

God's Patience



Patience (Part 2)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue with our theme for this week, "Patience"—a theme which is not popular in our contemporary culture, yet essential for successful Christian living.

In my introductory talk yesterday, I explained the difference between patience and perseverance. Perseverance is essentially active—it's running a race, it's pressing forward, it's doing something; whereas patience is essentially passive. As a matter of fact, by origin the word "patience" and the word "passive" come from the same Latin root. Patience means not doing anything. It means waiting, it means standing still an that's much harder, believe me, than it is being active. I've asked many servants of God which is harder—to work or to wait, and almost invariably they've answered that it's easier to work than to wait. Well, work requires perseverance, waiting requires patience. We would like to eliminate this but we can't because God's people are a waiting people. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul says two things about Christians: they've turned from idols to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from heaven, Jesus. So, Christians have two marks in this age. We are serving God with perseverance; but while waiting for Jesus to return, with patience.

Now, today I'm going to speak about the patience of God, Himself. I turn, first of all, to Romans 2:3–4, which are addressed to religious people who think they're right because they know what's right and who are very critical of others and condemn others who don't know as much as they do and Paul really deals very severely with these people. This is what he says:

> "And do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment upon those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" (NAS)

Paul says these people deserve judgment just as much as the ones they criticize but they think they're getting away with it because judgment doesn't come immediately. They don't

realize that it's God's kindness and forbearance and patience that holds Him back from dealing with them as they deserve to be dealt with. But they misinterpret that and Paul says they don't realize that the kindness and patience of God should lead them to repentance. All the world is full of people like that today. They don't appreciate God's patience. Because they don't immediately come under the judgment of God, they think they've got away with it. Their attitude should be the opposite: "O God, your patience just touches my heart and causes me to want to turn to You and receive Your forgiveness."

Again, farther on in Romans, chapter 9:22, Paul is speaking particularly about Pharaoh and how God dealt with Pharaoh and his persecution of His people Israel and how God permitted Pharaoh to go on and on in his wickedness and his stubbornness and his cruelty. And he says:

> "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (NAS)

You see, Pharaoh and his officers and his army were vessels of God's wrath. They were prepared for destruction but God chose the time of their destruction. He endured with much patience their wickedness, their stubbornness, their opposition to Him until His purposes could be fulfilled through their destruction. We do need to bear that in mind because the world is full of pharaohs today, all over the place, and they're still wicked and stubborn and in opposition to God. And we say, "God, don't you see? Don't you care?" God says, "You don't understand My patience. I'm being patient. But there'll come a time when I will do what needs to be done."

Again, Peter speaks about the patience of God to the people in Noah's day who were wicked, ungodly, immoral, violent, and so on. And it says:

> "[they] once were disobedient, [this is 1 Peter 3:20], [they] once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water." (NAS)

Notice, the patience of God caused him to wait. The Bible indicates that God waited at least one hundred years while the ark was being prepared. The people of that day concluded, "God doesn't judge, we can get away with it." They didn't understand that the patience of God caused Him to wait and it is still true today. We really cannot understand history unless we understand God's patience. We'll get a very warped and negative and dark view of history. We'll say, "Well, the wicked flourish and God does nothing about it." But God's patience is expressed by not intervening hastily against wickedness. The phrase that's used about him in Exodus 34:6–7, is that He is "slow to anger." And that, incidentally, is part of being patient. We need to bear that in mind. Being slow to anger. God revealed Himself to Moses in these verses. It says:

> "Then the LORD passed by in front of [Moses] and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.'" (NAS)

So God passes over wickedness and sin and rebellion because He's longing to show mercy and to forgive but there will come a time when His patience will run out and He'll intervene. Not only patience a characteristic of God the Father, it is also a characteristic of Jesus Christ our Savior. Paul says this about himself, in 1 Timothy 1:16:

> "And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." (NAS)

Here's Paul blaspheming—persecuting the church, taking the clothes of those who stoned Stephen—in total open rebellion against his Messiah and yet Jesus was patient, He waited, but when His moment came, He apprehended Paul on the Damascus Road and changed him just in a moment.

Patience is also an aspect of Christian character that we need to cultivate. Listen to this about the fruit of the Spirit:

> "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law." (Gal. 5:22–23, NAS)

Where this version says "patience," you will remember the old King James version says "long-suffering." And let me say what I said yesterday: there's only one way to acquire

long-suffering and that is by suffering long.

And then in Colossians 1:11, Paul prays for the Christians, that they might be "...strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for attaining of all steadfastness and patience..." And notice that patience is an expression of God's power. It's not a mark of weakness, it's a mark of strength.

And then, further on in Colossians, he tells the Christians:

> "And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience..." (Col. 3:12, NAS)

I want to emphasize that patience is the expression of strength, not of weakness. So many people with a carnal view see patience as weakness—it isn't, it's strength.

There are two verses from Proverbs that speak about this: Proverbs 16:32:

> "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city." (NAS)

And Proverbs 25:28:

> "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit." (NAS)

That's the kind of person who loses his temper in a moment. As we say in contemporary speech, "He blows his stack," "He loses control of himself." He can shout, he can even get violent, but all that is not strength, that is weakness. The man is strong who rules his own spirit, who doesn't let the city of his spirit be broken into by things that disturb him and take away his peace and his self-control. Believe me, that is true spiritual strength—to be in control of yourself, not to be provoked into foolish or rash statements or actions by people who are wicked, people who are reasonable, unjust. We have to learn a little of God's patience. We have to learn to let things go wrong sometimes than do nothing about them.

But the Lord spoke to me personally the other day in a rather unexpected way. I really don't know what I was thinking about, but He said this to me as I believe I heard His voice. He said, "People have to be allowed to make their own mistakes." And I thought, "That's profoundly true." How many times, as parents or pastors, we want to protect everybody from their mistakes. Sometimes we have to do what God does. Let people make their mistakes. That takes patience.

When you see a child you love or a member of your church going astray and doing something foolish and you know that they are going to pay the price for it. But God doesn't give you liberty to intervene. God says, "You've got to let them go their way and learn their lesson." That's patience.

As a matter of fact, the Bible emphasizes that patience is particularly necessary in God's servants. This is what Paul says about the Lord's bondservant in 2 Timothy 2:24–25. He's talking to somebody about pastoral responsibilities:

> "And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth." (NAS)

You see, we see people are wrong but we don't have to jump on them every time. We have to exercise patience and just hope that our patience, like God's patience, will bring them to repentance.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll explain how patience means that we leave the initiative with God.

My special offer this week is my book, The Grace of Yielding. It contains vital lessons from my own experience that lifted me to a new level of Christian living. It will help you to cultivate patience in your life, too, and to reap all the benefits that flow from it. Also, my complete series of talks this week on "Patience" is available in a single, carefully-edited cassette. Stay tuned for details.

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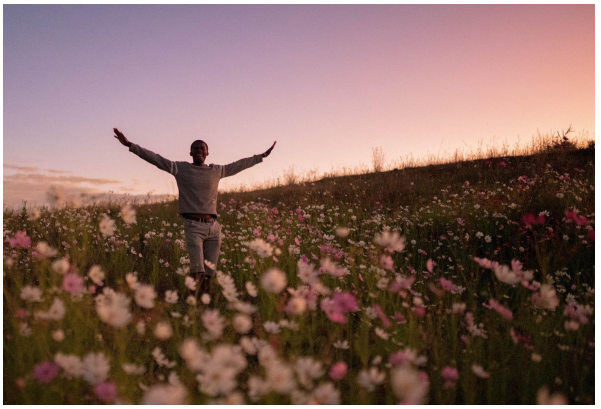
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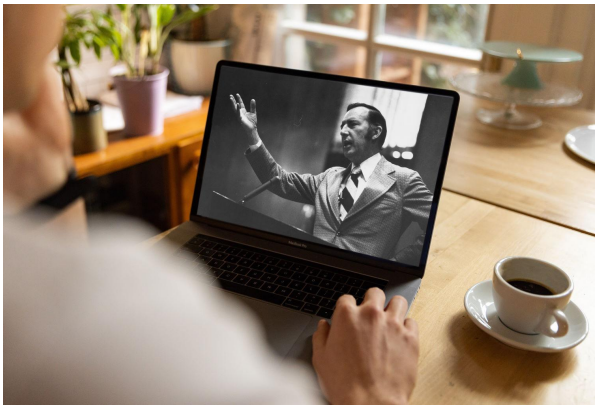
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