

Patience

By David Phillips

Faith is one of the most necessary characteristics for salvation. However, faith that is not able to endure the test of time will avail little. That is why our faith must be combined with patience. James teaches us about the perfect reward of patience in James 1:2-4, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

True patience is one that is thoughtful, attentive and founded upon hope. Heb. 6:11-12 speaks of this hope saying, *“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”* When we truly put our faith in the promises of God then we will patiently endure the toiling, the trials, the temptation and the uncertainties that come with life. We will look forward to the great and precious promises of God and reach toward them in full assurance that we will receive those promises if we wait just a little longer. How does a runner stay on course mile after mile? By looking to the prize at the end of the race (1 Cor. 9:24-25). How was Jesus able to patiently endure the beating, the taunting, the mocking and the spitting on the cross? By looking to the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2). Knowing that there is something better for us in the next life will help us to endure the trials of this life.

There are many things in this life that work to discourage us. Christians may strive on a daily basis to teach the gospel to the lost, but no one seems to be listening. We may try to do good to all men, yet we still end up with enemies. We may help others, but they just end up taking advantage of us. Why do we continue to do good in spite of so many evil things? Because we are assured that our labors are not in vain and that we have a reward in heaven. James illustrates it like this: *“Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand”* (James 5:7-8). Our patience is our willingness to endure until that time comes.

Even though all Christians have the hope of heaven, not all Christians know how to use hope to learn patience. For there are some who, when tempted and tried, forget to look to the promises of God. Some people become angry or bitter when others do not treat them the way they want. Some people become anxious if their money situation is not as stable as they would like. Others become weighed down by the worldly cares that always seem to burden us. To people who live in the world, these trials are like pests that they strive to avoid at every turn. But to Christians who have their hope set in heaven, such trials are merely challenges that teach us to appreciate the gift of salvation offered through Jesus Christ. Therefore James teaches us saying, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience”* (James 1:3).

If we use our energy to learn how to overcome hardship rather than avoid it, then with every challenge we will learn to be a little more patient. With each hardship we gain confidence knowing that when we put our faith in God we will overcome. With every uncertainty our faith will become stronger seeing that God will not let us fall; that He is watching over His people and that He is in control (Rom. 8:32-39). When we have trouble learning patience, God says we can pray to Him for wisdom and He gives to all liberally (James 1:4-8). When we hold to God’s instructions then we will soon be able to face trials that we never thought possible.

We will be like Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brothers, framed for sexual assault and imprisoned for a time. Yet, in the end, we see that he was glorified. Joseph was able to look back on his trials and confidently say to his brothers, *“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive”* (Gen. 50:20).

We can be like Abraham who endured the uncertainties of wondering as a pilgrim in a foreign land, knowing full-well that the promises of God awaited him. We will be like Paul who was driven out of synagogues and cities and was beaten, shipwrecked, stoned and imprisoned (2 Cor. 11:22-29). Yet through it all, his zeal and patience increased so that he was able to say to Timothy, “...*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*” (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Patience is necessary and it is so beneficial for overcoming the world. But if our love is for this world and the things of this world, when we will never be able to learn patience. If we love the comfort of money, then we will never learn to wait on the Lord when money fails us. If we hate not being in complete control, then we will never endure when required to trust in the grace of God. When we love our physical homes and possessions then we will never be able to follow Jesus if required to give up all for Him. If we want to learn patience then we must truly seek first the kingdom of God. If we love the world then we do not love the kingdom. If we do not love the kingdom and the promises that God gives us, then nothing can help us to patiently wait for those promises.

The patience by which we wait for our eternal salvation is a characteristic that can be learned through every day experiences. We learn patience when we interact with neighbors. Older Christians learn patience as they see babes stumbling and making mistakes. The joy of helping a person grow in their faith is worth the struggle of teaching them. That is why Paul commanded Timothy to “*reprove, rebuke and exhort with great patience and instruction*” (2 Tim. 4:2 – NASV). Those who are taught learn patience as they are instructed, understanding that instruction will help them grow. Those who suffer learn patience knowing that the Lord will give them a new body in the resurrection. If we remind ourselves of the benefits of faithfulness on a daily basis, then we will learn to have patience. Let us therefore set our hearts on the promises of God that we may patiently wait till we receive those promises with glory.

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