

October 7, 2007

“The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience” Galatians 5:22-23

FCF: Misunderstanding and lack of patience

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because patience is the fruit of the Spirit,
(magnet) we must look to the Spirit to cultivate patience in our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

America is becoming a nation of angry, short-tempered people. From road rage to airplane rage, grocery store rage, and violence at youth sports events, the media has been reporting emotional outbursts with unprecedented frequency. We're tense, wound tight. C. Leslie Charles, author of Why Is Everyone So Cranky?, writes (**READ quote**):

I'm describing a fuming, unrelenting, sense of anger, hostility, and alienation that simmers for months, even years, without relief. Eventually, all it takes is a triggering incident, usually minor, for the hostile person to go ballistic... Cell phones, pagers, and high tech devices allow us to be interrupted anywhere, at any time. This constant accessibility, and compulsive use of technology, fragments what little time we do have, adding to our sense of urgency, emergency, and overload.

We are an impatient people. The advances of a modern world have created an expectation of solutions at the speed of GPS, MP3, laptops, broadband, and sitcom plotlines. We want efficiency and we want it now. But the advances of a modern world don't carry over very well into the brokenness of a fallen world and all its obstructions.

And so we are a frustrated people – a people that hardly knows what to do with the call to patience. But the Scriptures set it before us – both the call and the hope.

SCRIPTURE READING: Galatians 5:16-26

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

The message of Paul's gospel, preached to the Galatians, was straightforward. Salvation – new standing and new life with God – is found by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Faith as opposed to works, the Spirit as opposed to the flesh. The message was straightforward and passionately proclaimed. But it had been forgotten and foolishly dismissed. And so, with that same passion, Paul wrote this letter before us.

He wrote that they might rediscover the deep rest found in trusting and depending upon Jesus. He wrote that they might renew their progress in spiritual maturity, in becoming more like Jesus. And, in that, he wrote of the fruit that could blossom forth in their lives by the Holy Spirit – love, joy, peace, and patience. “Patience” – defined as a calm, abiding endurance, a God-given restraint in the face of opposition or oppression.

A patience not as the world gives – a laziness that fails to act, a pride that refuses to respond, an insensitivity to hurt or need. This is not the artificial, bland fruit that can look similar on the outside but has a completely different source and motivation. This is the patience of which Hudson Taylor spoke when asked for the three indispensable requirements for a missionary to China – patience, patience, and patience. Such is the fruit of the Spirit – the evidence and manifestation of His work. And it is such that, if we are to become increasingly patient ourselves, we must look to the Spirit to bring it forth.

That said, as we look at the biblical teaching on patience, we find it shows itself chiefly in two broad categories – patience in circumstances and patience in relationships.

I. PATIENCE IN CIRCUMSTANCES

The fruit of the Spirit is patience in circumstances. Or, to put it another way, a patience with God – a return to the sane position of the creature before the Creator.

A) In Waiting

This entails two things. First, a patience in waiting.

1. The reality of God's timetable

God has a timetable in which He will accomplish what He has determined to do. He knows precisely who, what, where, when, and how. And this timetable is His. Not ours.

2. The struggle of our ignorance

That said, with the sure reality of God's timetable, we have to acknowledge the inevitable struggle of our ignorance. We want to know so much more than we do.

Illustration:

Which, depending on how we respond, can present some problems. King Saul, for example ([READ 1 Samuel 13:8-10b](#)). And for this, for his unbelief in the faithfulness of God and his unwillingness to wait on the timing of God, Saul lost the opportunity to have his sons follow him as king. God has His timetable to which we need to yield.

B) *In Trials*

Patience in circumstances begins with patience in waiting. But it also entails patience in trials – in difficulty, in struggle, in disappointment, and in the refining fire.

1. The reality of life's trials

Just as surely as there is the reality of God's timetable, there is the reality of such trials. Whether because of our own sin or the sins of others, whether because of simply the fallen state of the world or forces unseen at work – all under God's control, all with His purposes in mind. Its source, we cannot know for sure. But that it will come we can.

2. The struggle of our impatience

And in the midst of it, as hard as it is to hear, we need to give heed to God's Word ([READ Romans 12:12; James 1:2-4](#)). Such is the deepest sanity we can have.

For huge happenings in our lives are not always apparent.

Illustration:

Annie Dillard writes in her book, Total Eclipse ([READ quote](#)):

The Ring Nebula, in the constellation Lyra, looks, through binoculars, like a smoke ring. It is a star in the process of exploding. Light from its explosion first reached the earth in 1054; it was a supernova then, and so bright it shone in the daytime. Now it is not so bright, but it is still exploding. It expands at the rate of seventy million miles a day. It is interesting to look through binoculars at something expanding seventy million miles a day. It does not budge. Its apparent size does not increase. Photographs of the Ring Nebula taken fifteen years ago seem identical to photographs of it taken yesterday.

Application:

Huge happenings in our lives are not always apparent. At least from our rather limited perspective. Pulling all this together, considering patience in circumstances, how then should we respond when we've prayed so long for this person, for a resolution, or for the fulfillment of some desire? How should we respond? Keep praying. Believe the promises of God, obey His will, and leave the results to Him, knowing He is ultimately in control, working out events for our good. We must commit our struggle to the Lord, knowing He knows well where we are, and let Him bring this good fruit forth in us.

II. PATIENCE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Patience is the fruit of the Spirit – in circumstances and also in relationships. If the first is patience with God, the second could then be described as patience with others.

A) *When Mistreated*

Patience in the face of mistreatment.

1. What it means

Patience in the face of the actions of others that tend to arouse our anger or wrath, often causing us to lose our temper. Innocent jokes and intentional hurts. Office politics and power plays. Ridicule, insults, scorn, and persecution. We are assured of such things.

2. How we're to respond

How are we to respond? In a way that imitates God Himself – in whose image we were made and upon whose mercy we depend ([READ Exodus 34:6-7b](#)). Which is to say, we are to be slow to anger – just as God has been towards us. Not ignoring what has been done or said but responding in a godly fashion. To such we are called.

Illustration:

Consider this story Jesus told His disciples, often called “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” ([READ Matthew 18:21-35](#)). Jesus’ point is clear. If we are to be patient and long-suffering ourselves towards others, we must consider His towards us.

B) When Provoked

This applies to outright mistreatment and to lesser provocations as well.

1. What it means

That is, the things that do not so much hurt or wound but irritate and disappoint. The things we encounter so often in the home and in the church. That offhand remark, the annoying habit, the inconsiderate neighbor, the delayed flight, the painfully slow driver.

2. How we're to respond

How are we to respond? First, by recognizing that our natural response is rooted in pride ([READ 1 Corinthians 4:7](#)). We are to forbear, to put up with, to even tolerate the faults of others. All motivated by love for Christ and love for others ([READ Ephesians 4:1-3](#)).

Illustration:

Consider another story, a traditional Jewish tale ([READ 750 Illustrations](#)):

Abraham was sitting outside his tent one evening when he saw an old man, weary from age and journey, coming toward him. Abraham rushed out and greeted him, and then invited him into his tent. There he washed the old man's feet and gave him food and drink. The old man immediately began eating without saying a prayer or blessing. So Abraham asked him, "Don't you worship God?" The old traveler replied, "I worship fire only and reverence no other god." When he heard this, Abraham became incensed, grabbed the old man by the shoulders, and threw him out of his tent into the cold night air. When the old man had departed, God called to his friend Abraham and asked where the stranger was. Abraham replied, "I forced him out because he did not worship you." God answered him, "I have suffered him these eighty years although he dishonors me. Could you not endure him one night?"

Application:

That we might endure one another and these provocations that daily grate upon us, that we would be emulate our “long-suffering” God, we must consider His having suffered long not only with them but with us as well. Such is the cure for the resentment that so easily builds. And going beyond that, looking beyond mere shortcomings and provocation to outright mistreatment and persecution, we need to consider and trust also in God’s justice ([READ 1 Peter 2:21-23](#)). Striking words – “To this you were called.”

CONCLUSION:

Perhaps we need such patience now more than ever – demonstrated and modeled for all to see. In the early 19th century, the great Cambridge-trained linguist, Henry Martyn, devoted his life to reach Islamic Persia. Turning his back on a promising academic career, he accepted a post as a chaplain for the East India Company, initially serving locally stationed British soldiers. But his heart burned for the local people and he began work on simultaneous translation projects of the New Testament into Persian,

Arabic, and Urdu. Serving in the Muslim city of Shiraz, he endured the oppressiveness of the weather, the abuse of his detractors, and the apparent futility of his labors. One year and one convert. But not long before his premature death, he said these words (**READ quote**) *“Even if I never should see a native converted, God may design, by my patience and continuance in the work, to encourage future missionaries.”* And He has.

This world needs such patience. Where? Not just in 19th or 21st century Islamic nations but wherever we are. Wherever we are and with whomever the Lord brings across our path – beginning with those closest to us. Why? That the world might know this is real. How? Through time in the Word, the encouragement of others, and by taking us through it, the exercising of our patience. It doesn’t come any other way. It is the Spirit who enables us to walk by the Spirit. We’ve used this image before – the toddler learning to walk. We walk as He enables us to walk. Each step has His grip. We grow in patience as He works the soil of our hearts. For patience is the fruit of the Spirit.

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