

Romans (76) **Practical Words of Exhortation (Part 2)**

Let us return to Romans 12 in which we read a series of 17 directly worded commands for the Lord's people. These are all commands that flow forth to us through the mercies of God shown to us through Jesus Christ. It is because of the mercies of God toward us that we are to respond to God in obeying these "laws". We are to keep these commandments out of our love for God for Who He is and for all that He has done for us and promised to us through Jesus Christ. This is how we prove that we love God, not by word only, but by our deeds.

"God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."¹
We demonstrate our love toward God, in that while we are forgiven sinners, we live for Him.

Keeping God's commandments is both *how* we show our love for God and it also defines *what* it is to love God. 2 John 6 reads, "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments."

Let us read the entire paragraph once again for context:

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We have already considered the first two in this list of 17. Let us turn our attention to the third, which reads,...

3. "Love one another with brotherly affection" (12:10).²

The first command was, "Let love be genuine"; which we showed was literally, "Let love be without hypocrisy." How does one love without hypocrisy, or with sincerity? Answer is in this third command: "Love one another with brotherly affection." We are to have an *affectionate* love and this is particularly shown toward our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.³ This means that it is not our common humanity that elicits our affection for one another, although "we are brethren in Adam according to the flesh."⁴ Rather, it is because "in and by Christ according to the Spirit"⁵ that we are to love one another as brethren in the Lord. "Paul conceives of the church as a family that is even closer than one's biological family, for all are united to

¹ Romans 5:8

³ Matthew Henry, vol. 6, p. 460.

⁴ John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and the New Testaments* (Tanski Publications, 1997), vol. 5, p. 511.

⁵ Ibid.

Christ as brothers and sisters.”⁶ Therefore, this love that we have for one another is not a result of our uniformed affections. We are to love one another recognizing our common bond and relationship with one another in Jesus Christ.

It properly denotes the love of parents to their children, which, as it is most tender, so it is the most natural, of any, unforced, unconstrained; such must our love be to one another, and such it will be where there is a new nature and the law of love is written in the heart. This kind affection puts us on to express ourselves both in word and action with the greatest courtesy and obligingness that may be.⁷

The love that we are to manifest to one another is to be like the love that we will manifest to one another in heaven. **Jonathan Edwards** wrote in one of his classic books, *Charity and Its Fruits*, the nature of our love in heaven. It describes that which will be characteristic of us in heaven, which should characterize us now as Christians. This is extended quotation is lengthy, but good. Let us consider his words:

The joy of heavenly love shall never be interrupted or damped by jealousy. — Heavenly lovers will have no doubt of the love of each other. They shall have no fear that the declarations and professions of love are hypocritical; but shall be perfectly satisfied of the sincerity and strength of each other’s affection, as much as if there were a window in every breast, so that everything in the heart could be seen. There shall be no such thing as flattery or dissimulation in heaven, but there perfect sincerity shall reign through all and in all. Everyone will be just what he seems to be, and will really have all the love that he seems to have. It will not be as in this world, where comparatively few things are what they seem to be, and where professions are often made lightly and without meaning; but there every expression of love shall come from the bottom of the heart, and all that is professed shall be really and truly felt.

The saints shall know that God loves them, and they shall never doubt the greatness of his love, and they shall have no doubt of the love of all their fellow inhabitants in heaven. And they shall not be jealous of the constancy of each other’s love. They shall have no suspicion that the love which others have felt toward them is abated, or in any degree withdrawn from themselves for the sake of some rival, or by reason of anything in themselves which they suspect is disagreeable to others, or through any inconstancy in their own hearts or the hearts of others. Nor will they be in the least afraid that the love of any will ever be abated toward them. There shall be no such thing as inconstancy and unfaithfulness in heaven, to molest and disturb the friendship of that blessed society. The saints shall have no fear that the love of God will ever abate towards them, or that Christ will not continue always to love them with unabated tenderness and affection. And they shall have no jealousy one of another, but shall know that by divine grace the mutual love that exists between them shall never decay nor change.

Perfect tranquility and joy in heaven. — Charity, or holy and humble Christian love, is a principle of wonderful power to give ineffable quietness and tranquility to the soul. It banishes all disturbance, and sweetly composes and brings rest to the spirit, and makes all divinely calm and sweet and happy. In that soul where divine love reigns and is in lively exercise, nothing can cause a storm, or even gather threatening clouds.

There are many principles contrary to love, that make this world like a tempestuous sea. Selfishness, and envy, and revenge, and jealousy, and kindred passions keep life on earth in a constant tumult, and make it a scene of confusion and uproar, where no quiet rest is to be enjoyed except in renouncing this world and looking to another. But oh! what rest is there in that world which the God of peace and love fills with his own gracious presence, and in which the Lamb of God lives and reigns, filling it with the brightest and sweetest beams of his love; where there is nothing to disturb or offend, and no being or object to be seen that is not surrounded with perfect amiableness and sweetness; where the saints shall find and enjoy all that they love, and so be perfectly satisfied; where there is no enemy

⁶ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 664.

⁷ Matthew Henry, vol. 6, p. 461.

and no enmity; but perfect love in every heart and to every being; where there is perfect harmony among all the inhabitants, no one envying another, but everyone rejoicing in the happiness of every other; where all their love is humble and holy, and perfectly Christian, without the least carnality or impurity; where love is always mutual and reciprocated to the full; where there is no hypocrisy or dissembling, but perfect simplicity and sincerity; where there is no treachery, or unfaithfulness, or inconstancy, or jealousy in any form; where there is no clog or hindrance to the exercises or expressions of love, no imprudence or indecency in expressing it, and no influence of folly or indiscretion in any word or deed; where there is no separation wall, and no misunderstanding or strangeness, but full acquaintance and perfect intimacy in all; where there is no division through different opinions or interests, but where all in that glorious and loving society shall be most nearly and divinely related, and each shall belong to every other, and all shall enjoy each other in perfect prosperity and riches, and honor, without any sickness, or grief, or persecution, or sorrow, or any enemy to molest them, or any busybody to create jealousy or misunderstanding, or mar the perfect, and holy, and blessed peace that reigns in heaven! And all this in the garden of God — in the paradise of love, where everything is filled with love, and everything conspires to promote and kindle it, and keep up its flame, and nothing ever interrupts it, but everything has been fitted by an all-wise God for its full enjoyment under the greatest advantages forever! And all, too, where the beauty of the beloved objects shall never fade, and love shall never grow weary nor decay, but the soul shall more and more rejoice in love forever!

Oh! What tranquility will there be in such a world as this! And who can express the fullness and blessedness of this peace! What a calm is this! How sweet, and holy, and joyous! What a haven of rest to enter, after having passed through the storms and tempests of this world, in which pride, and selfishness, and envy, and malice, and scorn, and contempt, and contention, and vice, are as waves of a restless ocean, always rolling, and often dashed about in violence and fury! What a Canaan of rest to come to, after going through this waste and howling wilderness, full of snares, and pitfalls, and poisonous serpents, where no rest could be found!

And oh! What joy will there be, springing up in the hearts of the saints, after they have passed through their wearisome pilgrimage, to be brought to such a paradise as this! Here is joy unspeakable indeed, and full of glory — joy that is humble, holy, enrapturing, and divine in its perfection! Love is always a sweet principle; and especially divine love. This, even on earth, is a spring of sweetness; but in heaven it shall become a stream, a river, an ocean! All shall stand about the God of glory, who is the great fountain of love, opening, as it were, their very souls to be filled with those effusions of love that are poured forth from his fullness, just as the flowers on the earth, in the bright and joyous days of spring, open their bosoms to the sun, to be filled with his light and warmth, and to flourish in beauty and fragrantcy under his cheering rays.

Every saint in heaven is as a flower in that garden of God, and holy love is the fragrance and sweet odor that they all send forth, and with which they fill the bowers of that paradise above. Every soul there, is as a note in some concert of delightful music, that sweetly harmonizes with every other note, and all together blend in the most rapturous strains in praising God and the Lamb forever. And so all help each other, to their utmost, to express the love of the whole society to its glorious Father and Head, and to pour back love into the great fountain of love whence they are supplied and filled with love, and blessedness, and glory. And thus they will love, and reign in love, and in that godlike joy that is its blessed fruit, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath ever entered into the heart of man in this world to conceive; and thus in the full sunlight of the throne, enraptured with joys that are forever increasing, and yet forever full, they shall live and reign with God and Christ forever and ever! ⁸

The kind of love that we will have for one another in glory should be the kind of love we possess and exhibit now to one another.

⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (The Banner of Truth Trust, orig. 1852, 1978), pp. 340f, 350ff.

4. **“Outdo one another in showing honor”** (12:10b). How does one love without hypocrisy, or with sincerity? We are to have a *respectful* love.⁹ Being in Christ brings great stature and regal status for every Christian. We are to honor one another highly. This means that we should be polite toward one another, considerate of one another, and treat others with great respect and dignity. And so, rather than being as persons in the world, clamoring to obtain status and recognition above others about us, within the church we are to seek to render honor and confer preeminence to others. We are to foster an outlook and attitude in which we delight when another is exalted, even above ourselves, not being jealous or envious of another who may seem to have attained higher stature of more authority than ourselves. This is how we shall be in heaven; it ought to be how we think and behave in the church in this life in this world. In heaven all envy and jealousy will be eradicated from us.

There is undoubtedly an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory; and that love is in proportion to the perfection and amiableness of the objects beloved, and therefore it must necessarily cause delight in them when they see that the happiness and glory of others are in proportion to their amiableness, and so in proportion to their love to them. Those that are highest in glory, are those that are highest in holiness, and therefore are those that are most beloved by all the saints; for they most love those that are most holy, and so they will all rejoice in their being the most happy. And it will not be a grief to any of the saints to see those that are higher than themselves in holiness and likeness to God, more loved also than themselves, for all shall have as much love as they desire, and as great manifestations of love as they can bear; and so all shall be fully satisfied; and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no reason for envy. And there will be no temptation for any to envy those that are above them in glory, on account of the latter being lifted up with pride; for there will be no pride in heaven. We are not to conceive that those who are more holy and happy than others in heaven, will be elated and lifted up in their spirit above others; for those who are above others in holiness, will be superior to them in humility. The saints that are highest in glory will be the lowest in humbleness of mind, for their superior humility is part of their superior holiness. Though all are perfectly free from pride, yet, as some will have greater degrees of divine knowledge than others, and larger capacities to see more of the divine perfections, so they will see more of their own comparative littleness and nothingness, and therefore will be lowest and most abased in humility.

And, besides, the inferior in glory will have no temptation to envy those that are higher than themselves, for those that are highest will not only be more loved by the lower for their higher holiness, but they will also have more of the spirit of love to others, and so will love those that are below them more than if their own capacity and elevation were less. They that are highest in degree in glory, will be of the highest capacity; and so having the greatest knowledge, will see most of God’s loveliness, and consequently will have love to God and love to the saints most abounding in their hearts. And on this account those that are lower in glory will not envy those that are above them, because they will be most beloved by those that are highest in glory. And the superior in glory will be so far from slighting those that are inferior, that they will have most abundant love to them — greater degrees of love in proportion to their superior knowledge and happiness. The higher any are in glory, the more they are like Christ in this respect, so that the love of the higher to the lower will be greater than the love of the equals of the latter to them. And what puts it beyond all doubt that seeing the superior happiness of others will not be a damp to the happiness of the inferior, is this, that their superior happiness consists in their greater humility, and in their greater love to them, and to God, and to Christ, than the inferior will have in themselves. Such will be the sweet and perfect harmony among the heavenly saints, and such the perfect love reigning in every heart toward every other, without limit or alloy, or interruption; and no envy, or malice, or revenge, or contempt, or selfishness shall ever enter there, but all such feelings shall be kept as far away as sin is from holiness, and as hell is from heaven!¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

5. **“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”** Although we are to attempt to outdo one another in showing honor, this should not result in our laziness or inactivity. All of us, even each of us, are not to be slothful in our zeal for the Lord or for His cause. There should be earnestness about us, and intensity of desire to see our Lord honored, His kingdom advanced, His people secure in their redemption. We serve the Lord by serving these goals.

6. **“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”** This command contains three parts. It describes what we should be doing in the midst of difficulty. While we are in the midst of tribulation, we should rejoice, be patient, and prayerful.

Is your life as a Christian characterized in rejoicing? Perhaps it is not, for you are rejoicing in something other than what God has promised you in Jesus Christ. The Lord’s people bear heavy burdens in this fallen world, but our Lord has so provided for them that He is able to ease the burden of them who serve Him. Indeed, His Words are when He states to His own,

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matt. 11:29f)

How does He lighten the burden that weighs upon His people? He does not remove them. He does not make them less intense for His people; in fact, generally the difficulty that His people encounter in this world is more severe than those who do not live for Him. The world is no friend to believers. Believers who are walking rightly will have conflict as they battle with sin within and they endure hostility from without. And so, Christ’s burden is light not because the burden is less, rather He enables His own to become stronger so that they are able to better bear that which is upon them. Through Christ the believer is made stronger; and so, his burdens *seem* light as He trusts Jesus and sees clearly the promises that are His in Christ.

What is it that gives believers strength? It is what the Bible describes as *hope*. Discouraged people are hopeless people. But believers who are encouraged to face their trials boldly and with peace are ones who have the hope of God sustaining them.

What is the nature of biblical hope? ***Hope is a certain anticipation of what most assuredly will occur.*** Because the Christian believes what God has said concerning all that is promised to him through Christ, he is infused with hope, the deep-settled certainty that all the good that God has promised will most certainly come to pass. This joyous anticipation changes the believer’s outlook toward all that he faces. He sees what he is enduring is temporary and that a glorious future awaits him. This anticipation of the realization of God’s promises is what strengthens him to endure, yes, even rejoice through his present trials.

If our joy is derived from the hope of future life, then patience will grow up in adversities; for no kind of sorrow will be able to overwhelm this joy. Hence these two things are closely connected together, that is, joy derived from hope, and patience in adversities. No man will indeed calmly and quietly submit to bear the cross, but he who has learnt to seek his happiness beyond this world, so as to mitigate and allay the bitterness of the cross with the consolation of hope.¹¹

And so, if you will purpose to “rejoice in hope”, you will find yourself being “patient in tribulation.” And so, first, ***see the glorious future before us with the certain prospect of our God’s future blessing.*** Because we know with certainty what we shall most surely receive, we are infused with hope which affects the way we live; it is a “living hope”. And because the prospect is so bright, it causes earthly matters to fade in significance. What results us that ***we become a people living in the prospect of the future.*** We are a forward-looking people. Not for what we might purchase with next week’s pay check, or the prospect of enjoying next year’s vacation, although these are pleasant. These are not the things that drive our lives; rather, it is the prospect of eternity, which moves and shapes our thinking and actions. We are to ***anticipate with joy our future resurrection.*** We long for God’s kingdom to be realized. We look forward to our

¹¹ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Baker, 1993), vol. 19, 466f.

reunion with loved ones, our coming into God's presence, as the things that give strength to us in living now. This will lead us to be dependent upon God, trusting Him, as we pray to Him faithfully.

Rejoicing in hope through our tribulation will lead us to be *patient in tribulation*. Here in Romans 12: it is worded as a command: *be patient in tribulation*.

Every one of us Christians has had, is presently, or will in the future encounter tribulation. The Lord told His disciples,

I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

Further, we read that the apostle Paul taught that all of us will undergo tribulation in our entrance into the kingdom of God. Luke wrote of Paul and Barnabas:

When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²²strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God*. (Acts 14:2f)

But the tribulation that we encounter should not unsettle us or lead us to make unwise decisions that are contrary to the will of God. We are to be *patient* in tribulation. As we read in the Epistle of James:

⁷Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. ⁸You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door. ¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5:7-11)

To be patient means not to be inordinately disturbed by what we are enduring, but we are ones who trust in the Lord, knowing that He will enable us to endure what we are suffering until the day that we receive what He has promised us, which is not only deliverance from our suffering, but entrance into our promised glorious Sabbath rest and eternal happiness.

It is going through tribulation that produces patience in our lives. The untried Christian is a weak Christian, and generally an impatient one. But "tribulation worketh patience", as Paul had written earlier in this epistle.

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ²By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: *knowing that tribulation worketh patience; ⁴And patience, experience; and experience, hope: ⁵And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.* (Rom 5:1 KJV)

The manner in which tribulation produces patience in us is not the tribulation directly, for unconverted people also experience tribulation but it does not result in them becoming patient people. Rather, it is through the help and strength that the Lord gives to His people while they endure tribulation that results in their patience in their tribulation. Patience is an acquired quality as the Lord teaches and strengthens us in our trials. It takes God's grace to strengthen His people so that they might have patience in tribulation. Paul wrote to the Colossians:

¹¹*May you be strengthened with all power*, according to his glorious might, *for all endurance and patience with joy*, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (Col. 1:11f)

Since we are in need of God's strengthening grace, that places upon us the need for prayer, which speaks of the third part of this command: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, ***be constant in prayer.***" Our Lord has us go through tribulation of such a nature and to such a degree that we realize only He can sustain us and deliver us. Therefore tribulation produces patience in us for tribulation produces prayer by us. A troubled Christian will be a praying Christian.

Nazianzen saith of his sister Gorgonia, that she was so given to prayer, that her knees seemed to grow to the very ground. Trasilla, it is reported, that being dead she was found to have her elbows as hard as horn, by leaning to a desk at which she used to pray. Saint James is said to have knees as hard as camel's knees, by his continual kneeling in prayer. And Paul the Eremite was found dead kneeling upon his knees, holding up his hands, lifting up his eyes; so that the very dead corpse seemed yet to live and to pray to God (Jerome).¹²

Let us "***Rejoice in hope*** so that we will be ***patient in tribulation***, even as we are ***constant in prayer.***"

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (Heb. 13:20f)

¹² John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Tanski Publications, 1997, orig. 1865-1888), vol. 5, p. 511.