

The author inserts personal comments when quoting Scripture which are indicated by square brackets. All biblical references are quoted from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

The patience of God is our theme today. Take your Bibles and turn to 2 Peter 3 which reminds us of the patience of God. Now when we saw in the Bible that God is patient, because of our experience, we tend to think of it in a couple of ways. Let's take for instance, traffic. Now I do not know about you, but when the traffic is stalled on the freeway and there does not look like any way out, I sort of wonder about patience. Another time when I think about it is in a long line when I am trying to get some service. Amen? And then I feel convicted that I am not very patient.

I just want you to know that both illustrations are never true of God. God is never said to be patient about things or circumstances. Why? It is because He knows all things. He knows the beginning from the end. He does not have any need of that kind of patience. When we speak of the patience of God, we are not talking about enduring hard times; we are talking about being longsuffering toward people.

The Hebrew word is often translated, "slow to anger." The Hebrew word is *arek*. The word *arek* appears about fifteen times in the Old Testament and sometimes it says "longsuffering," sometimes "patience," or sometimes "slow to anger." It means "patient," as in "slow."

In the New Testament the word "patient," like a lot of our English translations, changes it into "longsuffering" or *makrothumeo*, which is used about twenty-five times. It means "taking a long time to boil." God is slow—the patience of God.

In 2 Peter 3, it is going to tell us about future events. It is going to tell us how the world order is going to be changed and how Jesus Christ is going to come back to earth and set up a new kingdom. The theme, however, is patience. It is longsuffering, which you will see as we read 2 Peter 3:1.

1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both
of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),
2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken
before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of
us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,
3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days,
walking according to their own lusts,
4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For
since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were
from the beginning of creation."
5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the
heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water
and in the water,

6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering [There's our word, the patience of God. He is longsuffering] toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,

12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

15 and account that the longsuffering [There it is again, the patience] of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.

17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;

18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Will you join me, please, in prayer?

Father, thank You, for the Bible that tells us about future things. Thank You that it tells us about who God is and what He means to our life and what He can do. I pray, dear Lord, that You will help us as we study the wonderful attribute of God called, “patience.” Will You help us to understand what it is and why it is such a blessing to us. May we also learn from His patience, so that we might have it in our own experience. Thank You, Lord, for what You are going to do. In Jesus’ name we pray, amen.

There are five things I want to tell you about the patience of God. I have come to rejoice in this attribute of God and to be truthful, I have come to be quite thankful for it. I guess I could say in general terms to all of us right now, we should be thankful for His patience. Amen? Aren’t you glad that God takes a long time for His anger to boil toward you?

Now take your Bibles and turn to Romans 9 and let me tell you the first thing about the patience of God. According to the Bible, this attribute of God controls His sovereign plan and perfect timing. The patience of God is controlling His sovereign plan and His perfect timing.

Now, you and I do not always think that everything is happening the way we want it to happen. Have you ever thought about this concept: everything happens on time? You may say, “I was late to the meeting.” That is true, but everything did happen on time, including your being late. Did you ever think that your birth, according to the Bible, was known by God long before you were born? The exact day and time were known by Him. Did you know that all the days that you are going to live in your life are already in the mind and heart of God and in His plan? The Bible says that too. Did you also know that you are going to die on time? Isn’t that a thrilling thought to take home today? You are going to die right on time, no matter what the means or the method. God knows exactly when and where and under what circumstances. It is interesting, isn’t it? God knows exactly when people are going to turn to Him and repent and get right with the Lord. He knows the exact time.

It is the patience of God that is controlling this sovereign plan of God and all the perfect timing in it. And here is a classic example of that in Romans 9, beginning at verse 22, “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, [What if that was the only reason? Just to show you that He is a God of wrath. To let you know about His power] endured with much longsuffering [there it is] the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.”

Now the word “vessel” is referring to people. It is a whole illustration of a potter working with some pots. You can see that from verse 21. Now what if God, who is the Great Potter working with the clay, what if He endures with longsuffering some vessels that He made that are never going to believe in Him? They are going to wind up in hell. Perhaps

you would say along the way, “God, they are so rebellious, why don’t You get rid of them now? Why even let them continue to live?”

Maybe God wants to show you something about His wrath and His power. Suppose He decided to endure them with much longsuffering, these who will never be in heaven but who will actually be in hell?

You may say, “Well I don’t like that.”

“Well, tough. The text says, “What if He wanted to do that?”

You may say, “Well, I do not understand that.”

“Well, what if He wants to do something and He does not want you ever to know about it?”

“Well, that does not seem right.”

“Well who are you to even ask the question? If God wants to do it and does it, what if He wants to do all of it, then what are you going to say about it? You are not going to say anything. There is not anything you can do about it.”

Look back at Romans 9:20-24

20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?
Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why
have you made me like this?”

21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the
same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for
dishonor?

It is interesting that God’s longsuffering applies to those who will never believe in Him?
It is also true that it applies to those who will. Look at verse 23.

23 and that He might make known [He endured with
longsuffering first the vessels of wrath.] the riches of His
glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared
beforehand for glory,

24 even us [Paul says] whom He called, not of the Jews
only, but also of the Gentiles?

Now, from the day of Pentecost which was recorded over 1900 years ago in the book of Acts (i.e., first century AD), until now, what God has been doing is pouring out His Spirit and bringing a vast host of Gentiles to Jesus Christ. And there have been millions of them. And you may say, “Well, what if God wants to do that?” “Well, He has a perfect right to do that.”

So He has endured with much longsuffering, first of all, the rebellion of the nation of Israel. But of course, it was all a part of a sovereign plan. And because of their fall, now the blessing came to the Gentile world; which interestingly so, fulfills His original promise to Abraham that in him all the Gentiles of the world will be blessed. They will

become like the sand of the seashore and the stars of the sky (Genesis 32:12, paraphrased). And He has been fulfilling that. What if He decides to, as the Bible says He will, go back to Israel again and work very powerfully with them in a brand new way in the future? What if He wants to do all of that? You may say, “Well, I guess He can do it.” You are right! That is exactly right.

Well what is controlling that plan? What is causing all the perfect timing of that plan to achieve God’s purposes? And He says that it is the longsuffering of God. He takes a long time to boil, first towards the unbelievers who will never believe in Him, and also to those who were unbelievers but have become believers. He has longsuffering toward both.

As a matter of fact, it says in 1 Peter 3:20, concerning the days of Noah that the longsuffering of God or the patience of God waited in the days of Noah. What is that talking about? Well, God gave them 120 years, according to Genesis 6:3. And Noah told them about a flood, but they had never even seen rain. Millions of people died in the flood. Only eight people were saved: Noah, his three sons, and their wives. But God was patient for 120 years getting the message out and warning that generation. God was patient and yet only eight people responded and millions were killed in the first civilization because they rejected God. And God’s commentary is, “The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah” (1 Peter 3:20).

Has He been waiting for you?

Turn to James 5. Now if we understand this, then it ought to have an effect upon on us. If in fact, the patience of God is controlling His sovereign plan and His perfect timing and all things that are in it, then that should affect us. Look at James 5:7-11 to see some words about the second coming of Christ and how we should respond to that.

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.

Now let me stop right there and ask, “What are we learning here?” Well, God is talking about the second coming. It is coming. It is under a plan of God. It is under His perfect timing. The day and the hour is known to the Lord, even though we do not know. So we cannot set the date. But it is interesting that it is all known to the Lord. The day, the time, the circumstances; and as 2 Peter 3:8–9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness” (paraphrased). In other words, He is not delaying for any reason at all. You may say, “Wait a minute, it has been over 1900 years now and He has not come back.” Now remember, a day unto the Lord is as what?—a thousand years; and a thousand years is as a day. So the Lord is not delaying for any reason at all. He is longsuffering toward people that He wants to come to Him, out of every nation, tribe, tongue and people.

Now the interesting thing is that according to the Bible, knowing the wonderful patience and longsuffering of God, we have a specific responsibility while we wait for all these events to unfold. Now what is the specific responsibility that you and I have? Answer: stop complaining. Now you would think there would be some deeper, heavier theological deal to go out with. But that is what God says, “Stop complaining.” Literally He says, “Do not grumble” (cf. John 6:43). It means murmuring. It is doing it “under your breath” in the Greek. What it means is that while I am preaching, some of you do not like what I am saying, so you are saying, “Blah, blah, blah, what right does he have, blah, blah.” God says to stop all of that! It does not make any difference. He has a plan unfolding no matter what you say. “I don’t like this at all. And I don’t think I’m going to...” “Stop it,” He says. Why? The Judge is standing at the door. “I don’t like the way things are.” “Stop it!” Why? It is because it will not make any difference to anything. God is going to continue to unfold His plan.

A positive way to look at that is to relax and stop being so troubled all the time. You know, why pray when you can worry, right? God says because His patience is controlling His sovereign plan and perfect timing, so you do not need to complain or grumble anymore. You can just rest, relax, everything is working out on schedule. Everything is cool. Do not worry, just relax. Amen? Don’t you feel better? I suggest you enjoy it now because the message gets worse.

Number two. Turn to Exodus 34. The second thing we learn about the patience of God is that it not only controls His sovereign plan and perfect timing, but interestingly, it calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible. Did you hear that? The patience of God, what He is, calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible.

In Exodus 34:6–7 God tells Moses His name.

6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD is God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, [There’s our word, slow to anger, patient.] abounding in goodness and truth,
7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and sin.”

In Number 14:18–19 we find the same thing. It says that the Lord is longsuffering, forgiving iniquity.

Turn to the book of Joel 2, please. It is near the end of the Old Testament. Here is a very interesting thing about God's patience. It causes Him sometimes to keep back from destroying somebody, even though they deserve it. In Joel 2:12 is an example of God appealing to His children.

12 “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all
your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.
13 So rend [or tear] your heart, and not your garments.”

By the way, they still do this in the Middle East. It has been a long standing Middle Eastern custom in the culture, that when you are really upset in grief—for instance the death of a loved one—or just upset at a situation in life, you take your robe and you tear it, showing your grief outwardly. Well God is saying, “Hey, I do not want to see the outward garment torn. What I want to see is your heart torn apart. Come back to Me.”

13 Return to the LORD your God, [Why?]
For He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, [There's our word again for longsuffering
and patience. Slow to anger] and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.

In the book of Nehemiah 9, there is a prayer by Nehemiah to the Lord that reviews the history of Israel. Now Nehemiah has come back to the land of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. And they are going to try to rebuild the land, rebuild the temple, et cetera. Now he is praying to God and he is reminding God of how He dealt with Israel in the past. And in Nehemiah 9:16–17 says,

16 But they and our fathers acted proudly,
Hardened their necks,
And did not heed Your commandments.
17 They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,
And in their rebellion
They appointed a leader to return to their bondage.

The children of Israel wanted to go back and get rid of Moses. Now listen to the next statement.

17 But You are God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger,

Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.

You know here these people deserved to die. I mean, God could have said, “If that is what you want, then that is what you get. Go on back to Egypt.” He could have said, “Hey, it is national wipe out Israel day.” He could have done anything He wanted to and it would have been righteous. But the Bible says that because He is slow to anger, He did not wipe them out. And instead He forgave them. So in Nehemiah’s time, after the Babylonian captivity, he is now appealing to God the same way. “God, I know what You are like. You did it before. You can do it again.”

Now turn to the book of Jonah chapter 4. What a great story this is. Here is a Hebrew prophet who has to go to Nineveh. He did not want to go there, but God told him a little fish story and he got there. Amen? No, that is not what happened. He got swallowed by a giant fish and got dumped out in Nineveh. That is what I call a jet-propelled fish, because Jonah got dumped out in the Mediterranean Sea and if you know your geography, there was no Suez Canal then. Is everybody listening? Then how did that whale get to the city of Nineveh, which is on the Tigris River, which dumps out in the Persian Gulf in the Indian Ocean? It means that what went through the straits out into the Atlantic Ocean, all the way down the coast of Africa, around southern Africa and up through the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, up the Tigris River and then it threw him up. That is what I call a moving whale, man! That is great. So it took a few days, I am sure.

But anyway, the Bible says in Jonah 4:1 that the city of Nineveh repents! One writer said, “Well if you saw a man come out of a whale, you might think about it, but this whole city? We are talking about a barbaric, torturous society. Do you know that historians today still tell us the most torturous people who have ever lived on the planet earth were the Assyrians. They flayed people alive. They did terrible things to villages and women and children. It is awful. This giant culture was at the height of its glory, with its majestic city of Nineveh where they could run chariot races on its walls. You can see the Assyrian glory in the Oriental Museum in Chicago in the Assyrian room. You get a picture of it with its tremendous power and glory. And here is a little Hebrew prophet saying, “Repent.” Jonah was a Hebrew prophet who hated those people at Nineveh.

Now the interesting thing is that they believe him. And they all repent. And now he is mad. He came to see God wipe them out. “Boy, this is going to be great.” He went up on the side of a hill waiting for it to happen. And it did not happen. The Bible says in Jonah 4:1,

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became
angry.
2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, “Ah, LORD, was
not this what I said when I was still in my country?”

Boy, I do not know if I would have the courage to do that. Jonah is basically saying to God, “I told You so.” It is a wonder that God did not hit him right then.

Jonah said,

2 Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that
You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger
[There's our word, patient, longsuffering.] and abundant in
lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm."

"God, I should have known that is what You would do! They deserve to be punished, these awful barbarian people, who took us all into captivity. They deserve to be judged. And here You are forgiving them!"

Aren't you glad God is patient with you? Huh? What a wonderful thing the patience of the Lord is. It calms His righteous anger and provides forgiveness for us. And I say, "Praise the Lord for that!" Were it not for His mercies, we would be consumed, says Lamentations 3:22 (paraphrased). It is the patience of God that calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible.

Now turn to 1 Corinthians 13. The third thing I want you to see about the patience of God, it not only controls His sovereign plan and timing, and calms His righteous anger, and makes forgiveness possible, but it also characterizes His wonderful love.

How do you know when somebody really loves you? The world looks for love. It is getting near Valentine's Day and people get all romantic. They get those vibes—buy those cards. More cards are sold on Valentine's Day than any other day but Christmas. They say they are going to do over 6 billion dollars worth of cards this year. It is hard to believe. That is a lot of cards. Everybody wants to know about love. God says in 1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love suffers long." The very first thing God says about love is that it is patient. It takes a long time to boil.

Now it is interesting the way these verses are organized. The first two statements of 1 Corinthians 13:4 in the Greek text say, "the love" is patient and "the love" is kind. Then it does not repeat the words "the love" again until verse 8 when it says, "the love never fails." What that means is there are two definitions of love: patience and kindness. The next eight are negatives. Did you see that? The negatives are organized in the Greek grammar to describe patience and kindness. For instance, if you are patient, you are not envying. You do not parade yourself, you are not puffed up. You do not behave rudely, you do not think about evil, and you are not provoked. All of those things are all negatives describing the two qualities of love which are patience and kindness. And the first one that God tells you is that love is the patience.

See, you do not know when some one says, "I love you," if that one really loves you or not in a moment of time. Did you know that? You do not know. See, it is always nice to hear the words. Somebody comes up and says, "Man, I really love you." In your heart you can say, "Well, I can think of several reasons why that is so." But you do not know why somebody says, "Oh, I really love you." You are not going to say, "Well, I can see

why you feel that way.” I mean, you do not know how to respond. But you will see whether it is true over a period of time, especially when you do not perform well, amen? Especially when you do not live up to the expectations of the person who said, “I love you.”

Now we will learn whether or not you have God’s love. The only kind of love that sustains, builds up and encourages, and causes you to go on another day, is the love that is always there. It is because “a friend loves at all times and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17). Amen? Love is patient. It takes a long time to boil.

That means that there is cause to get mad. There is cause to get mad. Do you realize that there are people who do not deserve your words, “I love you.” Amen? Do you understand that? The truth of the matter is that you do not deserve it either. And there is reason to get mad at people. There are plenty of reasons, but when the love of God controls you, you are patient and you take a long time to boil. Now we are talking about *love*.

Take your Bibles and turn to Romans 2. When we speak of the patience of God, we mean it controls His sovereign plan and His perfect timing. It calms His righteous anger and makes forgiveness possible. And it characterizes His wonderful love. Number four, out of five is that it cares about people who need the Lord. The patience of God is longsuffering, and it cares about people who need the Lord.

Have you ever thought, parents, what brings your kids back when they rebel? Have you ever thought about that? When your kids are getting a little, you know, feisty or something, you may say, “Well, what should I do? And the answer may be, “Hey, we are going to lay the law down here, brother. We are going to set up new standards, I will tell you right now. They are not getting away with that. Hey, I am going to show you what being a parent is.” And before you know it, the kids have left. “Well, if that’s the way they feel, that’s the way they feel. I did everything I could for those kids.”

Is everybody with me? Now what brings them back? That is what I want to know. Assuming of course that you want them back because you really do love those kids. What brings them back? By the way, what brings you back to the Lord Himself? It is an interesting question.

In Romans 2:4 it says,

Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance,
and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God
leads you to repentance?

There are two things that characterize that goodness. Forbearance is number one, which means: “to put up with people.” And longsuffering is number two, which means: “to take a long time to boil.” “Forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God [that is, forbearance and longsuffering] leads you to [what?] repentance?”

What brings people to repentance is the goodness of God. What is the goodness of God? It is forbearance, putting up with them because they are not performing like you want. And it is taking a long time to boil, because they really deserve to be zapped and judged and punished. But in fact, love and patience withholds it and the goodness of God brings them back.

Now does that mean that God will not judge sin? No. No, do not presume on the judgment of God or on the goodwill of your parents. We need to be careful. The Bible says in Psalm 19:13, “Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins.” But it is important for every one of us to understand that it is not even the message that if you reject Jesus Christ you will be in hell that draws people to Christ. Now in my case, I want to talk about it for a moment because I received Christ listening to a message on hell. Being a bright kid, I decided I was not going to go there. So, I asked my mother how to keep myself from going to hell. But it is not the fact that I was going to go to hell that led me to repentance; it was when my mother told me about Jesus and that He would forgive my sins—that He loved me.

It is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance. Sometimes it gets our attention to know that there are consequences to the gospel and you need to do something. Get right with God. We need to know we have to pay the consequences of our sinful actions. But my friends, what leads people to repent is the goodness of God, His forbearance, His patience. Wow! This is a good lesson for all of us.

In 2 Peter 3:9, we read earlier that “The Lord is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In Paul’s own testimony in 1 Timothy 1, he said, “I didn’t deserve anything. I was a blasphemer, a murderer, an insolent man. But I obtained mercy that in me, Christ might show all longsuffering to others who will believe in Him.” Paul said, “My life is an example of how God is patient. For somebody who deserves hell, and He loved me so much He waited for me to come to Him” (1 Timothy 1:12–16, paraphrased).

Are you glad God waited for you? The patience of God, folks, cares about people. God does not have patience towards things. He does not need that. He controls all things. What He has is patience towards people.

Number five. When we look at the patience of God, we wonder, “Hey, I need that. How am I going to get it?” The fifth thing we give you about the patience of God is that it comes to the believer through the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible teaches that we do not have this patience naturally. Do you find yourself getting ticked off with people who disagree with you? Have you found that out? If somebody walked up to you today and you told them some neat little thing that you have just been thinking about, and they said, “That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard.” Now haven’t you felt, when that happens that there is a little bit of ill will in your heart toward that person? Just a slight bit maybe, huh?

And when somebody looks at you and says, “You know, you never say anything right.” Now that does not automatically cause you to say, “Oh, that was the most thrilling thing I have ever heard in my life. Can you tell me more of how I have failed?” You don’t do that, right? Now, what I am trying to tell you is that we all are operating naturally when we get mad. We are operating naturally. We may say, “Hey, you don’t have any right to say that to me.” And we are operating naturally.

What I want to know is how in the world can we possibly react to people that deserve to be zapped on the spot for what they have done or said? And how can we endure that? How can we be patient and longsuffering?

We are not born with patience—patience toward people. Listen carefully, patience toward people is not learned by human experience. Wow! Patience toward things is. The Bible says, “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because those trials will produce [what?] patience” (James 1:2–3, paraphrased). But that is not the same word. That is referring to patience toward things. So how do you learn patience toward circumstances? It is by actually having difficult circumstances. Trials produce the quality of that kind of patience. But patience toward people is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is not innate in human nature.

Turn to Galatians 5 and let me show you. How do we get the patience of God? It comes to the believer through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit of God. Galatians 5:22 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, [What’s the next one?] patience or longsuffering.” It is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. And I need it. And I need it in three ways.

Number one, I need patience in my relationships with other believers. Turn to Ephesians and look at chapter 4. I need the patience of God that comes only by the Holy Spirit in me. I need it in my relationships with other believers. Ephesians 4:1 says,

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk
worthy of the calling with which you were called,
2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering,
[patience. What is that?] bearing with one another
[forbearance].

Turn back to Romans 2:4. What is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance? It is forbearance, putting up with people in love. And longsuffering, here it is again. What God has toward us that leads us to repent is also what we need toward other people. That leads us to good relationships. Interesting, isn’t it?

I do not believe that it is easy to have good relationships with people who disagree. It is not easy. I do not believe it is easy to have relationships with people who like things that you do not like and people who do not like things that you do. I have very little sympathy for those who do not believe that watching Monday night football is definitely of the Lord. But I understand there are some people who believe that is downright carnal. I understand that there are people who actually do like ballet. My background has never

been tip-toeing through the tulips. You understand? Now, how in the world are we going to get along, people? Well, we need the power of the Holy Spirit controlling us. That is what we need.

Even in a family, every kid is different. And parents are all trying to make them act the same, do the same things, and follow the same instructions. Listen, everybody is different. How do we get along? We need the power of the Holy Spirit in our relationships with each other.

Proverbs is filled with the argument of slow to wrath or longsuffering. “He who is slow to wrath hath great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29). “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty” (Proverbs 16:32) “He who is slow to anger always allays contention,” that is, kills arguments. Interesting. We need patience in our relationships with each other.

Secondly, we need patience in our responsibility to teach God’s Word to this generation. Turn to 2 Timothy 4. I will show you something interesting. We not only need patience in our relationships with other believers, we need patience in our responsibility to teach God’s Word to this generation. In 2 Timothy 4:2-4, Paul warned us of a time that was going to come.

2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.

Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all [What?] longsuffering [patience] and teaching. [Why do we need patience?]

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; [What that means is they will want people who will say what they want to hear.]

4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

And our Christian culture is filled with it. There are multitudes of pulpits in America that have already done what Paul predicted would happen. They have turned to mythological and fable teaching, all because they thought the generation wanted to know it. They tried to stroke, so to speak, the wounded self-image of people. They thought perhaps that going to some sort of psychological approach to the gospel would somehow help. We pointed out the needs of people to the point we have lost sight of God and who He is. Salvation is interpreted incorrectly all across the country. It is in multitudes of pulpits, in supposedly Christian churches. Paul said, “Watch out. The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. They will want to be entertained. They don’t want to sit there and have to study. They don’t want to sit there and be like a Berean Christian who search the Scriptures daily to see whether those things are so” (2 Timothy 4, paraphrased) Has the time come, folks? You bet it has come.

Now understand that to reprove and rebuke and convince, we do not always need that. Sometimes we need softness. Amen? Now I have observed something. We have a little marketing firm that studies people and tries to help people, including me. And they study how people respond to certain people who are on the radio, whatever. It is kind of interesting. There is one particular speaker who people love to turn to if they want to be encouraged. And I understand that because I do not turn to me, I always turn to him. And I like to listen to him because he encourages my heart. You see, if I am in the hospital and I am sick, I would not call on me to call on me. I want somebody to come in and encourage me at that time who has compassion and mercy. You know what I mean? And so, different people are used for different things. I did not win the contest on being a soothing, quiet speaker on the radio.

Now everybody is different. I have noticed that people like certain things. You see, we like a person and that is what we want to hear, because that is what we like. We often do not like somebody else, who may be different, but who may be telling us what we need to hear.

You see, what the passage in 2 Timothy 4 is saying is that there will come a time when all that people want is to hear what they want to hear. I think that is a problem of the church. You see, sometimes you come and you want me to comfort the afflicted; when in reality, I may have to afflict the comfortable. Do you understand? You may say, “Well, you’ve got to feed the sheep.” That is right; you have to tell them the Word of God, but did you know in the feed there is a little flogging once in a while? There is some food that is hard to take, but you need to have. We have to warn people about sin, about hell, and all of that. It has to be there. We have to confront the culture and we have to tell them what the truth of God is.

What I am trying to say is, “Boy, do we ever need the patience of God! All of us!” Whether you are talking to one person, or talking to a Bible class of five people, or fifty or five thousand, we all need what?—longsuffering. And what time are we referring to? It is the time before the return of Christ. Why? It is because they will not endure sound doctrine.

I want to ask you, when people do not respond to what you are saying, and turn their back on you, when they do not like what you are saying or how you are saying it, will you still be faithful to God? Will you? Patience.

But there is one other thing. Turn to 2 Peter 2, since you are right there in 2 Timothy. We not only need patience or longsuffering in our relationships with other believers and in our responsibility to preach and teach God’s Word; but folks, we need it in our reactions toward nonbelievers. 2 Timothy 2:24 says, “And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel.”

Does the Bible tell us to argue? Yes, it uses the Greek word “dialogue.” We are to prove the points about who Jesus is, why He came, and how we become Christians. We are to argue with people. But if you mean argument, quarreling, like getting ticked off and mad,

bitter and resentful—no, never! The servant of the Lord has to hang in there and be gentle to all, able to teach, and patient.

This is not our word longsuffering, but it is one like it. It is a special Greek word that is highly unusual. It literally means, “to hold up under evil.” And it is similar to “slow to anger” only it is more powerful than ever. What God is saying is that if you are going to start sharing with nonbelievers, let me tell you something, you are going to get some hassles and some hostilities. What we need is patience and longsuffering and holding up under that evil. Why? “In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,” (2Timothy 2:25).

What leads people to repentance? It is forbearance and patience again. So when Christians lose their patience with people and get ticked off at the sinner rather than the sin, they are not being used at that moment by our wonderful Lord to draw people to Jesus. Are you following me?

So in our attitudes toward nonbelievers, we have to tell them the truth. We need patience no matter where it is, but especially with nonbelievers. I do not have the time, but it is amazing to me how, in the book of Acts the situations that the apostle Paul faced would have driven a lot of us into retreat. And in this culture, I have observed Christian people retreating from the secular society around them. Why? It’s because it is becoming more hostile. It is becoming more angry. It is becoming more difficult to reach them. And instead of hanging in there for Jesus’ sake, and using forbearance and patience and kindness and staying with the stuff, a lot of us are running away. When our feelings get hurt or somebody tells us they do not like our message, be careful!

I close with this illustration. Jesus told us a parable once, in Luke 18. It is an amazing parable in this sense—that an unbeliever was used to illustrate God. That is a little unusual. The story was of an unjust judge, a judge who was an unbeliever. And it says that a widow, who was being ripped off, came to him for a judgment. He got rid of her. He did not have time for that. She came back the next day and she just kept coming back. She drove him batty. And the Bible says that unjust judge, just to get her off his back, did what she wanted. He just made a decision and did what she wanted. He said, “All right, there! Now go!” Interesting. And then Jesus said that the unjust judge is like God. He said, “Will not God also avenge His elect, His believers, who cry unto Him day and night?” And then He took it a step further and said, “And will the Son of Man, [meaning Himself] when He comes again, find such faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:2–8).

What an interesting example of patience. Here is an unbeliever who just wants to get rid of this woman. She kept coming all the time and he finally just does what she wants, just because she kept at it. And then Jesus said, “How much more would a loving God, who loves you and is so patient towards you, hear you when you cry to Him?” And by the way, when Jesus comes back, would He find that kind of faith? Would there be the faith among us that trusts the patience of God and realizes that He has been enduring all of our junk for a long time? He loves you. The longsuffering of God, as Peter said, is salvation. Praise the Lord.

Let's close with prayer.

Father, we thank You so much for Your wonderful love. Sometimes, Lord, we are very aware of what we have done or said and we know we deserve Your judgment. But to think that because of Your patience, Your righteous anger is withheld and forgiveness is made possible, it overwhelms us. To think that You are patient, waiting for us to come to You, God we thank You. I know there are believers who are grateful for Your patience. And some are not walking with God. And some are presuming upon Your love and compassion. You will not always strive with us. But we thank You for Your patience. Some of us need to come home to the Lord. You love us and You are patient. You are giving us time to get right with God. We thank You for that. I pray, Lord, for those who are not sure if they died now whether they would be in heaven. They have no confidence of their personal relationship with You through Your Son Jesus Christ. God, help them to rejoice in Your patience and in knowing that You love them so much and You are leading them to salvation, waiting for them to come. You tell us in the Bible all day long that the Savior stands with outstretched arms to a people who have been disobedient, inviting us to come home. Help us, Lord, to make the decision we know we ought to make. In Jesus' name, amen.