

Patience

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As societies go, Modern America has a notably impatient culture. South Americans might speak of *manana*, but for us, everything must happen now, now, now! We eat fast food for lunch, go to convenience stores for snacks, and sign up for Amazon Prime so that we can get two-day shipping for all our purchases online.

When we are so busy and so rushed, we often have little time for patience. This is a problem generally, but especially so in the matters of the spirit. Spiritual growth takes patience. Evangelism takes patience. Bearing with others takes patience. If we aren't willing to be patient people, we will never succeed at any of those things. Even though it goes against our cultural grain, we must learn to wait and endure instead of giving up and moving on. Let's spend our time together this evening, then, considering the subject of patience.

Why Be Patient?

Now, building patience isn't the most enjoyable activity in the world. It's one that most people have no interest in pursuing. Why should we be any different? Why should we be patient? The Bible provides several answers to this question, but the first and most direct is that **IT PLEASES GOD**. We see this point raised in 1 Peter 2:19-20. In context, Peter is speaking to servants who have unreasonable masters, but the point applies to all of us. When we do right and suffer because of it, we need to respond to that with patience.

However, we shouldn't limit the application to times of intentional persecution. Any time we patiently seek righteousness in the face of some provocation, it finds favor with God, because it's in times like those that we show how much God matters to us. Just about anybody can behave well when they're not being provoked. Nobody says, "My kids are listening to me, they're playing quietly with their toys, they're not attempting to murder each other, but I'm just about to blow my stack at them!" If we feel that way, it's probably a sign of some other problems!

Instead, we struggle to be righteous when our kids are ignoring our existence, when they are determined to locate and break every contraband item in the house, and when they're treating their siblings as if the conduct of Cain were an approved example. That is when we are tempted to lose control ourselves, to discipline in anger instead of in love. However, it's also when keeping a grip on our tempers, for God's sake as well as for our children's, truly glorifies Him.

Second, we should choose to be patient because **WE WANT TO SERVE**. Paul highlights the importance of patience to the Lord's bondservant in 2 Timothy 2:24-25. There are lots of ways for us to serve God. We can look to serve Him by gently correcting the erring, as in the specific context of this passage. We can serve God by helping in the assembly, teaching Bible classes, visiting shut-ins, and a host of other good works. However, one thing is true of all of them. If we want to be useful as a servant, we have to be patient.

I guarantee you that any time we try to serve God, the devil knows it and doesn't like it. He's going to do everything in his power to make us mad, discourage us, or overwhelm us, so that we will give up on God's work instead of continuing in it. If we're amenable to quitting, Satan will always hand us a reason. Lots of brethren do quit. They sit in the pews and let the work go on around them. If you talk to them about it, they'll have a list of grievances. They'll talk about this one time they tried to teach the lost, and it didn't do any good. They'll talk about some blowup about a Bible class five years ago, so they don't teach Bible classes anymore. Sometimes, grievances real and imagined will drive Christians out of the church altogether. The bottom line, though, is that all those brethren aren't willing to be patient. They aren't willing to work through the tough times to keep serving, and a servant who won't do that is useless to God.

Third, we should be patient because **WE WILL REAP** if we are. Consider Paul's words in Galatians 6:9. There are many different ways in which our patience is tested. As we just observed, it will be tested when we're doing the Lord's work, and it will be tested in the provocations of everyday life. When we are patient and godly throughout all these challenges, it cannot help but have an effect. Sooner or later, we are going to make a difference for good. Our friend that we've been talking to about Jesus, she might not obey the gospel right now, but maybe she will 20 years from now, or maybe another friend will prove more receptive when we reach out to him. Our children might still act like hooligans tomorrow, but sooner or later, they will profit from the example of our faith and patience. Maybe this clerk in customer service who's been having a really bad day won't notice when we are kind and polite, but sooner or later, somebody will notice and give us an opportunity to glorify God. In other words, friends, it's not enough to be patient. We have to be patient about being patient. We have to keep on plugging away at doing what's right, even if there are all kinds of provocations not to, because eventually that labor will bear fruit. It might not bear fruit in the way that we hoped or expected, but it will bear fruit. God's word as revealed in our lives will have the result that He desires.

Finally, we should be patient because **OUR LABOR IS NOT VAIN**. Paul tells us so in 1 Corinthians 15:58. This is a punch-line verse, but the argument for which it is the punch line isn't about working hard for the Lord. Instead, it's about the resurrection from the dead. Paul's point is that we should persevere in doing good because the resurrection from the dead is real, and if we are faithful, we will share in it.

My crystal ball conked out years ago. I don't know how my work for the Lord is going to turn out in this life, but I know for certain how it is going to turn out in the life to come. God has made me a promise, and I know He will keep his word. And that, friends, is the very best reason of all to keep going, to patiently continue in doing good. We will inherit eternal life if we do. Sure, there are all kinds of frustrations in this life, and that's true for me just as much as it is for you. Anybody who thinks being a preacher ISN'T frustrating has never tried it! Preacher or no, we want everything to go our way smoothly. We want immediate results for our hard work. Results, though, are God's business, not ours. Our business is to do our best at glorifying Him, and if we do, He will surely glorify us.

Learning Patience

It's clear from the Scripture that if we want to go to heaven, we're going to need patience to get there. In the final portion of our study this morning, let's see what the Bible says about how to learn that patience. First, we must **ABANDON VICE**. Consider Paul's reasoning in 1 Timothy 6:10-11. According to this text, if Timothy pursued the love of money, then among other things, he wouldn't be able to develop patience. This makes sense. After all, greed and materialism are about instant gratification. We want things right now, we want financial security right now, and we are willing to abandon even our service to the Lord to get them. By contrast, waiting on the Lord is a patient alternative.

However, the same thing is true of most, if not all, sins. Consider, for instance, the young Christian who goes out and commits fornication. He is so intent on sexual pleasure that he isn't willing to wait until marriage. He is impatient. Likewise, consider the slightly older Christian who has an affair. She isn't willing to invest time and effort in making her marriage better, so she finds somebody else who will fulfill her expectations immediately. In short, she too is impatient.

Sin is all about finding a quick, easy solution to our problems that tramples God and other people in the process. It is the opposite of enduring, being patient, and trusting in God. If we want to live patiently, the first thing that we must determine is that we aren't going to take any shortcuts. We're going to do things God's way, even if God's way takes longer and requires more from us. If we live with this resolution, the quick fixes of sin no longer have any appeal.

Second, we must **STUDY THE PROPHETS**. James encourages this in James 5:10-11. Here, he specifically points to the patience of Job as an example, but really, just about any righteous character from the Bible will do. I don't even know how many stories of faith the Scripture records, but in every case, whenever a man or woman pleased God, they had to pass through trial to do it. Nobody gets to ride the wave of easy all the way to heaven.

In fact, some of those people had it much worse than we do. Take, for instance, the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah faithfully served God his whole life, and in return for his service, he was ignored, persecuted, and dragged into exile. A few people listened to him from time to time, but never enough to spare Judah from destruction. And yet, through all of that, Jeremiah patiently endured. He put his hope in the promises of God, even though he himself didn't live to see any of those promises fulfilled. Friends, none of us are in Jeremiah-bad situations. If he kept doing what was right through his trials, we can keep doing what is right too. The more time we spend in the study of men and women like Jeremiah, the more their example encourages us.

Third, we learn patience as we **ENDURE TRIAL**. James famously describes this process in James 1:2-4. On some level, all of us want our lives to be as trial-free as possible. We don't like to suffer; we don't like to be tempted. However, God is wise enough to know that what we want is not necessarily what is best for us. It's not fun for an athlete to go to training camp and run wind sprints until he feels like he has to throw up. However, every coach in any sport is going to demand that his players train, the harder, the better. Why? So that when that player is challenged in a game, he will have the endurance he needs to achieve victory.

If a coach is smart enough to see that about his team, God is smart enough to see it about us. It is inevitable that we are going to face challenges in our lives. If nothing else, every one of us is going to die, and most of us are going to get sick and suffer before that happens. If we skate through life and then wham! we're dying, that huge trial will find us unequipped to deal with it. God, then, allows trial in our lives in bearable amounts, not too much to overwhelm us, yet enough to make us stronger. However, we have to do our part too. When we encounter trial, we have to stick it out, and as we do, the trial will teach us the patience we need to overcome sterner trials in the future.

Finally, we must remember to **PRAY FOR PATIENCE**. We see an example of this in Paul's indirect prayer in 2 Thessalonians 3:5. The old joke goes that if you pray for patience, God will send enough misery into your life to teach you to be patient. Sometimes, the name of a particular child is attached to the joke. Of course, there's no need for that. All of us have enough trials and annoyances in our lives that opportunities to learn patience are already abundant. What we are actually praying for, then, when we pray for patience is that we use those opportunities to the fullest. We're asking for the wisdom to put our trials in perspective. We're asking for the strength of character to smile at provocations from others instead of lashing back. We're asking for the endurance to outlast the devil. What's more, these are the prayers that God loves to hear from His children. When we come to Him looking for wisdom and strength and endurance, we're looking for things that He has already promised are ours for the asking, and what He has promised, He will do. If we feel in need of more patience through our trials, then, we need to turn to God, to make sure we get the help He's offering.