**Lord, Give Me Patience!**

Yes, there are familiar fears that praying for patience simply delays the good times; accidentally asking to be tested in a crucible of frustration or anger. We may have such fears because modern dictionaries tell us that patience is peacefully “accepting or tolerating delay, trouble, or suffering.” Who, in their right mind, asks for bad times to be prolonged in order to improve their already good character?

Yet, how do we explain these texts from the Bible: “We are happy because of the hope we have of sharing God’s glory. We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce *patience*. And patience produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint us, because God has poured out his love to fill our hearts.” Furthermore, “My brothers and sisters, when you have many kinds of troubles, you should be full of joy, because you know that these troubles test your faith, and this will give you *patience*. Let your patience show itself perfectly in what you do. Then you will be perfect and complete and will have everything you need.” (Romans 5:2-5 and James 1:2-4). We are urged to be imitators of those who through faith and *patience* inherit God’s sure and certain promises. (Hebrews 6:9-12)

Is your patience being tested by the Covid-19 virus we’re experiencing? The answer probably depends on your view of patience. And your appreciation for God’s counsel, at least as it applies to patience, is likewise affected. Again, who, in their right mind, wants uncertainties and agonies to be prolonged?

But, digging a little deeper, I think we can be encouraged by what the Bible is saying. These references to patience were inspired to be written in the Greek language of the time. Converting them into English, as you can notice in many translations since the King James Version was published, *patience* can just as properly be called *perseverance*. It is a special kind of endurance.

In fact, God’s call to patience is the exact opposite of what most people think today. The Greek word (remember, it’s the one God caused to be written) that the King James translators (in 1611) referred to as patience occurs in 31 New Testament verses. It means: “cheerful or hopeful endurance, constancy, waiting upon the Lord.”

Biblical patience is not a form of suffering, but of overcoming through faith in God’s promises. Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not yet see it. (Hebrews 11:1). So, although patience may encounter suffering, it focuses on the assurance that God *will* provide a way to escape it. (1 Corinthians 10:13) Praying for patience is asking to be reminded of the good that is slightly around the corner, or just over the horizon; and seeking to remain expectant throughout the passing of time. In refers overwhelmingly — and positively — to unyielding, defiant perseverance in the face of aggressive misfortune, and thus to a kind of courageousness that the Bible considers to be praiseworthy (2 Thessalonians 1:4). This patience, rather than being a test of one’s own inner strength, results from close association with Jesus. (2 Peter 1:3-8)

Confident endurance is not motivated by public opinion or hope of reward but inwardly by love of the honor of being chosen. (John 15:16) We are a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) in Christ through faith and baptism, though our reception into heaven is still to come. In patience, Christians span this tension between having been given a complete state of grace, which has already occurred, and their still-anticipated freedom from sin’s effect. In the trust and belief that we possess God’s Spirit as a “firstfruit” (Romans 8:23) and “guarantee” (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5), Christians compose themselves in patience and persevere in expectation. (Romans 8:25)

Often in Scripture God urges us to “wait on the Lord,” to “wait patiently on him” (Psalm 27:14; 37:7). “The Lord is good to those who wait for him.” (Lamentations 3:25-26)

God is working in every way, through every person and circumstance, with one goal: That he might by all means save people from sin and its consequences. (1 Timothy 2:4-6; 1 Corinthians 9:22) The focus here is neither on hostile forces nor uniquely on us but on the power and faithfulness of God to be God. (Psalm 140:12).

When surrounded by spiritual rebellion and possibly much inward distress, Christians know that they are protected by God and can confidently wait for His liberating action to bring them relief. (Micah 7:7)

God’s kindness and justice is itself patient. (2 Peter 3:9) God’s work may not always be evident to us (Job 38:1-5; Isaiah 55:8-11) but we gladly share in his goal and he always shares in our wellbeing. God’s patience towards others (John 3:16) does not cruelly burden our patience; nor is it for the purpose of “checking us out.”

There is, however, a second Greek word that is also translated as patience. It is a “fruit of the Spirit” invested by God in all believers. (Galatians 5:22-23) It’s mention is less common than the enduring assurance we’ve already examined. Rather than perseverance, it tracks closely to our modern sense of bearing up under adversity, shouldering unavoidable sorrow. But even this *patience* does not demand tolerance and courageous fortitude. Attention is not directed towards hostile and unjust conditions which one hopes to resist, nor is the one who endures commanded to draw the power of resistance from within one’s self. The point is to hold fast to God and not overlook Christ’s power and faithfulness.

Both these forms of patience rise above the complaining, weary, despondent grumbling so typical of unbelievers. Christian patience is inspired and filled by a righteous and heroic will to hold firm to God’s promises. In persevering, Christians are not judged by their own power. The needed power of resistance comes from God Himself. (Colossians 1:11) The divine giver of good and perfect gifts (James 1:17) grants his children a strong inner ability to wait peacefully in the face of obstacles.

Why? Because we need it. Recall that Jesus told us “In this world you will have trouble but be brave! I have defeated the world.” (John 16:33; also 2 Timothy 3:12) God has invested this bravery in us so that we will not surrender to the effects of a world broken away from Eden and far short of heaven.

Notice that it is not God causing our difficulties, nor their duration. God takes no pleasure in our grief or pain. Rather, God has equipped us with his power of patience, and encourages us to use it. God *gives* us patience. (Romans 15:4-5) Above all, God is the keeper of his promises. Patience towards God is thus inwardly inspired by thoughts of his covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and our future. (Ephesians 5:27, Revelation 19:7-8)

The faithful endurance spoken of in the beginning of this article, specifically Romans chapter 5 and James chapter 1, is entirely about faith. (1 Thessalonians 1:3) It refers to that quality of grace which prepares believers to *not* surrender to circumstances or succumb under hardship. It is evident in our constancy of trust in the Lord and steadfastness in the honor of discipleship.

We may only grasp God’s reasons and workings as a dim reflection of his mercy, but we are assured of his eternal care. We may know only a part, but we are confident that in everything God works for the good of those who love him. So, these three things continue forever: faith, hope, and love. Together they provide us unshakeable and expectant endurance, the biblical meaning of patience. (1 Corinthians 13:7)