



### Introduction

Paul continues his list in verses 11-13 and we will continue to look at it through a view of mercy! As I memorize these verses, I can just see Paul pouring out his concern for the church and for individuals Christians, that they be sold out to Christ and His purposes. Paul had been zealous before but it was for the traditions of men. Paul was now a follower of Christ and zeal for Him had consumed Paul. In these passages he calls us as Christians to the same kind of lifestyle.

### Looking at the verses and looking at our lives

As usual, different versions will give us added perspective, so let's take a look:

*"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."* (NIV)

*"Not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality."* (NASV)

*"Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality."* (Message)

*"Do not be lazy but work hard, serving the Lord with all your heart. Be joyful because you have hope. Be patient when trouble comes, and pray at all times. Share with God's people who need help. Bring strangers in need into your homes."* (NCV)

*"Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality."* (KJV)

For these passages I would like to zoom in on some of the words used in the different versions. Let's take this phrase by phrase.

### Zealous diligence

The original word for this first phrase carried a connotation of haste. In our culture we are hastily pressed and driven for many things. In this phrase Paul calls us to have a sense of driven zeal about our walk with Christ, to have an urgency that overcomes us and drives us! I love the phrases here in the different versions. Paul tells us we can't be lacking in zeal, lagging behind in diligence, burnt out, lazy or slothful. Too often that is what we allow in our walk with Christ. As we look at the placement of this phrase, we see Paul had already listed some things and then he interjects this statement before He lists some others. It is almost like he is stopping for a minute to tell us, "Living like this is going to take everything you have, so decide now to press in and really be committed to it." What great words these are for us who have made the commitment to memorize. We can't be lacking in diligence as we press on to finish memorizing this passage. We can't allow ourselves to get lazy or burnt out. Paul uses the word "never". In other words there is no reason for us to ever have a "doldrum" spirit about any part of our walk with Christ. That is not just true in our memorizing but in every part of our walk. Zealous diligence, it is the way of the Christian life!

### Spiritual Fervor in serving the Lord

The original word for this phrase carries the metaphor of boiling water. The idea is that there is always a stirring up, a heating up in our spiritual life as we serve. This phrase tells us to keep it that way. In order to keep water boiling you have to keep it on a flame. We can get greater understanding as we apply that thought to our walk with Christ. Many times the Bible likens the Holy Spirit to fire. We can make the connection that we must always have our lives on the flame of the Holy Spirit. Just as we cannot wish water to boil, we cannot wish our spiritual fervor to just stir up either. We can't maintain a spiritual fervor by ourselves. We must stay closely connected to the Holy Spirit if we are to keep our spiritual fervor.

### *Joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer*

I believe these 3 instructions are the keys for keeping our zeal and spiritual fervor. We can't ever lose hope, we can't quit when it gets hard, and we have to pray all the time. I love these phrases because they are totally direct. If I get off course, they are a quick check for me. Am I being joyful in hope, am I being patient in affliction, am I being faithful in prayer. These are the things you will see in a transformed life. (Remember we are still connected to verse 2, it all fits together!) Let's look a little closer.

#### *Joyful in hope*

Several years ago I decided to live with a conviction of hope. As a Christian I personally believe there is no reason for me to ever lose hope. One of my favorite life verses is Psalm 27:13-14. It says, "I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage, yes wait for the Lord." That tells me that if I believe God is good, I can't choose despair. Oh there are plenty of things I don't understand and I am waiting on God concerning them. But I am convinced God is good, so there is always hope in Him, in any and every situation. Hoping in Him, I choose to have a joyful anticipation of what He is going to do even when things look bleak. This phrase is certainly connected to the ones before it though, because I will not be able to have that perspective unless I stay closely connected to the Holy Spirit, allowing Him to stir up my spiritual fervor to believe in the goodness of God!

#### *Patient in affliction*

The word patient is used again and again in these verses. There aren't a lot of other ways to say it. When trouble is there, we have to believe in the goodness of God and be patient for Him to work through it. That is challenging in our instant society but God promises to build us up in Him (James 1:2-4) as we do so.

#### *Faithful in prayer*

Once again these things go together. I can't be joyful in hope, or patient in affliction, if I don't keep talking to my Father. As I am faithful to pray and communicate with Him, He keeps reminding me of these things. It is a common principle that communication is very important in times of conflict and in times of peace. I must make a commitment to be faithful in prayer at all times, communicating with my Father. In any strong relationship, sometimes you just talk, because it is the right thing to do. You communicate to continue the relationship. You may not even feel like talking, but you do so because it is right. Well, it is right to talk to God too. We must be faithful to that, knowing that it strengthens our relationship to Him.

#### *Share with God's people who are in need*

As you look at the original language of this phrase there is a strong connotation of becoming united. The idea of sharing is a joining with, a linking together to offer your assistance. This whole phrase appears to be closely connected to the ideas of verse 3 where we are told not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought and verses 4-5 where there is the idea of the body working together. Paul continues to impress the idea that we are in this together, so let's put aside selfish thinking and be transformed to that way of thinking.

#### *Practice hospitality*

When we think of the word practice, we have ideas of attending a session to learn how to improve. While that may be our cultural definition, the original word for "practice" in this verse carries a different kind of idea. The thought is one of running after something quickly and with urgency. The word "hospitality" in this verse really conveys the idea of showing the love of Christ to strangers. That can be challenging in our non trusting world and yet there are opportunities around us daily. God's Word makes it plain here that we are to run after opportunities to share His love with people we don't even know.

#### *Consider*

Would you use the word zealous to describe your life in Christ? Why or why not?

How is your spiritual fervor? Are you staying closely connected to the Holy Spirit? How do you know?

Is there any area where you have lost hope, any trial where you are not patient, any time where you need to be more faithful in prayer? Ask the Lord to do some transforming work in your life in these areas?

Imagine an opportunity where you could show Christ's love to strangers. Make a plan of how you will do that.

#### *Pray*

**"Lord I want to be zealous for the things that matter to you! Help me to serve you with fervor in all things."**