

“Perseverance in Suffering”
Romans 12:12
(Preached at Trinity, February 6, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verse 9** Paul says our love for one another must be without “hypocrisy.” The word means our love must be genuine, sincere. Genuine love is always an active love. It is full of emotion, but it isn’t emotion without action.
In **Verses 10-13** Paul sets forth several virtues that flow forth from love. This is one of the reasons love is so essential in our lives. Everything else depends on it!
Paul considers in these verses our love for Christ and our love for our brethren and how this love is put to action.
 - The virtue of brotherly love – of caring for our brothers and sisters – **Vs. 10, 13**
 - The virtue of zeal in service – **Verse 11**
 - The virtue of joy – **Verse 12**
 - The virtue of perseverance in suffering – **Verse 12**
 - The virtue of prayer – **Verse 12**
 - The virtue of loving our enemies – **Verses 14-21**
2. This morning I want to continue with **Verse 12**. Paul speaks of the virtue of “persevering in tribulation.”
3. This is a subject that strikes at the heart of the Christian experience, indeed it is the heart of the human experience. And it is at the heart of the New Testament message. We see it over and over.
Paul presupposes suffering here and that genuine love will result in pressing on in spite of the suffering.
4. The word here is θλίψις and can refer to any kind of affliction or distress.
^{NAU} **James 1:27** – “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.”
2 Corinthians 1:4 – “who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”
5. Suffering is consistent with our fallen world
 1. Sin has brought much sorrow into the world
 2. This life can be characterized by sorrow and tears
David wrote, **Psalm 42:3** – “My tears have been my food day and night”
 3. There are diseases and other forms of sickness,
There are natural disasters: floods, storms, earthquakes, droughts
There are financial difficulties, difficult marriages, rebellious children
There are widows and orphans

6. God's people face affliction with patience because of their love for the one who has ordained all things. In spite of their worldly condition their contentment is in Christ. **Philippians 4:11-13** – "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. ¹² I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. ¹³ I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."
7. In the New Testament, however, this word almost always refers to suffering due to persecution.
Romans 8:35 – "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"
2 Thessalonians 1:4 – "therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure."
Acts 14:21-22 – "they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
8. The question is are the countless New Testament references to persecution addressing a situation for that generation only or are they dealing with something connected to the nature of Christianity itself?
 There is no doubt that persecution is a part of the Christian experience. Those who live righteous lives in this evil world will inevitably face the displeasure of people who suppress the rule of God in their lives.
9. Throughout the world today Christians are suffering greatly for their faith. In China pastors are arrested and imprisoned, churches are destroyed. In Muslim nations converting to Christianity is not permitted. The penalty is often death.
 A. But this seems so remote to us. For the most part Christians in the U.S. experience little persecution. But is this a good thing? Does persecution weaken us or strengthen us?
 B. What does the suffering church throughout the world think of us?
 Jimmy Draper, president of the Lifeway stores says:
"We in America keep praying for God to bless us"—with success, prosperity, political clout, and booming churches—"and Christians in other nations are praying God will allow us to experience persecution so that we'll act like the blessing we were made to be."
10. Again, this subject comes before us often in Scripture. And it is a subject we should consider often. We should examine our own lives. Are we escaping persecution because of God's grace in our lives or are we escaping persecution because of our poor testimony?
 Paul says that Christians will persevere through persecution. Why does this have so little application to most professing Christians today?
11. This morning I want us to look at this subject once again. May God grant us a large measure of His grace this morning.

I. First, we have to understand the fact of suffering

A. We saw in **Chapter 8** that suffering is a part of being united with Christ – it is evidence that we have been adopted.

Romans 8:17 – “and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.”

1. Paul assumed that Christians would suffer. As he said in **2 Timothy 3:12**, “all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
2. There's no way around some form of persecution--its part of being a Christian. It's proof that we belong to Christ. Suffering is a necessary element in our lives.-
4. In **2 Timothy 2:11-12** Paul says, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with [Christ], we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him."
5. This hostile, God-hating, Christ-rejecting world doesn't like believers because we live in contrast to their sinfulness. Therefore we shouldn't be surprised when we endure persecution. Jesus said, "If [since] the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (**John 15:18**).
6. Sometimes you will make decisions that will not be well received among your extended family or among friends or coworkers.
Matthew 10:34-36 – “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.”
7. In the pursuit of holiness and Biblical truth our church will sometimes make decisions that will not be well received
8. Pastors are sometimes persecuted by religious church members for faithfully preaching the Word of God – many are dismissed or forced to resign.
9. This world does not like our doctrines our decisions, or our disciplines
They do not like our precepts, our practices, or our purposes.

B. In other words, Paul's is not making a statement of something that is strange or unusual but something normal with being a Christian

1. This seems strange in the ear of the American Christian. In the modern secularized church teaching about suffering for our faith seems rather foreign. To teach suffering as the essence of the Christian life seems like false doctrine. This is because there is a Christianity today that is quite different from Biblical Christianity. It is a feel good Christianity today. True Christianity has always been acquainted with suffering.

2. Christians of every generation have faced a world hostile to Christ and the life He has called us to live.
 - a. Our generation is no different. The media hates Christianity. Hollywood hates Christianity. The political elite hate Christianity. Higher education hates Christianity. Many churches today hate Biblical Christianity.
True believers will sometimes find a hostile environment in many churches today.
 - b. Living in such a world will often bring us face to face with conflict, sometimes open persecution.
 - c. Every one of you have faced it –
 - From family members who don't understand why you are so wrapped up in your Christianity
 - From co-workers who can't understand your commitment to Christ
 - From professing Christians who see you as an extremist, too hard, too serious.
 - d. I'm not talking about suffering for being arrogant, censorious, mean spirited.
 - e. We should not see suffering for Christ's sake something unusual
3. This was the consistent teaching of Christ
John 16:33 – “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”
4. Peter also affirmed this:
1 Peter 4:12-14 – “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; ¹³ but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. ¹⁴ If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”
5. Scripture teaches continually that Christians should expect to suffer. It should be a part of Christian teaching.
Paul is presupposing this truth in this passage. He presupposing that his readers had experienced persecutions. He is saying that in love we persevere through all our tribulations.

II. Don't lose heart. Paul affirms here that this genuine love will cause us to persevere through suffering.

Romans 12:12 – “persevering in tribulation”

- A. The believer is known by his perseverance
 1. The word for perseverance here is ὑπομένω
It's a compound word: “to abide under”

2. The Christian continues to abide under whatever suffering the Christian life presents before him.
NAS **Matthew 10:22** – “And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.”
3. The counterfeit Christian will usually flee persecution.
NAS **Matthew 13:20** – “And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.”
 - a. For him Christianity is a feel good experience. He loves the music and good friends. He loves feeling good about himself.
 - b. But Christ hasn’t become His Master. He doesn’t see Christ as precious and worthy of his life.
 - c. He hasn’t died to self. He hasn’t set his sights on spiritual things.
4. The true believer, however, embraces suffering. He sees God’s glorious purpose in suffering
 - a. In the history of the church the church has always been the strongest when it faced the greatest hardships.
 - b. Although we do not seek tribulation we embrace it because it has come as a result of our standing upon the truth of Christ. It drives us closer to the one we love.

B. We saw in **Chapter 5** that the true believer presses on with joy even in the face of persecution

ESV **Romans 5:2** – “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance (ὑπομένω), and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

1. Does that seem strange to you?
2. Most people want a life free from trials or troubles. We want other people to think well of us. For Christians the opposite is true – men despise us, but we still rejoice.
Matthew 5:12 – “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven . . .”
3. Paul is describing the reaction of the believer to persecution, to suffering. We rejoice! It is our boast, it is our medal of honor.
4. We glory in tribulation because it proves our faith genuine. And we rejoice to be counted worthy to share in the sufferings of our Lord.
Philippians 3:10-11 – “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; ¹¹ in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Conclusion:

1. How is it that we press on even during the most fiery persecutions?
But remember, this can apply to every type of adversity. How do we endure failing health, financial difficulties, a dead end job, a catastrophe – a fire, flood.
2. How do you endure suffering or hardship?
Is it not by your love for the One who saved your soul?
And is it by your own strength that you stand? No! We stand firm by God’s grace though whom we press on.
^{ESV} **Romans 5:2** – “Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”
3. We persevere through God’s omnipotent power that sustains us even in the midst of persecution. We can rest assured that Christ will deliver us from every trial and every persecution; even if it means laying down our life. Nothing shall be able to separate us from His love.
2 Timothy 3:10 – “But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me!”
4. Stand firm with fearlessness. Continue to represent Christ. Continue to obey Him no matter what the cost. Great is your reward. Press on!