

Patience and Prayer in Times of Trouble
Romans 12:12
#59 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – March 4, 2007

Introduction

I am pretty sure that at some time this past week you have encountered trouble. It may have been a momentary problem that has been resolved, or you may have had something take place in your life that you will be a companion for some time to come.

Learning how to deal with life's difficulties is so basic to following Christ that virtually every book in the New Testament deals at some point with the subject. And here in Romans 12:12 Paul gives us three brief commands on how we are to think and act when trouble comes our way. We are told to "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer."

Last week we looked at the first of these, and I explained how hope is a certainty, not a wish, and that our hope in trial ultimately rests in the reality that someday God will make all things new, that he will right all wrongs, that he will heal all hurts.

Before we move on to the other two commands in verse 12, I want to underscore again a concern that I have that we not disregard the reality of the future. The future sometimes seems vague and disconnected, but a biblical understanding of the future has a marked impact on the way we live our lives now. We're going to see some ways in which that is true in a few weeks. But I want to caution us about being dismissive about future hope because we can't see it. One of the ways in which we can need to not be shaped by our culture is in the way a secular culture views reality. We live in a universe created by a sovereign God, and his reality is reality. So future hope is important for us to hold onto.

Patience and Prayer

But what else does Paul say about responding to trouble? The other two commands in this verse tell us two things:

1. We can be patient if we know how God uses trouble in our lives.

What the Bible tells us:

Let's look at four passages in the New Testament:

- Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through 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. ³More than that, 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 5:1-5, ESV)
- ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:7-11, ESV)
- ²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4, ESV)
- ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3-7, ESV)

When we read these verses we can see that God uses our difficulties to build character and to test the reality and quality of our faith.

When we're young it is hard for us to see that, but as we get older, we often look back on life's most difficult moments and see how they shaped us. And that shaping can be good or bad, depending on our response.

The importance of seeing difficulty through God's eyes

That is why it is important to see difficulty through God's eyes. No one enjoys having problems. But if we can see that God is doing something good in our lives – even though we might not see it at the time – we can respond in the right way when hard times come. And the first thing we're to do is "be patient in tribulation."

What patience involves

What does it mean to be patient in tribulation. Let me suggest a few things that help us get a practical feel for what Paul is talking about:

- I choose faith over doubt – I trust that God will accomplish something good through this instead of doubting his goodness.
- I choose truth over error – I choose to believe what God says about trials instead of seeing them as God "getting me back" or as an evidence that he does not love me.
- I choose right over wrong – when attempting to find a solution to my difficulties, I will do what God approves of and reject what he does not.

These are practical ways in which we demonstrate that we accept God's hand in our lives, and our circumstances as part of his plan for us.

(To be continued on 3/11/07)