonstrators of His love..., both to each other and before a watching world. Throughout the NT, *this is the highest priority given for the church*. We are to be a people that live out the love of God with each other. “By this will all men know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). **Why is agapē so important? Because agapē will move each of us to take up the battle to liberate and equip one another.** The team players will help one another become the team. Agapē drives us to value the other person enough to care about his or her struggles, to assist them in finding answers and in getting support, and in doing whatever is necessary to help them find freedom, health and a readiness-to-action that will fulfill the calling within each person’s breast. As we help and serve one another, it will become more clear what our own strengths and abilities are, and we will find by a testing-out-by-trial process who we are, and how to function as a *team*. **As we learn to fight the enemy within the community of believers, we learn how to recognize his strategies and how to deal with his methods, so we can deal with him effectively outside of the community.** Then, we as a group will become an effective assault team to come against his fortifications, wherever they are.

Thus, we begin to see the significance of Peter’s statement, “before all things, be having earnest-continuing love toward yourselves”. It is crucial, ...it is essential to the purposes of God..., that we keep our commitment of esteeming one another in the face of all opposition. The word translated as “earnest-continuing” is a word that means “to stretch out, or extend”. By metaphorical application, it is used to refer to both an “eager, earnest reaching-out-to-help or welcome” and a stretched-out-ness which indicates perseverance. The vital and significant role that agapē plays should impress itself upon us so that we eagerly “stretch out our heart” to lift up and liberate one another. It also should cause us to “hang in there” with each other when we are momentarily hard to deal with. Obviously, the message is clear that we should expect that there will be numerous and repeated times when the earnest-continuance of agapē will be required, for Peter wrote that agapē covers a *multitude* of sins. Why mention this, unless he meant to prepare us for the reality that people will disappoint and hurt us *many times*, ...repeatedly, ...often even with the same offense. **Brace yourself, be sound-minded, be disciplined and self-restrained, for this is what love will face**, ...what is required of agapē. To walk in agapē means that we will face this day-in and day-out. **Those we love will fail us or hurt us in many ways, but agapē will continue to value them enough to stick it out** with them, ...as well as to hold them accountable so that they can grow, when it is appropriate to do that.

What does it mean to “cover” someone’s sin? The basic idea is to “remove from view, hide, keep secret or protected from open view”. The opposite would be to “uncover” or “expose”. Many Christians think that this is their calling from God, to expose the sins of others. There are three basic word pictures associated with “covering” in the Scriptures. They have to do with covering someone’s vulnerability and shame, covering in order to hide from others, and covering in the sense of accepting a temporary covering for their sin against you, to maintain relationship.

Earnest-continuing agapē will also be expressed in hospitality without complaint. Again, eagerly extending oneself into someone’s life may mean that your advances of generosity will not be reciprocated, especially at first. Do not let that get in the way! (Be willing to “cover” and “bear” such offenses for a greater purpose.) Or, possibly you have the ability to entertain, and the duty seems to fall to you more often than others. *Don’t fall into the trap of comparing yourself with others*. Use the resources God has given you to serve as He enables you! **In the Kingdom of God, power and ability are given to be used to help and serve others. Freely you have received, freely give** (Matt. 10:8). It is the enemy that would cause bitterness and division by getting us to “keep score”.

Finally, **earnest-continuing agapē will issue in service to one another.** As we have seen before, agapē is not an emotion. It is centered in the will. It is a choice, a free decision to act on behalf of another. **Love is a verb. If it is genuine, it cannot help but be expressed in some form of giving action.** We are *all* stewards of *some* ability, ...something that can benefit others. **God has given us this ability so that we could be part of the Body-life team**, so that through *our* help others could be strengthened, and also so that together we could accomplish what could not be done individually. **Be eager and persistent in giving yourself for others.**