

Week 5: Patience

"All men commend patience, although few are willing to practice it." (Thomas à Kempis)

Few are the number of virtues that are both more needed and more difficult to obtain than patience. While our own fallibility convinces us of a deep need to develop patience with others, it is that very fallibility in those around us that tends to ignite all *but* patience inside of us.

Even so, Scripture confirms our conclusion that patience is virtuous:

- "A patient man is better than a warrior, and he who rules his temper, than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32, New American Bible)
- "A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention." (Proverbs 15:18, NKVJ)
 - "A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." (Proverbs 15:18, NIV)
- "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." (Proverbs 19:11, NIV)

The Patience of God

If God's demonstrations of wrath and righteous indignation compel us to take notice, His demonstrations of patience certainly warrant our attention.

Once we wrap our minds around the heinous nature of sin, we have no difficulty understanding how God's wrath is justified. Sin not only deserves severe punishment, it deserves *swift* punishment.

And it is that very fact that makes the patience of God mind-boggling.

Though we don't relish the thought of righteous judgment being rained down on us, we can understand it. Justice is logical: If I commit sin "A", God will justly respond with punishment "B." B naturally follows A. Justice is common sense, and because God's wrath is intertwined with His justice, we can also understand His wrath.

God's patience is nearly impossible for us to comprehend, though, because it makes no logical sense. It is inextricably tied to God's grace and therefore offers us something that we don't deserve. When I commit a sin (and truly repent of it), God chooses to respond not with wrathful punishment, but with patience and grace.

Instead of striking me dead on the spot for rebelling against Him, He says, "I love you. I want you to come back to Me, and I'm willing to wait for that to happen."

Wow!

How poignant are the Psalmist's words: "*But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*" (Psalm 86:15, NIV)

Those who are inclined to disagree with the Psalmist need only read the accounts of God's endurance with the children of Israel or the accounts of Jesus' longsuffering with His impetuous apostles.

God's patience is inconceivably great.

And because that virtue is so deeply woven into the character of God Himself, those who espouse His Son as Lord and Savior must weave it into their characters as well.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Why is patience so difficult for us as human beings? Why doesn't it come naturally to us?
2. "Twenty-first century America is not a culture given to patience." Give some evidence to defend or refute this statement.
3. How can we, as Christians, develop patience when we live in a society given to impulsivity?
4. This lesson contrasts wrath and patience. How exactly is patience the opposite of wrath? Or is it?
5. Cite one Biblical event, story, or parable that you think teaches the virtue of patience. Then list the practical lessons about patience taught by that story.

6. The word "longsuffering" is often used in the same context as "patience." What might "longsuffering" teach us about the concept of patience? Did Jesus have anything to say about the concept of longsuffering?

7. Patience and hope are mentioned together in the New Testament on more than one occasion (See Romans 12:12, Romans 15:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:3). What is the connection between these two concepts?

8. Is there an easy way to develop patience? In other words, is there a shortcut? (Consider James 1:2-4)