

Romans 12:9-21

Implications

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

St. Paul’s epistles are all written with a certain structure. They ordinarily begin with a statement of gratitude or expression of joy. Then there is a long section characterized by a proclamation and explanation of the meaning of the gospel, followed by practical application.

Indicative

The theological section involves the use of the indicative mood, for all you english majors. The indicative mood indicates how things are, if it helps to say it that way. In the case of our text from last week, “you are God’s children.” There are other examples:

“You are forgiven.”

“You are accepted and loved . . .”

“You are not under law, but under grace.”

“We are ‘In Christ.’”

“We are the Body of Christ.”

That is the indicative, how things are, and it is gospel news for us.

Imperative

Last week we spoke of our obligation, in view of the salvation we have been given, to live our lives after the Spirit rather than according to the flesh. Our obligation is to live out the meaning of being under the umbrella of God’s grace. It has no requirements, but it does have implications. These implications are often expressed by the use of the imperative mood, for all you english majors. The imperative is the mood of command. It means, “go and do . . .”

There is a certain sense to being under this obligation, it may not be “common sense,” but there is a logic to it, and throughout the New Testament we are confronted by this logic, faced with certain imperatives. It might not be “common sense” because the imperatives of the faith imply a manner of living that far surpasses the common.

Zamperini and Forgiveness

As an example, “you are forgiven, now go forgive.” While that makes sense, treat other people the way God has treated you, and God has forgiven you, so now go forgive others (involving a variation of the Golden Rule, not sure what to call it, “Do unto others as God has done unto you.”) in the extreme, this demand is not seen as “common.”

In minor offenses we can see how this may indeed involve a kind of “common sense.” Everyone makes mistakes, everyone sins and if we do not forgive, we not only won’t be able to get along with anyone, making life miserable, but we also involve ourselves in a major contradiction and hypocrisy. We proclaim a forgiveness for ourselves that we do not extend to others.

But in major cases, forgiveness on a divine scale is required and it goes beyond any “common sense” known among people. I think, for instance, of the example of the Olympian Louis Zamperini, whose story was told a few years back in the book Unbroken and the movie of the same name. It is a good movie, and book, if you haven’t already, enjoy them.

Zamperini served in WWII and was captured by the Japanese and spent two years in a POW camp where he was subjected to unusual torture. Recognizing him as an olympic star, they singled him out. They reported to the Red Cross that he had died, and were thus not bound by the usual rules for the treatment of prisoners. He was beaten mercilessly, exposed to greater dangers.

I have described this story to a few people over the years when the topic came up, and when I get to the part where after the war Zamperini went back to Japan and met with his former captors, forgiving them and establishing friendships with them, the most “common”

response is, “no way, never! I would never forgive if someone had done that to me.” Clearly, forgiveness is not “common.”

## Romans 12

In Romans 12 Paul goes on a rant. He adopts a rapid-fire approach. Beginning with “therefore,” and demanding believers offer themselves as “living sacrifices,” he fires away with implication after implication, imperative after imperative. Our text is a part of that barrage.

It preaches powerfully enough that it doesn’t really need much help from someone like me. It deserves our attention. It involves not only implications, but may be understood as instructions for a happy and blessed life. Before I just read it again, I will highlight three of the imperatives, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.”

## Joyful in Hope

Paul was aware that the recipients of his letters looked out at the world and their lives and did not see how anything would ever change for the better. I have lived my life in a time when people have generally been optimistic, yet for many presently, that optimism has been eroded. “Millennials” say they do not share it. They are not unlike the people in Paul’s time. Yet he tells them not only that there *is* hope (it is hope in God,

not in human efforts), but that no matter how badly things may appear, because they are under grace they may rejoice. Be joyful in hope.

### Patient in Affliction

And patient in affliction. Afflictions come in all shapes and sizes. We may suffer specifically because of our faith, people may deride us or insult us, or worse. Or we may suffer what is common to all people; aging, illness, pain from accidents, job loss, anxiety, and the like.

Paul calls for patience, not because things always work out, but because we have received such a great salvation. Patience leads to perseverance, which leads to character, which leads to a hope that does not disappoint.

### Faithful in Prayer

And faithful in prayer. There is much to be said about prayer but the most important thing to say is, do it.

I once listened to a country club golf instructor who was trying to help people with lowering their scores. He had helpful tips that I have long since forgotten. But I remember the last thing he said, "I know you want a magic solution and don't have time for it, but if you want to get better, play more golf."

Prayer works the same way, it is a very powerful tool in the spiritual toolbox, but the temptation is not to allow much time for it or to be discouraged when there are not immediate results.

Be faithful in prayer. Pray every day. Grind your way through if you must. Use the suggestions of others, but be faithful to it. Resolve to make it a part of your everyday routine and that you will never stop.

Just these three suggestions are enough to transform life, but Paul can't be limited to them. So I will re-read this whole text to help us get the full impact.

Remember, these are not requirements to achieve salvation, they are practical applications of a salvation already received. They are imperatives that flow out from grace, so richly given, so fully transforming, so tirelessly effective and able to endow life with a rich and fabulous texture that fashions all our days.

### Listen

Love must be sincere

Hate what is evil

Cling to what is good

Be devoted to one another in friendship/love

Never be lacking in zeal

Keep up your spiritual fervor

Serving the Lord

Be joyful in hope

Patient in affliction

Faithful in prayer  
Share with God's people who are in need  
Practice hospitality  
Bless those who persecute you  
Bless and do not curse  
Rejoice with those who rejoice  
Mourn with those who mourn  
Live in harmony with one another  
Do not be proud  
Be willing to associate with people of low position  
Do not be conceited  
Do not repay evil for evil  
Be careful to do what is right in eyes of everybody  
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you,  
live at peace with everyone  
Do not take revenge, my friends,  
but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written  
"It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord  
On the contrary:  
If your enemy is hungry, feed him  
If thirsty, give them something to drink  
In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head  
Do not be overcome by evil  
but overcome evil with good.

Amen

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