



ROMANS Part 114

Chapter 12:6-13

Fondness and affection for one another.



Now, having graces excelling, in accord with the grace which is given to us, whether prophecy, exercise it in accord with the analogy of the faith; 7 or dispensing, in the dispensation; or the teacher, in teaching; 8 or the entreater, in entreaty; the sharer, with generosity; the presider, with diligence; the merciful one, with glee. 9 Let love be unfeigned. Abhorring that which is wicked, clinging to good, 10 Let us have fond affection for one another with brotherly fondness, in honor deeming one another first, 11 in diligence not slothful, fervent in spirit, slaving for the Lord, 12 rejoicing

in expectation, enduring affliction, persevering in prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality.

The body of Christ is an amazing, supernatural organism. Some of my acquaintances wonder why I don't join a church. They think that I need to be accountable to a body of people. I say, "I *am* accountable to a body of people." Of course, they think that this body of people must belong to an observable, recognizable, human-labeled institution founded upon brick, mortar, and the accolades and titles that humans are known to bestow upon one another. Nope. The body of people I belong to has no walls, no diplomas, and no means by which to expel me from it. Lucky me. Thus, I'm in it for the eons and beyond.

ENTREATY

Everyone in the body of Christ has some sort of gift. It may be something as simple as "dispensing," which is giving. One can give time, care, conversation, good advice. Entreaty is in short supply, so if you are an entreater, then please entreat away. The Greek word translated "entreaty" is *paraklesis* and the English elements are BESIDE-CALLING. Call someone beside you. Proximity to another human body is underrated. We're all too much on the cell phones and computers. Bring someone beside you for the purpose of dispensing something. It need not be a member of the body of Christ to whom you dispense, but it ought to be *especially* a member of the body of Christ. "Consequently, then, as we have occasion, we are working for the good of all, yet especially for the family of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

SHARING

Remember when our parents always insisted that we share our toys with our siblings? We would begrudgingly

give up the rubber ball, the truck, the doll, the stuffed puppy, or the Legos. Now here is our apostle calling upon us to share with our fellow adults. Whenever I fly from here, I let my landlady Giuliana use my car. Conversely, whatever is in the fridge that is hers, she says, “Go ahead and take it, Martin.” This applies to eggs, butter, cheese, white wine and other such things. Anything that fits in the fridge, basically, she is willing to share. I do the same for her. But whenever I borrow one of her eggs, I will replace it with three eggs. “It is always a good deal for you to let me borrow from you,” I say. “It is better to give than to receive, especially for you. You will always come out ahead.”

I live in a bed and breakfast establishment. I sometimes use other people’s shampoos. (Please don’t tell anyone that I do this.) My shampoo ran out a week ago. I only use a dab of other people’s products. But still, I really should not do it. I ought to refrain. This does not qualify as giving, but taking. The owners of the shampoos have no idea that they are giving, and I do not plan to tell them. But I will make sure that the “giver” gets credited to their account at the Great White Throne. They will be happy to have known me then. Some are happy now. Even in this life, I try to find some way to make it up to people. (I finally did. I replenished my own shampoo.)



GENEROSITY

Generosity falls under the category of sharing, although generosity is more about the amount of sharing. You can either share a little or a lot. Unbeknownst to them, the people from whom I “borrow” shampoo, share a little. When I share my car with Giuliana, that is sharing a lot. I think it is generous. But then again, Giuliana is extremely generous with her raisins, to the point that I have probably bought her ten large boxes of raisins by now, having eaten only three. You, the saints, have been very generous with me over the years, sustaining me in this work. You will be paid back for this by God, at the dais of Christ. As I have always told you, “You’re backing the right horse.” I am generous with you with my time. I have written literally tens of thousands of emails and letters over the last twenty-three years. This takes its toll on me, but I pay the toll because this

particular booth sits smack in the middle of this particular highway. I do not want to be indebted to anyone.

Back in the day, my wife and I used to tithe. I knew that it was a Jewish law and that, as a member of the nations under a different evangel, I didn’t have to do it, but I used the 10% figure as a rule of thumb to force myself to at least do something. There are other ways, but we used this way. So I put 10% of my paycheck every two weeks into a pot. The money grew and grew until a need manifested itself. One time, we had a ridiculous amount of money in the pot: \$2,000 dollars. It had built up over much time, while we waited for a need to present itself. There was more money in that pot than what we were worth. That is a fact; I think we had only a couple hundred dollars in the bank, if that. It was a lean time. Then a need arose with a family member, and I remember that my wife and I put the money in an envelope and gave it to this person and his wife, by stealth. We put it in their car. Christmas came



early for them. We got them out of a terrible bind. We did this more than once, for many people. It always felt good. But it was always shocking to give away more than what we were worth. It was a widow’s mite thing. But I know that “what goes around comes around,” and I knew then that we were casting our bread upon the waters and that it would return to us. For me, it has returned overboard. Not that God needed this from me. Not that God would refuse generosity were I a miserable Scrooge. But there does seem to be a principle of reciprocity in play.

TEACHING

Teachers teach. You don't need a degree from an accredited college or a license from the state to do this. Teach your son how to shoot a basketball. Teach your daughter how to play Gin Rummy. Teach someone how to use the television remote. Do it with patience. This requires great patience. How many damn buttons are needed on these remote controls? How many functions can there possibly be? It requires an education these days just to turn on the television. I have not owned a television for ten years, so I am not in the remote control business. I am not in the business of understanding it. Most people have three or four remotes. They never know which one does what. They press many buttons in vain. There are more buttons, conglomerately, on people's remotes, than exist on the space shuttle.



I am a teacher. I teach people on the highway not to dawdle in the left lane. It is amazing the number of people in this country, out on the Interstates, who do not realize what the left lane is for. It's a *passing* lane. But they don't generally know this, these people. No one has ever taught them. No one has any business being in the left lane on the Interstate unless they are passing a slower vehicle. After one passes a slower vehicle on the right, one must immediately return to the right lane. But no. People don't do this. They get into the left lane and stay there, as though it is an optional driving lane. Which it isn't. They take up residence over there in the left lane. They ought not do that. It's a *passing* lane. So they languish in the left lane, oftentimes going only as fast as the traffic in the right lane, meaning that now no one behind them can pass. I have seen traffic backed up for several miles because drivers didn't know how to pass in the left lane and then get out of the left lane as quickly as possible and back to the right lane.

This was an epidemic in Colorado. I lived in Colorado for a year, and the state legislature should really initiate a mandatory re-education program about the purpose of the left lane, because drivers in Colorado are clueless. Colorado resi-

dents should not be able to renew their licenses until they take a course on the purpose of the left lane. I would have gladly taught the course. I would have named the course, "Pass On the Left, Then Get the Hell Back Over To The Right, Moron."

While I was living in Colorado, I visited Ohio. While driving on Interstate 71 from Cleveland to Columbus, I encountered an uneducated driver in the left lane, driving side-by-side next to another car in the right lane, at the same speed. I tried to comfort myself. I tried to comfort myself concerning Colorado. I remember thinking to myself, "Well, at least this is not exclusively a Colorado problem." It made me feel a little better about Colorado. But then, as I got closer to the car in the left lane, I noticed that it had a Colorado license plate.

I have taken it upon myself to educated these "left lane campers," as I call them (LLC's). They have to learn sometime. Apparently, no one has ever taught them. In order to educate them, I must persecute them, somewhat. I love them, but love must be tough. Love must be persecutory. My first lesson is to run up on their bumper. I am hoping that they will snap out of their lethargy, or out of their somnolence, or out of their actual nap (or whatever daydream they are in), and realize that they are supposed to pass the car on the right with authority and then get out of the left lane so that *I* can pass the slug in the right lane with authority. There should be no slugs in the left lane, no, but only drivers passing with authority. All the slugs should be in the right lane, where they belong. The right lane is the Slug Lane.

When my "run up" doesn't work, I do not stop being a teacher. I now resort to flashing my lights. Some people are awakened by flashing lights. Others are not. If this fails, I honk my horn. Apparently, some drivers ambling



along in the left lanes of the Interstates of this country are actually deaf. I have no problem with deaf people, unless they are dilly-dallying in the left lane, in which case I have a *great* problem with them; in fact, it is a monumental problem that has driven me to become an educator on the highways. My last option is the “love tap,” when I actually run into the car in front of me. I also call this my “amusement-park-bumper-car” move. I have yet to resort to this advanced lesson, but it makes me no less of a teacher. Someone has to do it eventually, and I guarantee you that it will be me.

PRESIDING

A presider presides. It’s as simple as that. A presider takes charge and runs stuff. The Greek word translated “presider” is *proistemi*. The English elements are “BEFORE-STAND.” A presider stands up before others can do it and takes care of business. Don’t you love it when a presider does this? I do. This works extra fine when it is time to organize a family reunion. No one wants to organize a family reunion. But I misspeak, because there is *sometimes* someone who has a penchant for presiding, and he or she takes over the family reunion. Everyone is very happy for the other person to take over, because few people want to be bothered.

My ex-father-in-law, Art White, one time presided over the White Family Reunion picnic. In his case, I think that he was shamed into it. This is not a good reason to preside, but Art White was cajoled, shamed, maneuvered, misled and pushed into presiding over this annual event. He gave a great speech when finally the day arrived for the White Family Reunion. I’ll never forget it. He started off with a bang, saying, “You may have been wondering why there are no Chinese people in our family. It is because two Wongs never made a White.” I can’t remember the rest of his speech. Who cares? With the first sentence, he had already topped himself and brought down the house.

MERCIFUL

Paul says that members of the body of Christ ought to be “merciful, with glee.” I agree with this. If you’re going to be merciful to someone, be happy about it, even giddy. For instance, if you decide to rescue a drowning person from the ocean, don’t be grouchy about it. Don’t swim out there and say, “Grab onto me!” or “Stop fighting!” or “Just relax!” This could make the victim



think that you are merely rescuing them out of a sense of duty, rather than of glee. To prevent this from happening, do what I do whenever I rescue drowning people from the ocean. I first introduce myself. I say, “Hi, I’m Martin Zender!” (I always add the exclamation point), and then I smile. Always. I don’t care how much salt water I draw into my mouth, it is very important to smile gleefully while engaged in a merciful act such as an ocean rescue. I need the victim to know that not only am I merciful enough to save them, but that I am merciful with glee. I usually tell them a joke on the way into shore. One of my favorite jokes in this situation is, “Did you hear the one about the guy who got his leg bitten off by a shark?” (I forget how that joke ends.) There are also a couple Titanic jokes that I know. I know two jokes about the Edmund Fitzgerald. In case my victim does not laugh at my jokes, I make sure that I laugh at my *own* jokes. I usually don’t like to do this, but I will do it in extenuating circumstances. Rescuing a drowning person from the ocean is definitely an extenuating circumstance.

GRACE AND PROPHECY

In verse six Paul says, “Now, having graces excelling, in accord with the grace which is given to us, whether prophecy, exercise it in accord with the analogy of the faith...” and on he goes about these things that I have just mentioned. My point here (and Paul’s point) is that, since we have been given excelling grace, then we ought to be good

to others with just as much grace as we have been given. It's a "pay it forward" kind of thing. It's not so hard. Paul is not telling us to do a good act with more grace than we have. No. How is that even possible? But we are to remember that God has given us much grace, and so we ought to give that much grace away. Don't worry about exhausting the grace, because it seems to me that the more grace you give away, the more God replenishes it. God replenishes grace much more quickly than I replenish my own shampoo.

So if you have six ounces of grace and give six ounces away (in accord with Romans 12:6) as you teach your daughter Gin Rummy, or as you crowd someone in the left lane on the Interstate (for their own good, of course) or as you rescue some hapless sourpuss in the Atlantic Ocean from drowning, I am convinced that, by giving out that six ounces of grace, God will replenish you with seven. He does with grace what I do with Giuliana's raisins. This is only a theory; I have no proof for it. I like to believe it. It hasn't happened to me yet, but it must have happened with someone, at some time. If not, then you will at least break even in the grace department.

Prophecy is a bygone gift. Don't try to prophesy; you will fail. You cannot predict the future or say the words of God. You can say the words that God has already said in Scripture, but this is not prophecy. This is saying the words that God has already said in Scripture. Prophecy, back in Paul's day, was a gift. It was a gift necessary for the completion of God's Word. God's word is now complete (Colossians 1:25), so prophecy is no longer needed. Paul himself said that, when maturity came to the body of Christ, prophecy would be discarded (1 Corinthians 13:8). Maturity has come.

UNFEIGNED LOVE

"Let love be unfeigned. Abhorring that which is wicked, clinging to good" (Romans 12:9).

Sometimes when you love someone, you have to fake it. You know that you love the person but you can't work it up in the moment, so you "fake it until you make it." This is fine. I do it when I need to. I will force myself to say one nice thing, or at least to think one nice thought, and then I depend on the nice thing or the nice thought to reproduce itself in the manner of a human zygote. It usually happens. This is love that is only *temporarily* feigned. The love itself is real, but it just has its rough moments.

I abhor what is wicked. I just watched a terrible movie, "The Accountant," with Ben Affleck. (I didn't watch the

movie *with* Ben Affleck; the movie *starred* Ben Affleck.) It may have been the worst movie I have ever seen—with the exception of "Something About Mary." As far as I can tell, the theme of "The Accountant" is that autistic people can become dedicated assassins. It takes great concentration to shoot people directly in the head, and no one can do this better than the autistic person. This is the theme and the moral of the movie. So many people were shot in the head in this movie—shot by Ben Affleck and others—than no one was left alive at the end except for maybe three people. The violence in this movie was so overwhelmingly gratuitous that only people with deep-seated emotional issues (or people holding another person's hand during the movie—but I repeat myself) go the distance. When the movie was over, I said to the people watching the movie with me, "Aww. Is the movie over? I was hoping that one more person was going to be shot. Another person could have been shot in the last two minutes of the movie. There were still three people left. There was still time."

I am always amazed at the hypocrisy of Hollywood. Most Hollywood types are Liberals, and most Liberals are against people owning guns. Liberals hate gun ownership. If it was up to Liberals, we would all be unarmed, leaving a potentially evil government a clear path to subduing us. And yet no one exalts guns more than Hollywood. This generation of movie-goers has been so dumbed down and been so inured to violence



that if someone is not shot every half minute or so in a film, or if a car does not explode in the first forty-five seconds, then the dumbed-down movie-goer loses interest and withdraws to play a video game, where he or she can shoot people and make cars explode at will.

"The Accountant" was wicked, and I abhorred it. (I routinely "cling to good"—in accord with Paul's expectation—when I watch movies like "Mary Poppins," "The

Sound of Music,” or “Field of Dreams.”) So I definitely obeyed Paul here in abhorring evil. “The Accountant” was overly complicated. There were about seventeen plot lines. I can keep track of three plot lines, but no more. After that, I get lost. Movies are supposed to be relax-

ing; they’re not supposed to be like some Chinese riddle or Rubik’s Cube. The screenwriters probably worked ten years to produce a script so complex that it would earn them an Oscar for “Most Complicated, Least Understandable Film.” They must have dared themselves, these screenwriters, to stuff as much intrigue as possible into two hours and three minutes, and then expected viewers to follow it in real time over a period of what seemed to me like two years and three months.

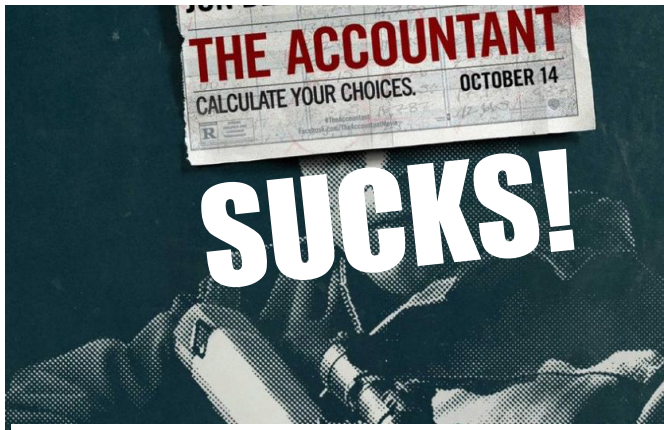
Well, no. You self-pleasing, Stanley Kubrick-wannabes labored in vain. I lost the plot of your pretentious, self-indulgent offering in about two minutes and three seconds. Neither did I care. From two minutes and three seconds onward, I simply looked at moving pictures. I didn’t care about any of the characters, if that’s indeed what they were. I simply watched people getting shot in the head. Even though I had no idea what was happening in the movie from the two-minute and three-second mark on (except that autistic people are experts at shooting other people, precisely, in the head), the only reason I did *not* walk away from this abortion of celluloid was that I didn’t want to offend the people I was with and stop holding the hand I was holding throughout the film. So you can see that I was acting with brotherly kindness. I also made the person whose hand I was holding feel gleeful. I killed two birds with one stone. This is not as good as Affleck, who routinely killed five people with one bullet.

FOND AFFECTION

“Let us have fond affection for one another with brotherly fondness, in honor deeming one another first” (Romans 12:10).

If there is anything I love more than affection, it’s fond affection. The only thing better would be tender, warm, *enamored* fond affection. I go just about nuts with that. There should be more of it. What is the matter with us? Are we afraid that people might get the wrong idea? Or are we afraid that they might get the *right* idea?

I never had a brother, but I know that Paul is using a figure of speech here. I have one sister. We are fond of one another (most of the time), and we got along great when we were growing up—except for one time during a Monopoly game. This was the biggest fight that we ever had, during this Monopoly game. My sister Kelly insisted that one could not collect rent while one’s properties were mortgaged, and I said, “Are you *kidding* me?” Of course we went for the rule book, and in those days I was hotter for



Piles up plotlines like an overbuilt house of cards that comes crashing down at the first well-earned guffaw of ridicule.

October 17, 2016 | [Full Review...](#)



Richard Brody
New Yorker
★ Top Critic



Affleck plays a math wiz whose position on the autism spectrum allegedly makes him a perfect assassin. That notion is offensive on so many levels, especially in the service of such low-grade crime fiction, that it's painful to watch.

October 15, 2016 | Rating: 1/4 | [Full Review...](#)



Peter Travers
Rolling Stone
★ Top Critic

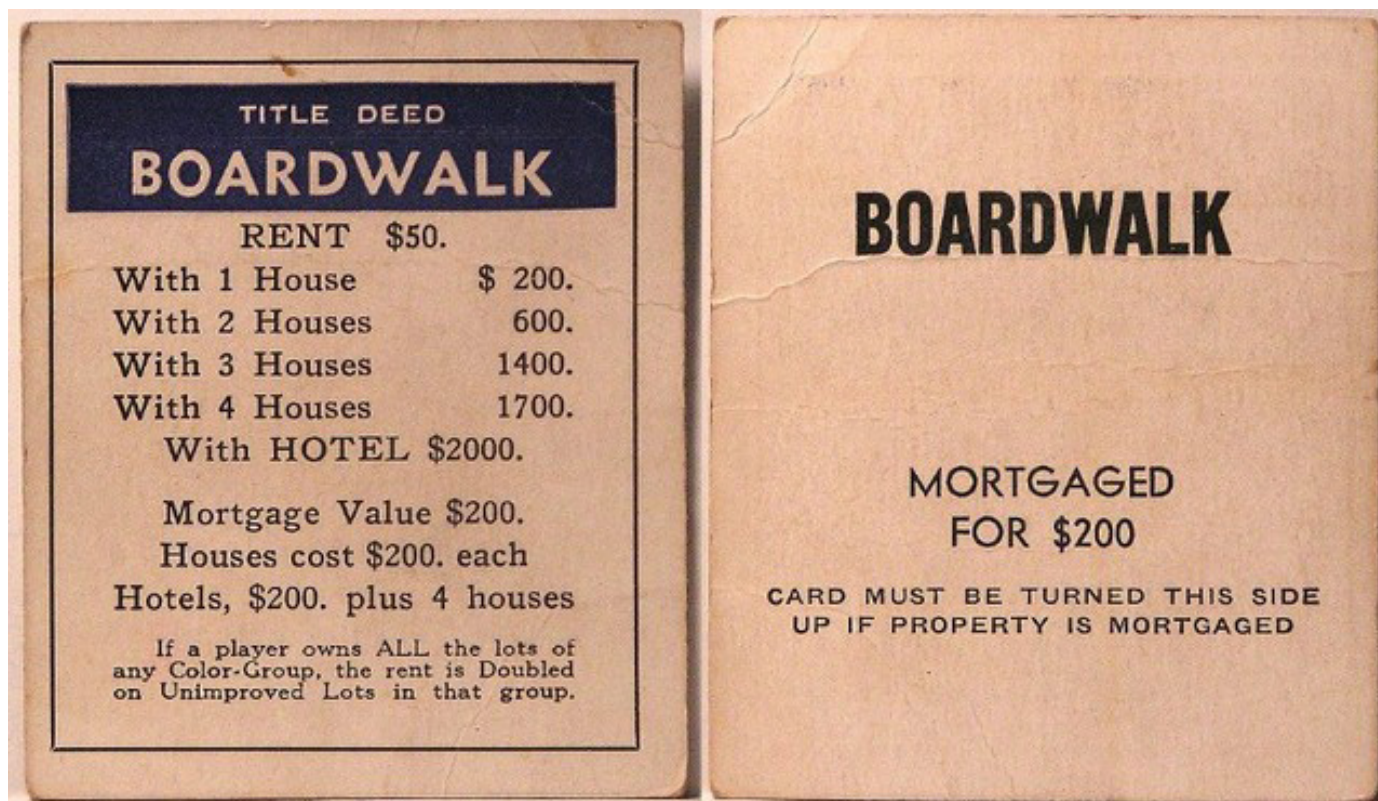


All the origin-story stuff, mysterious machinations, and even action-scenes come off as calculated contrivances in the end.

January 1, 2017 | [Full Review...](#)



Brian Gibson
Vue Weekly (Edmonton, Canada)



the Monopoly rule book than I am today for Scripture. But the rule here was ambiguous.

There was another player at the board, a neighbor kid named "Chuck." His name was Alika Hondros (he was Greek), but we called him "Chuck." Kelly said, "Chuck, what do *you* think? Surely no one could even think of collecting money in the face of a mortgage crisis." I said to Kelly, "You're leading the witness!" My objection was overruled. Chuck was afraid to give his opinion because he knew that his decision could possibly break up the family that he had come to know and love because we were the only home in the neighborhood with a swimming pool. It could be that Chuck didn't even know that properties could be mortgaged in the first place. Chuck was not exactly the shiniest metal game piece in the Monopoly box. I can't remember the outcome of this trial. I just know that it was a Barnabas/Saul thing between Kelly and me. I was Barnabas and she was Saul. If I had been spiritual then, I would have put Kelly first. I would have given her the benefit of the rulebook ambiguity. She should have done the same for me, had she been spiritual. But she was the spawn of Satan back then. Can you imagine a life when people put other people's needs ahead of their own? Imagine a marriage where the husband puts the wife first, and vice-versa. Surely a marriage like that would last five years.

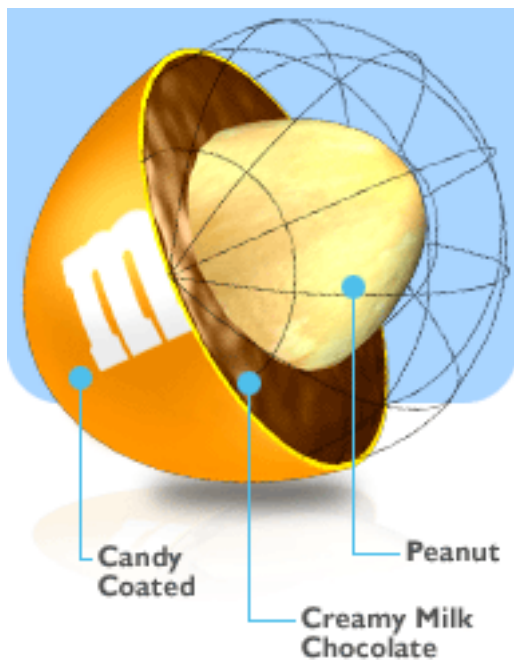
Kelly and I eventually moved on to Antioch and took care of other, more important business. However, we have not ever played another Monopoly game together. Neither of us has since passed "Go." Neither of us has collected \$200.00.

In diligence not slothful, fervent in spirit, slaving for the Lord, 12 rejoicing in expectation, enduring affliction, persevering in prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, pursuing hospitality" (Romans 12:11-13).

If you're going to be diligent, do not be slothful about it. Do not be a slothful person who is not slothful—*please*. And if you're going to have spirit, you may as well be spirited about it. I really have little patience for anything else. I realize that patience is a fruit of the spirit, so I may be screwing myself here by admitting this to you. But I am patient about my lack of patience, so my spiritual fruit abounds after all.

Rejoicing in expectation is better than being down in the dumps over expectation. Who has a greater expectation than we do? We are promised by God to be glorified, to be lifted from Earth to meet Jesus, and then to be seated at the right hand of God for the eons, where rent for mortgaged properties can *always* be collected, whether you are in jail or not.

The only way you can not be said to be enduring affliction is if you kill yourself. Anything short of suicide means that you are enduring affliction. I don't care if you have to eat three bags of M&M's a day while enduring affliction, you're still enduring it. If you do have to eat M&M's, try to eat peanut M&M's. If someone had given me this advice ten years ago, I would have scoffed. I used to harbor great animosity toward people who ate peanut M&M's. I thought that they were too pure and holy for their own britches. I thought they were trying to make me feel like a sinner because all I wanted was pure chocolate and screw the legume. But now I see the wisdom of coating a legume with milk chocolate. At least there is some nutrition to be had. ("Nutrition"; the same reason why I mocked the legume back in the day.) Besides, I have come to appreciate the crunch of the legume beneath the colorful candy shell. Besides, I



like the size of the chocolate and candy-coated peanut when I crush the M&M between my molars. Nothing like it, wow. It's larger than a plain M&M. It and other things like it have kept me from killing myself over the years, and thus great affliction has been endured while the legume has provided needed fiber and protein.

I also endured much affliction while watching "The Accountant," and you can too, though I would not recommend it. You would be better off spending a day and a night in a swamp. Or being beaten by your own countrymen.

I persevere in prayer every day. This is because I pray



without ceasing. Paul told the saints to "pray without ceasing" in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, so I wonder why he recommends *persevering* in prayer here, as persevering seems like a downgrade from not ceasing. Perhaps not ceasing and persevering are the same thing. If I am missing something here, please let me know. If you have nothing to offer in this department, theologically, then at least send me a bag of peanut M&M's. I am thanking you in advance.

Some would say that "contributing to the needs of the saints" and "pursuing hospitality" could possibly mutually exclude itself, as many saints neither want nor need people coming to their houses. The person hoping to pursue hospitality in the manner of Paul runs over to someone's home, rings the doorbell and says, "Howdy neighbor!" It is possible that the neighbor could then say, "This is *not* what I *need* right now," and so the whole enterprise would self-destruct. It's hard to know what to say or do in such a circumstance. I say take the chance. Paul would say, "take the chance" and just pursue hospitality. If you are turned away, send your neighbor a DVD of "The Accountant." They will never be the same. —MZ