

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Serving According to Grace-Giftings

by Dan Trygg

“The fulfillment of all things is at hand; therefore be sound-minded and clear-headed unto prayers. ⁸ Above all, be having the stretched-out *agapē*-love unto yourselves, because love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Be showing hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ According as each has received a gift, be serving it to one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one speaking words of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the might unto the ages of the ages. Amen.”

1 Peter 4:7-12

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”

Philippians 2:12-16

We talked last week about how Peter was saying that **the plan and purpose of God, which He had set in motion generations before, had been accomplished in Jesus Christ, and now the fulfillment or completion of His desire for us as His people has come near to us. It is available for us to receive and walk in.**

In chapter one, Peter emphasized that **we have been born again to a living hope**, to obtain an inheritance preserved in heaven for us. Based upon that radical change within us, and the hope before us, **we are to no longer be conformed to our previous lusts, but to walk as ones set apart and dedicated to God.** In chapter two, he admonished us to put aside all the negative thinking and emotion, and long for the pure milk of the word, that we might grow in our salvation. **We are to present ourselves to God as living stones, to be assembled together with others in Christ to become a holy priesthood.** We are a chosen family, a royal priesthood, a dedicated nation, a people belonging to God. This is in order that we might proclaim (“good-news”) the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous (amazing, wonderful) light. Therefore, **we are to live as aliens and strangers, sojourners who belong to another kingdom, ...a kingdom not of this world.** We are to no longer live for our own lusts, but choose to live exemplary lives, so that others would have nothing bad to say about us. In fact, as they observe our good deeds, they ought to glorify God for us!

This will require us to live very different lives. While others are complaining and resistant to governing authorities, even if they may be incompetent or unjust, we are live as free people *above* such negative attitudes. We are to yield to and cooperate with those who are in positions of authority over us, so that they would have no reason to criticize us. **By doing what is right and good, we hope to silence the ignorance of foolish people. In spite of our best efforts to avoid conflict, however, we will still often encounter opposition and even harassment from those who are not living for Christ.** We need to be prepared to even face persecution and sufferings, at times, as did our Master. Often the change in our lives, ...or the fact that we don't join them in their carousing..., causes unbelievers to speak against us.

It is important to understand that the empowering of God is available to us. This is part of what Peter is talking about, when he mentioned that the goal or fulfillment of all things is “at hand”. **It was God's purpose to reconcile our relationship with Him, so that we could be filled with His Spirit, and live out from the empowerment which is available to us now in Christ** to do what pleases Him. This is expressed and made tangible through our love for one another, and through the ways in which we serve each other in the body of Christ.

We talked last week about the *agapē*-love, which comes from God. Only those who are born of God and experientially-know God are able to operate out of this kind of love. Peter rightfully emphasized that **this should be our first priority, ...having the fervent, outreaching *agapē*-love of God at work in our lives and our relationships.**

That brings us up to our passage for today. **We are to be “...showing hospitality unto one another without complaining/displeasure.”** The word, “hospitality” literally means “friendly-love of strangers”. One sign of genuine *agapē*-love is a desire to benefit strangers, and make them feel welcome. **We should show friendly love and affection to one another, so that we all feel welcomed, valued and affirmed.** Though we might be strangers, from a worldly point of view, we are now members of the same spiritual family, and we should express our kinship to one another, by friendly greetings and thoughtful actions. **Complaint or grumbling-displeasure steals the joy and shuts down the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives.**

“According as each one received a gift (*charisma* – an outworking of grace, *charis*) be serving it unto yourselves as good stewards of the manifold or diverse grace of God.” What can we learn from this passage? **What observations can we make? First, we have received a gift or ability of grace that we can use to minister to one another.** We don’t need to go out and find one. Each one of us has received one. The language here is past, completed action. We *did* receive such a gift. We might not know what it is, or how it operates, but it has been given to us, nonetheless. **Second, we are to serve in accordance with the gift we have received.** Romans 12:6 tells us that we have received differing gifts according to the grace God has given to us. We are to operate according to that grace endowment or inworking. God’s grace is diverse, of many and varied kinds, “many-colored”, and therefore our gifts will be varied, as well. **Third, we are responsible as stewards of God’s grace to be actively utilizing the abilities God has given to us.** A stewardship is a responsibility of trust, to carry out the will or desire of the Master. Stewards are expected to be trustworthy, and will be accountable for what they do with what they have been entrusted with. **Fourth, the kind of service is very practical.** The word used is *diakoneō*, referring to helpful service to one another. It is expressed toward others in our group by helping, supporting, meeting needs, or assisting one another, in some way or another. **Fifth, the service is not directed toward God.** It is not “religious service”, *per se*. **It is to be directed toward one another.** In Ephesians 4:12, this service is to “edify” or “build up” one another, ...that is, to strengthen, encourage, heal, support and teach one another so that we grow and mature. We do this by receiving direction from Christ, and then expressing that in love to one another (4:15,16).

The source of the grace is from God, but the expression of the grace comes through the ways we minister to one another. The goal of the grace-empowered service is to strengthen one another.

This is very similar to the description of the process of working-out our salvation, described in Philippians 2. **God works within us, through the operation of His Spirit, to initiate a desire to do what is in accordance with His will. He also produces the ability to carry out or express that desire,** again through the inworking of the Holy Spirit. **What remains, however, is for us to engage with the inworking of God. WE must work out, what GOD is working within us.** We must step into action on that desire, and act in accordance with the inner working. As we do this, we will discover the grace-empowering of the Holy Spirit. **As we work out what He is working within us, we will experience the cooperative partnership of Him working through us.** The inworking desire and ability finds outward expression *as we act* in response to His leading, *and step forward* as active co-workers with Him.

This is a learning process. There is a need for self-awareness, ...the ability to recognize the prompting of desire caused by the Holy Spirit. How will you know? What will it be like? I can’t really tell you. How God works in your life may not be the same as He works in mine. In my experience it can sometimes be barely noticeable, while at other times, it is very direct and discernable, ...almost an agitation that is uncomfortable. **There is also a need for faith, ...trusting enough, or being willing enough, to step out, ...to act on the prompting. Notice that faith = action.** We must be willing to work-out what God is working-within us. **We must bring the inner-working into outward expression.** We must take a *risk*, ...give it a *try*, ...do something *new* and *different*, ...step *beyond ourselves* into partnership with the Holy Spirit. **We must die to self-consciousness or self-comfort, to discover how the life of God’s Spirit works in us.**

The goal is to walk in this living partnership with God. We talk about it so easily, ...about walking in the Spirit..., but learning to function in our spiritual gifting is an application of that same process. If we are not able to discern or discover the leading of the Spirit there, how do we know if we are walking in the Spirit in the other aspects of our lives? **If we cannot discover and function in the area where God has given us a special gift, ...a gift that is part of who we are in the body of Christ, and a key assignment He has given to us..., how effectively are we living our lives in the Spirit, versus simply living everyday lives by our own strength and self-understanding?**

Our spiritual gift is important. Learning to walk in the leading and empowerment of the Spirit is central to our mission. What does Peter say? **He breaks down the giftings into two basic categories: Those who speak, and those who serve. Those who gifted to speak are to take this calling and responsibility very seriously. They are to speak as if they were delivering the very words of God! They aren’t to simply be “good speakers”, they want God’s words to be communicated through them. What about those who serve? In the same way, their service is not just to be natural, human service. They are to serve in the power and effectiveness supplied by God Himself! WHY? Because our lives are meant to be explainable only in terms of God!** We are meant to be “display cases for the Holy Spirit”. We are to be lights that shine in this dark world, ...*God’s* lights. So, whether we are called to speak, or called to serve, **our lives are to be the expression of God’s Spirit. That is how God will be glorified through us.**

We come back to Peter’s assertion at the beginning of this paragraph: **The end, the purpose, the fulfillment, the goal of all that God set in motion for us to experience has come near, and is available to us. We need to be sound in our understanding, and clear-headed, so that we would devote ourselves to prayers, ...prayers for *agapē*-love, and prayers to discover and walk in all that God has for us, so that our lives demonstrate and express HIS LIFE working in us.**