

Hope and Hospitality

This article on Romans 12:12-13 is edited from the Ligonier Ministries

God's saving grace is effectual (i.e. always effective and successful)—it always accomplishes the salvation of those to whom it is given. The Lord cannot fail to finish the good work He begins in us (Phil. 1:6-7). He will transform and is transforming us into men and women who bear His image in perfect holiness.

Of course, we cannot achieve perfect holiness in this life; as long as sin abides in us, we will always fall short of the Lord's demands in some way. Therefore, we cannot find our justification in our own good works or even in the change already started by the work of the Holy Spirit. Only Christ's perfect righteousness, imputed to us through faith in Him alone, can avail before the judgment seat of God and guarantee our heavenly citizenship (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:15-16). But justification never occurs without sanctification following on its heels (James 2:14-26). Those whom the Lord justifies are also granted His Spirit, and as we walk by this Spirit, we begin to fulfill our Creator's charge to love one another and to serve Him with zeal (Rom. 12:1-11).

As we love God and others more and more, we gain further assurance of our secure hope that this love will be perfected, that one day we will fully love the Lord our God with all that we are, and that we will love our neighbors as we love ourselves (Matt. 22:34-40; 1 John 4:7-21). This hope gives us cause to rejoice, as the Apostle Paul indicates Rom. 12:12-13. Yet as we see more clearly and rejoice more completely in the hope that God will complete the work of salvation that He has begun in us, we also understand that trials and tribulations litter the road to our final possession of this hope. Scripture clearly teaches that suffering is the lot of those who follow Christ (Acts 14:19-23). Thus, Paul also calls us to endurance in the midst of these difficulties, and following upon that, he exhorts us to constancy in prayer (Rom. 12:12). Left to ourselves, we cannot endure the pain that attends serving Christ in this fallen world, but through prayerful dependence on Him while we suffer, we are perfected over the course of our lives (James 1:2-4).

Those who love the Lord genuinely, who long for the day when their hope will be realized and their love will lack nothing, will love their brothers and sisters in tangible ways. Paul makes this point in Romans 12:13 with his exhortation, "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality." The sense in the Greek is that we are to go out of our way to provide for fellow believers who lack the basic necessities to sustain life, and that we are to welcome Christians into our homes when they are traveling or otherwise in need.

Because there were not many inns in the ancient world, hospitality was particularly necessary. That need continues today, even in countries where hotels and other lodging options are abundant. We should seek to show hospitality whenever we can, whether by providing a meal for someone in our church, welcoming missionaries, or meeting other needs. In so doing, we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the love of God is fulfilled in us.