

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Pondering to Provoke Love

By Dan Trygg

“...And let us consider one another toward a provocation of *agapē*-love and of good works: not abandoning our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” Hebrews 10:24,25

This is another passage that has been poorly translated, in my opinion. Both the NASB and the NIV introduce the word “how” to their renderings of verse 24, and make it about trying to get others to grow in love and in good deeds. This is one time when **the King James Version has the “cleanest” rendering, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.”** As you interpret the verse, you may end up in a similar place as the NASB or NIV translators, ...or you may see something entirely different in this passage.

Before looking any deeper, however, **let’s try to understand the context** coming into this passage. **The writer is penning this letter to Jews who had come to believe and identify with Jesus as the Messiah**, spoken about by the prophets of old. **However, after choosing to follow Jesus, they had come under intense persecution, and were now considering going back to identifying themselves simply as Jews.**

Jews had enjoyed some measure of tolerance and protection under the Roman laws. By identifying as disciples of Jesus, these believers had put themselves in a precarious position. Suddenly, they were being harassed by those of the Jewish community, ...and the Gentiles did not know what to think of them. Were they Jews? Were they some off beat followers of some other strange gods? **They seemed to be disloyal to Caesar, refusing to offer allegiance or sacrifice to him as “Lord”. In fact, they referred to this other person, Jesus, as “Lord”.** As a result, they had experienced persecution, harassment, and even the seizure of their property (Heb. 10:32-36). **The author of this letter is writing to convince them that they can’t go back.** They needed to stay faithful to the truth they know, and the Savior who died for them.

The letter builds the case for Jesus, and the salvation available through Him, as being the fulfillment of the promises in the scripture. Jesus is superior to angels, to Moses, Abraham, Levi, the Aaronic priesthood, and Melchizedek. **The covenant He established is far superior** than anything contained within Judaism. The author makes many comparisons, and emphasizes that **Jesus is the initiator of the New Covenant promised in the prophetic Scriptures.** While the former covenant temporarily covered the sins through animal sacrifices, in the New Covenant Jesus offered Himself to forever cleanse and remove all of our sins once for all time. Furthermore, **this New Covenant made possible a cleansing and transformation of the heart.** God’s law would be written upon the hearts of those who believe in Jesus.

The culmination of the letter is in chapters 9 and 10, where the author establishes how much more is available through Christ. After establishing that Jesus’ sacrifice cleansed us of every sin, sanctified us for God, and perfected us in Christ, **there are three conclusions, or resulting applications, that follow for those who trust in Him.** These are translated in English by the phrase, “let us”, but in Greek these words represent a certain form of the verbs that signify a possibility. To express that, I would use “we might now...” as an alternative way to render these verbs. **These three new possibilities that exist for those of us who are in Christ are that:**

(1.) **“we might now draw near”** (10:22). Since Jesus removed every barrier that kept us distant from God, the invitation, ...the opportunity..., that exists for us now is that we can and should draw near to God.

(2.) **“we might now hold fast our confession without wavering”** (10:23). Since we have *seen* the genius and fulfillment of our hope in God’s salvation finally fulfilled in Christ, **we can be assured that our beliefs are well-founded, and we can be resolute and unshakeable in our confidence** in what God has done in Christ.

(3.) **“we might now consider one another to incite love and good works”** (10:24). This may seem a little strange as a “possibility that is now available to us”, but it represents a larger application of what Jesus Himself had accomplished. **Just as Jesus was a priest that was from a different, and superior, priesthood** than that of Aaron (a priesthood like that of Melchizedek), in a similar way, **He has set us all free to function as priests**, both to one to another and to those outside of Christ. He has made us to be a kingdom of priests, both toward God and toward people (Rev. 5:10; 1 Pet. 2:9). This had been God’s ultimate purpose for Israel under the Old Covenant, in that they were to represent Yahweh to the nations about them (Ex. 19:5,6), but the privilege of being priests within Israel, and of serving in the Holy Place, belonged to the tribe of Levi, and to the clan of Aaron. Under the New Covenant, this limitation has been

removed, and we are all given access to the Presence of God Himself, through Christ. **We have greater access and privileges than the Levites, priests, or even the high priests of ancient Israel.**

Let's take a closer look at our passage for today: "And we might now consider one another toward a provocation of *agapē*-love and of good works: not abandoning our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Note the simple subject and verb in this sentence: "We might now consider one another." There is nothing here in the original construction of the sentence to say, "We might consider *how*..." No. The subject is "we". The verb is "might consider", and the direct object is "one another." There is no way around these parameters. **If we start adding other explanatory phrases, we quickly lose sight of this simple core of the sentence. We are to be thinking-about one another.**

The subject and direct object are inescapably clear. What about the verb? The Greek verb here is a form of *katanoeō*, which is a compound word from *kata* = "according to" and *noeō* = "to think upon, ponder, heed, consider, apply one's mind to, carefully-observe, notice, perceive with the mind, recognize, understand, gain insight into, comprehend". When you put the two component parts together, it means to "take note of or think about according to what is the reality of *that* particular person". In other words, you don't read *your* thoughts, expectations or beliefs onto the person, or assume that all people are alike, ...instead, you observe and ponder each person according as they really are, in order to come to an accurate understanding. Now, go back and read through the listing of definitions for *noeō* again. **Have you ever consciously, intentionally, prayerfully applied your mind to observe and carefully-understand the other people in your faith community? Are you investing the time, effort and care to come to an accurate perception of each person, as they actually are? You see how we are not instructed to do this, or how easily we avoid this as "not my responsibility"? Yet, according to this passage, this is something we should be applying ourselves to.** We ought to be pondering one another, in order to accurately perceive and understand what is really going on with one another.

Note, too, what it says and does *not* say. It says that YOU, yourself, are to take time and effort to prayerfully observe and think about the others in your faith community, or your network of Christian brothers and sisters. It does NOT say that this gives you a license to demand information or pressure people to reveal information about themselves. This is NOT saying that you can play "20 questions" with others, and they are expected to comply. NO. The responsibility is on YOU to observe, think about, ponder, in order to understand. **We all need to respect one another's level of comfort and privacy.** Information that is shared will come out naturally as we spend time together, and people can see that we prove to be trustworthy. **This passage also does NOT give us a license to share the secrets of people with others.** Again, the focus is on each of us making thoughtful, prayerful observations, ...not talking about people behind the scenes.

BUT, the sentence is not complete without the qualifying prepositional phrase!! The verse is NOT simply saying that we are to observe and consider one another *as an end in itself*. The writer added another phrase that gives further direction and clarity to the focus and purpose of our observations and careful perceptions of one another. What is this prepositional phrase that is meant to specify or modify our ponderings and perceptions? "...**toward a sharpening, incitement, encouragement or provocation of *agapē*-love and of good deeds.**" As you can see, the word that is the object of the preposition is capable of several possibilities. The Greek word is *paroxusmos*. It means a "stirring up, encouraging, incitement, stimulation, agitation, irritation, exasperation, arousal". **It is a strong word for being prompted or pushed into a change of motivation that results in action.** Here the actions that are the result of this agitation are "***agapē*-love and good deeds**".

There is *nothing SPECIFIED* in the sentence that tells us *who* is supposed to be pushed to the actions of love and good deeds. The NASB and NIV seem to think that we are to be trying to figure out how to stimulate the others we are thinking about to engage in love and good deeds. The translators probably get this from the next verse, "encouraging one another". **But, if we go back to the context, it would seem to be saying that WE are the ones who are to be "aggravated to action".** It only makes sense that, if we are carefully-observing and pondering each other, that the Holy Spirit will begin to show us areas of need where we could express *agapē*-love or choose to serve by a practical act of service in response to a need we notice. **The purpose of the pondering, then, is to provoke Spirit-prompted love in US to serve and encourage OTHERS.** This would seem to be confirmed by the record of the early church in Acts 2:42-47, where the early believers spent considerable time together, and shared their hearts openly with one another. The sharing of hearts and needs spontaneously produced a response of practical action to help the poor. No one told people that they had to give to help the poor. The desire to help seems to have developed as those with resources *came to clearly perceive* the needs of those who were financially struggling. **The New Covenant is about Spirit-prompted motivation rising up from within. As we observe the need, we are prompted to serve.**