

Patience a Tender Fruit
Galatians 5: 22

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Hello Dear Listeners;

Before long, D.V. it will be spring and a new season of growth , of planting seed and watching things grow will be upon us. The farmer or orchardist is already thinking of the crop and the fruit he may harvest. Will there be a bumper crop this year or will there be disappointment?

The bible also deals with sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting. In fact it deals with very special fruit called “ *The fruit of the Spirit*”. A ‘basketful’ of that fruit is mentioned in a letter of the apostle Paul to the churches in Galatia a Roman province in central Asia Minor, today the country of Turkey.

It appears from chapter 4:8 of Paul’s letter that the churches there were made up mainly of converts from paganism for Paul says, “ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods” (Galatians 4:8).

That doesn’t mean that when Paul addressed them, these new Christians were now free from spiritual decay. On the contrary it appears that some, if not many, of them had been influenced by certain teachers who proposed what Paul called “ *a different gospel*” (ch. 1: 6) which he said, “*is really no gospel at all!*” It appears to have been a teaching which suggested salvation was only possible in the ways of sticking to man-made rules and restrictions. We call that *legalism* and you find the Holy Spirit’s warnings about falling for that teaching throughout Paul’s letters.

In chapter five Paul contrasts the acts of the sinful nature, that which older translations called “ *the flesh*” to *living by the Spirit*. For, said Paul in v. 16

of this chapter, “ *Live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.*”

That Holy Spirit, whom the church confesses to be “ The Lord and Giver of Life” (Nicene Creed) sows the Word of God, that is, the seed, in the hearts of people through the preaching of the Gospel. By God’s grace this brings forth “*fruits*”, including not only love, and joy, peace and kindness, goodness, faithfulness as well as others, but also *patience*.

Patience, is a rare fruit especially in our society in which it appears to be at a premium. For we live at a time when instant results, immediate gratification are in demand. If those demands are not met then irritation, anger, protest often take over. You find it in a traffic line-up if the stream just doesn’t move fast enough for someone’s liking. You see this lack of patience leading to frustration in people’s personal lives when dealing with illnesses or operations that are postponed, as well as in confronting challenges in the workplace.

Now we need to remember that mention of patience as it is used by Paul doesn’t mean being *lethargic or adopting a fatalistic attitude* of “ Whatever will be will be...” There’s nothing weak or infirm, debilitated or insipid about this patience. W. Phillip Keller, in his excellent little book, *A Gardener Looks at the Fruits of the Spirit* calls it “ *the powerful capacity of selfless love to suffer long under adversity.*”

The word Paul uses in Gal. 5 can perhaps be more accurately translated as *long-suffering*. It is a word which in its original form speaks of the restraint of anger or agitation. No not in passive resignation but in resolute, steadfast endurance. Someone has rightly said it is not just some character trait but *a way of life*. It is that powerful Spirit-worked attribute

that enables a person to remain steadfast under strain, not just standing still but pressing on.!

The word is actually used of the Lord God himself for the bible often says of him that he is “*Slow to anger*” for example in Numbers 14:18 and Psalms 86:15 and 103: 8. It is used elsewhere in the bible of both God and man united to and by Christ. That connection between God’s own patience and that of human beings is made clear in the parable of the unrighteous or unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. By means of this parable Jesus highlighted how patient God is with his children. In the parable we meet a man who had an enormous debt cancelled by his creditor who was asked to be patient by the debtor. Yet when he received this amazing cancellation of his debt he himself went out and demanded immediate payment from someone who owed him “*a mere pittance.*”¹

Forgiveness has been called “*an adjunct of patience.*” They are twins. Just as God is long-suffering towards his people so our patience with others must not be self-centred. “*In love*”, says Paul in another passage (that of Ephesians 4:2) *there is mutual forbearance.* Paul himself was long-suffering towards his persecutors.

Keller points out that “the patience spoken of by the New Testament writers is that of a small donkey carrying enormous burdens of firewood, sacks of grain, or other produce for its owner, Year in ,year out, the beast does so, surely steadily, safely.”

Do you know of someone who exhibits this kind of patience? Someone who perhaps is able to bear up though faced with very difficult trials, a horrible strength-sapping illness perhaps, the collapse of one’s business, stuck in some rut not of one’s own choosing?

¹ Keller, *ibid*, p. 121

Invariably you will find that sincere Christians, receive also this fruit of the Spirit. No, not that they don't know tears or never get frustrated. They too are human and know about deep dark valleys in one's life.

Yet the difference is that they know God and his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He, Jesus Christ was born into a world seething with unrest, sin, and the brokenness of life. But with gracious perseverance he endured every adversity and the abuse of evil persons. It was all part of his suffering in our place. A suffering that came to a climax on Calvary's cross where he gave his life as the supreme sacrifice for our sins.

How much patience, how great the long-suffering of God Almighty in dealing with us, difficult, so-often-stubborn and unwilling-to-listen people! I must ask, "*Where would I be but for the loving, persevering patience of this loving God in dealing with me?*"

The amazing thing is that this Mighty God is willing to give his precious gifts of love and faith, peace and patience to all those who ask him for these things. To all those who humble themselves and believe in him and are led by him.

For not only did Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son die for sinners, but He left us his Word. That directed by the Holy Spirit we might walk in his way. The way of peace and patience, of perseverance and even of joy. More than once Christ Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to comfort and direct believers so that they would have the courage to live in patience.

Patience must be learned. It isn't available at the push of a button. Since it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, you and I have to get to know this Spirit. What better way than to take to heart God's Word?! Read that Word, for it is the

power of God for the salvation of all who believe (Romans 1:16). The more you read it, hear it, believe it the more you will be gripped by the Spirit.

Believers await the coming of the Lord. (James 5:7) They do so with eager expectation, knowing that then even the renewal of the whole earth will take place and there will be no more suffering nor sadness, no more horrible illness, and best of all, no more sin!

To await this coming of the Lord we need patience. We need to “ *be patient and stand firm*” as the apostle James writes in ch. 5: 8 of his letter. You need to stand your ground as it were. Forget grumbling and complaining. Not giving up but looking to the example of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord and persevered though often undergoing trial.

May Almighty God equip you to face what someone has called, “ *The fever of living*” with great patience. Constantly looking to Jesus Christ and God’s Spirit. For our Triune God is mighty and gracious. He’s there for you, that you might delight in him!

Amen and thanks so much for listening.

