

WITH PATIENCE
Live Fully
Dr. George O. Wood

Patience is the theme of today's message as we look again at Galatians 5:22-23. Our theme for these summer months – the fruit of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...” patience is the fourth fruit of the Spirit.

Patience like relaxation cannot be hurried. It takes time to become patient. If there were not frustrations in our life, if there were no difficult people that we had to live with or put up with, if there were no stressful situations there would be no need for patience. That's probably why most of us on nice tranquil days of our life don't make it a reflex to pray for patience. If you're going to develop patience in your life there has to be something coming against you that causes you to be impatient. There must be a need for patience. Everything's going well I don't need patience.

Patience is a great need in our lives because we do have difficult situations, difficult people, stressful times.

I wanted to spend some moments in this message first of all talking about definitions of patience – scriptural definitions. There are two Greek words that lie behind the word “patience” that is used in the English New Testament. The word used here in Galatians 5:22 is *macrothumia*. It's from two words *thumia* from the root *thumos*. *Thumos* most commonly is translated “anger.” It originally carried the idea of a violent movement of air, of water, or a violent movement in the ground or in animals or even humans. It carried the idea of something that boils up. Or something that goes up in smoke. Therefore that word in Greek usage began to be attached to people that were angry. Even today we describe an angry person as someone “blowing up.” Blow my stack! Or “He is so mad he is boiling over.” “He erupted.” All of these are out of that original idea of anger as something that is violent and turbulent, moving up within us to expression. That's the idea of *thumos*.

Macro in front of *thumos* is the opposite of *micro* is “large” or “long.” In this case it is long. So literally the Greek word for “patience” in Galatians 5:22 is “long anger.” It's a person who has a long fuse. Ask yourself does your anger have a short fuse or a long fuse. A *macrothumia* person is a long fused anger.

It's kind of surprising that patience would be related to the word “anger.” I know it surprised me when I first began to discover that that was the original idea of the word. It was the ability to hold anger and express it in a right way and at the right time without simply erupting with it. If you think however about the relationship of patience with anger and look at the times in your life when you have been impatient I think you will find that the overwhelming majority of those times involved a display of anger on your part. Either an inward anger and hostility or some thing that really got you ticked off and made you lose your patience.

There's some New Testament examples of this idea of *macrothumia*. For example in Jesus' story of the two debtors in Matthew 18:26. The debtor asked for patience from the creditor that he might pay off his accounts. Paul in Acts 26:3 asks King Agrippa to be patient with him while he made his address. Being patient meant not to interrupt him prematurely. 1 Timothy 1:16 tells us that Paul says God was patient with him the chiefest of sinners. He didn't right away move his judgment into Paul's life but he was patient with him until he could come to a point of

WITH PATIENCE

Live Fully

repentance. In Hebrews 6:12 and James 5:10 believers are asked to have faith and patience to inherent what is promised. And in Hebrews 6:15 we are told that Abraham was given a promise but the promise was delayed and while waiting for the promise to be fulfilled he had to be patient and was patient. Therefore we are told in James 5:7 and 2 Peter 3:9 that we are to be patient for the Second Coming of the Lord.

Seeing those examples then immediately raises questions in our mind that we're called to be patient with people who owe us something. We're called to be patient with people that talk to us and to hear them out. We're taught to be patient with other people whose behavior is not pleasing to us. Rather than simply moving against them with a violent display of anger we give time for change to occur. We're called to have patience while waiting for the future inheritance that has been given to us. And even we're called to patience while waiting for some present earthly promise, some delightful event that may come to us that may not yet be at hand. We're called to patience.

Patience therefore, self-restraint. It does not involve the idea of retaliating or promptly punishing. But it rather instead does not surrender to circumstances. It has a long fuse.

The second word that the New Testament translates patience is the word *hupomene*. It comes from the Greek *very* that means "to remain under" or "to abide." To remain under, to stay behind, to abide. It has a more active quality to it than *macrothumia*. A person who is simply patient in the *macrothumia* sense avoids getting ticked off. But a *hupomene* person is one who has a resiliency, who can stand stress and has staying power and can be actively persistent and persevere in the midst of pressure.

Romans 5:3 tells us that suffering or adversity in our life produces this kind of patience. This staying power, abiding under. In turn that produces character.

When it comes to prayer requests that we give, I think of the prayer request as sort of a load on our shoulder that we carry. We can ask God to remove that load from our shoulder. If he does instantly remove that load we generally call that a miracle. But sometimes God does not remove the load. Instead sometimes he gives us the strength to carry the load. That strength would be *hupomene*. Staying power – persistence.

This idea of *macrothumia* and *hupomene* are to be together in a loving person. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:4 in his chapter on love that love is patient, it's long fused. But in verse 7 he says love endures. It has staying power. It persists.

Paul using himself as an example to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10 says that in him, Timothy could see a person of *macrothumia agape and hupomene*. He was long fused, full of love and had staying power.

Why is this quality important to have in our life? Because it is a quality within God himself. When you see the attributes of God or the qualities of God, the traits of God, theologians have divided these attributes into what may be called the communicable attributes and incommunicable attributes. There are some aspects of God's person that he will never share with us. We will never as being be like God in the sense of being all knowing or all-powerful. Omniscience and omnipotence belong alone to God. But there are communicable attributes of

WITH PATIENCE

Live Fully

God. That is God is love. Therefore we are called to be people of love. God is filled with joy. At his right and are pleasures for evermore. Therefore we are called to be people of joy. God is the God of peace. Therefore we are called to peace. And God is the God of patience. Slow to anger. 1 Peter 3:20 and 2 Peter 3:9. Longsuffering tells us that God's quality is patience.

If these are some of the ideas associated with patience, how do we get it in our life? How does patience come to us? I'd like to suggest to you four ways. These are not all exclusive. I'm sure there are others. But it seems to me these are at the top of the list.

One is that Jesus must become present in our life. Does that mean to say that only the Christian can have patience? No. The non-Christian may have patience as well. But there's a special attribute to Christian patience. I think Christians are to have what might be called the lived-in look. The lived-in attitude. The lived-in action of life. If my living space shows carelessness I do not do as well in whatever I'm doing. Sometimes we in our own Christian life may become careless in not nurturing our walk with the Lord. When our walk with the Lord is not nurtured then patience does not flow naturally and easily as a product of Christ's indwelling in us. We need to ask the Lord to help us get the mess cleaned up and have his life truly become present in us. I must seek him first as I would love and joy and peace. Seek his presence ministering that quality to me.

I think a second way that patience comes is to realize patience is not something isolated but is in connection, in linkage with the other fruit of the Spirit. Patience is in fourth place in the development of the fruit of the Spirit in our life. I really believe that's not an accidental placement. Paul does not start us off by saying first of all that the fruit of the Spirit is patience. He begins by saying the fruit of the Spirit is love. Then joy and then peace. Do you realize that if you and I are really beginning to walk in being loving people, joyful people and peaceful people that patience almost comes as a natural by-product of that. It is extremely difficult for a loving, joyful and peaceful person to be impatient. Loving, joyful, peaceful people have a good quality of patience already going for them. So we shouldn't try to develop that trait in our life isolated from what other qualities the Lord is calling us to.

I think of the inner linkage of the fruit of the Spirit like maybe you could think of the Panama Canal. If you were coming on a ship and entering the Canal from the Atlantic side you would know that the Pacific Ocean is higher than the Atlantic Ocean and the terrain of Panama is such that there has to be a lifting of the ship going through the canal and after it is lifted it must be lowered somewhat also. This lifting and lowering is done through several sets of locks in the Panama Canal. These locks are about a thousand feet in length, 110 feet wide. When a ship entering on the Atlantic side comes into the first set of locks the series of locks will lift that ship 85 feet. The ship is pulled into the first lock. The massive steel gates behind it are closed and then water begins to come into the lock and lift this ship. The water keeps filling the lock until the lock water level is at the same level as the second lock. Then the gates in front of the ship are opened and the ship goes into the next lock. This water then is lifted until it fits the next lock. The ship almost in a stair-step way climbs the 85 feet. And to the Pacific Ocean.

The fruit of the Spirit are locks in our life. Because we enter from the ocean of our own life without Christ. The object of the Christian life is to move from the ocean of our personality to Christ's personality. No longer I that live but Christ living in me. As I begin to move through the locks of the fruit of the Spirit. First love, then joy, then peace, then I come into patience.

WITH PATIENCE

Live Fully

A third key to developing patience in our life is to lower the temperature of water in our pan of water. Take a pan of already heated water and put it on a burner on the stove. If the pan is already hot it isn't going to take long for the water to boil. But if you'll take water straight out of the faucet that's cool and put it on the same burner with the same intensity it's going to take a lot longer for that water to come to a boil.

I've found in regard to patience that there are times in my life that the reason I get impatient is my water was already hot when I touched the burner of the unpleasant circumstance or the difficult person. So I boiled over quick. But when I can lower the temperature of my water it takes a lot longer to heat up.

What sets you off? There are certain things that set every one of us off. We need to be aware of what they are and consciously, visually begin seeing ourselves as being cooler water. You cannot positively change somebody if you're in a rage. Even if you're in a rage for the right cause. It must be a controlled expression.

It is good when you're in a conflict relationship to not both become heated at once. Keep the water in your pan of life at a lower level so that it takes more to boil up.

A fourth step in developing patience in our life is to simply a practical recognition of the harmful consequences of the lack of patience. When we are impatient with others, with God, with life situations, with ourselves rather than that impatience helping things it forces things. It destroys things. It hurts us. It maims, it wounds. When we do not have along fuse to anger for example, anger spills out and it does maim and hurt.

The Lord however calls us to patience. He calls us to patience with all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14. I think that "all" would even include ourselves. And he calls us to patience with him. Isaiah 4:31 "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength..."

If I am not patient, if I insist on pushing upon getting it done even when the situation is not yielding, if I push and push I not only wreck what I am trying to do because of my impatience. But critically, my impatience does not allow the Lord an opportunity to work out the situation in his way.

I have learned that there is a distinct difference many times in the way I would solve a difficult situation and in the way the Lord wants to solve it. I have learned likewise and the scriptures bear this out that in delaying action and simply waiting rather than forcing ourselves to some conclusion, but in waiting upon the Lord and waiting upon someone else, very often a ticklish and dangerous and difficult situation works itself out because I give time for the Lord to be at work in the process. And I yield it to him.

Over and over again I'm realizing as we look at these fruit of the Spirit that we must in each one of them place our lives in God's hands. We must truly commit our way to him because it is in his hands. And there are some situations that some of you are wrestling with that there is not one thing you can do at this moment to change that situation except to make it worse. God is calling you to a long fuse. To have the patience of Christ. And by waiting to express your trust that he's going to do something very splendid in the process. Trust in the Lord.

WITH PATIENCE

Live Fully

I think that I'm not in a state of emergency, that I've got all the time in the world, that everything is mine to decide. It's really not. It's in the Lord's hands. We do live with an open end lease in our life. If I need to trust the Lord as to the timing of going to meet with him, I need also to trust him with those difficult and ticklish situations where I absolutely cannot act because there's no way I can act and the situation come out good. I simply have to wait. Wait upon the Lord. Develop his patience. Give him a chance to work things around and see his glory emerge.

The Holy Spirit today calls you and calls me to develop patience in our lives. Whenever patience is developed, with it will come an increased trust in the Lord.

Our Father, there are young people here who just can't wait to graduate, just can't wait to get married. There are people in this audience who just can't wait to see some difficult circumstance they're wrestling with resolved. For a long hoped for break that they've been working on to come to pass. It is tough to wait. Sometimes in waiting we will lose the joy of this moment. We realize the terrible thing we do in life when we are so future oriented, so impatient with what is going to happen that we don't savor the moment and live in the present to the hilt. Lord we do not want to see patience as a weak virtue of a person who keeps procrastinating. That's not what it means. But we want to see it as an active quality of trust in our life. Therefore Lord I pray for persons in this sanctuary this morning who are facing things and people that just naturally produce impatience in them. I pray that by the Spirit you would put within them your calm resolve. Your trustful perspective. Father, into thy hands I commit this. We pray too that if there are friends here who have never personally opened their life to you and received you as Lord that this will be a day of rejoicing for them. A day of coming to you and you coming to them. Bless this people, Lord. We pray in your name, Amen.