

Increasing in Holiness

The Holiness of patience

Intro: Most of us are like the woman who said, "Lord, I need patience; and I need it now." Patience is a difficult thing to develop; but it is essential that we increase in patience in order to be holy like God.

Paul in Galatians lists the characteristics of God that make us holy people. They are the fruit produced in us by the Holy Spirit. The fourth term Paul uses is variously translated--in the KJV "longsuffering." In the NASB "patience."

What it is

We usually think of patience as the ability to wait; but the word Paul uses focuses more on how we respond to what may anger or frustrate us. Patience or long-suffering is the capacity to restrain oneself acting in anger when faced with painful people or painful circumstances! The Greek word is makrothumia. And though it is incorrect to always define a Greek word in terms of its constituent parts, it is sometimes helpful to know what lies behind the formation of a term. Makrothumia is made up of the Greek word "makros" meaning "long" and "thumos" meaning "wrath."

As we study its usages in Scripture, we can see that the idea of the word involves prolonging one's anger in the face of provocations of various kinds.

So then, Just as we speak of someone who is short-tempered (or has a short fuse), this word calls upon us to be the opposite. It means that we hold our anger in check, when the circumstances might have provoked its release! We restrain from inflicting pain on others.

KJV translators chose to translate this word by "long suffering".

When people do things that hurt, it makes us suffer. We have two courses. We can vent anger by inflicting hurt; or we can check anger and "suffer long". To "suffer" is to make allowance for pain and discomfort. And that's not easy! Some people won't suffer long. Some people won't suffer short! Some people won't suffer at all!

Do we have "long-suffering" as a part of our character?

How do we react to the painful things others do to us? How do we react to circumstances that hurt?

Do I tend to upset others by my remarks or actions? Does my approach or behavior offend people? Do I accuse others of being touchy, edgy, and over-sensitive? Or, am I unleashing too much emotion into my remarks and reactions?

Do I hold back from saying and doing hurtful things? Do I absorb the pain rather than inflict it again on others? Do I resist the tendency to vent anger?

If we are to be holy people, we must cultivate the holiness of patience or longsuffering.

Why we need it

We need it in order to have good relationships with others

And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men (1 Thes. 5:14).

Think about how important patience is in our dealings with our family or our fellow-workers.

We need it in order to effectively teach others!

Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (2 Tim. 4:2)

And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged... (2 Tim. 2:24)

There are going to be times when those we teach may anger us by a wrong attitude or by misuse in some way. We must be patient recognizing that they are held captive by Satan.

We need it in order to preserve harmony and unity among brethren!

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant... (1 Cor. 13:4)

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

There can be no unity without patience with one another in times of wrong.

We need it in order to endure life's painful blows

...that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Heb. 6:12)

The Hebrew writer follows with the example of Abraham who endured disappointments and hardships for many years before receiving God's promise.

Likewise we may go through all kinds of things that make us exasperated, frustrated, bitter, and angry; but we must find the patience to endure these challenges.

How can we get it

Patience is not a natural endowment. It is a learned condition. It is spiritual response that subdues emotion to volition.

Patience is learned through focusing on God in the painful moments of life.

Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; (Ex. 34:6)

Have you ever considered what kind of condition this world would be in, I would be in, if God were as short-tempered as you or I? Have we ever contemplated the pain we have caused God in our lives?

Have we ever considered how wronged He must feel to know that He has given us all we have and we use it without a

thought that it came from Him? That we take credit for what He has done?

Have we ever considered how it must feel to provide his Son as a sacrifice for our sins and then watch us entertain ourselves while the saints gather to remember his death?

Have we ever considered it must feel to be brought in loving forgiveness into his family as His spiritual bride and then watch us flirt with the wicked world from which He saved us!

If we only knew how much we had hurt God, then perhaps we could appreciate what restraint He has shown toward us!

What has kept God from just destroying us all? It is His patience or long-suffering with us:

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

We can even appropriate this personally. How long did God have to wait for you to get it together and begin to serve him? How many sins did you commit that he did not punish you for, but instead patiently waited to forgive you!?

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. (1 Tim. 1:15-16)

God endured all that pain so that we could be saved!

..and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; (2 Peter 3:15)

Can we afford to be unmerciful and impatient with others in view of what the Lord has done for us?

Patience is gained through prayer and dependence upon God

Patience is acquired through trusting in the power of God's Spirit to transform us into the image of Christ.

Like Paul we need to pray for patience.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; (Col. 1:9-11)

CONCLUSION

May the Lord help us to be long-suffering with those around us!

May we also be careful to respond to the Lord's long-suffering toward us in the proper way (Ro 2:4-6). How much longer must God suffer before we repent?

