

An Apostolic Admonition For Our Temporal And Eternal Welfare.

Text: Rom. 12:12

Suggested Hymns:

442, 360, 47, 390, 440

1) Rejoicing In Hope

2) Patient In Tribulation

3) Continuing Steadfastly In Prayer

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 12:12, ¹² *Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Justification by faith is the central doctrine of the Christian religion. It is of the utmost importance that everyone who feels any concern at all for his immortal soul should get clear on this chief doctrine of the Bible.

In this letter to the Christians at Rome the Apostle Paul sets forth, fully and beautifully, this gracious and grand doctrine, that a man is justified before God not by works, but by grace, through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

From this blessed teaching the Apostle under divine guidance draws an abundance of comfort and hope. In this twelfth chapter he makes practical applications of this doctrine for godly living and for Christian service. By the mercies of God he beseeches us to bring the sacrifices of faith in the fruits of righteousness.

In the passage immediately preceding our text St. Paul has been speaking about the Christian Church as the body of Christ in which all true believers are members. He thereupon exhorts the members of this spiritual body to a faithful fulfilment of their calling *“as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.”*¹

After setting forth various conditions and functions in which the members of Christ’s body are to manifest His spirit in the church, in their relationship with each other, he continues by admonishing the Christians in matters pertaining to their individual lives.

Such is the brief text before us. “*Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer*” Although the verbs are in the form of participles, they carry the force of imperatives. And as this inspired passage has under God’s preserving care come down to us in this generation, we may be sure that, as the doctrine is for our salvation, so also these admonitions are for our temporal and eternal welfare.

Let us consider *rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, and continuing steadfastly in prayer*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Rejoicing In Hope

Whenever a person finds himself in an unsatisfactory situation, he indulges in hope. The sick hope to get well; the unfortunate hope for better days; the storm-tossed mariner hopes to reach port safely. God is compassionate and often enough grants fulfilment of these human hopes.

However, many purely human hopes vanish into nothingness. They are simply the desires of the human heart turned toward the future. But they are lacking a foundation on which to rest.

The Christian hope, of which the Apostle here speaks, has a sure foundation in the promises of God. The Scriptures expressly speak of God as “*the God of hope.*”²

Our heavenly Father, because of His mercy in Christ gives us many precious promises in His holy Word, promises with which He uplifts our spirits and fill us with new courage and hope. In darkest hours, in deepest distress, the Christian by faith lays hold on these promises of God.

Like the Psalmist he says to his depressed self: ⁵ *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God.*³ This hope in God “*does not disappoint.*” Why not? “*Because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*”⁴

Such Christian hope, based on God’s Word and God’s faithfulness, looks forward to a sufficiency of divine grace to meet all of life’s needs: deliverance from evil, comfort in sorrow, and guidance in all perplexities. Hope is faith looking forward, a faith that rests in the assurance of God’s abiding grace in Christ.

For such Christ-centred hope we should be profoundly grateful to God. Yes, we are to rejoice in such hope. Be the night ever so dark, faith assures us that the sun of God's grace is still shining behind the blackest clouds; and hope expects to see that sun again.

Notice how St. Paul, under divine inspiration, links the Christian hope with faith in Christ, as we read in Romans 5:1-2, *¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

And again in Romans 15:13, *¹³ Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

The Christian hope extends beyond the sufferings of this present time, to the glory yet to be revealed. From the prospect of rest and joy and glory in heaven we borrow joy in this life even while bearing the cross.

This was the attitude of the Saviour Himself, *“who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁵*

On the way to Gethsemane He looked beyond Calvary and prayed, *“Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”⁶*

So beloved disciples of Jesus, whatever be your earthly lot, whatever the nature of the burden that oppresses you, whatever the sorrow locked up inside of you, whatever the pain in the heart, whatever the cause of your tears, hope in God and rejoice in the hope which He graciously gives through His own mercy and faithfulness.

2. Patient In Tribulation

As there are still many beautiful spots in the world, so there are in most lives days of joy and contentment. Yet, at its best, happiness is never complete, nor is it long enduring. The serpent trail of sin is all over the earth; and where sin is, there can be no unalloyed bliss, no undisturbed happiness. So it is that joy is

soon followed by sorrow, strength fades into weakness, and happiness takes wings and flies away.

The children of God are no exception to this general human experience. Quite the contrary: the godly often have less of prosperity and more of adversity than the ungodly.

It was this fact that constituted such a vexing problem for Asaph, as he tells us in the 73d Psalm. Yet there is a vast difference. The ungodly are still under the curse of the broken Law, and under the wrath of God. In all their troubles they must feel the wrath of the Lord, whom they offend with their disobedience and their unbelief.

But *“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*⁷ The believer is in a state of grace. In the assurance of sins forgiven in Christ the believer enjoys peace with God, comfort, and hope.

Accordingly, to the believer the afflictions of this life are not punishments of divine justice, but visitations of God’s grace. Yes, they are evidences of the Father’s loving interest in His redeemed child; for *“whom the LORD loves He chastens.”*⁸ This gracious assurance takes the sting out of every affliction and enables the believer to be patient and to wait for the unfolding of God’s plans.

Patience in tribulation is therefore a characteristic of a true Christian. But again there is a difference. Some find it easier and others much harder to be patient in tribulation. The reason for this is twofold.

First, it must be admitted that there is a difference in natures or dispositions, due partly to inheritance and partly to early training and environment. One who by nature is calm and gentle and even-tempered should find it easier to be patient in tribulation than one who is by nature restless and impulsive.

Secondly, and chiefly, this difference is one of a measure of grace. Christians who are still weak in knowledge and faith, who have not yet developed other Christian virtues to any high degree, will likely be deficient also in the virtue of patience under affliction, whereas more advanced Christians, those who have longer tasted the goodness of the Lord, who have more richly experienced His tender mercies, should give evidence of a larger measure of patience under the trials and disappointments of life.

However, all of us, whatever our natural temperament or our degree of Christian attainment, are still in need of this apostolic injunction to be patient under affliction. I am sure that as we examine our record, all of us will be heartily ashamed of our impatience and fretfulness. Yes, such impatience is a sin against God; it involves lack of faith in His wisdom and love.

Do you want to learn to be more patient? We must look to Jesus, our Saviour, who is also our Example and Pattern. See how patient He was with the ignorant multitudes who misunderstood Him. How patient He was also with His chosen disciples, so slow to learn, often so foolish and erring and so faithless in the night of betrayal!

Above all, see what patience Jesus displayed in His great suffering, and see what forbearance he showed with His accusers and tormentors! *“When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”*⁹ By His patience He atoned for our impatience, and at the same time left us an example that we should follow His steps. From Jesus may we all learn to be patient in tribulation.

3. Continuing Steadfastly In Prayer

However much we Christians may strive to rejoice in hope and to be patient in tribulation, we would not get very far without the privilege of prayer.

True, the fountain of our faith and hope, our joy and patience, is the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ and the blessed Sacrament. But God wants us to ask for the blessings which He is willing to give us.

In prayer we go to God and ask for the very gifts and graces and virtues which we need and which He has graciously promised to supply. In response to earnest and believing prayer our heavenly Father bestows His Holy Spirit; and this Spirit in turn works in us the fruits of faith and develops our spiritual life.

However, as in physical life, so also in the spiritual: growth and development are gradual. Hence we must be steadfast and persevering, in prayer. Yes, we must pray without ceasing. We must avoid that which unfits us for prayer and must cultivate the habit of prayer.

Day by day, and again and again during the day, and in the night watches, we must commune with our heavenly Father in prayer. In so doing, we shall

receive all needed grace; we shall obtain fresh supplies of joy in hope and patience under tribulations.

But here again, how negligent we are, how slothful! It should not be necessary for God to urge us to pray. Our need of the gifts which God alone can supply and His gracious promise to supply such needs should be sufficient to make us pray without delay, or persevere in prayer.

The early Christians found themselves in a very hostile world. They were opposed by Jews and Gentiles. They endured much for their faith. Many were persecuted and suffered martyrdom.

What was it that enabled them to rejoice in hope and to be patient in tribulation? We find the answer in what is told us of the first Christians in Jerusalem: ***“They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”***¹⁰

In other words, they came together for worship, to hear and meditate upon the Word; they continued in the teaching of the Apostles because they found them to be divinely true; they frequently received the Lord’s Supper; they supported one another in Christian fellowship; and they made diligent use of prayer, individual and corporate prayer.

Prayer is frequently mentioned in the Book of Acts and in the Epistles of the Apostles. St. Paul in particular assured the Christians to whom he wrote that he regularly remembered them in his prayers, and in turn he earnestly solicited their prayers.¹¹

As in all other respects, so also with regard to prayer, our Lord Jesus is our best Pattern. How did He secure strength for the day? By communing with His dear Father, preferably in solitude, early in the morning. Was He confronted by a special task or trial? He first lifted his eyes up to heaven. And at the close of day he again withdrew to be alone with His Father in prayer.

Oh, if only we better followed His example, we would be blessed with a larger faith, a stronger spirit, more joy in hope, and greater patience in affliction. Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

Let us conclude with these words of Scripture, 2 Thessalonians 3:5, ⁵ *Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 12:3

² Romans 15:13

³ Psalm 42:5

⁴ Rom. 5:5

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

⁶ John 17:5

⁷ Romans 10:4

⁸ Hebrews 12:6

⁹ 1 Peter 2:23

¹⁰ Acts 2:42

¹¹ Romans 1:8-10; Romans 15:30