

THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

⁵ Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ (2 Thessalonians 3:5)

Back at the beginning of 2006, I attended a meeting of brothers and sisters who were gathered together to hear the word of the Kingdom. At one point in the meeting people began to speak words of prophesy to one another, and one of the ‘words’ that came up (more than once, I believe), was that 2006 was going to be the year that saw God move mightily with regards to the birthing of the Man-Child and the ushering in of the next age.

Though I do not doubt God did amazing things from eternity that manifested themselves within our understanding of time and the Gregorian year of 2006, this ‘word’ perturbed me and has continued to do so. For I believe it is a small example of an inclination to impatience in the people of God, which makes it’s appearance is various ways and manners. I am not writing this to accuse or shame the brethren who spoke this ‘word’ or those by whom it was enthusiastically received, but to present the problem of impatience in microcosm, as a basis to illustrate the need for perseverance in those apprehended to take part in that marvelous reign of Christ, having ascended to the throne and become the fulfillment of the Most Holy Place and the Feast of Tabernacles. For indeed 2006 came and went much as any other year has come and gone in the twenty centuries since Jesus Christ was manifest in the flesh as a Galilean Jew. And I am sure that every January, believers everywhere – even those with a relatively greater understanding of the Kingdom – prophesy that THIS is the year where the desired thing comes to pass, whether on a personal level or on the grand stage of the kingdom.

Please do not misunderstand me, for I am not one who says:

“Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:4)

...for indeed there shall come a time when the eternal purposes of God shall unfold yet more, and those things which we hope for shall manifest even within this temporal realm of time and space. The purpose of this writing is rather to exhort the saints to patience, to endurance, to steadfastness, and to longsuffering, judging not by the outward calendar, but by the forming of Jesus Christ within His body.

THE PURPOSE AND FRUIT OF PATIENCE

Patience is a subject that does not appear to be preached about or taught on much in these times. Perhaps because we live in a highly advanced technological age and instantaneous culture where we are used to sending and receiving information, making purchases and ordering food in the

blink of an eye, the concept and reality of long suffering and endurance has become increasingly foreign to us, not just with regards to carnal humanity in general, but within the body itself. Much of this impatience comes from a lack of vision, a blindness to the purposes of God in the *forming of Christ within us*:

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you...(Galatians 4:19)

It is this very forming of Christ in us, through the pressures and afflictions of the life in the flesh with it's various trials and tests, that presents the need for patient endurance spoken of so frequently in the scriptures:

For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise... (Hebrews 10:36)

The work of the Lord in us is gradual, separating truth from error and freeing us from the prison of the flesh incrementally and painstakingly. Having steadfast endurance in the midst of the pruning and purging of God produces the glorious, precious fruit of the divine nature in us:

² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)

And again:

¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy...(Colossians 1:10-11)

Thus we see the scriptures placing a significant emphasis on patience and longsuffering, an emphasis that is not mirrored in much of the household of faith today. Patience is shown to be *produced by the testing of our faith*, and it has *a perfect work* to accomplish, for which we are strengthened with all might by His glorious power! When the veil of carnality has been torn to allow a glimpse of this truth, we can begin to identify with this patience, as John does when he refers to himself in the book of Revelation as follows:

⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ... (Revelation 1:9)

The *tribulation and kingdom and patience* of Jesus Christ! How many of us see the kingdom in the midst of tribulation and patience? How many of us would introduce ourselves to the brethren in these terms? It is only when our vision is restored - and we comprehend both the purpose behind our refinement and the subsequent need for patience – that we can understand the

connection between perseverance and the kingdom, desire to know this steadfastness, and walk joyfully in it, as those Thessalonians did, receiving commendation from Paul:

³ We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, ⁴ so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your *patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure* (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4)

We see here a picture of overcoming – a growing faith and an abounding love sprouting joyously from seeds of patience in tribulation. Not that our lives are to be chronicles of constant suffering in which we endure as though through clenched teeth, but rather epistles of joy, in which we correctly identify the reason and purpose behind the trials that do come, removing their sting in the process as we see the hand of God behind all things:

I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ^[b] who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-12)

It is the revelation of Jesus Christ that brings the contentment, the peace, the purpose. It is through knowing Him that the circumstances can be reduced to their correct dimensions in our minds, as we see beyond them to the glorious heritage of the saints of God in Christ!

GOD IS PATIENT

⁴ Love suffers long and is kind...(1 Corinthians 13:4)

Brethren, consider the patient nature of God Himself, who has conceived and executed such a majestic, awe inspiring plan for creation – yet in His perfect will is content for this plan to take literal ages to unfold. It is this same patient Father that sits as a refiner of His people:

**² “ But who can endure the day of His coming?
And who can stand when He appears?
For He is like a refiner’s fire
And like launderers’ soap.
³ He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver;
He will purify the sons of Levi,
And purge them as gold and silver,
That they may offer to the LORD
An offering in righteousness...” (Malachi 3:2-3)**

Throughout the scriptures we have multiple examples of God’s patience in His dealings with His chosen vessels, and the reality of Him working that same patience in them. Did not Joseph languish in prison for long years? Yet it was this same experience of captivity that was used to

form him into one who would govern Egypt under Pharaoh himself! Did not Moses toil in obscurity for forty years in Midian? Yet this longsuffering as a lowly shepherd made him more ready for his calling than the preceding forty years as an Egyptian prince! And not only these, but what of Noah, painstakingly building the ark? Or David, thrust into exile by the persecuting hand of Saul? Did not even the Lord Himself live and labor anonymously in Nazareth until the time of His ministry? We know what great and glorious things followed, and we can see how God's plan involved the preparation and refinement of each vessel:

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. (James 5:10-11)

Let us, like James, use the steadfast faith of those who went before us as an example. By these holy men of old we can be encouraged all the more, seeing the same pattern of endurance in them as we now find in us:

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. ⁵ Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus (Romans 15:4-5)

...and seeing this pattern, we become imitators:

¹¹ And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. (Hebrews 6:11-12)

It is God's patience that dealt with the prophets thus, and if we would heed the upward call of Christ, we must expect the same discipline, needing the mind of Christ to diligently persevere:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us... (Hebrews 12:1)

By contrast to all this, we are in a time where the people of the Lord want things to happen overnight. No sooner is someone baptized but they begin to look around for 'their ministry' to appear. No sooner have we prayed for God to deal with us and judge us, then we expect a spiritual lightning bolt to strike us, exploding within us in a great burst of piety and holiness. Not many are willing to wait upon the Lord and His patience, should they even see this reality in the first place! But to those that have spiritual vision and comprehend the increasing revelation of Jesus Christ, the scripture is fulfilled:

¹⁵ But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

PATIENCE AWAITS THE COMING OF CHRIST

Returning again to the issue of time and expectancy, we should indeed be awaiting the fulfillment of the promises – though judging not by time itself, but rather in light of the increasing manifestation of Jesus Christ, and this with patient endurance:

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. (James 5:7-8)

If the Lord can wait patiently for His harvest, that precious fruit of Christ within us, then we as His people should all the more strive to follow His example. And it is the rising of the Sun of Righteousness within that we should look for, not the change from December 31st to January 1st, or any such temporal thing. For we put our faith in that which our eyes are set upon, and I do not believe the Lord would have us circling dates in a calendar, but rather seeking the revelation of Jesus Christ within all men:

⁷ And He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority...” (Acts 1:7)

It is through patience that we can await His coming with joy, being at peace in Him and being firmly established, knowing who we are awaiting, and having clear vision to see the end for which we strive:

Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:7)

The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. (Ecclesiastes 7:8)

For indeed the end of this journey is better than the beginning, leading into the fullness of Jesus Christ in His body, and the manifestation of the sons of God to an eagerly waiting creation!

CONCLUSION

In the light of the scriptures, I earnestly pray that as the people of God we will leave behind the temporal mindset that looks into the outer world of time for the fulfillment of the Father’s precious promises, but rather turn our gaze to the heavenlies within, where Jesus Christ is enthroned, seated at the right hand of God. The joy set before us is eternal, incorruptible, and unfading, and knowing that the momentary and light afflictions of this age are not worthy to be

compared to that which is prepared for us, let us persevere with all long suffering, until the day of the Lord has fully come.

¹⁵ ...And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. (Hebrews 6:15)