

“LIVE IN HARMONY WITH ONE ANOTHER.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:14-16

Introduction.

Romans 12 is how we live when we have been forgiven and saved by the blood of Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit and are making daily progress in being conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Romans 12 is how we live when we have been overwhelmed by how much we don't deserve God's mercy and grace, and then experience His overwhelming love and kindness.

Romans 12 is genuine love for God expressed in genuine love for each other.

Romans 12 is how we live when we have been transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Becoming a Romans 12 Christian is not difficult, it is impossible! It is supernatural. It is enabled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is pursued in humble dependence and constant prayer. The ability to do the Christian life comes from what God has already done.

This is not a list of boxes to check. This is a description of the character of a person the Holy Spirit has gotten hold of and a church in which the Holy Spirit is working and transforming.

A person who lives and speaks and acts in this way will be a living example of Jesus among their friends, family, co-workers. Like the early Christians people will say they have been with Jesus.

Resist the temptation to be discouraged over how short of the mark you fall. That means you are looking to yourself and your ability to live up to the Gospel. Rejoice in the hope of the promises of God, be patient in the struggle, in the trials and testings, be constant in prayer, daily depending on God. Martin Luther said, "To progress in the Christian life is always to begin again." Help your children to understand this.

Romans 12:13

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

These two exhortations point in two directions, the first to within the church to the saints, and the second to outside the church, to strangers. We take care of family first, and then reach beyond.

Contribute to the needs of the saints.

Let's start with this little word we quickly pass over when we are reading our Bible, saint. If you are a Christian, you are a saint. You aren't made a saint by some ordination of man, you are made a saint by God. He confers this honorable title by His redeeming grace when He takes us out of the world and puts us into His kingdom.

Saints means holy one, one set apart by God, one sanctified by the Holy Spirit and being made ready for God's holy heaven with all the saints forever.

Start with the needs in God's house. Just like you take care of your house before someone else's house, so God's house, God's people first.

Galatians 6:10 Do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

When God calls us into the church, into this fellowship of believers we are surrounded by needs, people with every kind of need. We work hard to cover them up, but we all have them, and the ones we have many others have as well.

Talking about contributing is hard. Why is that? Because money is so close to our heart. Money is one of the last things to be sanctified in our lives. We have a tight grip on it.

It is especially hard for affluent 21st century Americans, and Dutch Americans.

According to everything Jesus says about money, and He says a lot, there is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money. We all try to keep the two separate, we try to keep our faith and our money divorced, but God sees them as inseparable.

I don't have to tell you this, you know it already. You know how the pursuit of money and things gets between us and God, and pulls us away from spiritual things. We have all heard lottery winner horror stories and inheritance horror stories, stories that expose greed, misery, unhappiness, families ripped apart.

Money in our wallet is a good thing, money in our hearts is not just a bad thing, it is toxic, worse yet it is an idol.

Remember when Zacchaeus became saved when Jesus visited his house. What was the first thing that happened? He was transformed, saved, and his view of money was transformed and saved. He told Jesus he would joyfully give half of his possessions to the poor and Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).

Remember the first converts in the church in Jerusalem in Acts 4, selling possessions to share with those in need to the point there was not a needy person among them, showing their salvation.

Remember the rich man in Mark 12 who was making plans to store up all his wealth for himself and retire early. Rich toward himself, but not toward God, and instead of retiring early, he died early.

We tend to think like he did. It is our hard-earned money after all. Except that it isn't.

Deuteronomy 8:17-18 Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.

What we have is from God and by the grace of God. We are stewards, we are money managers. He cares about what we do with His money and how we handle it.

Being not conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of our mind is meant to reach all the way down to our bank accounts and investments.

Think of it this way. Suppose you have something of value to you and you want to send it to someone who needs it. How do you do that? You wrap it up, you put it in a box and you give it to the UPS guy to deliver it for you. But suppose instead of delivering it that guy takes it home, unwraps it and keeps it for himself.

What would you say to that? You would say, hey, wait a minute, that doesn't belong to you. He is supposed to be the middleman. His job is to get that from me to the person I sent it to.

That's us. Just because God puts His money in our hands, doesn't mean He intends all of it to stay there. When you think about it God has put a lot of material blessings in our hands. Have you ever stopped to think about why He has given us so much?

Paul answers that question in II Corinthians 9

II Corinthians 9:10-11 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way ...

Enriched in every way so that what? How does the rest of the sentence go? So I can live well and enjoy a good life? So the world can see how much God has blessed me?

Listen to how Paul finishes the sentence:

11 You will be enriched in every way ... to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

God prospers us not to raise our standard of living, but to raise our standard of giving.

Tomorrow morning when you go to work go with a new mindset. Whatever the nature of your employment go into it knowing it has spiritual significance and purpose, it supports you and your family and your spiritual calling to share, give, support and supply the needs of others.

When God gives generously to us, and He has, we often think, this is a blessing, and so it is. But that isn't all it is, it is also a test.

Why does God distribute His wealth unevenly, giving more to some and less to others? Because He likes them more? He does it so His children will have the means to contribute to the needs of others on His behalf, so that one won't have too much and the other too little. Two problems solved at once.

God has been lavishly generous with us so that we can reflect Him to the world. And He has been lavishly generous to us to give us faith and confidence that when we give, He will supply more for what we need. We cannot outgive God. Whatever we shovel out, He shovels back and His shovel is bigger.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Let your love be genuine. One way to show genuine love is to serve, bless, help those who are in need, those who may not be able to return the favor.

Do you know why there are saints with needs? It is because of the grace of God. God knows our hearts. God puts the poor and needy in our lives to show us our hearts, to prove our love and draw it out. Don't resent the needy or look down on them with contempt, they are worthy in God's eyes of our kindness.

This is where genuine love gets real, this is where it shines. Open your eyes to the tangible needs around you.

Here is a thought, how many people when they make a family budget, budget for giving to those in need? Be rich toward God who has been so rich toward you.

Seek to show hospitality

First to saints and then also to strangers.

A cynic once defined hospitality as making people feel at home when you wish they were. That is hypocritical love, not genuine love. Christian love actually pursues hospitality, seeks ways to show it.

They seek to show kindness, friendliness, generosity. Especially to those without family or loved ones nearby. Hospitality is hard, it doesn't come naturally for most of us, so Paul says practice hospitality, and the more you practice the better you will become.

We can start here, warmly greeting people and welcoming them into our fellowship.

Hebrews 13:1-2 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

The city of Rome was an inhospitable place and the need for this grace was urgent. There is an incredible quote from the Roman Emperor Julian, one of the fiercest persecutors of the Christian church, who complained in disgust: “[The Christian cause] has been specially advanced through their loving service rendered to strangers... It is a scandal that there is not a single (one) who is a beggar, and the Christians care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Christians in a pagan city and godless nation under horrible leaders, loving, serving, giving, sharing, being salt and light. Which leads me to say just a word about one of the great debates that has consumed us for most of this century, immigration.

We talk and complain mostly about the political aspect of it, but not the spiritual aspect. I am not in a place of power or influence or authority to change or effect laws. I don't have responsibility over that. What I do have responsibility over is God's law, loving my neighbor, loving the person in front of me and extending grace, mercy, kindness, help where needed regardless of their immigration or employment status. God bless Joe Strong and Mitchel Senti for showing us how.

Implications and Application.

Here is what happens when we contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

II Corinthians 9:12 The ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

God has given us money and homes not just so that we are thankful, but by our generosity and hospitality we make many people thankful to God and He is glorified.

1 John 3:17 If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

When we give generously and open our homes and hearts, the genuineness of our love is revealed. We are real. We are not phony or hypocritical Christians.

Luke 12:33-34 Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail. . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Our reward is the display of God’s glory, the good of others, and the joy of true treasures in heaven forever.

This table is a reminder of the generous abundance of the greatest gift ever given, a table full of the joy of giving for the needs of others, a table that reminds us that we belong to Christ and to each other. Let’s renew our covenant at this table and our commitment to love each other for the glory of God and for the sake of the body of Christ.

My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Therefore I urge you, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

Prayer: Father, make us more of a loving congregation, practicing love, showing love, showing preference and honor, diligent in serving the Lord through our loving each other. Set our minds on the great reality of your Fatherhood over us all and grow us into a family of believers that loves each other with tender affection and generous hearts, calling on you in the name of Jesus for the power and presence of your Holy Spirit poured out in our midst.