

Patient Perseverance

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended by the Lord*—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your “Yes” be “Yes,” and your “No,” “No,” lest you fall into judgment. (James 5:7-12)

After having given us some of the sternest of words of warning in the first few verses of this passage concerning the manner in which we can mistreat and abuse the people we work with each day, God, very graciously does not leave us in despair. But He is instead generous, and He turns the conversation to tell us that there is reprieve and relief from the ravaging effects of such sins that can so easily take control over us as we get about our average day of business.

And here, with the Apostle’s words, God tells us to “step back” from our behaviors and to be “patient”, His words implying and revealing that He has different and more righteous desires for us, His dear children.

Here, God cautions our hearts and minds that “patient perseverance” will be required of us as we deal with some of the deeply ingrained sinful habits and behaviors that we have become so accustomed to over the years, behaviors that have no place in the kingdom of God.

May I pause for a moment and remind us of something that we said in the message a week ago? While none of us in this congregation really seems to “fit” the description of the unscrupulous and corrupt businessman spoken about in these earlier verses, cheating and mistreating our workers, you and I still might have some of the same propensities hidden within the depths of our souls.

Why is that so? It is because the nature that brings on those sinful habits and behaviors and controversies has remained the same since Adam and Eve first sinned and imbedded that nature into our DNA. And even though, in Christ, God has freed us from the control of our old sinful nature, our affinities for all those old ways of behavior still keep rearing their heads and tempting us and luring us into their traps.

Turn with me in your bibles and look at some of those old sinful habits and behaviors that are spoken about in Galatians 5. There, beginning in verse 16, God warns us that now that you and I are in Christ, we are not to “walk in” and “cooperate with” the “desires of our old flesh”.

And as I read these words, notice carefully the use of the word “lust”. In this context, God is not necessarily making reference to a “sexual” form of lust, but rather to any excessive desire for the things of this world.

Listen to these words, beginning in verse 16 of Galatians 5,

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

¹⁷ For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, ²¹ envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:16-21)

Wow! What a litany of corrupt behaviors! And while none of us does all of them, we must humbly agree that we can be guilty of at least some of them!

Thankfully though, here in Galatians 5, God also gives us His precious remedy for these sinful behaviors. The remedy is the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit

who has some very special “fruits” that He brings with Him into our souls to help us in our battle with these sins. Listen to this passage carefully and note the strong contrast given between the “desires and lusts of our flesh” and these precious “fruits of the Holy Spirit”.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. ²⁴ And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)

Looking back at those first words that we read that speak about the sinful works of the flesh, we can quickly see that the sinful desires and behaviors in that Galatian congregation were little different from those taking place in the churches that the Apostle James pastored. And also, are very little different from those within the churches of our present generation.

Again, why is that so? It is because our sinful desires and our temptations to do wrong things are natural to us. It is as God told us in 1 Corinthians 10,

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Our sinful nature comes already predisposed toward the temptations that we encounter, most of those temptations falling under what God calls “lust of the eye, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life”.

And then to make matters all the worse, our “three enemies”, the world, the flesh and the devil, all know these sins so very well and are able to use them in the most effective ways to drag us into depravity.

And while becoming a “born again” Christian does free us from the “control” that our sinful nature has over us, it does not take away all the many temptations that those enemies bring our way at every turn. To the contrary, our salvation seems to enrage “the world, the flesh and the devil” to try to tempt us all the more.

And so, each day as we rise up, fresh new temptations await us. Perhaps today or tomorrow it will be . . . selfish ambitions, perhaps dissensions or envy, or drunkenness and revelries, or the like.

Again, some of these, perhaps most of them are not a temptation to you or to me. But somewhere within this long list is at least one or more that the devil can tempt us with.

But thanks be to God, the words of 1 Corinthians 10:13 are also true, that

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

One of the greatest benefits of our being a “born again Christian” is that God truly is always faithful, and as He tells us here, He will not let you or me be tempted beyond our ability to resist. But with the temptation, He will always provide us a way of escape, so that we can endure it. And that is a promise God will keep!

A question! How does God convey His precious provision of help to us in our moments of need? The answer is right here within these words of Galatians 5. God's Spirit is ever and always abiding within our Spirit. He tells us that in Ezekiel 26, where He says to us,

²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. (Ezekiel 36:27)

And His Spirit never leaves us for a moment, and He will always be faithful to fulfill His promise to warn us away from sin.

And in addition to that, as the Holy Spirit abides within us, so do His special “Fruits”. Listen again to those words here in Galatians 5!

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

Folks, these "fruits" are within you and me right now and are ready at our fingertips to provide the needed remedy for the sinful temptations that arise within our souls. No matter what inclinations towards sin that our soul may experience, as we allow these special fruits to have their freedom to operate within us, no sinful temptation can overpower us. These precious "fruits" are a "way of escape" that God provides. And Praise be to God for them!

Stop for a moment and consider these "Fruits of the Spirit"!

²² . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

If we have this very first "fruit" mentioned here, the "love" of Christ, dwelling within us, we will not get involved with behaviors such as . . . adultery or hatred or contentions, or the like. (Galatians 5:19-21)

And also, if we have the "love of Christ" dwelling within us, we will not do the things mentioned in the first few verses of this chapter that the corrupt businessman did to his workers.

If we love the Lord Jesus, and if we love our neighbor, such behaviors will simply not occur to us to do. It's as Jesus told us, all the laws and the teachings of the prophets are wrapped up within this commandment to "love", to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And the most wonderful part of this command is that God has already put that love into our spirit by His Spirit, enabling us to fully obey His command to "love". Isn't that amazing!

And then also, as other difficulties and temptations assail us, we have these other blessed "fruits" that rise up and bring help to our struggling soul.

²² . . . joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22)

Here in today's passage, the Apostle James speaks about the special need for patience, and in particular, the need for "patient perseverance" as we endure all the many long, drawn-out difficulties of our days. Listen . . . verse 7 . . .

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! ¹⁰ My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end *intended* by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. ¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment. (James 5:7-12)

Of all of the precious "fruits" of the Holy Spirit that are present within my soul, "patience" is one fruit that I personally seem often to fail to apprehend from His presence. And that same failing seems to be a common occurrence with many of our brethren in the faith.

For me, I believe I know at least some of the reason why "patience" is such an elusive "fruit of the Spirit" within me. It's because my "old personality", the one God formed within me as He wove me together in my mother's womb, a personality I sometimes describe as being similar to ADD, still has sway within my behaviors. As you might know, us ADD types seem to want to run about three steps ahead of everybody else.

And no, my personality is not defective. God didn't make a mistake. My personality is the one God intentionally designed for me. And when I use it in the right way, I am able to accomplish many more things than I would otherwise. And for that reason, I'm glad God made me the way He did.

But with that being said, I know that I dare not leave my personality unattended. It can, so quickly, get out of hand. And I can easily become impatient.

But thanks be to God, His “Holy Fruit” of “patience” gives me help over and over again, all through my day, giving me “ways of escape” from my dilemmas of impatience, warning me away from so many opportunities for failure.

And one of the precious means by which God ministers His “grace of patience” to me is through my beloved wife. She truly is my “helpmeet”, helping me to be patient, as that driver “tailgates” us, or as that person on the telephone is less than helpful.

And folks, God truly is wise in His provisions of grace. He knows that “patience” is not a onetime or a one moment occurrence in which we can simply “count to ten”. Here in these “fruits of the Spirit”, patience is often translated as “longsuffering”. That is why I like to call the response “patient perseverance”. For my particular personality type, it really is a matter of a life-long endurance of patience!

As I began to prepare for this message and to read the words of our scripture text here in the Book of James, my first thoughts went to the impatient personality that is common to the world and especially to the “unbelieving world”. And oh, how impatient the world is!

On the national scene, members of our political parties and of our national press, seem to have no patience at all within their character and behavior. In their broadcast interviews, they are so self-consumed with their own opinions, they can't wait for the other person to finish talking, so they “impatiently” interrupt or they simply “talk overtop” of the other person's words.

But not only do we see it on the national scene, a lack of patience is very common in our small towns also. As I sit preparing this message, I can hear the noise of the traffic passing by on my residential street. And very few of those drivers are honoring the posted speed limits, especially the school buses.

With all that being said about the conduct and behavior of the unbelieving world, these words of our scripture text are not directed particularly at them, but rather to us, you and me, the “brethren” in the faith.

So, may I “cut the unbelieving folks some slack”. Because, while every person, believers and unbelievers alike, are held individually accountable for the sins committed, the unbelieving world does not have the advantage that you and I have. As we said a moment ago, you and I are blessed with having the Holy Spirit abiding within us, warning us away from sinful behavior. Unbelievers do not.

So then, with the Holy Spirit living within us, warning us away from sinful behaviors, we become “doubly accountable”. He gives us everything we need for life and Godliness, everything we need to avoid and to escape the sins that befall us. You and I are truly without excuse when we behave wrongly.

As I observe my own behaviors, I think my greatest failure involving my lack of patience is my failure to remind myself that God always already has a “plan” that He is working out in the circumstances of my life. And His is a good plan, far better than my own and I really do need to humbly take a step back and wait upon Him and His plan to take its sway in my circumstance.

One last thought! Patience is especially needful as we interact with others within the Christian faith, and especially within our own families.

As we studied in an earlier message, if impatience is combined with an uncontrolled tongue, then damaging conversations can so easily take place, conversations that we will wish had never taken place, hurtful words spoken that we can never take back, causing offense and harm for years to come.

And yes, our beloved family members and friends will often hold us accountable for our impatient words. But our real accountability lies at a much higher level. God Himself will hold us accountable.

He tells us here that our “Judge” is always close, “standing at the door”, hearing and seeing all that we say and do, and prepared to administer justice for our sinful impatience.

This is real folks! Sometimes God’s recompense for our impatience will wait until we are in eternity, but sometimes He does not wait. As a loving Father, God will often administer correction to us here and now in order to bring us back into a right behavior. And so, we are warned . . .

⁷ 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. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. ⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:7-9)