

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: December 27, 2020

The Spiritual Gift of "Standing-Before"

by Dan Trygg

"According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If ... standing-before, with diligence..." Romans 12:6,8

"...in order that the ones having believed might think to-stand-before concerning good deeds...¹⁴ ...but let our people learn to-stand-before concerning good deeds to meet pressing needs, in order that they might not be unfruitful." Titus 3:8,14

"Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to know the ones laboring among you and standing-before you in the Lord and reminding you,¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

"...one standing-before his own house well, having children in subjection and with all respectability." 1 Timothy 3:4

When studying spiritual gifts, there is a whole lot of "baggage" that has often accumulated over time regarding what the spiritual gifts are, and how they are to work. So much comes down to how the original language has been translated, ...and how we perceive that from our own world view. Today's study is a case in point. *The word under scrutiny today is the Greek word, **proistēmi**, which most literally would mean "to stand before"*. In Romans 12:8, it is used in a phrase, "the one standing before", and it is often translated as "he who leads", which then is encapsulated and presented as "the gift of leadership". That might not seem like a big deal, ...but is actually *is*, because then we add to this translation all of the Western and 21st century ideas of "leadership" from our culture, and what we end up with does not necessarily look much like what Paul was trying to describe here, at all. Our understanding has been affected by traditional worldly ideas of authority that include notions of rulership, control and hierarchy that don't seem to accurately convey what Paul was attempting to communicate here.

As a backdrop to our discussion, let me remind you of an interaction Jesus had with His disciples that should have clued us into an important truth: **The kingdom of God, ...especially the interactions within the community of believers..., is not to operate like the world.** Jesus told His disciples, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it down upon them, and the men of high position exercise power down over them. *It must not be like that among you.* On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:25-26). That should tell us that **leadership in the church should not be a top-down, hierarchical structure to control and dominate others, but a coming under as a servant to build up and serve others.**

There is a noticeable distinction in the language of leadership in the church that is very different from the language used by the world. While the world system used *nouns* to describe *positions of authority and power*, the writers of the NT used *verbal forms* to describe the *functions of servant-leadership* in the community of the church. **Power in the kingdom is not given to dominate or control; it is given to enable strength to help and serve others effectively. People respond to effective service voluntarily.**

With this in mind, let's return to more closely examine the phrase "the one standing before". What does this refer to? Just to broaden our thinking a bit, look at Titus 3. In vs. 8, Paul counsels Titus to speak so that the believers would "*think to stand-(themselves)-before concerning good deeds*". In other words, they were to "stand ready" to engage in good deeds. In vs. 14, Paul wanted the believers to "*learn to stand-(themselves)-before, or "stand ready" to participate in good deeds to meet necessary needs.* **Clearly, the "standing-before" is a willingness to get involved, to take action, and to be "hands-on" in service.** There is nothing about leading others, just a readiness to get involved.

Then, in 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, we have another passage that gives us further definition as to how this spiritual gift might operate in the Body to build others up. The text says, "We ask you... to recognize (to 'see' or 'know') the ones laboring among you, and standing-(themselves)-before you in the Lord, and admonishing (or reminding) you, and to think about them very highly in love, on account of their work." **We can discern some helpful insights in this passage. First, these cannot be people necessarily appointed to leadership positions.** If that were the case, why would Paul have told them to "know" or "recognize" who these people are? **Second, these are people who stand-before their brothers and sisters to work diligently among them, to instruct, admonish or remind them.** Their "standing-(themselves)-before" them seems to indicate a willingness and readiness to consistently be involved in the lives of others to build them up and remind them of truth. **Their "leadership" is not from a position of "higher authority" but of consistent, day-by-day involvement.** They are present and "stand ready" to engage and invest in them, ...they consistently are in front of them, working to invest in their lives. **Their work could go unnoticed or unappreciated, ...so Paul made it a point to cause people to take note, and value such people.** Note again, that Paul is

careful to use the *verbal* description of what they do, rather than speak of any *position* they might hold. **This is a spiritual gift, a function at work in the Body of Christ, whether it is recognized, acknowledged or even appreciated.**

A similar passage is 1 Timothy 5:17. Here, the word is definitely applied to the activity of recognized church leaders. The verse reads, **“Let the elders having-stood-before-well be worthy of double honor, especially the (ones) laboring in word and teaching.”** If we apply the definition of this word from W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* as meaning “attending to with care and diligence”, **there is nothing in the context that requires the hierarchical idea of “ruling over”, although many translations render it as “the elders who rule well.** In fact, as we have mentioned above, if there is any doubt as to how NT Christians were taught to think of the office of elder, the apostle Peter clearly portrayed it as being essentially example-oriented (1 Pet. 5:1-4). He specifically forbade any elder from “lording it over those allotted to” them. **The idea of being a “ruler” is not there in the original language of 1 Timothy 5, and it is foreign to the other passages on NT church leadership.** Like our previous passage from 1 Thessalonians, Paul is saying that **leadership that is effective should be valued.** Note, too, that Paul especially underscores “the [ones] working hard/laboring in word and in teaching/instruction”. It is almost a direct parallel to what he had written to the Thessalonian believers. **The kind of leadership that is described here is that of repeated, consistent, attentive care and instruction. Someone who always was “standing before”, at the ready, to speak and to teach the truth is the kind of function that Paul is commending here.**

The next context (1 Tim. 3:4,5,12) relates to this kind of leadership function in the family. It is here that I believe we can find an important understanding of this word that will carry over into the context of church leadership. In these verses, Paul is discussing the qualifications for those who would be overseers and deacons in the Body. One important mark required of such leaders is that **they are to be ones “standing (for themselves) before their own houses well”.** Here the context helps to define what Paul is getting at. He goes on, “having children in obedience/subjection/order, with all seriousness/proper conduct. (But if anyone does not know how to stand before their own house, how will he take care of/look after the church of God?)”. **Whatever *proistēmi* means, proper, healthy exercise of it at home should produce children who are obedient and are serious about the things of God. We are dealing with more than controlling behavior here. We are dealing with establishing their character.** This is not an example of a top-down, authoritarian, legalistic structure which focuses on behavior. **It is the result of attentive leadership that models character in such practical, consistent and winsome ways that the children choose to value and adopt what they have seen in their parents. It is leadership primarily by example, and way of life training, ...not legislation.** This is the model set forth for parents in the Torah: “Repeat these words to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:7). **It requires a personal presence, ...the choice of the parent to be consistently “standing before them” by example, instruction, observation, application, correction and reminders. It also requires a positive presence, ...the consistent investment in attractive, affirming, upbuilding interactions of love. Rules without relationship tends to breed rebellion. Application with affirmation tends to produce acceptance.** Furthermore, the comparison of the home dynamic to what is to happen in the church sheds additional light on this servant-type of leadership. **The implied comparison is that knowing how to “stand before” one’s household well should equip one to “care for, be attentive to, and look after” the church family.** W. E. Vine states that the Greek word here, *epimeleomai*, involves “caring for something with interest, forethought, and provision”. For example, it is also used in Luke 10:34,35 for the care and attention given to the wounded Israelite by the good Samaritan. Somehow, these activities of thoughtful, attentive caring must be involved in the process of “standing before one’s household well”, and they provide perspective and developed skills that are to be an indicator of readiness for church leadership.

While we all should be developing a heart and character to be investing in the lives of our family members and others in the Body of Christ, someone with the spiritual gift of “standing-themselves-before” others will be uniquely gifted and empowered to do this. They will be “at the ready” to get engaged to meet needs, but especially to repeatedly, consistently, attend to *you*, or to others in the Body. They may be recognized leaders, but often **they are just people who you will find standing before you with a good word, a positive affirmation or some good counsel.** They will find a way to repeatedly come into your life to serve, instruct or encourage. Their own example will be a powerful influence, but they go beyond just being an example. **They will show up, again and again, to keep you on track, moving you forward in thoughtful, affirmative ways, ...or sometimes with a word of admonishment.** They always seem to maintain relationship, because that is the entry point, the platform for their service to you. They are watchful, attentive, and ready to step in to help and offer support and counsel. **Esteem them highly with love. They are powerful “worker bees” in building people up. And, if you are gifted in this way, ...if you see yourself showing up in people’s lives, with a heart to attend to needs and then to invest in a message or word or teaching, in some form or another..., know that this is a powerful work that you do. Do it with diligence and zeal. We need what you give.**