

Sermon Title: Contribute and Show Hospitality

Biblical Text: Romans 12:13

Teaching Series: Justified by Love

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Romans 12:13

Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

On my drive home from holiday travels, Laura and I were listening to a podcast ... like good Millennials. It was an interview with Christian psychologist Diane Langberg. She was talking about spiritual abuse. She defined spiritual abuse as a breaking of the third commandment. The third commandment prohibits "taking the Lord's name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). Usually that phrase is taken to mean refraining from shouting out God's name when we stub our toe or something like that. But Langberg said that the third commandment is much more about using God's name to accomplish something contrary to God's will. It's baptizing our desires in spiritual language. That's what she calls spiritual abuse. And as I've reflected on our passage this week, that's what I realized church leaders in particular have done with respect to money far too often.

You see, as we look through the course of church history, we observe countless examples of spiritual manipulation and coercion with respect to money. We've used spiritual language to hoard resources and build kingdoms of human hubris and

pride. We call it vision. We call it missions. But it's abuse. We're using God's name to accomplish human purposes. Explicit abuses include that of the Catholic Church's practice of indulgences, teaching members that they could pay for their dead relatives sins—especially those in purgatory—by giving the Church money (until the Council of Trent in 1562). In the early days of the United States, many church leaders justified slavery on the grounds of funding church ministry. More subtle and modern sins are those of leadership teams convincing congregants that God's vision for their church is a bigger better building; they just need to give a few more dollars to make it happen. Not to mention the countless micro-misrepresentations of God's name when we talk about how God is more pleased with us when we give a certain percentage of our paycheck every month.

No doubt, there are beautiful stories of Christians living generously—Teresa of Calcutta, Dorothy Day, and the first century Macedonian church. However, much of our history and contemporary habits with money reveals generations of sinful behavior and abuse.

Father forgive us.

These are the wounds and sins we carry into this conversation. Some of you give regularly with joy. Some of you perhaps have never thought about giving the Church money, not even this church. Some of us have been directly and deeply hurt by these spiritual abuses and misrepresentations of God and his will. Others have a vague impulse to give to help people, but it may be void of spiritual

understanding. Others still may reserve generosity to the specific needs of the poor and organizations outside the church community. We all come about this differently, but as always we come to this text and teaching together.

I think that's how Paul's words find us today. And because we carry a great deal of pain and disinformation about what the Bible teaches about money, I want to say a couple things from the outset ... we're not doing a special offering today ... you will not be asked to make a commitment or sign a letter of financial intent ... and there's no specific debt we're hoping you'll help us cover in the near future. Of course, like any organization we have needs ... we have financial projections and aspirations ... we have a staff that gets paid and rent that's due and persons we'd love to bless and care for. However, my firm belief is that God desires to shape our character through his Word today not squeeze a few more dollars out of us. He's always after our hearts.

Look at Romans 12:13. ***Read Romans 12:13 ... Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*** Paul's instruction, though multifaceted is really about living generously. And so here's how we'll organize our time in the Word ...

- Generosity *meets needs*.
- Generosity *is not natural*.
- Generosity *reveals our God*.

[Pray]

Movement 1: Our Generosity Meets Needs (v.13a, Acts 2:42,44, Galatians 6:10, Hebrews 13:2)

Paul has two groups of people in mind in v.13. He's talking about saints and strangers. Saints are the people of God. Theologically they are all Christians ... past, present, and future. However Paul likely has in mind the Romans' local fellowship, and those within the immediate community of the Roman congregation. Strangers are everyone else. Hospitality is the act of welcoming the stranger. Paul is articulating a robust character quality of the local church. We're supposed to be generous. We are called to be generous to God's people. We are called to be generous to our neighbors. It's this gospel posture which is wide awake to the needs of everyone around us—inside and outside the church. However, Paul uses different language to describe this dual calling which help us to see the specific ways we're supposed to be generous to each other and to those around us.

First, Paul talks about being generous to the Church. He says, ***Read Romans 12:13a ... Contribute to the needs of the saints.*** That word 'contribute' is a translation of the Greek work *koinoneo*, which means to share. It means to share in needs and suffering. This idea leaps off the page of Luke's writings in Acts. He said the early church, ***Read Acts 2:42,44 ... "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... all who believed were together and had all things in common."*** Both "fellowship" and "all

things in common" in Acts 2 come from the same root word as "contribute" in Romans 12. That helps us understand that Paul is not talking about a behavior. He's talking about an identity ... a quality and character of generosity. He's not talking about tithing a percentage of your paycheck. He's talking about giving your life to people. He's talking about being so close in relationship with people—physically, spiritually, and otherwise—that we know what our brothers and sisters need.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains that this means, "*you do not merely distribute to the necessities of the saints, but that you enter into fellowship with them; you become partners with them; you share with them*" (Romans 12, 409). All this to say, financial contributions and meeting basic and spiritual needs of the church family is an overflow of a deep and abiding identity and relationship as the family of God.

The Bible never answers our specific questions about how much we should give.

But it's clear we should share with the saints in planned and spontaneous ways. The Corinthian church wrote Paul specifically asking about this. His response was,

Read 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ... Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

Many of gravitated toward this idea of the tithe, or ten percent. And that may be a good starting place for many people.

But for many others that might be a crippling amount. For others still that may feel like nothing. In any case, the modern concept of the tithe is not explicit in

Scripture. In fact, ancient people gave over 23% of their income. There are three

types of tithes in the Mosaic Law. One for the work of the priests, one for festivals, and one for the poor (Numbers 18:20-28, Deuteronomy 12:17-19; 14:22-29; 26:10-16). But Paul seems most concerned (in Corinth and Galatia) with a more personal and nuanced approach. He says, "*as he may prosper*" or in other translation, "*in keeping with your income*" (BDAG). The only place where a tithe is addressed in the New Testament is when Jesus is critiquing the heart of the religious leaders. Jesus said to them, ***Read Matthew 23:23 ... "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."*** *What's Jesus' point?* Their behaviors changed, but their hearts did not. They were hypocrites. They did not love the saints and strangers.

That's why after prioritizing the needs of the saints, Paul goes on to say that we're also supposed to be generous to strangers. Look at it with me, ***Read Romans 12:13b ... and seek to show hospitality.*** At the most basic level hospitality is about welcoming people into your life and practically, your home. We're supposed to see this as a deeply spiritual practice. The writer of Hebrews encourages his readers, ***Read Hebrews 13:2 ... "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."*** In Romans, Hebrews, and elsewhere, "hospitality" is a translation of the Greek word *philoxenia* which means love of strangers. And a primary way we love strangers is by welcoming them into our lives, in our homes. In her book, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*, Maya Angelo wrote, "*The ache for home lives in all of us. The safe place where*

we can go as we are and not be questioned.” Biblically, the stranger is not only someone who is unfamiliar or unknown to us, but who usually is without a home, a community, a place to be loved and seen and enjoyed. And so showing hospitality is about being generous with our money, food, beds, space, and relationships with those who are without.

Generosity meets the needs of saints and strangers. It's about seeing ourselves as part of a family. It's about seeing other persons, outside this community.

Movement 2: Our Generosity is Not Natural (v.13, Romans 12:1, Matthew 6:24;19:21, Psalm 24:1, James 5:1-6)

When we keep the context of Paul list of commands, we realize none of this comes natural to us. Specifically, this type of generosity is not natural. Because of sin if we practice generosity at all, it's often tainted by self-centered motivations.

Remember, Paul has just made a big shift. In the first eleven chapters he focused on the doctrines of grace, and sharpening his readers' thinking. And then in Romans 12:1 he says, *Read Romans 12:1 ... I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* He moves from our thinking to our living. And how we live is a direct result of the truth of what the Heavenly Father has done in and through his Son. That is, "*by the mercies of God.*" Because of his

mercy. Or in our consideration today, because of his generosity. You see, it's only through the generosity of God that we are able to be generous to saints and strangers. After all, we were not born saints. We were born strangers, to God and one another. We were not born into the family, we were adopted in through the work of the Eternal Son. We were strangers in the world with no spiritual inheritance. And Jesus, our cosmic neighbor welcomed us by the mercy of God. We are the strangers who Jesus welcomed and made his family. That's the generosity which is not natural to us. Jesus did not send us a percentage of himself nor did he remain far off and send aide vicariously. He drew near himself. He came himself. He gave his whole life. He shared everything with us. Therefore as followers of Jesus we are able to share with the saints and welcome strangers.

The gospel transforms us to be supernaturally generous.

Giving things away is not natural to us. And such generosity remains a challenge in a world built on different powers and principles than the Bible. You see, we live in a time when we're daily being told that acquiring and consuming will make us secure and happy. In other words, we don't live with open hands with what we own but with tight fists. We live in fear. We acquire as much money as we possibly can and call it wisdom. We chase after as many thrills as we can and call it self-care. We consume clothes and food and coffee and alcohol and call it the good life. Being generous may still be a cultural value but that value has limits. Worldly generosity limits our sharing and welcoming by our comfort. We're taught to give out of our excess rather than out of love. We're taught to treat strangers well out of

curtesy but not to the point of cost. Generosity without discomfort and cost is natural. But the gospel compels us to a supernatural generosity which is after the heart, which offers our lives as a sacrifice, which reflect the generosity of Christ.

Jesus calls our money and possessions *mammon* in the Sermon on the Mount. And he famously warns that you can't serve both God and mammon. You have to choose. Jesus says, *Read Matthew 6:24 ... "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."* It is not a sin to have money. It's not even a sin to have a lot of money. It's not a sin to enjoy the things that money affords. What Jesus is saying is that it's a sin to be a slave to money. It's a sin to look to mammon—your money and possessions—to bring you hope and peace. Ultimately, that's what's underneath a worldly sense of generosity. It's an attempt to serve and trust mammon while still doing something nice for others. But Jesus says that's impossible.

While religion (or moralism) and social values may change our behaviors with mammon, only Jesus reshapes our relationship with our money and possessions. Only Jesus transforms the way we view and relate to what we own. Specifically I see a few ways that the gospel rearranges our relationship with mammon, empowering us to live with supernatural generosity ...

- First, the gospel teaches us that God owns everything. There is a misnomer about tithing. Many believe and even teach that if and when we give God ten

percent, then the other ninety is for you to do with as you please. Professor Craig Blomberg calls this the "mine mentality" (*Ten Percent Won't Work for Everyone*). The Scriptures teach us something very different: *everything we have belongs to the Lord*. The beginning of Genesis teaches us that we're supposed to be stewards of the entirety of creation (see also 1 Peter 4:10). We have what the writer calls "dominion" over God's creation (see Genesis 1:26, 28). But our stewardship and dominion are not a change of ownership. The psalmist says, *Read Psalm 24:1a ... "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."* Everything in this world belongs to God. Everything in your bank account belongs to God. Everything in your home belongs to God. Everything in your storage unit belongs to God. Everything you still keep at your parent's house belongs to God. And God does not want you to tip him from your possessions. He calls us to offer our whole self as living sacrifices and serve him, not mammon. This is not natural, but the gospel empowers you to live supernaturally.

- Second, the gospel teach us that we're always in need. Usually we think the more we have the less need we have. To be sure there's a degree of truth to this. Money can alleviate many forms of sufferings and challenges we might otherwise face. But when we know the gospel, when we know the truth of our sin and the beauty of the cross ... mammon never makes you feel safe because your real need is never only physical nor financial. That means no matter how much we have we always have great need. This should keep us humble and not haughty toward those who have different needs than we do.

It's like when Jesus spoke with a rich young man. The man had followed all the religious laws his whole life, but still lacked something. Jesus said, ***Read Matthew 19:21 ... "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."*** For those who know the story, you know the man was saddened by this teaching because, Matthew tells us, "***he had great possessions.***" *You see?* His moral beliefs changed his behaviors with money but it did not and could not change his relationship with money. He was too dependent on his stuff. He served his stuff and trusted his money and loved his possessions. We're always in need. We're weak. We're dependent. This is not natural, but the gospel empowers you to live supernaturally.

- Thirdly, the gospel teaches us that what we own can't fix us. Money and possessions never meet our ultimate need. In fact, more times than not mammon exposes our need. That's what James warned his readers. Meet me in James 5:1. Rich land owners had withheld wages from their workers in order to garner more safety and security for themselves. James says, ***Read James 5:1-6 ... Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You***

have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. Mammon does not silence fear. It often causes anxiety. Mammon does not make you safe. It regularly reveals our spiritual vulnerabilities. Mammon does not make you happy. It often reveals our need for real joy. This is not natural, but the gospel empowers you to live supernaturally.

Generosity meets the needs of saints and strangers. But generosity is not natural to us. We may learn the new habits of a particular religion or social value system, but only Christ transforms us. Through Christ we are freed from the shackles of mammon and made worshippers who serve God, strangers who have been made saints.

Movement 3: Our Generosity Reveals Our God (v.13)

Can you imagine what this might look like? If your resources were not seen as 'your' resources? If we knew our need and weakness? If we looked to God, not money for healing and safety? If we served God, not mammon? In short, I think we'd live generously. We'd work to know and meet the needs of the saint and the stranger. In doing so, we'd be telling the truth to the world about who God is. That he is generous. That he takes care of his family. That he loves the outsider. That he transforms hearts.

Our generosity reveals our God. Any relationship with mammon which does not tell the truth about the God of the Bible is a breaking of the third commandment. When call ourselves the Church but don't share with the saints out of love and welcome strangers as we've been welcomed, we take the Lord's name in vain. It's calling ourselves the people of God without living and loving like God has loved us.

In some sinful ways, I wish I could prescribe to you a percentage that you had to give to the Church and to your neighbors. But God seems constantly less concerned with changing and dictating your habits and much more interested in changing you. Yet, as he changes you ... of course ... your habits and behaviors change. You should give to the church, not though an arbitrary percentage, not because we have a great and compelling vision, rather because we're called to be a kind of people who share needs and resources. For some of you that's a particular percentage. For other's it's less. For others it's much more. You should seek out meet the needs of your neighbors, not because you're better than them but because you don't serve stuff ... you serve God.

Does money have your heart? Do you serve mammon? Are you loving your neighbors? Do you love your brothers and sisters? Are you sharing with the saints? Are you welcoming the stranger? Because that's what God has done. That's who God is.