

Romans (12:13)

Holy Hospitality

Part 69 - May 7, 2006

GIVING OUT - DRAWING IN

Have you noticed that we've been studying tiny little passages in Romans for the past couple months? It isn't because I'm trying to drag things out ... honest!

It's that in the second half of chapter twelve - verses 9-21 - Paul *blazes* through a pile of Christian commands: We've examined ten in the last four verses!

1) Love must be sincere. 2) Hate what is evil; 3) cling to what is good. 4) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. 5) Honor one another above yourselves. 6) Never be lacking in zeal, but 7) keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 8) Be joyful in hope, 9) patient in affliction, 10) faithful in prayer. - *Romans 12:9-12 NIV*

We can't just run through 'em and hope to be transformed in love and hate and devotion and honoring and zeal and fervor and joy and hope and patience and faithfulness and prayer! So, that's why we're strolling instead of sprinting.

And today's passage is so simple, it's almost embarrassing:

Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. - *Romans 12:13 NIV*

The issue isn't: What does it mean? I can explain that quickly enough:

- A. We must: "Share"
- B. With: "God's people"
- C. Who are: "In need"
- D. And: "Practice"
- E. "Hospitality"

The issue isn't what does it mean ... but, am I gonna do it?

Q: Have you ever thought about "hospitality" as a crucial component, or a *critical, vital, essential* factor of faith?

To be honest, it's easy to yawn about the topic.

Q: But what if *hospitality* was a key decisive factor on the Day of Judgment, to determine whether our faith was genuine?

That'd kinda wake you up, wouldn't it?!

[Jesus said] When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in ..." - *Matthew 25:34-35 NIV*

There it is: "Sharing" and "Hospitality" on the Day of Judgment! Sharing and hospitality are two sides to the same coin.

"Share with God's people who are in need"

That's: Giving things out

"Practice hospitality"

That's: Drawing people in

- That's the "breath" of a believer: giving out - drawing in.

How we handle our money and our possessions and our homes is a barometer of how much we trust God and treasure Christ.



In order for the space shuttle to break free from the pull gravity, it requires thousands of pounds of thrust to push against this earth-centered force. There's a *self-centered* force of gravity that pulls our thoughts and affections and actions ever inward. It is very natural to neglect sharing and hospitality. It's the path of least resistance and self-indulgence.

So, Paul is urging us to fight the force! And to build a launching pad, and to seek after God's Spirit to fill our boosters and to blast us out of our self-centered worlds.

Remember at the beginning of chapter twelve, when Paul said:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. - *Romans 12:2 NIV*

Our whole orientation is supposed to *confound* the world. We shouldn't work to *have*, we should work to *give*. I love this quote from Randy Alcorn (in *The Treasure Principle*): "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living, but to raise my standard of giving."

In verse 13, when Paul says, “Practice hospitality”, the word for “practice” literally means to “pursue” (hospitality).

Q: What exactly is the psychological gravity that holds us back?

Well, there are four forces that weigh us down, and work against us:



1. Obliviousness

Maybe it’s never occurred to you that giving and hospitality are *essential* acts of worship.

2. Carelessness

Maybe you’ve always kind of known that this is what people who love the lord do ... but you just never seem to get around to planning who, or how much, or how often.

Here’s an fascinating fact: If every family who attends here *regularly*, went on Welfare and we all tithed (10%) on the benefits ... the offering (and budget) would *double!*¹

3. Greediness - the spirit of greed groans when it gives!

It broods over all the extra stuff it could collect for itself, with the time and money it’s being asked to sacrifice. And we are not called to “disciplined groaning”! God wants us to internalize *His* generosity and hospitality toward us (welcoming our muddy feet into His Heavenly home), so our love for others will grow as we desire to reflect Him.

God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7) (*and* a cheerful host) because it means that they are free from the bondage of greed.

4. Fearfulness – the dread that I won’t have what I need.

What does money represent to you? Security? Authority? Power? Pleasure? Comfort? These are the things we’re giving to God through our offerings.

And we can fear inviting new people into our homes as well:

- They’ll take up too much of our time.
- They’ll be difficult to talk to.
- They’ll mess up our stuff.
- Or even worse, they’ll think *we’re* messy!

“We can’t have people over – I haven’t weeded the flower beds!”

¹ Based on a Washington State welfare benefit annual wage equivalent of \$20,700. (www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-240.html) and 1035 families on the church mailing list.

There is a huge difference between entertaining and hospitality. Entertaining is about vacuuming & dusting, and hor'dourves & proper table setting, and dressing up & decorations. Hospitality is a holy act of expressing God's love in practical ways that meet needs and minister to people.

Holy hospitality recognizes the lonely, the hungry, and those in need of encouragement, fellowship, or just a sense of belonging. And *they* don't care if there's crab grass in your petunias!

Don't underestimate the power of your messy living room as a launching pad for new life and hope and ministry and mission!

And this goes for your church-home too. Invite the lost and lonely to join us here. We'll even weed the flower beds! Before or after the service, turn on your hospitality radar; it'll pick up distressed folks within a radius of 10-15 feet! Watch for the new, the confused, the nervous, or the discouraged and draw them in to a conversation, or show them where the nursery is, or invite them out for pie.

- This is how we express God's love in practical ways.
- But, you can't meet every need, or take everyone in.
- And each of us appeals to different types of people.



So let's close by talking about the one call, the one duty, the one ministry that we all have in common. And that's constructing a big ol' sign (just for Jesus) that says: Open!

He knows we can't fix everything and everyone. He knows your unique mix of gifts and talents. So the objective is to learn to discern when the Lord is asking *you* to respond to what you pick up on your radar.

Even about Himself, Jesus said:

[The Son] can do *only* what he *sees* his Father doing ... - *John 5:19 NIV*

In order to truly be open to God, you must:

- A. See what our Father is doing (there's the radar).
- B. See if we can help (that's the holy hospitality).
- C. Launch ourselves past greediness and fearfulness.

And then, on the day of your judgment, Jesus Himself will say: *I* was hungry and you gave *me* something to eat. *I* was thirsty and you gave *me* something to drink. *I* was a stranger and you invited *me* in.

Q: So, when it comes to sharing and hospitality the question is ... are you open?