

Patience

—Part 1—

Forbearance and Longsuffering

*“Giving all
diligence, add to
your faith virtue;
and to virtue
knowledge; And to
knowledge
temperance; and to
temperance
patience.”
—II Peter 1:5,6*

IN THE LISTING OF CHRIS-

tian graces by the Apostle Peter in II Peter 1:5-7, patience is the fourth of seven graces he says must be added to our foundation of faith—following virtue, knowledge, and temperance, but preceding godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, or love.

It is appropriate, as shown by our theme text, that patience is listed immediately following temperance, or self-control. Patience, in its fullest development, requires that we have already made significant progress in controlling self—temperance. We cannot hope to “add” patience in its complete sense to our foundation of faith if self is not, to a measurable extent, under the control of the New Creature.

DEFINING PATIENCE

Defining patience might at first seem relatively easy, because it is likely that we know quite a bit

about it. Mankind in general understands certain things about patience, and most feel that it is a trait to be admired and emulated. The patience of the Scriptures, however, goes much deeper than what most among mankind would include in its definition.

Patience is a progressively learned grace, and has various levels, all of which must be developed within the Christian's character. The Scriptures, and life's experiences themselves, suggest four progressive aspects to this grace of patience: 1) Forbearance; 2) Longsuffering; 3) Endurance; and 4) Constancy. All four of these aspects of patience are necessary to its complete development. We know this because God, his son Jesus, and many other examples of faithful individuals found in the Bible, had all of these. In this article, we will examine the first two of these—Forbearance and Longsuffering.

FORBEARANCE

Forbearance is the most basic form of patience, and it is most likely the aspect that the world understands something about—whether they actually practice it or not. As used in the Scriptures, the meaning of forbearance is similar to how most people would define patience. *Strong's Concordance* and *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* give these synonyms for forbearance: self-restraint, to tolerate, to put up with.

Forbearance is usually thought of as an action—a relatively short-term restraint or act of tolerance. By definition, it is directed toward another person, group of people, or set of immediate circumstances,

resulting from some wrong (or perceived wrong) having been committed against us. Forbearance may be shown with a truly loving heart. It can also be shown with much grumbling and little in the way of a loving motivation.

The Scriptures state that God exercises forbearance. The Apostle Paul, after speaking about the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, says further concerning him, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. (Rom. 3:25) Earlier, in verse 23, Paul said, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” In other words, all in Adam have fallen into sin, and hence, are partakers of the just penalty of death.

From these verses, the first thing we notice about God’s forbearance is that it does not in any way remove the just penalty of death upon mankind. However, we notice something else in Paul’s words. He indicates that God’s forbearance is directly associated with a plan for the recovery of man from sin through the redemptive work of Jesus. His forbearance is shown in that once our first parents fell, and as all their progeny were born into sin, and as mankind continued to fall further away from perfection, God, to a large extent, tolerated man’s downward course. He restrained himself from interfering with the course of man’s affairs. He “put up with” much of fallen man’s sinful and ungodly deeds—moment by moment, day by day, year by year—in a seemingly unending exercise of forbearance.

The key to understanding God’s great exercise of forbearance is his knowledge that only by doing

so will mankind eventually learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and also that he has a plan in place that will eventually bring about man's release from sin's stranglehold. Only thus can we harmonize the penalty for sin—death—with God's forbearance of man's downward course since the fall of Adam. This goes far beyond a mere surface appreciation of the forbearance aspect of patience.

CHRISTIAN FORBEARANCE

As followers of Christ, we must also exercise forbearance—not just in the mundane experiences of life, but also in the course of our development as New Creatures. Our forbearance must be tailored after God's high standard. Like God, our exercise of forbearance toward others does not mean we condone their sin. We realize, however, as God does, that all of man's current experiences with sin will one day yield the positive results God intends. So we properly forbear much in the way of wrong deeds, unkind words spoken, ridicule, and criticism directed toward us.

However, our forbearance is to have an even deeper effect upon us. Paul talked about his life as a Christian and the many trials he endured. "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it."—I Cor. 4:11,12

The word translated "suffer" at the end of verse 12 is the Greek word for "forbear." Paul is saying, "being persecuted, we forbear"—we tolerate, we restrain ourselves from retaliating, we put up with

persecution. Paul could do this because he knew that persecution, as well as hunger, thirst, being buffeted, being reviled, as well as the other kinds of trials and besetments mentioned in these verses, were all necessary experiences for him in order to be fully developed as a member of the sympathetic “royal priesthood” which will teach mankind in Christ’s coming kingdom.

Paul, here speaking of the various experiences that came to him, and which will come to us, in which forbearance is needful, hearkens back to the opening words of this chapter. In I Corinthians 4:1,2, he says, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” We, as Paul, are stewards of the mysteries of God. As stewards, it is required that we be found faithful. The exercise of Godly forbearance toward others, as Paul demonstrated and testified of in verse 12, is part of our stewardship responsibility.

WARNINGS

We might be inclined to think that forbearance, because it is the most basic form of patience, is relatively easy to master. A close look at our fallen flesh, however, reveals that even simple forbearance is not easy. Because forbearance is most often the immediate, or short-term, response to an action or words spoken against us, the fallen flesh is likewise notorious for its momentary and immediate responses, usually in direct opposition to forbearance.

Think of this relatively common experience which could happen to any of us. We are sitting at a traffic

light in the left turn lane, behind several cars, waiting for the green left turn arrow. After waiting through an entire light cycle, the green arrow comes on, and the cars in our lane begin to move—except the car directly in front of us. For some reason, the driver is not paying attention, and even after the cars in front of him have gone, he continues to sit there, and we are behind him, still waiting. After what probably seems like eternity, we honk the horn, say a few grumbling words to ourself, and the person finally starts to move. By this time, however, the left turn light has turned red, and we find ourself stuck there for another seemingly endless light cycle, perhaps uttering a few more grumbling words. Finally, when the green arrow comes on again, the car in front of us makes its turn, and we do too. This entire experience likely took all of about 3 minutes out of our day from start to finish, yet we allowed it to irritate us.

For the child of God, such an experience, or one similar to it, demonstrates a failure to exercise forbearance, the most basic form of patience. In this example, the fallen fleshly mind was quicker in responding the wrong way than the new mind was in responding with forbearance. Worse than this, however, is the fact that the quicker wrong reaction meant that the New Creature was not in sufficient control of the flesh in the first place. If it had been in control, the new mind would have responded first and the flesh would not have gained the victory. This should serve as a warning to us that the fallen flesh, when not properly controlled by the New Creature, will get victories along the lines of even the most basic of the Christian graces.

Another warning concerning forbearance lies in the fact that even when we have successfully and faithfully exercised it in many experiences, over a long span of time, and are perhaps toward the latter years of our Christian walk, it is still possible that, under certain circumstances, we could fail in its application. We recall Moses, who meekly and faithfully showed forbearance to his fellow Israelites for nearly forty years. He tolerated their complaining, he restrained himself when they lacked faith, and he put up with their murmuring. Yet, near the end of his life, when instructed by God to speak to the rock to obtain water for the “still complaining” Israelites, it was more than Moses could take. His flesh got the better of him. In disobedience he angrily struck the rock, doing it not once, but twice, rather than speaking to it as God had instructed him. In addition he angrily spoke to the people, saying, “Must we [Aaron and I] fetch you water out of this rock?” Moses failed this test of forbearance late in his life, even after nearly forty years of patiently exercising it. As a result, he was not allowed by God to cross over the Jordan and enter the land of promise.—Num. 20:7-12

We understand, of course, that God still considered Moses a faithful servant of his, taking his whole life into account. (Heb. 11:23-29) However, this experience late in life, which cost him so dearly, is a lesson and warning to us, not only along the lines of forbearance, but with regard to any of the Christian graces. We must be on our guard to the very end of our walk, that the old flesh does not, even for a moment, gain the upper hand and cause us to lose control and fail to exercise these graces when

it would be the proper course to do so. On the contrary, when put into practice time after time, in experience after experience, forbearance will lead us to the development of the second aspect of patience—longsuffering.

LONGSUFFERING

Longsuffering is similar to forbearance in its meaning and application. The chief difference is that longsuffering, as suggested by the word itself, is a type of forbearance which is not just exercised in the immediate moment of an experience. Rather, it is a character quality developed and exercised over the long-term course of many similar experiences.

Turning again to *Strong's* and *Thayer's* definitions, the Greek word for longsuffering means: bear long, slow to anger, slow to punish, slow in avenging, slow to wrath. In the Greek language, it is the compound word "*macrothumeo*." "*Macro*" means "long in relation to time and place." "*Thumeo*" simply means "wrath." Putting the two words together—*macrothumeo*—means literally to go for a long period of time before exercising wrath. We see from this definition that the longsuffering aspect of patience represents progress beyond forbearance.

There is a connection, however, between forbearance and longsuffering. In Romans 2:4, Paul speaks these words about God, "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Here God is described in the same verse as both forbearing and longsuffering, and that these are the products of "the riches of his goodness." In the case of God, this does not mean

that he must “progress” from forbearance to long-suffering. In him, both qualities dwell fully and are exercised in total perfection and harmony. His perfect forbearance in all the individual instances of disobedience on the part of his human creation brings with it the natural result that God is also longsuffering—slow to anger, slow to wrath, slow to avenge.

Note also in this verse that the same goodness of God, which results in his being both forbearing and longsuffering, is designed to have an effect upon those who recognize that they are the beneficiaries of these. Paul says that the recognition of these qualities in God should have the effect of leading us to repentance. All mankind will eventually learn this and benefit from God’s exercise of forbearance and longsuffering, but for now the chief lesson is for the church. When we approached God in consecration, there was a fundamental realization on our part that he had shown much forbearance and longsuffering on our behalf. As a result, we had a sincere desire to repent, and to make a change in our walk of life. We covenanted to do his will, and follow in the example of his son Jesus, and to develop these same qualities which we saw that they possessed in such perfection and harmony.

GOD’S LEGACY OF LONGSUFFERING

The Scriptures show God’s legacy of longsuffering with mankind. We read this concerning the period leading up to the flood: “The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. (I Pet. 3:20) Although in the final

analysis only eight persons were saved from the flood, God was longsuffering to give mankind every opportunity to repent and join faithful Noah and his family. The account in Genesis, chapter 6, indicates that there was a period of time which passed after God's initial declaration that he would destroy all flesh, until the flood actually took place. During this period, and as the ark was being prepared, God was longsuffering, to the intent that possibly some might have a repentant heart and turn toward him. Once again, he was slow to wrath, slow to avenge, slow to punish—longsuffering.

Another example of God's longsuffering is given to us with respect to his chosen people—Israel. We read of this as follows: "God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." (Rom. 9:22) From the context, we know that Paul is speaking here of the nation of Israel as "vessels of wrath." The word translated "willing" at the beginning of this verse has the proper thought of making a choice, or having the option. In other words, God could have chosen, and had the option on many occasions, to exercise his wrath toward Israel by carrying out their destruction, for which Paul says they were "fitted" by their demonstrated lack of faith and obedience. Yet God endured "with much longsuffering," Paul says. God did so, as in the case of the flood, for the purpose and with the hope that some might repent and turn to serve him.

The longsuffering of God with Israel lasted many centuries, even up to the time that he sent his only begotten Son to be their long-sought Messiah.

A few, a remnant, did indeed repent, accepted Jesus, and received the resulting blessings of coming out from under the Law and into Christ. To these individual Jews, the longsuffering of God was much appreciated and highly valued. The nation as a whole, however, failed to benefit from God's longsuffering, even crucifying the one who was their Messiah. As a result, their house was finally left desolate and all vestiges of their nationhood destroyed. This shows another important feature about God's longsuffering. God's longsuffering with Israel, and with mankind in general, does not mean that there will never be punishment, never be wrath, or that longsuffering will be indefinitely manifest toward a continued lack of obedience and faithfulness.

Even here, however, God is merciful. Recalling the entire context of Romans, chapters 9, 10, and 11, God's message is not just about the failure of the nation of Israel to maintain their covenant with God, his longsuffering with them, and their ultimate casting off by him as a nation. If this was the end of the story, then God's longsuffering would never serve any real purpose, nor have any true benefit. We are thankful that such is not the case. These same chapters in Romans also promise the recovery of Israel—that they will eventually learn the lessons needed and be reestablished, not just as a nation, but as a covenant-keeping people of God. Additionally, the New Covenant, which God will establish with Israel, will flow out to the entire world of mankind. Then, truly, the longsuffering of God will have achieved its full fruition and purpose in them and well as in all men.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

The Scriptures show that the prospective members of the church must develop and exercise longsuffering, just as they enjoin forbearance. Paul said, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." (Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12,13) In these verses, we are admonished to be both forbearing and longsuffering. Who especially does Paul say we are to exercise these aspects of patience toward? In both scriptures he says we are to exercise these toward "one another," the fellow body members of Christ—our brethren.

In James 5:7,8,10, the Greek word for longsuffering, *macrothumeo*, is used four times. In the *King James Bible* it is translated "patience," but as we quote it we will substitute the word "longsuffering," putting it in brackets: "Be [longsuffering] therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath [longsuffering] for it . . . Be ye also [longsuffering]; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of [longsuffering]."

These verses speak of the longsuffering of three groups or individuals. First, verses 7 and 8 admonish the church to be longsuffering in our experiences as we wait for all the events relating to the coming [Greek, presence] of the Lord to unfold. Second,

verse 7 says that the husbandman—God—has long-suffering for the fruit of the earth. This fruitage is the church, developed on earth, and to whom God continues to exercise longsuffering. Third, in verse 10 James counsels us, as we endeavor to develop this character trait, to look at the example of the prophets, not just in their suffering of affliction, but especially in their longsuffering attitude while going through those afflictions.

The Apostles Paul and Peter both expressed their humble appreciation of the longsuffering of God and Jesus toward themselves personally, as well as toward all the Lord's consecrated. Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." (I Tim. 1:15,16) Similarly, Peter says, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. . . . And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." (II Pet. 3:9,15) Truly, without the longsuffering of the Lord, we could not obtain salvation.

In I Corinthians, chapter 13, the famous love chapter, Paul simply, but powerfully, states in verse 4, "Charity [Greek, '*agape*' love] suffereth long," showing that one of the demonstrations of *agape* love is longsuffering. Additionally, although Peter in our theme text mentions the grace of patience,

Paul, in his listing of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22,23, specifically mentions longsuffering, showing that it is indeed part of the fruitage required in our character.

CONNECTION TO FAITH

Paul also connects longsuffering and faith. Once again, the *King James* translators used the word patience, although it is the Greek word for longsuffering. Rendered accordingly, Paul says, “Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and [longsuffering] inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after [longsuffering], he obtained the promise.”—Heb. 6:12-15

Here Paul mentions an important truth. The promises made to those such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other men of old, are to be fulfilled toward them because they not only had great faith, but they were also longsuffering. What was this connection in their case? We answer that their faith in God’s promises of a better day, a day of blessing to all the families of the earth, gave them the confidence and assurance needed to “suffer long” in their experiences of trial, testing, ridicule, and even persecution. They counted this longsuffering as, in a sense, a “light affliction” to them, because of their faith in these promises and their desire to obtain them.—II Cor. 4:17

So it should be with us. As Peter says in the context of our theme text, faith is the foundation principle upon which we build all the Christian graces,

including the longsuffering aspect of patience. In reality, faith is vitally connected to every aspect of this grace—fornbearance, endurance, and constancy. So important is the connection between faith and all the Christian graces, that the Apostle John says, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4

In next month’s issue of *The Dawn*, we will consider the final two aspects of the grace of patience—Endurance and Constancy. ■