

Hallmarks of the Transformed Life

Showing hospitality

Intro: This is the season for giving. Almost everybody here has probably spent some time this week in giving and receiving of gifts. For most of us, giving centers on our family and friends; and is prompted by special occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, holiday giving and the occasional financial crisis that family members may experience.

But Paul in Romans 12 shows us that giving is to be a regular part of the life of the transformed disciple and that the objects of our giving should be not only our families and friends, but our brothers and sisters in Christ.

contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (Romans 12:13)

The transformed disciple shares with his needy brethren.

As regards the needs of saints--sharing!

There will be times when our brethren in Christ will have financial needs that they cannot meet.

The Christian's duty is expressed with the verb form of "koinonia" which is often translated "fellowship". "Fellowship" is essentially sharing with others. Most of the time in the Bible it is used of the sharing of spiritual blessings or qualities; but in this text, "fellowship" is sharing of our physical blessings with another! Here that sense is borne out by the KJV "contributing to".

The Scriptures afford us with some fine examples of this kind of fellowship

In the days of the early church there were many poor among the Jerusalem saints. Luke reveals to us the love of the Jerusalem Christians for one another!

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Perhaps an even more remarkable display is found in the generosity of the Gentile churches who expressed gratitude for the sacrifices of the Jerusalem church in sending out the preachers that helped them to become Christians by collecting and sending money to meet their needs.

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

Get this picture in your mind! Every week the Gentile Christians who probably did not know anyone in the Jerusalem churches (and who were predominantly Jewish) were voluntarily setting aside some of their income to produce a store of funds to send to them. They were not doing this just to check off one of the five acts of worship, but

because they loved and appreciated their Jewish brethren in Judea and wanted to help them in their time of need.

We too need to look for occasions to meet the needs of our brethren!

Listen carefully and you will still identify occasions when brethren may need our assistance (times of sickness, job loss). When you hear such occasions do what you can to help.

And we too can help brethren who live far away! Over the past several years members of this church have contributed thousands of dollars to help the needy saints in the congregations in Moldova.

Because of you Serghei has had funds to travel to encourage churches in other cities that don't have a preacher.

Because of you people who needed surgery have been cared for and healed.

Because of you the church in Chisinau has a place to meet each Sunday and during the week for Bible studies and worship.

This kind of sacrificial giving brings glory to God and affirms the spiritual fellowship we have in our common life in the Lord.

Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. (2 Corinthians 9:13-14)

It will do the same today.

Read a note from Serghei!

The transformed disciple shows hospitality to unknown brethren.

As regards hospitality--pursuing it!

The Greek word for hospitality "philoxenia" means "having love for strangers." You will not miss the connection between the word "hospitality" and the word "hospital and hospice" (places where people can be received for care).

In the ancient world, Christians were often dependent upon the help of other brethren that they did not know to survive travel to other parts of the empire.

A teacher of God's word going from city to city was dependent upon Christians to take care of him while he taught there!

Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth. (3 John 5-8)

Sometimes Christians were forced to flee from their homes to get away from persecution. They needed other Christians who did not know them to take them in and providing for them.

Perhaps this is what prompted the exhortation of Peter who addresses the problems of suffering for Christ's sake:

Be hospitable to one another without complaint. (1 Peter 4:9)

Sometimes brethren had to travel to other places, sometimes in the service of the church.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. (Romans 16:1-2)

Whatever the circumstances, the responsibility of the Christian is the same:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2)

It is interesting that hospitality is made the condition of two important things in the NT church.

It is the indispensable quality of those who would lead (Tit. 1:8)

It is the expected prerequisite of those who might later receive the church's help. Assistance in widowhood was contingent upon whether the needy widow has herself "shown hospitality to strangers" (1 Tim. 5:10).

Has our culture eliminated the need for loving acceptance and assistance to unknown brethren? Sure, there are motels, rental cars, restaurants and good incomes that make such things often unnecessary. But is there not still a need and a time for hospitality?

What about the visitor that comes to our door, either from out of town or just looking for a better life? Do we extend to them a warm welcome? Do we offer our help?

What about the new family that moves to town and is seeking fellowship with a new congregation? Do we give them reasons to want to consider being a part of the church? Do we help them with the difficulties of getting needed information about the city, finding a house, or moving in?

What about the new converts that give up old friendships to become Christians? Do we show them that their decision to follow Christ has not meant the permanent loss of loving associations and friendships?

Conclusion: As I continue to present these characteristics of transformed living, I don't mean to make us all feel the burden of doing the impossible. But I do hope to prompt in all of us a willing spirit to be used in God's service. Sometimes one of the most important things we can do is share a little of what we have to help someone else!