

## Helping Each Other Financially

Romans 12:13a

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I don't know how many of you have noticed the most popular book in the bookshops today. It's so popular that we just don't keep it on our book shelf because we suspect that it isn't really the way God wants us to emphasize knowledge. The most popular book is the "How To" book. Do you realize that? How to live the Christian life, how to live right, how even to use religion to be prosperous. And it seems to us to emphasize the tree of knowledge rather than the power that comes from God's Holy Spirit that enables you to be spontaneously what he wants you to be. But those really are the bestsellers so if you want to make money in religious books, you want to stock your shelves with the "How To" books! Yet all of us feel that there is really only one person who can actually tell you how to live right and that's the one that made life. He knows how we should live and he is the only one, really, that we should listen to. That's why we've been studying, in this chapter of Romans, some directives that God has been giving us about our practical everyday lives.

It's Roman's 12:13 and it runs like this: "Contribute to the needs of the saints" and you see that it involves much more than this, but it involves at least what I tried to say in the title of the sermon; it involves helping each other financially. Now you might say "Contribute to the needs of the saints -- but shouldn't we contribute to everybody's needs? Shouldn't we help earthquake victims, and shouldn't we help the orphans, and shouldn't we help the little children who are starving, shouldn't we contribute to everybody's needs?" Well, the Bible is so good because it answers a question like that in a precisely correct way and you'll see that answer if you'd like to look at it in Galatians 6:10: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." So God's word says "Yes you should help everybody, but especially those who are of the household of faith." Now why? Well, the Father is saying to us that financial or physical help may be the most visible help that a person needs, but it's probably, at the end of the day, the least vital help. And it's probable that what most people need, above everything else, is love and care and somebody who has concern for them. And so God says to us, yes, financial help is good, material help is good, but it's really only useful when it's part of a whole friendship relationship that you have with that person.

That's why he said "do good to all men but especially, to those who are of the household of faith -- to those with whom you have a whole and complete relationship." It's not because he thinks we should be a little ghetto that just takes care of their own, but it's because he emphasizes that any financial or physical help is most useful to a person when it's part of a whole love relationship that you have with them. That's why in Matthew 25: 34-36 Jesus kept on saying to us, "I want you to visit the sick and those who are in the prison, I want you to clothe those who are naked, I want you to look after the orphan, I want you to feed those who are hungry as if you are doing it to me and for the people for whom I have died. Then it comes over to them as part of your love for them and it's something that builds them up in the only relationship that is really valuable. If you don't do it that way, then all you are doing is helping them to exist a little longer in this silly old world in the same frustration and loneliness that brought them to this tragic material situation." So Jesus says whenever you help anybody, help them with love for them and have a whole relationship to them and give them the financial help as part of your whole commitment of yourself to them.

That's the problem with socialism, isn't it? I don't know if you knew it, but those of us who came

from Europe came from the background of the welfare state and couldn't quite grasp your theory that "Oh, you don't want to help them, it'll make them lazy." We felt "Boy, in America -- such an enlightened country -- that is a hideous attitude of selfishness." But loved ones there is no question that that's the problem with socialism. I don't think anybody who is a follower of Jesus will say it's not a responsibility to help the orphan and take care of the widow, as God has told us to do that. But wouldn't you agree that our societies are full today of loved ones who are paralyzed as far as their own initiative and their own wills and their own sense of responsibility and often where their own personal dignity is concerned because they have gotten used to hand outs that have no personal relationship to them at all, that have no love to them. In other words, we have charity without love and there is nothing so degrading.

I worked in a city mission back in Belfast where we gave out clothes to loved ones every Tuesday morning and I could testify that a coat or some money thrown in a guy's direction without love and concern and a whole friendship and relationship for them simply makes them think they are charitable objects. It has the same paralyzing effect on their will as a gambling win has or any other unexpected interruption in the normal development of their lives. That's part of the reason that God tells us to be generous to all men but especially to those who are of the household of faith and why, in this verse, he says contribute to the needs of the saints. I think many of us have had experience where somebody gives us some money or gives us some material help but it's given as if the material help or the financial help is an end in itself.

Would you look again at Matthew 25:45 and see what Jesus says to us: "Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did not to me.'" So he says when you help somebody, do it as unto me. That's why your financial help or my financial help to a person is best done in the context of the body of Christ. That's why it's best done as an expression of the body of Jesus. The body of Jesus is an environment in which other people can come to know God and can come to know Christ. So when you and I give financial contributions as an expression of the whole ministry of this body of witness and prayer and love and care and concern and fellowshiping to a person, then it comes to them in that context and it is part of the ministry of Jesus in conforming them to his image.

So, it is tricky to work out the principles; my only job is to share some of the principles that seem to be in God's words. But you need to be careful about the check that you stuff quickly into an envelope and send off because of some human need that was vividly presented to you. You probably need to watch that. I think you know me well enough by now to know I'm not saying give all your money here. You know we've never had a financial appeal in all the years we've existed and I've encouraged you to give your money where Jesus guides you, but that's the heart of it -- where Jesus guides you. But do be careful about the check that you stuff into an envelope because of a human need that was vividly presented. Really, there is meaning in "contributing to the needs of the saints."

The word "saints" is "hagios" in the Greek, and it doesn't mean outstanding men and women that are formally canonized by some Church. It doesn't mean that. It means ordinary men and women who have such faith in Jesus' death and their death with him that their heart is being changed into his heart and their life is becoming more like his life. They may not be free from every sin that they know, but they're fighting sin with all their beings and they want to be like Jesus and whatever sin turns up in their life, they hate it and they fight against it until the Holy Spirit cleanses their heart and they are able to live above it. That's what the saints are. Now you can see that a group of people who are bound together in that kind of heart relationship to God are the people that can most

safely help each other financially without damaging their conformity to Jesus' image.

You may say "Now wait, it's not that serious is it?" Oh yes, it is. Say one of us here has an income of \$600, the rent is \$250, the car payment maybe \$100, \$100 to \$150 for food, and precious little left for the tithe and for gas money and the other little things. So the situation is barely manageable. Many of us find ourselves in the same situation; the situation is barely manageable. Then an opportunity comes along for a once in a lifetime \$1000 vacation in 24 month repayments or an opportunity comes along, to help a friend with \$1000. Now, there are many of us here who could probably weigh in with \$1000. Many of us could weigh in \$30 extra to that person each month. But loved ones, what is God after in that person's life?

Faced with that tight budget and either the vacation or the person needing help, God could be after a mass of things as I have seen him be in my life -- "Is the car, or the apartment an Isaac that you won't give up? I'm just checking you on it. Is the car or the apartment an Isaac that you won't sacrifice to me with the confidence that Abraham had that I would give it back to you?" God can be after that. God can be after, "Wait a minute, how much do you love this friend? How much do you really care for him?" God can be after "Are you ready to stay under a difficult, tight, situation that's 'hupomone?'" (The Greek word for patience is "hupomone"). Some high roller like ourselves can whip along and take all that trial right out from under the person. God can be after "Are you willing to enter into more self-discipline? I know the situation is tight but are you willing to enter into more self discipline in regard to it?"

In other words, money is not always the answer and giving the financial help on your own judgment is not God's way of ministry. God doesn't want us would-be philanthropists to be God. He doesn't want us saying "That guy could do with a bit of humility, I'll just keep my money, let him crawl." Or "That guy should have a vacation, he needs a vacation." Loved ones, we'd better be careful before we play God in each others lives. Nevertheless, it is true that we are true workers of God's and we had better get some idea of what the Father is trying to do in this person's life. We better be in touch with God and listen carefully to his Spirit. God will not always explain to us why he tells us to do what he tells us. He may not always explain to us why he wants us to give the money or not to give it. But he will guide us loved ones, he will guide us to make the giving of the money dovetail exactly in with what he is trying to do in that person's life. And I don't know about you, but I testify now, after a good many years in his care, that often God's greatest blessings to me were the withholding of blessings.

I know it seems funny, but I think often God has had a hard time keeping me in hard enough situations so that I would continue to grow. That doesn't mean we look at everybody in that light, but I am just urging you to see that you need to have some idea of what the Father is about in a person's life before you just deluge them with the money. You can see how very careful we need to be, generally, about the way we give our money away. Later I'll try to talk about how essential it is to get rid of this stuff before it kills you! But here, I'd just like to talk with you about how it fits into the ministry of God's life.

That's why this verse runs "contribute". The word really is "koinonia" and those of you who know a little Greek know that "koinonia" is a verb that actually means not just giving but sharing and fellowshiping. So God is saying "fellowship in heart, empathy and love in my presence with people until you know what I am doing in your lives and only then will you be able to give in wisdom. Only then will you be able to get my mind for their financial situation." That's why to share or "fellowship" in the needs of the saints. You'll only know people's needs when you are close to them.

Loved ones the fact is, you and I have been meeting here for ten to twelve years because we all owe the same debt to the same Person. My dirt and the sin in my heart, Jesus took into his own heart and allowed his Father's wrath to burn out forever so that I could be free of it. But you contributed some of that too. I contributed some of his pain but you contributed some of it too. And you and I have met together over these years because we know we are bound together in a common debt that no other person can share who does not believe in Jesus. You and I owe the same Man our life. We owe the same Man our hope of heaven; we have a bond together that is deeper than even blood relationships. So when you have a need it's not your need, it's my need and when I have a need, it's not my need, it's your need and that's what God is saying to us first -- forget all this business about money. God is saying "get close to each other so that you know what's happening in each other's lives. Get close to each other so that you know what I am doing in each person's heart and only then will you stand a chance of getting from me my advice or my direction on your material or financial help that you are going to give to each other." Loved ones our giving money is crude compared with that.

Even in churches it's terrible, you know that, you know the way it goes. They're in trouble because their husband is out of work so then somebody helps. But how rarely is it a heart relationship where I know what you need and I know what you feel? Oh I'd refer you to that quotation from Trollope that I've mentioned before. The daughter wants to marry this man and her mother doesn't think he is the right man for her and they go back and forward because the mother really does love the daughter. The daughter finally says, "Mum, if you can see with my eyes and hear with my ears and feel with my heart, only then can you expect me to judge with your judgment." And isn't that what love is and what empathy is and what fellowshiping with each other is -- putting yourself in the other person's shoes and seeing it from their viewpoint?

You know that's what the Bible says: "if one member suffers, then everybody suffers, if one member rejoices, then everybody rejoices." The only way we'll ever be able to get a line on where we should give our money is if you and I no longer look at a guy who has lost his job and say, "Oh, I don't know how he faces it?" Or we no longer look at the father, who has a son dying of cancer and say, "Oh! I don't know how he faces it", but when we say "I have lost my job" or "we lost our job today" or "my friend and I lost our job today." Sure we still have a job, I still have my job, but actually "we lost our job" or "our son is dying of cancer", that's it. When we have that attitude to each other in our hearts, then God's Spirit is able to direct us as to what we do with our money. And if we don't have that as we should loved ones, the money can be as much of a curse as it is a help. So that's why God says "contribute to the needs of the saints." First of all love them. First of all see that you are actually giving to yourself. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you for the generosity of this great country of ours. We thank you too Lord for the generosity that so many of us were brought up with. We thank you Lord that the world sees us as the most generous people on the earth. Thank you Lord that every immigrant who comes to this country sees the immense generosity of America and Americans. Lord thank you that we put the whole world to shame with our generosity. Lord thank you too that it's not that we give always out of the plenteousness of our own resources, often we give out of the scarcity of our own resources. But Lord we do see that you are saying to us this morning "If you don't do it, as if you are doing it to me, or as if you are doing it to a person for whom I have died, or if you don't do it as to a friend whom you know and understand, if you don't go to the trouble of knowing the person to whom you are giving the money and caring for them and make it part of the total ministry to that whole person,

then it can be as much of a curse to them and can thoroughly mess up what I am doing in their lives."

So, Lord we see that and we see why you gave us this command: "contribute to the needs of the saints --do good unto all men but especially to those who are of the household of faith." So Lord we thank you that you've called us into this body, not to run another church, not to be acquaintances of each other, or even to be good friends, but you have called us to live in each others' hearts, to see ourselves in each others situations and to look at each other as if we are looking at ourselves. Then Lord you will show us how to make our financial help a blessing and a contribution to your work in each of our hearts. Lord we thank you that your call is always to love: to love each other even as you have loved us. Thank you. Amen.