

LOVING GOD THROUGH FAITHFUL GIVING—

Loving God's Mission

Romans 15:20-29

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/loving-gods-mission/>

I'll never forget the day I first heard these words in seminary class. After class, I went up to my professor, Dr. Coble, and asked him for a copy. William Newton Clarke, who lived from 1841-1912, wrote, "The narrowing of the idea of salvation is a main cause of the weakness of the missionary motive. Many suppose that to be saved is to be taken care of and brought to a place of safety and a state of welfare. But to be saved is to be brought into moral fellowship with God. It is to receive something of God's character: hence, to be saved is to become at heart a savior, in fellowship with him" [*A Study of Christian Missions*, pp. 26-27].

I love watching the way my grandchildren have traits similar to their parents, little mannerisms, the tilting of the head, the way they walk. When we come into Christ, we take on some of God's nature, and begin to love the world the way God does, to begin to give as God gives, to love God's mission to the world. Doesn't this explain the Apostle Paul and what made him tick? His passion to reach new people who've never heard the gospel (v. 20). He loved being a pioneer. He had God's heart, God's nature.

He not only had God's passion for the spiritually lost. He also had God's heartbeat for the poor and needy, specifically for the struggling believers in Jerusalem. When he wrote this Roman letter from Corinth, he had made an arc of the Mediterranean region, taking up a financial collection for the saints back in Jerusalem. He is about to sail from Corinth to Jerusalem with the collection. He mentions in v. 26 that other believers who love God's mission took part in that offering (churches in modern-day Greece). They too had taken on God's nature.

There are two words used by Paul to help us understand how significant this offering was, how it reflected their love for God's mission. THE FIRST WORD IS *debt* (v. 27). Biographers tell us that when Billy and Ruth Graham were young and struggling, they were attending a worship service. When the plate was passed, Billy thought he put in a \$5 bill. But it was actually a \$20. Ruth leaned over and whispered to him, "You're only going to get the blessing of a \$5 gift!" Giving our money is never a blessing when it is given grudgingly (2 Cor. 9:7). The debt of love is much deeper and richer than the debt of ought to.

Even today, we Gentile believers have a debt to the Jerusalem believers because our faith got its start there. Wherever you are in God's river, you owe someone upstream something. There is a humility in acknowledging every Sunday, through our offerings, that something happened before we arrived on earth!

THE SECOND WORD IS *koinonia* (vv. 26, 27) translated "share" in NRSV. It's our word for fellowship, but it means much more than cookies and coffee. It means partnership, establishing

a bond. To put it bluntly, giving money becomes a glue, binding us together in common cause (helping heal the Jew/Gentile rift among believers in Paul's day).

I want to say a personal word here, a challenging word, to our FBC family. Those of you who are our guests may just listen in! Nearly all of us respond to emotional, special giving needs. Hurricane relief, youth dessert theatre, our monthly benevolence offering. And that is all good. But what Christ's church also needs is sustained, disciplined giving. We forget sometimes that FBC is a mission, too. This place is a specific project, a mission site. Every child who is taught the gospel in VBC and sports camps, every youth who comes to Christ through Wednesday night and Sunday ministries, every senior adult touched in a nursing home, every mouth fed. It's not as exciting. It's everyday-ish, but it's mission. It's gospel work. And it needs support.

We do that by partnership. Koinonia, a deep bonding. In fact, think about something. While it's true, that loving the church causes us to give. It's also true, giving to the church causes us to love it. It's that koinonia glue, adhesive love. All year long, we've been focused on "Come see what love can do." Do you know how the Bible spells love? G-I-V-E. That's God's nature. And ours in Christ.