



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## Inward Change and Outward Results

August 2, 2020

Romans 12:13-16

Clint Pressley

*<sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Connie has been away for the week visiting her mom and dad in Mississippi. And the only redeeming quality of her being gone is my temporary but sovereign control of the television, which means “all documentaries all the time.” Thursday after supper, I sat down to watch a riveting six-part production on the history of Europe: from its Greek and Roman roots, the battles with the Gauls and the Picts and the Celts, I watched, and as the narrator walked around an ancient city in France, he commented on the fingerprints of Christianity in that city, mostly because of the medieval and gothic cathedrals.

All those churches reminded the citizens that Christianity is at the city's foundation root. And as I watched, I thought of the present-day Europe with all its cathedrals that sit empty because although the buildings remain, the real marks of Christianity in modern-day Europe, and maybe in even modern-day America, are gone.

And my mind, because I am a preacher, went to the Apostle Paul who really wanted to get to Spain but wrote a letter to the little church in the big city of Rome. And more specifically, in this chapter, chapter 12, Paul stands on the theology of 11 chapters and begins telling us how to live out all that great doctrine: That the church isn't recognized by its buildings but by its

people. That Jesus died for souls, not sanctuaries. And after telling us what a Christian is to believe, he now tells us what a Christian is to live.

The Christian Gospel is an act of God that's believed by a soul, that's seen in a life. First, it is an act of God. Then it is appropriated by a soul which, means to repent and believe. And third, it is seen in a life with sanctification, godly living and Gospel witness. And it's that last bit, that outward impulse that Paul deals with in these four verses, reminding us that...

### **An Inward Change Has Outward Results**

If you're changed on the inside, it'll be seen on the outside.

To get at this passage I'd like to use singular words instead of broad statements. Let's see how it goes. The first word is -

**Generosity.** We see this in the first part of verse 13. Contribute to the needs of the Saints. That word "contribute" is a familiar word to most of us. It is *koinonia* or "fellowship." It means to have fellowship in, share in, have partnership in the needs of the saints. Those needs would be the basic food, clothing and shelter. It's much of what we do here as a church at Hickory Grove through the Food Pantry and Clothes Closet. We can't actually be the hands and feet of Jesus; those were pierced for our transgressions. But we can be the people of Jesus who meet needs in the name of Christ. This is not just a call to have fellowship with people but with their needs. And the truth is that we are simply stewards of what God has blessed us with materially, and one of the most important responsibilities of a Christian is to use your resources to contribute to the needs of the Saints.

We have fellowship with people's needs like Christ had fellowship with our need. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* To fellowship with people's needs is a Gospel act. There are several reasons people don't give. The first is they just don't know the need. The second is they know the need but don't care about it. There is a fear that if you give, you won't have enough (yourself). And there is greed where you actually have your eye on more stuff. A recipient of grace becomes a practitioner of generosity.

The second word comes in the second part of verse 13. The second word is -

**Hospitality.** <sup>13</sup> *Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.* So we seek to show hospitality. That doesn't mean what I thought it meant when I first read it. I think I had in mind "southern hospitality." That it meant to be nice, welcoming, making a pound cake. But this word "seek" means "to pursue, go after, to take the initiative." It means to show hospitality. The translation is an unusual word *philoxenia*. "*Philadelphia*" we know means "love of brother." But this word means the "love of strangers." It means "to go after and take the initiative in loving strangers." In context that would mean travelers. It's the Christian witness to opening up your home to people other than your family and friends.

I am surprised how important this is in the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 13:1-2, *Let brotherly love continue.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* Jesus even mentions this in the final judgment in Matthew 25:34-40, when He is speaking to the disciples. <sup>34</sup> *Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* <sup>35</sup> *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,* <sup>36</sup> *I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'* <sup>37</sup> *Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?' <sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?' <sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' <sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'* And mostly because of grace, Ephesians 2: 12-13 says, <sup>12</sup> *remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.* <sup>13</sup> *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* We are to be generous and pursue hospitality because of what Christ has done for us.

The third word is –

**Irrationality.** This comes from verse 14. You don't have to do anything but read the verse to understand why I say it's irrational or maybe I should say illogical. Take a look at it. <sup>14</sup> *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* That's not a practical command. What places more stress or greater demand on our spirit than to bless the person who treats you unjustly or maliciously? It's not road rage but road blessing!

This seems impossible, and I genuinely think that's the point. It's not natural, it's supernatural and radical and will be astounding to the one who persecutes. It's sheep to wolves. This is what marked Paul before he got saved. He had a hand in killing a man named Stephen. And as Stephen died, he prayed in Acts 7:60, *And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And every time Paul told his conversion story, he included Stephen's prayer.

This is so much more than just not rationality; this is the ethic of Jesus. We see this in Luke 6:32, *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."*

So how do you do it? I think the best way is to pray and act. I have three prayers and two actions. Pray that your enemy would cherish Christ above all. Pray that your enemy would hate sin. Pray that your enemy would find deep contentment in the Gospel. Then, treat your enemy with kindness and respect. And speak well of your enemy. Ask God to give you supernatural power to live with an irrational love for those against you. Generosity, Hospitality, Irrationality and Empathy.

**Empathy.** Man, we need to cling to verse 15 right now. Empathy is first aid on division. It's radical. It's not full recovery but it will get you started. Look what Paul says in verse 15. <sup>15</sup> *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.* Christian love cares. Christian love never stands aloof from others. Love enters deeply in solidarity. Both of these are difficult but I think John Chrysostom was right. It's much harder to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. When your job plays out or your love connection hasn't happened or you can't have a baby, and yet part of the Christian call and experience and command is to join in celebration of a brother or sister even when your life isn't what you hoped it would be.

This is best illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son in the resentment of the elder brother. This happens when we get too wrapped up in ourselves. We become envious of some victory and start feeling like life has ripped us off. What do you do? Go to the cross and see the remarkable grace in Jesus and repent of that sin. Weeping. This is best illustrated by Jesus in John 11:35. He knew He was going to raise Lazarus yet He still wept. That's empathy, being able to give yourself to people because you have already given yourself to Jesus. You see an inward change has outward results.

We have gone through four words so far. Generosity. Hospitality. Irrationality and Empathy. Let's end with one more that I feel is an umbrella to the rest.

**Humility.** There are four roads to humility right here. I'm going to put them in negative phrases to point toward positive results.

Don't be **divisive**. Live in harmony. Have the same mind, a mutual understanding of God's way of thinking, an agreed upon foundational doctrinal stance. At Hickory Grove, we have a statement of faith. To follow the Gospel, there is a need for a response.

Don't be **prideful**. Do not be haughty. "Haughty" means to have the settled belief that you are smarter, better, more deserving, or even that you are further along than other Christian people. The biggest barrier to Christian unity is pride. It goes before the fall, makes you an opponent of God and is a rot to the fellowship. Grace heals it.

Don't be **partial**. Don't make friends for advantage or advancement but as a means to love and grow and bless. When you extend the right hand of fellowship, it shouldn't go up for your own advancement, it needs to reach for another to flourish.

Don't be a **know-it-all**. *Never be wise in your own sight*. Being wise in your own sight would include a sense of superiority and even spiritual pride. Proverbs 9:10 tells us, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight*. That insight, that knowledge of a holy God, reminds us of our own sin and need for grace. And that takes us back time and time again to the cross of Jesus. And it's there, by faith in Jesus, that inward change happens and creates outward results of generosity, hospitality, irrationality, empathy and humility all in the name of Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*