



FOUNDATIONAL TEACHING FROM

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M I N I S T R I E S

## Character that Stands the Test

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In this letter I want to focus on one single word: *endurance*. It is not a very popular word—nor one that is easily understood. Nonetheless, I believe we are living in times when it is increasingly important that we understand what it means to endure.

The King James Version of the Bible was translated well over 300 years ago, and the meaning of some English words has changed. Normally, the King James Version uses the word *patience* where today we would use *endurance*. And where we would talk about *patience*, the King James Version uses the word *longsuffering*. *Patience* (or *longsuffering*) is being willing to put up with irritating people, situations and circumstances without losing your temper—to remain composed and not fly off the handle. It is a very valuable Christian virtue. I am well aware that I could use more of it myself. But when the King James Version uses the word *patience*, the modern equivalent is *endurance* or *perseverance*—those are the words that are used in most of the modern translations of the Bible. The verb form that the King James Version uses is usually “to endure.”

By way of introduction to my subject, we will look at verses from two texts: Matthew 24 and Mark 13. Each of these chapters is a prophetic preview given by Jesus on the Mount of Olives of the situation that would exist in the world immediately prior to His return. Many of the things that He spoke about we see very definitely manifested in the world today. My purpose in this letter, however, is not to explore prophetic interpretations, but to focus on the one characteristic that Jesus said we are going to need to get through days like this.

We often think of love as something free and spontaneous, which requires no laws and no discipline. That is incorrect. Love and discipline go hand in hand. When discipline and law break down, love grows cold.

“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”  
Matthew 24:12–13 NKJ

Notice there is a direct connection between lawlessness and lovelessness. When people become lawless, they become loveless. We often think of love as something free and spontaneous, which requires no laws and no discipline. That is incorrect. Love and discipline go hand in hand. When discipline and law break down, love grows cold. The word for *love* in verse 12 is *agape*, which refers essentially to the love of Christians. Jesus is not talking about the love of the world growing cold, but the love of Christians growing cold.

In the midst of this terribly bleak climate—lawlessness abounding and love growing cold—Jesus says, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” You have to endure to the end. The original Greek says, “He

that has endured unto the end, it is he who will be saved.”

In Mark 13 you’ll notice this warning repeated:

“Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”  
Mark 13:12–13 NKJ

This is a very somber picture of a degree of treachery and disloyalty that is rampant even within family relationships, also of Christians being hated of all men. And then the admonition is the same: endure. We must hold out. Sometimes holding out is all God asks you to do—and it can be a full-time job.

I met a Swedish missionary who had worked in France for many years. And he told me that he had visited a prison near Marseilles in the south of France where the French Huguenots (the Protestants of that time) had been imprisoned for their faith. Many of them went into the dungeon there and never came out alive. The missionary told of one prisoner who had engraved in the stone of the dungeon one single word: *résister*—the French word for *resist*. That was the message one believer left to the others who would follow him. Resist. Don’t give in. Hold out. Endure. I believe that God is speaking those words to us today. I pray that God, through His Word, will put steel in your soul and give you a spiritual backbone if you don’t already have one.

## The Fruit of Tribulation

Now let’s consider some very simple principles on how to cultivate endurance.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.  
Romans 5:1–2 NKJ

We rejoice because of what the future holds for us. But Paul goes on to say that not only do we rejoice in the light of the future, but we also rejoice in what the present offers, although it is very different.

And not only in that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.  
v. 3–4 NKJ

Where verse 3 uses the word *glory*, the same word, as used in Greek, means to rejoice, boast, or exult. And why should we exult in tribulation? Because of what tribulation does. The New American Standard Bible version says, “Tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.” Perseverance produces *proven* character in us. This is the heart of endurance—character that has stood the test. Look at verse 5:

**Patience and endurance are marks of strength; they are not marks of weakness.**

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.  
v. 5 NKJ

Here we see that love is a matter of character. In essence, we are dealing with the forming of our character.

We rejoice (boast, glory, or exult) in tribulation because tribulation is the only thing that produces perseverance. And perseverance produces proven character. I know men with whom I have walked, shared hardship, opposition, misrepresentation and misunderstanding—even misunderstanding between them and me. But today, for me, their character is proven; I know I can trust them. In the midst of treachery and lawlessness, I want to know whom I can trust.

First of all, though, I want to be sure that I can be trusted. I am well aware of the daily pressures that tempt us to serve ourselves at others' expense. But I would be horribly ashamed if pressure could make me unfaithful or disloyal to those I am committed to in the Body of Christ.

Let's look at the first chapter of Colossians:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy . . .

Colossians 1:9–11 NKJ

Isn't it wonderful to know that God wants you to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding? Where Paul says "that you may walk worthy of the Lord," keep in mind that when we are filled with the knowledge of God's will, it will affect the way we live. It will even affect how we handle adversity. It is one thing to suffer long; it is quite another thing to suffer long *with joyfulness*. It takes endurance and strength to do it. Patience and endurance are marks of strength; they are not marks of weakness.

**Some people will tell you that all you need to claim God's promise is faith. But that is not true. You need faith and endurance. It takes both.**

One of the consistent themes of Hebrews is the danger of going back on your profession of faith in Christ. There are five distinct passages in Hebrews that warn us of the danger of going back. They are some of the most solemn words in Scripture. Therefore, one of the key words that Hebrews emphasizes is this word that we are looking at: endurance.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:11–12 NKJ

Faith and endurance. Some people will tell you that all you need to claim God's promise is faith. But that is not true. You need faith and endurance. It takes both.

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Hebrews 10:35–36 NKJ

The word *confidence* means you have freedom of speech. You can talk boldly about Jesus—about what He has done for you and what He is going to do for you. You have done the will of God, but you have not yet received the promise. What do you need? Endurance. You need to hold out from the point where you did God's will and claimed the promise to the point where you actually receive the promise. Some people do the will of God and claim the promise, but they don't hold out. Then they say it didn't work. But it will not work without endurance. You need faith and endurance.

## It's a Marathon

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1 NKJ

Here Paul envisions life in an Olympic Game setting, as a race that has to be run. At the finish line there is a great throng of spectators waiting to see who will win. This throng of spectators is all the great saints of the Old Testament who finished their course and are waiting there ready to cheer us from the balconies of heaven.

Where he says “lay aside every weight,” we must think in terms of this race. The runner empties his pockets and wears the lightest, most flexible clothing he can. He doesn’t carry a single, unnecessary ounce of weight. We need to remember that some things are not sins, but they are weights that can burden you down and hold you back. They exhaust your strength or lure you into spending too much time and attention on them. Remember, this is not a sprint; it is a long, deliberate race. The characteristic that is required is endurance. Many people start off the Christian life as if it were a dash. A little while later they are panting beside the track; they’re finished and they have hardly begun the race.

The race is not to the swift,  
Nor the battle to the strong . . .

Ecclesiastes 9:11 NKJ

It isn’t speed or strength, but endurance that counts.

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience [or endurance] have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

James 1:2–4 NKJ

Do you count it all joy when you fall into various trials? Well you need to. I need to. I need to praise God that He counts me worthy of the trial and that He trusts me enough to let me be tried.

Bear in mind always that the trial is for our good. James is saying if you hold out—if you will go through the test—it will surely shape every area of your character and personality. Don’t give up too quickly. The test will make you a complete, fully-rounded Christian. There won’t be areas in your character that have not been dealt with.

One of the great tests that really checks on our character is the test of close, committed fellowship—such as the small group where you meet every week with the same people and share your life with them. After a little while, it becomes uncomfortably clear to you that there are some areas of your life that have never really been dealt with. You realize that when you weren’t too close to people or too intimate, you could cover them up. But when you are exposed week by week to regular, intimate, close fellowship, you either have to back out or correct your life.

My friend Bob Mumford once said, “Suppose there are ten areas in our character that need to be changed. You can probably deal with six yourself. But the remaining four are going to need other people to put their finger on.” I think that is a pretty good average. If I do not expose myself to others, I can deceive myself about areas of my character. But committed fellowship doesn’t afford me the same opportunities to deceive myself. Somebody once said fellowship is “roof off, walls down.” We don’t mind getting the roof off because God sees through the roof anyhow. But what about getting the walls down and letting people see? There is no greater test of our Christian character than close fellowship.

In my next letter we will explore this theme further. Until then, meditate on these Scriptures and ask the Lord to help you build a character of endurance.

Adapted from “Endurance” (4053).

For further study we recommend audiocassette “Progressive Commitment.”

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