

# Patience

## The Key to Preventing Spiritual Burnout

By Al Felder

*“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and later rain. <sup>8</sup>Be ye also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. <sup>9</sup>Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. <sup>10</sup>Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord for an example of suffering affliction, and patience. <sup>11</sup>Behold we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:7-11)*

To say that patience is a virtue is an understatement. Patience is a necessity to living the Christian life. Without patience a person will not be successful in enduring to the end. Anyone who lacks patience runs the risk of becoming unfaithful to God, and being lost eternally. We must not only have patience, we must cultivate it in our life so that it will grow and flourish. Patience is a key to fighting against spiritual burnout.

The word patience as used in our opening passage means to be long-tempered.<sup>1</sup> Patience is the quality of self-restraint. When we are provoked by someone, patience keeps us from retaliating. It is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy.

Patience helps us endure difficult circumstances. It does not give up when difficult trials come along to test it. In this sense, patience is associated with hope. It causes one to endure instead of giving up.

Patience is not being passive. Sitting around doing nothing is not patience. That is laziness. Patience causes us to keep going when the going gets tough. Patience is active.

James wrote unto his reader to encourage them to maintain their course until the end. *“To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.” (Romans 2:7)* Patience will cause a Christian to continue. No matter what the circumstances may be, or how desperate the situation may seem - patience causes one to endure.

James uses the farmer as an example of patience. Farmers are known for being hard workers. They rise before the sun, and work until it sets. No matter how hard a farmer works,

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<sup>1</sup> Vine, W. E. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 463.

however, there are some things that he cannot control. A farmer does all that he can, and then he must wait on the rain. A farmer has to have patience if he wants to make it.

After considering the farmer, we are told to establish our hearts. This word means to fix, make fast, to set.<sup>2</sup> *“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord.”* (Psalm 27:14) Like the farmer, we are to do all that we can do. We must do our best, we must put all of our effort in it, and when we have done all of that – we must wait on the Lord. There are some things over which we have absolutely no control. We need patience for those things.

We are also told to not grudge against each other. This word means to groan, sigh, or murmur.<sup>3</sup> *“<sup>8</sup>And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”* (1 Peter 4:8, 9) Being a part of a local church requires patience. Each one of us has our own peculiarities. We have our own process, or way of doing certain things. We have our own pet-peeves, or things that get on our nerves. If we are not careful we can allow these things to take hold of us. We can begin to look down upon our brothers and sisters. We can grumble and complain about little things. Many times little things become big things and divide a congregation.

When this becomes our attitude, we are seeking to be served rather than to serve. Everything is about me and my personal preferences. Everyone should seek to suit me. When this becomes our attitude we have lost the mind of Christ. *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory: but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”* (Philippians 2:3) Instead of looking out for the welfare or benefit of others we have become focused on what pleases us. This attitude will cause us to run someone off or even divide the church, just so we can get our way.

Let me be clear on this point, I am not talking about overlooking sin or turning a blind eye to something that will cause someone to be eternally lost. There are some things, however, that we can turn into a big issue when in reality they really don't matter that much. *“Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.”* (Romans 14:3) A lot of our personal preferences fall into the area of liberties. There are certain freedoms that God gives us where we are allowed to either do or not do certain things. These things are not wrong in and of themselves, therefore, no sin is committed. People, however, often magnify these things and take issue

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<sup>2</sup> —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 206.

<sup>3</sup> —. 1996. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1996. p. 282.

with others over them. That's what happened with eating meat and other issues in the first century church. Patience is required when dealing with such matters.

Also, we must learn to tell the difference between someone who makes an honest mistake and someone who is sinning deliberately. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."* (Galatians 6:1) This verse refers to someone who was caught off guard. Their intention was not to sin, but they did. This is in contrast to someone who is disorderly. *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us."* (2 Thessalonians 3:6) This is a person who is unruly.

When dealing with a brother or sister who is caught off guard the Bible gives qualifications that we must meet. The scriptures say that whoever deals with this person must be spiritual and meek. A spiritual person is someone who is going to do things Gods way, not theirs. A meek person, in this context, is someone who possesses self-control. Patience is required for both of these virtues.

If you have the mindset that you're going to tell someone off, you are not the person the Bible is talking about. We don't get to rake someone over the coals, stick out our chest, and say, "I told him!" That's being carnally minded, not spiritual. When we go to our brothers and sisters in Christ we must remember that we are going to a child of God. *"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."* (Matthew 18:6) God takes issue with how we treat His children just as we would take issue if someone mistreated our children. Patience must be developed for such a situation lest we fall, or cause someone else to fall.

James tells us to consider the prophets as an example of suffering and patience.

*"<sup>32</sup>And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: <sup>33</sup>Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. <sup>35</sup>Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: <sup>36</sup>And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: <sup>37</sup>They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; <sup>38</sup>(Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."* (Hebrews 11:32-38)

These were God's messengers, and at times their task seemed great. They labored tirelessly to serve God. Patience allowed them to accomplish the things that God wanted them to

accomplish. They did not become anxious, and cast everything aside when they didn't get immediate results, nor did they allow themselves to become overwhelmed by the task at hand. They did what they could, and left the rest to God.

James tells us to consider Job as well. Who could forget the man who literally lost everything through no fault of his own? Job lost his family, his possessions, even his health began to falter; but Job never lost his faith in God. *"And the Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before."* (Job 42:10) God had pity on Job, and the Bible states that he had twice as much as he did before.

It is easy for us to develop a "why me" attitude. We begin to complain and worry. We become jealous, envious, and even bitter towards others. At the end of the day we think to ourselves, "I don't deserve this." You know, there are some things we don't deserve. We don't deserve salvation. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23) None of us would like it very much if God gave us what we really deserve, yet He has provided a way for us to escape what is rightfully ours.

The things we suffer in this life are not without meaning.

*"<sup>2</sup>My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; <sup>3</sup>Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. <sup>4</sup>But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."* (James 1:2-4)

The trials and temptations that we suffer in this life teach us to depend upon God. We learn that it's not about me. There is something much larger at stake than my own personal feelings or welfare. We learn to deny ourselves so that God's will may be done.

In closing, being content in Christ can only come with patience.

*"<sup>11</sup>Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. <sup>12</sup>I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* (Philippians 4:11-13)

Growth takes time. Change takes time. Obtaining or achieving anything valuable and important takes time and continual effort. In order to accomplish these things patience is required. The only way that we can have this patience is by studying the word of God, and allowing it to change the way we think and act.