

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Learning To Yield To One Another

by Dan Trygg

“On account of this, do not become unthinking, rather understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be being subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” Ephesians 5:17-21

“What then, brothers and sisters? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; ²⁸ but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰ But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³ for God is not a God of confusion (lit., ‘insurrection, defiance’) but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” 1 Corinthians 14:26-33

It is interesting to put these two passages next to each other, to see the common themes. We do not always think of the Ephesians passage in terms of Body-life, because we have usually heard only verse 18, typically lifted from its context. Both passages are descriptive of what is to happen when the Body of Christ gathers, and both end with a plea for learning to defer to one another in the eager, vying-to-share interaction of the first century church meeting. Obviously, we are coming from a very different place. We don't need a traffic cop to help us maintain some semblance of order. We haven't often needed to remind people to take their turn, though on occasion it may happen. Most of that eagerness to share has been “schooling out of us” in the public school system. We tend to wait until we are called upon. We need someone to teach us that the green light means “Go!”. We need to discover once again that we have an accelerator, not just a brake. We have so long been idling our brains and wills, disengaging our spiritual drive mechanism from gear, waiting for someone else to tune us up, teach us, pep us up, etc. that we have no idea what we've been missing. We've been idling in the garage, when there is a whole world out there to discover!

Part of the reason that these early Christians had things to share is that they were actively doing things out in the world. They were attempting to discover the will of God, and do it. That meant both investing in their inner walk with God, as well as watching for His activity and leading in their lives each day. God hasn't gone off and died. He is active in *our* lives, and He has things for *us* to do. So many of us just haven't learned how to tune into that very well, yet, ...or we are distracted by the multitude of demands on our time. The *good* is often the worst enemy of the *best*. Good things, fun things, nice things, will steal away our time and resources so that we never get around to actually doing the most important things, ...the things God has for us to do. We who *are* stepping out, *are* seeing God at work.

From the 1 Corinthians passage, you certainly get the feeling that a meeting there would be like the Oklahoma land rush. The problem there was that everyone had a tendency to be talking at once. There was no lack of things to share, but no one was being clearly and carefully heard, so that the benefit could be gained from what each person brought to the meeting. It was like a free-for-all, with certain people dominating (while others were getting trampled, or “over-talked”), certain gifts and spiritual experiences being highlighted (while others were being virtually ignored), and there was a general disregard for one another in the clamor to be heard. It was another manifestation of the selfishness of that particular group of people, which had caused them serious problems before (1 Cor. 11:17-34). What we find from the Ephesians passage, however, is that they were not that far off. The Corinthian church, for all its self-striving, was at least following the plan. They were doing interactive Body-life. They were doing the same activities described in the Ephesian passage, confirmed also by Paul's instruction to the Colossians (3:16). When you expand your grasp of the context of each of these passages, you see the larger emphasis on Body-life which has to do with intimate, honest sharing, bearing with one another's faults, forgiving one another, loving one another, etc. The early church was interactive through and through. If we return to the basic blueprint of Acts 2:42-47, the use of the spiritual gifts must have grown out of the sharing which happened around the table, as needs were heard and people were led to respond. Sharing and praying would have easily have risen in such an environment. Soon, the excitement of answered prayers, active ministry, the spiritual breakthroughs and revelations which people were gaining, etc., began to bubble up in many people's lives, and there was much to share. At some point, there was not time to hear everyone's story, or exercise everyone's gift, in every meeting, especially as the group got larger. So, Paul found it necessary to lay out some ground rules.

We are a long way from having problems with a “free-for-all”, “land rush” kind of dynamic in our meetings. There are some things which Paul shared which are helpful for us where we are, however.

(1.) Let all things be done for edification (lit., “house-building”) of the Body. Share those things which will be helpful to others. Interestingly enough, in Corinth, some of the activities which Paul had to limit were those that are edifying to the ones doing them, but did not readily benefit others. You cannot always use your own experience as the judge of what will benefit others. Things that *everyone can share in*, or which *concern everyone*, should be the focus.

(2.) Don't monopolize the time. Just as Paul limited the number of tongue-speakers, so we need to be respectful that others will need time to give their input. That will mean we need to limit our own.

(3.) Keep balanced. Just as too much tongue-speaking, or too many prophets can be counter-productive, so too much teaching, or too many songs, or anything else can become an unhealthy emphasis.

(4.) Take turns. Don't all talk at once, or battle to be heard. Be respectful of others.

(5.) Defer to others, especially to the *present ministry* of the Holy Spirit. This can be difficult. Note that there are several examples in 1 Corinthians 14 where someone had a gift which they would have liked to share, ...a legitimate, Spirit-enabled ability..., which they were to choose to *hold back* for the sake of the common good. In the case of a prophet who might be sharing a revelation he or she had received, and then, at that time, a revelation is given to someone else, the first prophet is to give place to the second, who has a more recent, complete, or explanatory revelation. This could be difficult, but it is part of the discipline of Body-life. In other words, sometimes our plans, or our perceptions of how things should be are disrupted by the Spirit. We have to be willing to defer to Him.

I would like to talk more about this idea of “being subject to one another”, or choosing to defer or yield to someone else in the Body.

First of all, note that it is part and parcel of the whole thought from Ephesians 5:18-21. Whether you understand the passage as “be filled with [the] Spirit”, or “fill-up (for yourself) in spirit”, the remainder of the sentence is about how that is done. There are five participles (“-ing” words) which further clarify the main verb (“fill, fill up, complete, fulfill”). These are: (a.) speaking *to yourselves*; (b.) singing; (c.) psalming (i.e., “making-music”, which can include music without words, or instrumental music); (d.) giving thanks; and (e.) ordering-(for yourselves)-under. This last participle means to voluntarily “arrange yourself under someone else”, i.e., to defer to them, to yield to them, to let them go first, to follow their lead, to willingly go along with them.

Secondly, it is unfortunate that we have such a history of abuse associated with “be subject to one another”. The English words “be subject” or “submit” do *not* adequately communicate the real meaning of the Greek word. The word, “subject” comes from the Latin words, “*sub*”, meaning “down” and “*jaceo*”, meaning “to throw”, hence, the verb “subject” means to “throw someone down”, usually by force and violence, and to “be subject” is to be in a conquered state of compliance. “Submit” also has a similar history. From “*sub*” and “*mitto*” (which means “to send”), submit means to “send someone down to a lower position” (again, usually by force or power). Both of these words convey connotations that are degrading and dehumanizing, and have often been used to force people into compliance. The Greek word used here is interesting. It is in the middle voice, which means that instead of being passive (where the subject is acted upon by something else), the subject here is voluntarily choosing to “arrange themselves under” or to “come under” someone else for a greater good. The important thing is that *the person is not in any sense diminished by this free choice*. He or she is not “thrown down” or “sent down” to a lower place. Instead, they choose to take a less prominent role in this scenario, in order to accomplish or facilitate something larger than their own immediate comfort or self-interest. The Greek middle voice communicates not only that the subject is making the choice, but that somehow the choice intensely affects him or her. Either the subject is intensely involved in the action, or the action limits or directly impacts them in some way. *The chooser freely accepts this sacrifice for the higher good*, ...whether a long-term, deferred benefit, or to help others, or to simply facilitate a group effort.

Thirdly, in Ephesians 5:21, this deferring to one another is a reciprocal, reflexive action. It is done *by everyone* to someone at some time in the group. There are no exempt classes or personages who are not expected to yield to others. Further, there are no groups which are “higher” than other groups in the Body-life interaction described here. Men will “order themselves under” women and children, at times. Leaders must be examples to the flock, here, and be willing to be “least of all, and servant of all” (Mk. 9:35), and be “as the younger” (Lk. 22:26) by “ordering themselves under” others. Jesus voluntarily “ordered Himself under His parents” (Lk. 2:51), and we are to follow His example of voluntarily “ordering for ourselves under governing authorities” (Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13). Wives are to voluntarily arrange themselves under their husbands, just as the husbands are to give themselves on behalf of their wives, as Christ did. The Greek word for “head” does not mean “boss” or “authority”. It is a serving role, describing one who is the source, supporter, and one helping another come to completion. Our cultural notion of a man being “the head of the house” in the sense of ruler, is carried over from sinful human culture. It is not biblical.

Fourth, we are to “yield to one another in fear/respect/awe of Christ”. What we are to be doing in Body-life is (a.) to give place, to facilitate, the activity of the Spirit of Christ; and, (b.) to show esteem, love and value to those whom He loves. He has called us to minister to one another. If we revere Him, we will follow His instructions.