

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Choosing the Lower Place

by Dan Trygg

“Therefore, if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mindset in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be held on to, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of humans. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself (‘made Himself low’, or ‘lowered Himself’) by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Philippians 2:1-8

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and sojourners to hold off from the fleshly desires that war against the soul. ¹² Be keeping your habitual behavior admirable among the unbelievers, in order that in what they speak against you as evildoers, by observing your good works, they may glorify God in a day of visitation. ¹³ Be subordinate to every human institution because of the Lord, whether to a king as supreme, ¹⁴ or to governors as being sent out by him to bring to justice evildoers and to praise the ones doing good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you, by doing good, silence the ignorance of foolish (‘unthinking’) people.” 1 Peter 2:11-15

We read in the first chapter of John's gospel that **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being which has come into being”** (vss. 1-3). **Everything that exists, in heaven and on earth, was created through Him. He was glorious. He was God.** Philippians 2:6 says that **He was “being in the form of God”, but “He did not consider equality with God to be something that He had to hold on to.” He was willing to “empty Himself” to become a human being. He “emptied Himself taking the form of a slave.”**

We don't know what all is entailed by those words. We know that somehow He set aside His glory, at least enough to be encapsulated in human flesh as a baby. **One of the great mysteries of theology is the Incarnation.** Somehow, He was, and remained, fully God, but He also was fully human (1 Tim. 2:5). We know from Hebrews 2 that **He was willing, for a time, to become “lower than the angels”, and that He “partook” of flesh and blood, ...and that, in fact, it was necessary that He become like us in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful High Priest, and a fitting sacrifice of atonement for humanity** (vss. 9,14,17).

All that John tells us is that **“the Word became flesh, and dwelt (lit., ‘tented’) among us. We beheld His glory, ...full of grace and truth”** (1:14). Later, as Jesus was preparing to face the cross, and return to the Father, He asked, **“glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I was having with You before the world was”** (Jn. 17:3). Apparently, **there was a much greater glory which He had shared with the Father before He came here, ...a glory which He somehow set aside in order to become human, ...but also a glory He looked forward to returning to.**

The point is that Jesus was willing to set aside His own comfort, self-preference, and glory in order to be a benefit to us. **He was willing to accommodate others, ...to let *their interests*, or literally, “the things of themselves”..., become more important than “the things of Himself”.** He adjusted Himself to accomplish His mission of giving His life to serve others and to reveal the Father's glory.

One application of that “mindset” to the church is that we are to learn to “empty ourselves” of all opinions, preferences, self-comfort and self-interest **in order to be able to work together to help others and to reveal Jesus effectively.** It is translated as, “...thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal” in the HCSB version, but the Greek says, “think or set the mind on the same thing, having the same *agapē*-love, joint-minded, thinking the one thing.” Read that over again, and consider the level of unity and consensus described there. **Paul is not saying that we may not have or entertain other thoughts, opinions or ideas. What he is saying is that we are to “empty ourselves” or “set aside” those individual thoughts or opinions in order to be in agreement in our common purpose, which is to do the will of God. We are to be willing to yield our self-determination, ...or to set-aside any non-essential belief or opinion..., in order to work together as a team to express the heart of God with purity of love and unity of purpose.** Consensus does not happen when we fiercely hold on to our opinions or perspectives. Consensus happens when we learn to “lower ourselves” to die to personal preferences and self-opinion and find our common ground at the foot of the cross. **We must be willing to die to “our truth” in order to stand together in the one, clearly-revealed truth of God.** It is when we go beyond what is written in the scriptures, that we encounter speculation, opinion, and divisiveness (1 Cor. 4:6). We must learn to “empty ourselves” of what is not clearly expressed in the scriptures, ...or we must learn to trust in and yield to the leading of the Spirit in

others, even when we don't perceive what *they* do..., if we are going to be able to be a united team, wholly committed to work together for a common purpose.

Secondly, we must be willing to “lower ourselves” to come under the preferences of others, at times, if we want the opportunity to serve them. We have to adjust our approach, to be sensitive to the cultural and personal backgrounds of those we are trying to reach, if we are going to be received by them. There are many customs, practices, and norms within a people group, or a family, or an individual's life, which can become either an obstacle to our approach, or an avenue that opens their hearts toward us. **If we willingly “empty ourselves” of our own preferences, and intentionally *adjust ourselves* to the customs and ways of interacting that are respectful to others, they will be more willing to receive us and allow us access into their lives.** Again, this does not mean that we give up our own beliefs or opinions, ...we just voluntarily decide to put them aside and adjust ourselves to be more acceptable by those we are attempting to reach or serve.

Jesus' incarnation was the ultimate example of that kind of adjustment. *He modified His very existence to become a human, in order to communicate to us.* As John 1:18 says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known (‘exegeted Him’, explained and interpreted Him).” Jesus set aside His heavenly glory and became a human being in order to reveal the heart and character of the Father through the medium of a human life. And, ...He did not come in the appearance of a religious professional, ...a priest or a Pharisee..., He came as a regular person. He also couched many of His teachings in parables, stories and word pictures from everyday life, so that common people would easily relate to what He was saying. His whole life was an expression of this principle, ...He adjusted Himself to reach the people He was trying to communicate with.

The apostle Paul did the same thing. In 1 Corinthians 9, he wrote, “**For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.** To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law (though not being myself under the Law), so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law (though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ), so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; **I have become all things to all people, so that by any means I might save some**” (vss. 19-22).

A third application is a corollary of this second principle. **We are to always be mindful of how we appear to others. We are to do our best to not get involved in needless controversies, and choose to live in a way that brings praise and honor to Christ. We are to empty ourselves of personal opinions or beliefs that are not clearly taught in scripture, so that we don't unwittingly offend people over non-essential issues.**

In 1 Peter 2:11-15, the apostle says that **we are to subordinate ourselves to “every human institution”.** The first example he cites is **governmental authorities**. “...to a king, or to governors/leaders/planners/rulers sent by him...” **We are to voluntarily “order ourselves under” such people because of the Lord.** This does not mean that we have to *agree* with them, or their policies. It does not mean that we have to *like* them, ...or even “cheerlead” them. **It simply means that we are to “empty ourselves” of our own opinions and non-biblical, speculative beliefs, and arrange ourselves in compliance with their authority.** We are not to be defiant or rebellious. We are not to speak negatively about these leaders, or pass along rumors or bad reports (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 2:1,2; Acts 23:5). It does not matter if they are evil and corrupt. Certainly, many of the authorities of the Roman society that Paul and Peter were living in *were* corrupt, abusive and brutal. **Our job is not to judge them, ...it is to live in a commendable way even under their corrupt oversight.** We are to be respectful and cooperative, ...unless we are being asked to do something that is clearly, *biblically* wrong. If there are other matters of conscience that we have, ...where we cannot in good conscience comply..., call it what it is, ...a matter of personal conviction, *not something clearly taught in the scriptures*. **Don't make it about Jesus, if it is not about Jesus!** That can easily be used by the enemy to become a false offense to the gospel. People will be put off from Jesus because of some opinion *you* have, ...not for something *Jesus* said or taught. They may reject the salvation of Jesus because we mixed His name together with our political or personal opinions! We don't want to put *anything* in the way of people clearly seeing *Jesus*! That is why it is so important to **put aside these secondary matters, and focus on presenting Jesus well, by what we say and do.** Instead of becoming entangled in such issues, **Peter directs our attention to doing what is good.** If we are living in such a way that everyone recognizes as positive and beneficial, how will people be able to speak against us?

We are to have the same mindset as Jesus had. We are to be willing to empty ourselves of anything that would be a distraction or barrier to communicating accurately the heart of God. We are to adjust ourselves and our approach so as to avoid anything that would put a stumbling block or false offense in the way. We want to learn to come alongside people in ways that are friendly, winsome and respectful to them. Finally, **if we are going to learn to work together as a team, we need to learn how to suspend our own opinions enough to hear each other out, and be able to defer to one another.** No one did this better than Jesus. These are skills we need to learn, as we follow Him.