

Fruit of the Spirit. Patience

It's been said that if you want to know a man, observe him with a woman, a young child and a flat tyre! There are many things in this life that try us, irritate and frustrate us, threaten to push us into a rage. An impatient person will fly off the handle very quickly. The patient person is the one who doesn't panic or get in an immediate flap. They are not easily provoked to anger. We might say they have a "slow fuse". The Biblical words suggest restraint and "long suffering".

Patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5, one of the results of living close to the Lord Jesus. As we seek to follow Him and live submitted to God's will we should be discovering the ability to practice a little patience. Patience is also one very practical outworking of love. One of the very first things Paul says as he describes love in 1 Corinthians 13 is what? – "Love is patient, love of kind" rather than jealous, proud, rude, self-seeking, and so on. People who are guided and motivated by the love of God in our hearts are not easily angered, for His Spirit is producing in us a Christ-like patience.

Aware of our sinfulness and dependence on God's grace we are humble, not quick to take offence. We recognise we are by nature far from perfect. Aware of God's deep love for others, Christ's willingness to welcome tax-collectors and sinners and prostitutes and lepers, we try to show a little understanding and mercy. Instead of harshly criticizing people we commit them quietly in prayer to the Lord who knows their situation better than us.

Let's consider for a moment our example in patience for it is the Lord Himself. In Psalm 103 v 8 & 10 God is described as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love ... He does not treat us as our sins deserve". God could wipe this world out in disgust at our human corruption, idolatry and violence. He did once before in a worldwide flood. Yet for centuries upon centuries He stays His hand

of holy judgement to give sinful people every last chance to repent and be saved. The Old Testament history of Israel is one long saga of God showing saving grace, faithfulness and patient restraint as His people consistently sin and rebel and disobey and chase every conceivable idol instead of loving their Lord.

Peter in the New Testament refers to the flood and says, “the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men”. It’s not slow in coming, it’s just that God “is *patient* with you, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance”.

God’s patience is mercy. Think even of Christ on the cross praying “Father forgive them, they know not what they do”. So Christians have a profound example to follow. The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruits like patience in us so that we might glorify God by being like Him.

With God as our example let’s think of three instances of patience that will serve us well as Christians:

Patience with others

Patience in prayer

Patient endurance in suffering

1. Patience with others. Just think what a powerful witness to the grace and compassion and mercy and understanding of the Lord our God, if His people, filled with His Spirit treat each other and those outside the Church with patience and forgiveness!

They say that actions speak louder than words. What good is it to preach the good news of how Jesus saves and transforms us if in our dealings with our fellow human beings we are as irritable and resentful as ever?

Jesus commands us – in everything to do unto others as we would have them do to us. Wouldn’t we appreciate it if others would be patient and understanding of us and our weakness? If they would

understand that sanctification is a process, sometimes a struggle and we're not quite perfect yet? We can do no less for them! Christians must be prepared to show a Christlike patience to others.

2. Patience in prayer. Sometimes we can pray a long time about something before we seem to get an answer. People pray for years to see a loved one saved. Some give up, failing to believe they could ever change. Some just get lazy. But in His parable of the widow who kept pestering the unrighteous judge, Jesus urges His followers to keep on praying and not give up. We should be patient, faithful in keeping at it. Some of the young people have wristbands with PUSH on them – “Pray Until Something Happens”. That's good advice. Thank the Lord for those who kept on praying for us when we weren't interested. Patience means being persistent in our praying.

3. Patient endurance in suffering. How do we cope when we see no end in sight? When suffering is unbearable with no apparent solution? James knew some of his readers were facing cruel persecution, as are many for their faith in our world today. He points them to the Old Testament believer Job who endured great misery but clung onto his faith in God and was rewarded in time. The writer to Hebrews points us to the Lord Jesus Himself Who “for the joy set before Him endured the cross.” Christians are urged to fix our eyes on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith” and “run with perseverance the race marked out for us”.

Scripture assures us the Lord knows our distress. He has shared it. His purpose and plan are firmly established. He Who authored our faith will perfect it. In other words He Who saved us will keep us through every trial till we become mature and heaven ready. He will provide the endurance we need. His Spirit will grow patience in us that we might glorify Him and fulfil His perfect will, extending His Kingdom even in times of suffering.

May the Lord in His grace and long suffering patiently continue to work in us by His Spirit, producing in us all that is good and

Christlike, including this spiritual fruit of patience, for our benefit and His glory.

Amen