

“Three Qualities for Spiritual Endurance”

Romans 12:11-12

Assumptions are powerful things. When we say that something should consist of certain characteristics, we expect that those characteristics will be met.

When my daughter Brittany was around four years old, I took her along for a church outing to see the Detroit Tigers. We arrived early to enjoy the pre-game events. We got in our seats as the stadium filled with other spectators and a sense of excitement (this was back in the late 80's when the Tigers stood a slightly better chance at winning a ball game!)

The line up was called. The players stood at their dugouts. The national anthem was sung. The ball game began.

Brittany seemed a little unhappy. This was not as exciting as she thought it would be. Finally, at the end of the first inning, Brittany looked up at me and asked, “but daddy, where are the tigers?”

In Romans 12:9-21, Paul is writing about the CONDUCT of believers.

These are more than friendly reminders of how Christians are to act. These are the **expected ethical norms** for those who have committed their lives as “living sacrifices,” according to Romans 12:1. The 29 imperatives contained here give a picture of what every Christian ought to look like in their behavior. The question for us today is whether or not these norms characterize your life.

First, let’s look at the expected ethical norms in Romans 12:9-13. In each of these five verses, there is a *series of triplets*... Rom 12:9-13

- Sincere love (12:9)
- Devotion to one another (12:10)
- **Zeal for the Lord (12:11)**
- **Spiritual Endurance (12:12)**
- Concern for those in need (12:13)

Our focus in this message is to examine verses 11 and 12 where we find the normal Christian behavior of Zeal for the Lord and Spiritual endurance. It is up to you to evaluate your life in these areas as we study this passage together. Ask yourself if these attributes are consistently in your life.

Normally, in our study of the Greek New Testament., we emphasize the VERBS. This passage requires a different approach because there are few complete verbs here, just nouns and participles. Notice the nouns in each phrase starting in Romans 12:11-12. I’ve highlighted them and written them in a very technical, but accurate translation of the actual Greek text:

“In the **diligence**, not lacking”

“In **spirit**, fervor”

“in the **Lord**, service”

“in the **Hope**, joy”
“in the **affliction**, patience”
“in the **prayer**, faithfulness”

The First Characteristic:

Living Sacrifices are Characterized by Zeal for the Lord. 12:11

Note that Romans 12:11 has three expected characteristics for the Christian.

1. A Spiritual Attitude of Diligence. (12:11)
Stated in three popular translations:
 - a. “Not lagging behind in zeal” (NAS)
 - b. “Not slothful in business” (KJV)
 - c. “Never be lacking in zeal” (NIV)

The word “zeal” (NIV) or “diligence” (NASB) means “eagerness, earnestness, diligence” (BAGD). Although the KJV uses the word “business,” the idea here is our spiritual business, rather than our work ethic, important though that may be.

Regarding this verse, John MacArthur writes, “*There has to be a sense of urgency and intensity in the Christian life. There's no room for laziness.*” (John MacArthur, “The Duties of Practical Christianity, Part 2”)

This is echoed in other passages of the Bible:

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." (Galatians 6:9)

*"We want each of you to show this same **diligence** to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."* (Hebrews 6:11-12)

Spiritual laziness is as repugnant to God as on the job laziness is to us! The Christian life requires zeal. There ought to be an excitement to serve the Lord, rather than a begrudging attitude of religious duty. This excitement is most powerfully seen in new Christians, but it ought to characterize all of us!

Some of us are spiritual sloths! We have little spiritual energy. For some, the reason is that our sins have separated us from true fellowship. Others of us have simply grown cold. Some are too busy seeking pleasure from the things of the world to have any time left for the things of God. We've become spiritual couch potatoes, as represented by this poem:

One potato, two potato,
three potato, four.
Couch potato, pew potato,
are there any more?

John Wesley was a man who had no time for spiritual laziness. He ministered in England and the US in the mid 1700's. Few of us today could come close to the spiritual fervor of Wesley. He did not object to walking 25 miles per day, reading as he walked. One day in 1750, he rode 90 miles on 2 horses, a 20 hour ride. He preached in America beginning in 1735 when he was

the Chaplain for the settlers in Savannah, hardly an easy life.

He traveled between the US and England, preaching anywhere he could. He was known to preach to as many as 10,000 people (without amplification). He preached in the open air, in the rain and snow. He stood outside the coal mines and factories and would preach as the men left work. His preaching gathered crowds of hundreds and sometimes thousands.

In his life it is estimated that he rode horseback for over 100,000 miles, balancing a book in his hand while he held the reins lightly.

He was once scheduled to preach at a coastal chapel. (Direct quotation follows from wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/methodist/ch17.htm) “ The coastal road was blocked by a rising tide. Looking out of the window, he shouted to the driver, "Take the sea! Take the sea!" Soon the horses were swimming, and the poor ostler expected every moment to be drowned; but Wesley put his head out of the window--his long white hair was dripping with the salt water.

"What is your name, driver ?" he asked.

"Peter," said the man.

"Peter," he said, "fear not; thou shalt not sink."

At last the driver got his carriage safely over. Wesley's first care, he says, was "to see me comfortably lodged at the tavern;" he secured warm clothing, good fire, and refreshment for his driver, then, totally unmindful of himself, and drenched as he was with the dashing waves, he proceeded to the chapel, where he preached according to appointment. He was then in **his eighty-third year**.

wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/methodist/ch17.htm

Now, let's look at the second of three characteristics in Romans 12:11

2. A Spiritual Flame for God. “Keeping your spiritual fervor”

the word spirit = our “life.” The spiritual essence of who we are.

The word fervor is from the Greek word Zeo. It means “To boil over.” There is only one other usage of **zeo** in the NT. It is used of Apollo in Acts 18:25, "*He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with **great fervor** and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.*" The idea of a person on fire for God is certainly pictured here. Does that characterize your life? Are you on fire for God?

While traveling with a missionary team in 2001, we visited Bristol England, the site of Wesley's chapel. The chapel seated about 400-500 attenders on two levels, with a raised pulpit half way between the two levels, allowing the preachers voice to carry and for everyone to see and hear him. Not only did Wesley preach here, he also trained aspiring young men to be preachers. Wesley's study was on a third floor, above the two levels of seating in the chapel. He had a window installed so that he could watch his young preachers! He would sit up and listen to them while he studied.

On one occasion, one of his young preachers was discouraged. Seemingly could not get a crowd to hear him preach. Wesley's encouragement to him was "***Get on fire for God and people will come to watch you burn.***" Wesley was a man who knew the meaning of Romans 12:11. “Keeping your spiritual fervor.”

Characteristic 3 from Romans 12:11

3. A Life of Service for God “*serving the Lord*”

Literally, *In the Lord: a bonds slave.*” Paul uses this description of a slave to describe the Christian life in 1 Corinthians 7:22 *“For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave.”* In our service for the Lord, we are his bonds slaves. One who knows Christ acts in this way.

Romans 12:12 - the Second set of three Expected Ethical Norms for the Christian.

Living Sacrifices are Characterized by Spiritual Endurance. Romans 12:12

1. The first characteristic is HOPE

Literally, *“In the hope.”* There is a definite article here, literally “THE HOPE”

There exist many kinds of HOPE

- a. Physical recovery
- b. Sports teams
- c. Political hope

But Spiritual Hope is found in the gospel

(1 Peter 1:3) *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”*

(Colossians 1:22-23) *“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.”*

2. The Second characteristic if Affliction

It may seem strange to say that affliction is an expected Christian characteristic. Certainly, no one seeks affliction. We understand this from the usage of the word. It is the Greek work *thilipsis*. It means *“pressure” in the physical sense, medically of the pulse.*” (Kittle, TDNT) Kittle writes this definition. *The afflictions of slaves or aliens, oppression by enemies, and such troubles as illness, desert wandering, and shipwreck.* (Kittle, TDNT)

This “pressure” from both external and internal sources is what Jesus spoke of when he told the apostles in the upper room, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”* (John 14:1)

We know that EVERYONE has trouble. But this verse is speaking about more than the trouble of everyday life. Job reminds us that all of us will have trouble *“Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.”* (Job 5:7) Jesus reminds us of the same thing. *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33). Bad behavior brings persecution, as does foolish actions.

But the trouble here is the trouble of persecution for the name of Christ. This is something that only the Christian will experience. It is the trouble that Jesus mentions frequently. *“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against

you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:10-12)

It is the trouble promised to all who follow Christ. (2 Timothy 3:12) *"In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,"*

This type of persecution for the cause of Christ is the expected course for the Christian. It does not necessarily exist *all of the time*, but it does accompany the man or woman who truly steps out in obedience for the Lord.

The third character trait is found in the last phrase of Romans 12:12

3. Prayer. "Faithful in prayer"

Many people pray. According to Gallop, 66% of Americans agree that *"I thank God daily for who God is and what he is doing in my life."* And 61% of Americans answered favorably to the question, *"I seek to grow closer to God by listening to God in prayer"*

www.gallup.com/poll/9088/How-American-Christians-Living-Their-Faith.aspx

But does God respond to all of those prayers? Certainly, in His omniscience, he knows who is praying, just as he knows who is sleeping, sinning, crying, dying, being born, etc. But we know from Scripture that He responds to those who are obedient to Him.

(Psalm 66:18) *"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;"*

(Isaiah 59:1-2) *"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."*

(John 9:31) *"We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will."*

(John 15:7) *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."*

Unique Christian HOPE. Unique Christian TROUBLE. Unique Christian PRAYER. **What makes them unique? The unique aspect is found in the three attributes that accompany these nouns.**

Three Characteristics of Endurance.

a. **Rejoicing** in hope

(1) Job 1:20

(2) Hab 3:17-19

b. **Persevering** in trouble

(1) Seems to be the opposite of rejoicing!

(2) Times of difficult circumstance and persecution.

(3) We persevere!

(4) "Wake up, man, wake up when you pray, for it is insulting to God to give him sleepy worship. Dreaming at praying and playing at praying, as some do, are grievous sins. No, no, prayer must be heart work, soul-work, spirit work. Prayer ought to be the sweat of the soul... as Jesus did in the garden." (Spurgeon. 6/22, 1879)

c. **Faithful in prayer.**

(1) Prayer binds both HOPE and TROUBLE.

(2) Through prayer we rejoice, and through prayer we persevere!

These are the assumptions. The evidences of Christ in your life.

Zeal for the Lord.

Spiritual endurance.

Are you Joyful, Patient, faithful?

Only Christ can produce these characteristics in your life.