

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Love From A Purified Heart

"Having purified the natural-lives of y'all in the hearing-under-obedience of the truth unto an unphony (un-hypocritical) mutual-affection-of-one-another, out from pure hearts y'all choose-to-esteem-and-demonstrate-value-for (agapē) one another intensely, ²³being-ones-having-been-born-from-above, not out from a corruptible seed, rather of incorruptible, by means of the living and remaining word of God."

"Therefore putting away all hateful feelings and all deceitful-treachery and hypocrisy and envy and all evil-speaking, ²as newborn infants long for the untreacherous spiritual milk, in order that by it y'all might grow unto salvation, since y'all have tasted that the Lord is good."

I Peter 1:22,23; 2:1,2

The central verb in the I Peter 1:22,23 is agapē. We are commanded to love one another in an earnest, intense, constant, unyielding manner. We are to seriously, continually choose to prefer others before ourselves, to act in their best interest in order to lift them up and benefit them. **That is the core message of these two verses. This message occurs over and over again in the New Testament. This is to be the mark of Jesus' followers** (Jn. 13:34,35). This is how the world will know us, and will believe that Jesus is real, if they can see this kind of radical love expressed for one another. We have talked about this many times before. What makes this particular passage unique are the accompanying phrases which give us a little further explanation into how this agapē works, or how we are to carry it out. **What are the necessary ingredients that accompany or encourage agapē love?**

Love can happen when...

(1.) In obedience to truth, we have purified ourselves toward an unphony tender affection toward each other. Although agapē is not dependent upon emotion. It can exist and continue where it is not getting emotional reward. Nevertheless, it is *easier* to make the kind of commitment that agapē requires if we "like" the person with whom we are involved. Tender affection toward our brothers and sisters in Christ helps pave the way for the further stretch of agapē. **How do we develop this "tender-affection-love"?** Peter says that **it requires a purification of ourselves.**

Purification of what? Of sinful, unclean attitudes, motives, desires, and habitual behaviors. Peter has a list of such troublesome attitudes and divisive practices in 2:1, ...things like "hateful feelings, guile (or deceitful-treachery), pretension (hypocrisy), envy, and evil-speaking (literally, 'talking-down' or 'talking-against')".

It is interesting to note that one of the few other occurrences of this verb, "purify", is in **James 4:8**. The surrounding context is about quarreling, envy, strife, and arguments (vss. 1,2). As James exhorts the believers to "cleanse hands, sinners, and purify hearts, double-minded", he calls for a genuine repentance and humility before the Lord. His first words after this are "Do not speak-evil of one another, brothers; the one speaking-evil of a brother or judging his brother..." **These sound like the same issues that were on Peter's mind.**

The apostle Paul had to confront the same attitude with the church in Corinth. In I Corinthians 3:1-3, he mentioned how **these characteristics were marks of immaturity.** Could we not conclude that indulging in these attitudes *kept them* walking in the flesh, and caused their spiritual growth to *be hindered*? **Division, evil-speaking of others, fractures the bonds that are necessary to promote love. If the purpose of church were to create an environment that promotes edification and love, then these kinds of attitudes are destructive.** Thus, he writes to the Corinthians later, "For I fear, lest, when I come, I may find you not of what sort as I desire, ...I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, evil-speaking, gossip, conceit, instability..." (II Cor. 12:20).

Unless we confront and jettison such old attitudes and behavior, we will never develop a community of love, or maturity in our own personal lives. It is possible to "get stuck" in our spiritual development (Heb. 5:11-14), both individually and as a group. *If we are to move on with the Lord into what He has for us, we must purify ourselves from all such negative attitudes and behaviors.*

It is clear from the above passages that **love does not simply naturally occur.** We should not expect that if we just hang out with people from church, we will automatically love them. Instead, the influence of our old fleshly programming rears up, and we tend to be put off by the negatives in people's lives, or at least where they may do things differently than we do. **By focusing in on differences and faults, we magnify them. We are not drawn closer to people when we do this. This focus on the negative creates distance and arrogance, and we are emotionally repelled by what we do not like.** If there was an initial attraction or interest in the other person, we are put off by these negative feelings, and begin to withdraw, emotionally. Then, when we begin to dissect them in front of others, we are not at all empathetic toward them. They have become *objectified* in our minds. We no longer see the whole person, we see only the negative traits we are focusing on.

Learning to love, and *maintaining that love*, is a skill to be learned, ...a discipline in which to walk. The Corinthians were having a difficult time learning this skill. The Thessalonian church, on the other hand, quickly learned how to express love to one another. Paul encouraged them, and the Philippian believers, to continue in and develop this skill (1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9,10; Phil. 1:9-11).

Love can also happen when... (2.) *We see one another as new creatures in Christ, not as we appear in the flesh.* Paul spoke out directly about this in II Cor. 5:14-17. "If any person is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." Because of the transforming, rebirthing power of Jesus Christ, Paul could say, "Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh". **Instead of viewing people as they appear, Paul had learned to see beyond that to the spiritual reality of who they were inside.**

Peter alludes to the same approach, here. After commanding us to "love one another fervently", he adds the phrase, "being ones having been born from above, not out from corruptible seed, rather incorruptible..." What is the import of this statement? What is Peter getting at? I think he is trying to get us to **look past surface differences and repulsive characteristics to see that the seed each of us has been born of has no corruption, no decay or rottenness, in it.** Whatever may be dislikeable about another believer is either due to the flesh *in them*, or *in us*, ...and *that* is passing away.

In heaven, there will be no disharmony or lack of acceptance. We will truly be a community of love and openness. **We can begin to experience that now, if we will get this eternal perspective. God is going to make us all like Jesus in our character.** We will all walk in the fruit of the Spirit. Consequently, we will be kind, loving, safe people to spend time with. **The truth is that we already have that new nature within us. We just need to learn to walk in it.** Furthermore, our brother or sister in Christ *also* has that new nature in *them*. It is our responsibility to encourage them and help them as they seek to discover how to walk in it, as well.

One of the keys to creating an environment where *agapē* is readily expressed is to *dedicate ourselves to getting to know one another's winsome characteristics.* We need to marshal all the points of connection with our brothers and sisters, so that we can *remove emotional distance* and *build a friendly warmth* toward one another.

What better way to do this than to see that:

(a.) **We truly are of the same spiritual family;** and,

(b.) **We have a potential for kindness, goodness, and winsomeness that is already resident within us,** waiting to be discovered and unwrapped. **There is "Jesus in me" to be cherished and jealously guarded with loyal-love.** Instead of being offended or repulsed by the "corruptible" aspects of our fellow believers, we must press past those unlovely features to find the real treasure of who they are in Christ.

(c.) **We should be on the lookout for the "God-nature" in one another, and affirm it when we see it.** Philippians 4:8,9 describes a discipline for the mind, *a chosen strategy to pursue* to develop a godly perspective, "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on *these* things."

Of course, this will require that we spend enough time with the other person to get to know their heart. If we are "scared off" by an unpleasant encounter with someone, then we are not only missing out on the blessing of getting to know who they are in Christ, we are also abdicating our responsibility to God to help one another grow. **In the early church at Jerusalem, they spent time together each day.** Part of the discipline that they were living out, and introducing new converts to, was that they met *daily* in private homes, where they shared meals with other believers with gladness and openness of heart (Acts 2:46). The word translated as "openness", or "sincerity", with regard to their hearts, literally meant that "it was not difficult to travel there". In other words, **the new-found joy, coupled with everyone excitedly starting out together, and spending quantity time with each other, created an environment where people were accepted, and where they freely and honestly shared from their hearts, when others asked.** They all knew that they were sinners saved by grace. They all knew that they had issues to deal with. None thought of himself as better than others. Everyone was excited about God, and they desired to help each other. No one was pushed away. **Humility and joy created an environment where love could abound.** The times of sharing *led to* tender-affection love. They enjoyed being together. **As they began to share with one another, and as needs became known, the response was to help in many practical ways.** Thus, *they became radically different than the culture around them. They became noticeable* because, in living for God, *they were serving each other.*

We, too, must humble ourselves to create an environment of acceptance and interest in one another, so that we will approach one another to get to know the heart, and the struggles of each one. This kind of sharing will help us see the "*Jesus in you*" aspect of the other person, and we will be drawn to the delightfulness of it. **Tender-affection will spring up in areas of commonality, appreciation, and compassion. *Agapē* will rise up to meet the special demands that go beyond friendship love, to meet needs or maintain relationships that would otherwise drift away.** In any case, our King calls us to *learn to love.* Let us purify ourselves for that purpose.