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LOVE...THINKS NO EVIL...BELIEVES ALL THINGS

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Have you ever been accused of something of which you were not guilty? It hurts, doesn't it? And no matter what you say, the accuser isn't convinced. Such is sometimes the case with the accusation of racism. It seems that some people see a racist around every corner (or in the case of the church, in every pew). The charge of racism is a serious charge. It's an accusation of sin. If there is evidence of bigotry, it needs to be exposed so that repentance can occur. If there is no basis for the charge, it is an unloving act. In the Spirit-inspired list of what love is—and is not (1 Cor. 13)—there are at least two characteristics that exclude false accusations:

Love “thinks no evil” (v.5). In his commentary, Adam Clarke suggests this means “Believes no evil where no evil exists.” He says, “The original implies that he does not invent or devise evil; or does not reason on any particular act or word so as to infer evil from it.” *Clarke’s Commentary*, Vol. 6, p. 269.2.

Love “believes all things” (v.7). About this phrase, Clarke says that the loving person, “Is ever ready to believe the best of every person, and will credit no evil of any but on the most positive evidence.” *ibid.*, p. 268.

Actually, it is not in the interest of promoting racial equality to make unfounded accusations or to *assume* that people are bigots. These only make matters worse and will inevitably delay the desired results. *Thing Magazine Jan – Mar 2021*

A Spirit of Generosity

Tim Jennings

“The more you give the less you have.” Right? The gospel questions the validity of this simple equation. It contends that it is more “blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35) and those who give will “reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6-11; Luke 6:38). Giving has a boomerang effect that brings back more than it sends.

We all know the joy of such giving! We’ve experienced the warm glow of a good deed done well. But when we search our hearts, we might discover we live many days in the cold isolation of guarding our own concerns. We groan with hunger because giving is more like a seasonal snack than a daily feast.

To ignite the fires of generosity we must begin to see giving as more than just an act. It is the compulsion of the heart! We don’t become generous by simply giving more, but by caring more. Generosity does not originate in the hand, but in the heart!

A truly generous heart can only be sculpted by the great Giver, Himself. He sacrificially gave us His best, when we deserved the least. He continues to give us what we need, even when we are indifferent and unthankful. Giving is God’s nature and all who are touched by His character, give (Matt. 5:45; John 3:16).

This is the story of the early believers. They were recipients of God’s grace, and they became gracious. They compassionately gave their lives and possessions for the care and salvation of others. J.B. Philips described it like this, “a wonderful spirit of generosity pervaded the whole fellowship” (Acts 4:33). May it be!

This spirit of generosity is essential to weave together the unity of God’s people. After all, our fellowship with God was initiated by His “*indescribable gift*” of Jesus (2 Cor. 9:15). Our fellowship with each other is deepened as we express the same generosity toward each other.

A fractured church doesn't need a heavier hand, but a more compassionate heart. Just look at your own salvation. God gave you Himself before you ever responded. In the same way, the best way to heal a strained relationship is to give. Yes, even before the other person changes. In the New Testament whenever a church struggled with unity Paul instructed them to serve one another (Rom. 12-14; Eph. 4:1-16; 1 Cor. 12-14), because a spirit of generosity knits lives together (See Rom. 15).

Charles Dickens' character Martian Chuzzlewit was a miserly old man. He was isolated from his family so he could guard his considerable wealth. He lived with constant suspicion that someone would take what is his. So, he turned inward and insensitive. However, he begins to see the ruthless results of this greed in his own family and ultimately says,

"The curse of this family is the love of self. It always has been. I see it now on some of your faces. There is a kind of selfishness which is always on the watch for selfishness in others and keeping others at a distance by suspicions and distrusts and wonders why they do not approach and do not confide. God forgive me I did not see it in myself." (Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit." Charles Dickens. Abridged version of the quote by David Lodge)

A generosity of spirit drives away our idolatry of self and stuff and into a compassionate unity with others. May God help us see it!

This generosity of spirit is also a necessary tool in sharing the gospel. How often are opportunities for salvation preceded by acts of kindness!?

Yes, the miracles of Jesus authenticated his words and proved his power to forgive sins (John 3:2; Mark 2:1-12). However, they also expressed God's goodness. He longs for our wholeness and joy. It is the goodness of His works that draws us to him (Acts 10:38, "He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil").

Similarly, our actions are to model the grace contained in the message of the gospel. This is not humanly defined charity unhitched from God's revelation. After all, the very purpose of the law is to give wings to love (Matt. 22:36-40). "Truth" and "Grace" cannot be separated from one another without destroying both.

Yet, when it comes to sharing the gospel, we often have more to *say* to people than for them to *see*! Yet, God designed the gospel to be shared from one person to another, so that others might not just know the message, but see the difference it makes in us (2 Tim. 2:1-ff).

The cherry on top is this spirit of generosity leads to the most joyful, fulfilling life.

How counter-intuitive this seems! "If I keep the best bits for myself, I'll be happy," we think. Yet, God made us to experience the highest joys from sacrificial giving.

For example, on one occasion the economically struggling churches of Macedonia scraped together a remarkably liberal gift for their needy brethren in Judea, and it resulted in "the abundance of their joy!" (2 Cor. 8:2).

Our Lord gave His life on the cross because of the "joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). There was gladness in the gift, as costly as it was, because Jesus could see the salvation of our souls to the glory of God. Paul told the Philippians he was "glad" and "rejoicing" to give his life for their faith (Phil. 2:17-18). Similarly, the joy we feel in our families and friendships is intensified by the sacrifices we make for them.

The gladness in life is in the giving, not the keeping. *Focus Magazine Online*