

## **Genuine Love Is Fixed on God!**

**Romans 12:12**

**June 18, 2006**

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**Grace Fellowship Church, Toronto, Ontario**

**“Delighting in God to the glory of God”**

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It is Father's Day today – Fathers, do your children know you love them? Let me read you John Paton's account of the day he left home to begin missionary training. Paton wrote this 40 years after the event:

"My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence — my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: 'God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you, and keep you from all evil!' Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him — gazing after me. Waving my hat in adieu, I rounded the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dike and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return — his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonour such a father and mother as he had given me." (pp. 25-26)

Here is a son who loves his father. But what is even more striking to me, is the description of this father and his love for his son. Fathers, do you love your children? Do they know it? Do they feel it?

We have been looking intently at authentic love... genuine, non-counterfeit love. And we have been challenging each other to grow in our love for one another. As it is Father's Day, I want you to look at Romans 12 with one eye in particular upon fathers. Clearly, what Paul writes is addressed to all Christians, but Dads, let's look at the Word of God today as a rule by which to measure our fathering.

(Romans 12:9-13) "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."

We are going to be looking today at verse 12: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.” We find here three characteristics of the man who loves:

## I. The Man Who Loves Shouts, “Upward and onward!”

“Rejoice in hope”

We have seen these words before, in a similar context, in Romans 5:

(Romans 5:1-5) “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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, 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.”

Here Paul says “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” You will notice that this rejoicing is a result of something – the fruit of something: **Justification by faith!** Our glorious doctrine returns again as the underpinning and source of these benefits:

- Harmony with God – peace in our relations
- Ongoing welcome before God – free ongoing access
- Joy in God –

But here Paul uses a word which means “boast,” as in “joyfully exult!” So, “we joyfully exult or boast upon the hope or confident expectation of the glory of God.”

And we saw when we studied this passage that the idea was something like this: Since we are declared righteous in the sight of God, neither *death* nor the *end of this age* holds any threat for us, since at our death or at Christ's return, all there will be for us Christians is the glory of God - the full manifestation of all His divine attributes and Person. And as Paul will make even more unambiguous in chapter 9, absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus!

So, a Christian goes through this life with this great and deep depth of joy in his *splagkna*. It drives him forward through life since current grace is never his resting point – he is always looking for more of Jesus. It bears repeating that “hope” is not “good luck.” It is a *firm expectation in that which is sure to come*. In that sense, there is no hope outside of God. Everything is unpredictable in life except Him.

Just when you think all things are the same and your family's routine is in place... Dad comes home every day at the same time, Tuesday is always meatloaf, Wednesday night is prayer meeting, Sundays we go to church... then some *unexpected disruption* occurs. It may be wonderful or it may be tragic. It may be small or it may be catastrophic. But when it comes, if your hope is set on the routine, the expected result or what “always happens on Thursdays...” just then you find your hope shattered.

We speak of people as “losing hope.” They have nothing to live for, nothing to look forward to. Having put their confidence in sinful men, sin-stained institutions, sin-cursed fields, sin-infected churches or sin-laden governments... they were disappointed, time and again. And thus they stop hoping, stop looking for anything good in the world. This is true whether you live in Mozambique or Mississauga. All men are prone to look for life where there is none, to hold out hope for something better in this world.

We recently bought some ice cream cones at a little store owned by an older, essentially second-rate actor. He posted pictures of movies he was in and bragged excessively of movie stars he had “worked

with” or who were “his friends.” But here he was, a middle-aged man with this tiny little ice cream shop. It didn’t appear to me that his acting career had been a great success. But the sense of utter hopelessness came when you read the big banner behind the ice cream counter: **“Ice Cream is the Meaning of Life.”** That is the motto of someone who has lost hope. Is life found in a chemically-derived milk product that melts in the sun? How is that life?

That is why we tend to think of hope as such a risky thing. But the Bible writers never think of it this way in reference to God. His promises are yes and amen. Thus we can put full confidence in Him and in what He says He will do. It is a firm expectation. And it is a firm expectation in the best of all things: the glory of God! So we rejoice in that hope!

A boy may have a very faithful father. So when Mommy says, “Your father will chastise you when he gets home” then that boy has hope that that very thing will take place! He may not think of it as *hope*, but at least he has a firm and confident expectation that, barring any divine providence, the said event is sure to occur!

Christians have a confident expectation that will never be divinely or otherwise interrupted or in any way interfered with! Is a firm expectation that we will see the glory of God! And this hope breeds and feeds our current joy! So Paul writes, “rejoicing in hope!” Christian, are you melancholy? Downcast? Prone to see the glass half-empty? Then I urge you to focus on the glory of God! The man who loves others is the man who is rejoicing in hope. And when you are delighting in the confident expectation of enjoying the full expression of God – it gets a little easier to love!

- Now, you cannot help but search out evidences of grace in brothers and sisters in Christ! You are so eager for that which will one day be yours, that you look for the evidence of that glory now in others and outdo them in showing honour!
- Now it is near-spontaneous to cling to what is good and abhor what is evil.
- Now it is much simpler to remain rigidly loyal with a kindly affection to your brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Now you are inspired to give your all and conquer fears and hesitations in your zeal.
- Now you are eager for the Spirit’s boiling over in your life since more of Him is more of glory!
- Now your focus is on serving the Lord!

*Now you are like all the characters of Narnia rushing forward into that allegorical heaven. Each one encouraging the other: “Further up! Further in!” Your heart becoming increasingly braver and fuller as you venture ever more on the Lord Jesus. “Rejoice brother, only more glory! Only more glory!”*

And so this hope increases and our love increases and our delight in God Himself increases so much so that we look at each other and shout, “Upwards! Onwards!” Christian – are you rejoicing in hope? The future good is certain! Are you like Hopeful who offers encouragements to Christian as they end their dangerous journey? Can you sing like Francis Ridley Havergal?

#### **From Glory unto Glory! (New Year)**

“From Glory unto Glory!” Our faith hath seen the King.  
We own His matchless beauty, adoringly we sing;  
But He hath more to show us! O thought of untold bliss!

And on we press rejoicing in blessed hope to this:—

That “greater things,” far greater, our longing eyes shall see!  
We can but wait and wonder what “greater things” shall be!  
But glorious fulfillments rejoicingly we claim,  
While pleading in the power of His prevailing Name.

The fullness of His *blessing* encompasseth our way;  
The fullness of His *promise* crowns every brightening day;  
The fullness of His *glory* is beaming from above,  
While more and more we realize the fullness of His *love*.

“From Glory unto Glory!” Though tribulation fall,  
It cannot touch our treasure, when Christ is All in All!  
Whatever lies before us, there can be naught to fear,  
For what are pain and sorrow when Jesus Christ is near?

O ye who seek the Saviour, look up in faith and love;  
Come up into the sunshine, so bright and warm above!  
No longer tread the valley, but, clinging to His hand,  
Ascend the shining summits and view the glorious land.

“In full and glad surrender we give ourselves to Thee,  
Thine utterly, and only, and evermore to be!  
O Son of God, Who lov’st us, we will be Thine alone,  
Our being and possessions, shall henceforth be Thine own!”

Now onward, ever onward, “from strength to strength” we go,  
While “grace for grace” abundant shall from His fullness flow,  
To glory’s full fruition, from glory’s foretaste here,  
Until His very presence crown happiest new year.

(Havergal wrote these words December 23, 1873 at Winterdyne.)

But there is much more. The man who loves is rejoicing in hope. And this gives grace for him to follow through in the next two descriptions Paul offers.

## **II. The Man Who Loves Stays True Under Pressure**

“be patient in tribulation”

One commentator wrote this: “We must not forget that the path toward the culmination of our hope is immersed in trials.” No team gets to the Stanley Cup finals without injuries! Few girls make it to marriage without getting their heart broken a few times along the way! The hope that Paul has described as issuing forth in such deep joy is not a hope in money, saved kids, job promotions, health, peace, safety, good looks, a spouse, or a pass in some tough course. That is where worldly men and women place their hope and that is why they have no joy, for their hopes are rarely realized and even when they are, they find there is no life in what they were looking for. And so the one who does not hope in God has to turn to something for the ache of his soul. Every age has its offerings. Perhaps sex, over-consumption of alcohol, another man or woman, more TV, bad things to look at on a computer screen, more work... there are many options!

But when money or kids or spouses or health fails the Christian – there is no need to turn to those bad things. In fact, when difficulties come, there is *patience*.

The kinds of difficulties Paul means to speak of in this verse are varied. He uses the word we often translate as “affliction.” It means “pressure” and is used as a metaphor for affliction or tribulation. Of course, trials like this create pressure. We speak of being “pressed in a vice” or “feeling the weight of the world” and we know all too well the experience of being “under the gun.” Whether it is at work or at home or with our personal finances we know what it is to be afflicted in this life.

And there is a sense that the more we live for Christ, the greater our afflictions will be! Isn't that at least a part of what Paul meant when he wrote: “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...” If you desire an ungodly life you can be sure the Devil will give you no attention. The soldier left behind to guard the army's luggage is of no concern to the enemy attacking the army on the front line! The overweight, second-string middle-linebacker is of no concern to the opposing team's coach! The rebellious, indolent day-worker is already helping the cause of that company's main competition!

But, the patriotic and focused soldier, the athletic and prepared athlete, the conscientious and diligent employee ought to expect the fiercest opposition. And the Christian who desires to live a godly life and thus works to live a godly life can go to the bank with this: he will be persecuted!

Isn't this the example of Paul? After some years of solitude and peace in Antioch, Paul is set aside by the church to preach Christ throughout the known world. And from then on, this is what he gets:

(2 Corinthians 11: 23-28 ) “...countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

Last week there was a little fun in the blogosphere concerning injuries. Poison ivy, gashed feet, sprained ankles... What must have Paul's everyday life have been? And yet, what do you see in this man of God while the affliction of *persecution* (perhaps the most difficult of all afflictions!) is taking place? We hear of Paul and Silas in Philippi:

(Acts 16:20-25) “And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...”

Later he will write to this jailor and his converted family and friends:

(Philippians 1:12-30) “I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

Here is Paul patient in affliction – abiding under it! Not wiggling and squirming to get out from under it, but staying there... and clinging to Christ in the midst of it. *This is the mark of a man or woman who loves: they are patient through affliction.*

Let me ask you: When do you fly off the handle? Get overly stressed out? Grow distant and cold? Feel most drawn to that particular temptation that you have given over to so many times in the past? Is it not mostly in the midst of affliction? When you are feeling the pressure? The pressure comes and you fall into default mode of self-preservation! Now sin is easily justified because, after all, how could anyone expect to live through this without (fill in the blank)?

But Christian, this is not to be your way! You are to patiently endure the trial. In the words of Paul in Romans 5:

(Romans 5:3-5) “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 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.”

Suffering – endurance – character – hope! And that hope will never leave us hanging! It is sure and certain! And as we dwell on that hope we find fresh courage to rejoice in the affliction, further building endurance and thus deepening character. But at the moment we bail on God's plan and seek to find life in some form of sin – whether anger or sensuality or lust or envy or greed or buying stuff - *at that moment we eject out of this most precious cycle, and all that is waiting for us on the ground is the suffering and affliction.* It does not go away.

When you go water skiing, you have to learn to hang on to the rope through that initial stress of getting up! Water splashing in face, the pull on your arms – you want to let go... but if you do there is only more

of the same waiting for you. Cling to the rope – let the boat pull you through it! Christian – in afflictions, cling to Christ! Don't let go! Don't try to relieve the pressure – let the Lord take you through it!

Paul says: “Be patient in affliction.” Stay true under pressure, and wait upon the Lord to remove whatever it is that is pressing down hard on us. It may be by Divine interruption – or it may be by death. Either way – be patient.

### III. The Man Who Loves Sticks to Prayer

“be constant in prayer”

“Constant” – It means “to occupy oneself diligently with.” To “attend to constantly.” To “continue steadfastly in.” Like a boy midway through a fantastic Lego project!

Again, Paul stresses that this is a continual, ongoing action of the person who genuinely loves. His life is marked by much prayer – personal, private, public, real, all kinds of prayer. But what else would we expect from a man who is always looking to his mates and shouting, “Upward and Onward?” A man who stays true to His Lord under the most extreme forms of affliction? This man must be a man who prays!

*I would suggest that this kind of outward behaviour of hope and patience is impossible without prayer!* And although we do not pray in order to control God or earn His favour, like some form of Air Miles – swipe your prayer card and save your points to redeem them in trials. Although we do not pray to obligate God, isn't it true that the more we pray, the more grace we find to hope and endure? Why? Because our prayer draws us closer to Him and always more mindful of Him. So there is a kind of indissoluble union between this triad of commands. I cannot think of how you could separate any one of them from the others.

I feel this is all I can say about prayer, for I don't think I know the first thing about praying the way I should! I have learned more from all of you than I have from my own experiences in the school of prayer. But I can say I love to be around a people that pray!

I will suggest this, however. The next time you collapse under the pressure, the next time you feel no joy, ask yourself this simple question: “Have I prayed?” NOT, “Have I prayed for God to give me joy?” Or, “Have I prayed asking God to take away my troubles?” But have you been constant in prayer, in communing with your God?

I am not intending by this question to add to your guilt or discouragement! I am merely urging you to do what our Lord commands and remember:

Though troubles assail  
And dangers affright,  
Though friends should all fail  
And foes all unite;  
Yet one thing secures us,  
Whatever betide,  
The scripture assures us,  
*The Lord will provide.*

When life sinks apace  
And death is in view,  
This word of his grace

Shall comfort us through:  
No fearing or doubting  
With Christ on our side,  
We hope to die shouting,  
*The Lord will provide.*

How can we preach to our own hearts this glorious Truth if we are not praying?

So, God develops this picture of a loving man even further for us... and our hearts quake! Is this me? Let me direct that question more specifically: Fathers, is this you? Where are the men of great love for their children? Men who seek what is good in their kids? Who abhor what is evil and keep it away from their kids? Men who look for evidences of grace in their kids – and tell them what they find? Men who don't listen to their fears, but press forward in their zeal? Men who seek to bless their wives and children by having a life that boils over with the presence of God's Spirit? Men who serve their Master? Men that shout to their kids, "Upward and Onward?" Men that stay true under pressure? Men that stick to prayer?

Where are those men? Many of them are right here in this room. But even if you feel this is you, fathers, don't you equally feel, "Oh, how much further I need to grow in the grace and knowledge of my Saviour Jesus Christ"?

Or, if you sit here today or listen online, and are thinking, "This isn't me at all!" If you look at your fathering and see it is made up of making money, carting kids to games, keeping the peace with your wife, going to work, then coming home to sleep again, and wondering what life is all about... if that is you, then here is your answer: The Maker of all things is calling you to be a man who loves.

But you will never do it – not for one fleeting moment – apart from the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. First you must be justified – then you will be sanctified. First you must be changed on the inside by God, then you will be changed on the outside by God. But that order is never reversed. *Moralism (living a clean life without God) is just as offensive to God as adultery or child abuse.* So you must do what every loving father has done – put your hope in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Then call upon Him to change your life.

Fathers, love your wives and your children. Children, honour your fathers today and love them lavishly! All of you – love one another! To the glory of God.

Shouting upward and onward!  
Staying true under pressure!  
Sticking to Prayer!

Amen.

By Pastor Paul W. Martin © Grace Fellowship Church

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