

The Faithful Life
Romans 12:11-13

Intro

Want to hear an awkward confession? Of course you do!

For some time now, each Sunday morning before the service when I'm finishing up my sermon preparation on my computer, Apple Inc. has decided that this is the perfect time to show me unasked for, on average, how much time screen time pops up - how much time I have spent on my phone in the past week.

I have to admit, sometimes that number has been, at times, surprisingly high, high enough that I immediately feel a slight internal pain and a wince of condemnation.

Here is how I approached this problem. I decided to make a significant life change. After much consideration and deliberation, I finally deleted and turned off that notification. Problem solved! Not today Satan! I mean Apple.

I did do that but I also have been evaluating how I use my phone. Its mostly email and social media - especially Twitter - learn lots of stuff - keep updated on the news and current events.

Still get on Twitter on my computer but I don't miss it. I feel better. Turns out I don't need up to the minute updates on everything horrible that's happening in the world.

Here's what I don't miss at all, the surprisingly brazen and caustic way that so many people feel free to voice their opinions.

It would appear that everyone has an opinion that they are aching to pronounce along with looking for the little dopamine hit that comes with getting those who already agree with you to smash the like button along with the potential for others to belligerently voice their counterargument.

Communication can so often be harsh and unyielding - no honor rather assumption, imputing motives, denunciation, no nuance. We may pride ourselves as truth tellers and discerning voices on the side of liberty but if this is our approach, we may find ourselves forgetting that God cares just as much about how we express ourselves as he does about the truth we communicate:

[1] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

Love in the Christian life is preeminent. There is a heart attitude, a demeanor that is to mark our lives in every way. An internal disposition of in love that fuels the faithful Christian life. Love is the banner over the Christian life and it is the banner over the list of exhortations that we drop into in our text. Love is not something we drum up or manufacture. We love because he first loved us.

Starting in Ch. 12 - in light of the glory and full force of the Gospel as described in chapters 1-11, The inspired apostle gives us exhortations to heed if we are to be faithful to the God who has shown us grace. These are essential marks of the faithful life. Rooted in love. Fueled by God's grace. Energized by the Holy Spirit.

Exhorts us to the faithful life that proceeds from love and is the expression of love. The faithful life is marked by I. Zealous Service II. Prayerful Endurance III. Generous Hospitality

I. Zealous Service

- A. "Do not be slothful in zeal be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord"
1. It seems best to connect the zeal we are called to with the genuine love we are exhorted to pursue
 - a) Love marked by affection and honor for others
 2. Paul is a wise pastor and he understands the temptation to be lazy in our love for others. It can be tiring to make space in our lives for others. Genuine love as described in these verses can tempt us to tune out - to count others as more important than ourselves can be exhausting - cuts against the fallen nature - especially for introverts like me.

The temptation to lose steam in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit of what is "good, well pleasing to God, and perfect," is a natural one—but it must be resisted. (Doug Moo, *NICNT: Romans*)

3. Don't be lazy rather be fervent in spirit - serve the Lord
 - a) Here we are reminded that spiritual zeal is in the first place about serving God. We serve God by loving and serving others.
 - b) Needed reminder for any who may have a misconception of spiritual zeal and fervency

Illustration: Dynamic, charismatic worship - great! Now what does Monday look like? We may be under the impression that energetic, passionate spirituality is in ecstatic worship and pursuing the realized presence of God and I say good but the true mark of zealous, fervent spirituality is found in the way we love and serve others.

- c) How we need to cultivate an internal zeal to serve God by loving and serving others. To resist the temptation to lose steam. To push back any laziness and complacency in our lifelong responsibility to reverence and serve God in every aspect of our lives.
 - d) Our spirits are energized by the Holy Spirit - thankfully - we walk in dependence on the grace and strength of God that he supplies through his presence in us
- B. There are a number of reasons that we can find ourselves losing steam - physical, psychological, spiritual - certainly giving oneself over to persistent sin.
- C. Here is a primary category to be aware of - what we take in, what we consume, what we pursue can also have a discernible dampening effect on our spiritual lives

Illustration - Sloths are slow because of their diet. They mostly eat leaves, twigs, and flowers they can easily reach from where they are hanging. Their herbivorous diet is low in energy and lacks much of the nutrients needed — like fats and protein — for a balanced meal. (Business Insider)

We need spiritual nutrients. Stuff ourselves with entertainment, hobbies, sports or consumed with the cares and concerns of this world. We need the meat, the rich fats and proteins of God's Word and the energy that he supplies by his Spirit.

D. Application

1. Parents - be aware your children are watching and are aware of what you are passionate about - not only our instruction but our example - more is caught than taught
2. You recognize a spiritual laziness in your life? A lack of zeal? Not walk around feeling condemned, assess, recognize, turn to God, receive fresh grace. Do whatever it takes to begin fueling yourself and feeding your zeal to serve the Lord - cry out to God
 - a) Don't be ok with being lukewarm!

Illustration: Jonathan Edwards 6th resolution - **Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live.**

3. Marriage of feeling and practicality - passion and practice - feel and serve God be loving and serving others WITH ZEAL
 - a) 2nd mark of the faithful life

II. Prayerful Endurance

- A. Rejoice in hope, be patient tribulation, be constant in prayer - not 3 separate isolated exhortations - **hope, endurance, and prayer are natural partners** (Doug Moo)
- B. We recall the words of the inspired apostle earlier in Romans:

[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] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] 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. (Romans 5:2-5)

1. To live in this fallen world is to regularly experience tribulation, trouble and suffering. Maybe you don't need to be reminded. Maybe trouble and suffering is a constant companion. Suffering for a long time.
 - a) The pain and sorrow of strife in your family life
 - b) The sickness that will not remit
 - c) The dark cloud of depression that greets you as you open your eyes in the morning
 - d) The temptations to anxiety in a culture that is increasingly hostile to biblical Christianity
 - e) We could go on and on - to live in this world is to know trouble - we should not be surprised

[21] When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, 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 that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:21-22)

2. That's the reality - it is through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God - be patient - endure

- a) Further, Paul says in your trouble, in your suffering, rejoice in hope, live constantly in prayer - live constantly in communion with the God of all grace - rejoicing in hope this is what faithful endurance is all about
- b) That hope, that hope must not ultimately be in the suffering going away, the trial coming to an end - we do hope, but that is not fully and finally the hope that God calls us to - we will find it quite difficult to rejoice in hope in our suffering if the ending of that suffering is the main thing we are hoping in and that trial that suffering persists.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:13)

- (1) How can one rejoice in hope in these days of trouble? By locating our hope in the grace and glory that is coming in the return of Jesus Christ
 - (a) The Bible is constantly telling us that joy-filled hope in tribulation comes with the forward look, with the anticipation of the world of glory and love that Jesus is bringing with him - a world free from all tribulation - a world of love
 - (b) Pray for relief and peace now - God kindly and generously is near
 - (c) Hope in the RENEWAL AND REDEMPTION OF ALL THINGS

Illustration: Friend with cancer - The Gospel - sweetness in the promises of future grace that only those who are experiencing suffering and trouble who put their hope in the grace that is coming experience. He is rejoicing in hope. I'm not that attached to this world.

C. Application

- 1. This should instruct and encourage any who are anxious about the state of the culture, the cultures opinion of and opposition of the Church of Christ
- 2. The world is going to going to end if my presidential candidate doesn't get in - rejoicing in hope please!
- 3. Fueled in prayer - looking to the Savior for the grace to endure patiently - more to rejoice in hope:

[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. [3] Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

- a) A reminder that much prayer doesn't come naturally - planned and pursued - we need God!
 - (1) Zealous Service, Prayerful Endurance

III. Generous Hospitality

- A. v. 13 contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Practical, tangible expressions of love -This is an exhortation in the way we care for others both inside the church and outside

- B. Contribute to the needs of the saints - we are called to care for one another practically, financially

[44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

Illustration: So many at LHC do this so well. People come to me offering to help others. Honor my wife - KITCHEN LOOKS LIKE TORNADO

1. The faithful life is one in which we move toward need. Don't need to be wealthy to do this. How can we who know and have experienced the grace of Christ - that though he was rich he impoverished himself TO DEATH ON A CROSS so that we, who were desperately poor AND UNDESERVING might become rich. Generosity is the lifestyle for those who know this infinitely lavish grace.
- C. Seek to show hospitality - not in the first place having our friends over for hot dogs and s'mores around the fire pit - I commend these too you.

Hospitality may be defined as the process by means of which an outsider's status is changed from stranger to guest. (Colin Kruse, *PCNT: Romans*)

1. We move with mercy and care for the refugee and the immigrant - it is sad to see many even in the church who seem to be calloused toward these in the name of patriotism.
2. It certainly applies to our neighbors who do not know Christ - opening up our homes so that strangers become honored guests in our homes
- D. Application
 1. COVID restrictions - social distancing - sharing meals - creative in your neighborhood - hang out in the driveway
 2. Living this way can be disrupting our routines - opening our lives and homes to others - but our if our aim is to please God - IT SHOULD BE

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:16)

- a) How sweet - could just say do it - it's the right thing to do - but oh, it is pleasing to God to live in this way
- b) This is part and parcel of genuine love

Close

Serving the Lord with zeal, prayerfully rejoicing in hope, living generously toward others - not a crushing list of commands - the voice of love guiding our steps into faithfulness

IMPOSSIBLE APART FROM GRACE - grace is not opposed to doing - grace is the reason that we do - set free to obey God

Lest any read these exhortations and find them a bit obvious and pedestrian Serving, Praying, Giving - I would do exploits for God!

Want to do great things in the name of Christ? Serve, pray, give - love. All can participate - children, teens, the busy mom with small children to those in the twilight of their life in these seemingly ordinary ways we bring great glory to God and our light will shine brightly in a dark and dying world. And such as these though considered small in the eyes of the world these are the men and women of whom the world is not worthy. Let us rekindle our zeal for the Lord and love on another, even as we endure the trials and troubles of this life - rejoicing in hope - staying near to God in prayer - and sharing with others. Let us, beloved, live faithful lives for God's glory.

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