

## Godly Character Requires Patience

Rod Reynolds

**One of the notable traits of God's nature and character is patience.**

**God wants to shape our nature into the likeness of his nature, with our willing cooperation. If we are to have godly character, we must learn patience.**

**How is God's patience exemplified? And in what ways are we expected to develop and practice patience?**

The Bible tells us that God is working out a plan which includes mankind. It tells us that human beings are destined to become members of the Divine family, as sons in his eternal kingdom. "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7).

The Bible tells us that God created the Universe as a place to dwell in. "Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out **like a tent to dwell in.**" (Isaiah 40:21-22).

One day in the future, we are told, not only will Jesus Christ be dwelling on the earth with mankind, but God the Father also will make the earth his dwelling place. "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. [Meaning the earth's surface will be reshaped, and there will be no Mediterranean Sea (referred to often by the Greeks as 'the sea,' or 'our sea') and the heavens, as they appear from the earth, will be reconfigured.] Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the **tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them**, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" (Revelation 21:1-4).

"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. **And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it.**" (Revelation 21:22-24).

So the earth, and the Universe of which is a part, were created for the ultimate purpose of being a dwelling place for God, and the family of God.

We don't know exactly how long ago God created the Universe, or brought it into being, because the universe is dynamic and constantly changing. But several lines of evidence indicate that the universe had a **definite beginning in time** somewhere around 13 to 20 billion years ago, as estimates of its age vary (*The Creator and the Cosmos*, Hugh Ross, p. 23; "What Were the First Stars?," universetoday.com, retrieved 6-21-2019). One line of evidence for a finite beginning is that the universe is expanding. We read in Isaiah 40:22 that God "stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a tent to dwell in." These words, "stretches out," and "spreads them out" imply an expanding universe, as has been observed by astronomers.

Since the Universe is expanding, it's logical to conclude that the expansion began from the very beginning, whenever that was.

Another line of evidence is the second law of thermodynamics, one of the fundamental laws of the physical universe. In simple terms, according to the second law of thermodynamics, the material universe and all that is a part of it is subject to decay.

"The implications of the Second Law of Thermodynamics are considerable. The universe is constantly losing usable energy and never gaining. We logically conclude the universe is not eternal. The universe had a finite beginning.... Like a wind-up clock, the universe is winding down, as if at one point it was fully wound up and has been winding down ever since. The question is who wound up the clock?" ("Second Law of Thermodynamics," allaboutscience.org, retrieved 6-28-2019).

The universe, like a clock that has been wound up, is slowly running down. The Bible compares the universe to a suit of clothes, that one day, perhaps billions of years from now, will be worn out, and will need to be changed for a new one. "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. **They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed.** But You are the same, And Your years will have no end" (Psalms 102:25-27).

The earth and every physical thing that exists on it, is made out of fundamental constituents called elements. Elements are composed of different combinations of smaller particles called protons, neutrons and electrons. There are currently believed to be 98 elements that occur naturally in the universe, although some additional ones have been produced artificially in laboratories. ("How Many Elements Can Be Found Naturally?," www.thoughtco.com, retrieved 6-21-2019).

These elements include lighter elements like hydrogen and helium, gases which are the lightest of the elements. Heavier elements include carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen, and elements that are heavier still include iron, copper, lead, etc.

In the early stages of the existence of the universe, the elements were essentially hydrogen and helium, the lightest elements. Before heavier elements could form, stars had to come into existence. The earliest stars were almost exclusively hydrogen and helium. Even the sun, which is a fairly young star, is said to be more than 99 percent composed of hydrogen and helium (“What Is the Sun Made Of? Table of Element Composition,” [thoughtco.com](http://thoughtco.com), retrieved 6-21-2019).

Elements heavier than hydrogen and helium are produced in stars. Biological life on earth is composed of a variety of elements, including hydrogen and heavier ones such as carbon, oxygen, iron, etc.

Astrophysicist Hugh Ross comments in his book, *The Creator and the Cosmos*, “For many decades astronomers and others have wondered why, given God exists, He would wait so many billions of years to make life [that is, biological life, such as exists on earth]. Why did He not do it right away? The answer is that, given the laws and constants of physics God chose to create, it takes about twelve billion years just to fuse enough heavy elements in the nuclear furnaces of several generations of giant stars to make life chemistry possible.

“Life could not happen any earlier in the universe than it did on Earth.” (p. 110).

Of course, God could have created any and all elements instantly had he chosen to do so. But it appears that he chose to wait for the natural laws and processes that he originated to work to create heavier elements, as the universe expanded.

What has been learned about the universe from scientific research indicates that the universe is probably billions of years old, and nothing in the Bible contradicts that. In fact, the Bible tends to support that understanding.

The Bible reveals that God began with a plan in mind, that involves not only living creatures, but specific living creatures called human beings (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2). And already, from all appearances, billions of years have passed since time as we know it began, as God works out that plan. This gives us an idea of God's patience, and how patience is a fundamental aspect of his character and nature.

Even if you put it in terms of the duration of the existence of mankind, about 6000 years now from the creation of Adam and Eve, we witness the patience of God in perfecting his purpose for mankind. He has allowed all these thousands of years to pass, many generations having come and gone. And all during mankind's history, most human beings have remained cut off from God through rebellion and ignorance, going their own way. God has allowed human beings to make their own rules, to live apart from his will, to write their own history in blood and sorrow.

Yet from the beginning God has planned in due time to intervene in the affairs of mankind to accomplish his purpose. “Repent therefore and be converted, that

your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19-21).

God has been and is patiently waiting as his plan unfolds, in a step-by-step fashion that encompasses vast stretches of time.

What is Patience? There are several definitions that explore various aspects of patience:

From *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*:

1. "The ability to continue waiting or doing something for a long time without becoming angry or anxious."
2. "The ability to accept trouble and other people's annoying behaviour without complaining or becoming angry."

From *Webster 1913 Dictionary*:

1. "The state or quality of being patient; the power of suffering with fortitude; uncomplaining endurance of evils or wrongs, as toil, pain, poverty, insult, oppression, calamity, etc."
2. "The act or power of calmly or contentedly waiting for something due or hoped for; forbearance."

Patience implies the quietness or self-possession of one's own spirit under sufferings, provocations, etc.

Patience is akin to longsuffering, endurance, perseverance. It implies being slow to anger and willing to forbear and forgive.

The Bible tells us explicitly that God is longsuffering and patient.

We are reminded in the book of Nehemiah of God's patience with Israel in the wilderness and afterward, despite many provocations:

Speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness: "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. But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them" (Nehemiah 9:17).

Israel's rebellion continued for decades, then for hundreds of years. Yet God's patience remained: "Yet for many years **You had patience with them**, And testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands" (Nehemiah 9:30).

But even then, after God had allowed the people of Israel to be taken into captivity as punishment for their persistent rebellion, God did not, and has not, utterly forsaken Israel. "Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful" (Nehemiah 9:31).

God continues to deal patiently and mercifully not only with the peoples of Israel, but with mankind. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever" (Psalms 103:8-9).

Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, set an example of patient endurance in the face of evil, injustice, and suffering: "For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. **For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:** Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." (1 Peter 2:19-25).

Because patience is an important aspect of God's character and nature, God wants us to develop that same quality of character as we seek to imitate him and grow into his likeness spiritually. Patience is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **longsuffering**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Greek word for "longsuffering" is μακροθυμία (*makrothumia*). It could also be translated "patience," and is so translated in several English translations (e.g., ESV, Lexham, NET, Weymouth, etc.).

The New English Translation, for example, renders Galatians 5:22 as follows: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness."

In the parable of the sower and the seed, Jesus highlighted the importance of patience in the life of a Christian:

“And when a great multitude had gathered, and they had come to Him from every city, He spoke by a parable: ‘A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell by the wayside; and it was trampled down, and the birds of the air devoured it. Some fell on rock; and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it. But others fell on good ground, sprang up, and yielded a crop a hundredfold.’ When He had said these things He cried, ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’ Then His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘What does this parable mean?’ And He said, ‘To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is given in parables, that “Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.” Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these **have no root, who believe for a while** and in time of temptation fall away. Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. 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 8:4-15).

Let's focus now one at a time on three specific areas of our lives in which we are instructed to develop and exercise patience.

### **(1) Patience in dealing with other people.**

In order to please God, we must be patient with one another, and with other people in general.

“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, “Master, **have patience with me**, and I will pay you all.” Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, “Pay me what you owe!” So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, “Have patience with

me, and I will pay you all." And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.'" (Matthew 18:21-35).

The lesson here is that if we expect God to exercise patience and compassion in dealing with us, we ought to do the same in our relationships with other people.

Do you consider yourself spiritually strong, or weak, or somewhere in between?. Perhaps none of us is as strong as he would like to be, but to the extent that we are stronger than others, we are required to support and assist the weaker brethren, with patience.

"We then who are strong ought to **bear with** the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor **for his good, leading to edification.**" (Romans 15:1-2).

Note that it does not say we are to please our neighbors in just giving in to their every desire, whim or demand, but we are to please them in those ways that will be to their benefit, and that lead to their edification.

"For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.' For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that **we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures** might have hope. Now may the **God of patience and comfort** grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 15:3-6).

"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all." (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15).

These words imply that we bear patiently with one another, and seek to encourage and help one another within the parameters of the Scriptures.

Part of exercising patience is that we must strive to avoid outbursts of wrath, and put away anger.

Outbursts of wrath is listed as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20. That means we must keep our temper in check, and strive to maintain self-control at all times.

Sometimes, we have to just put up with difficult, or even downright wicked people, leaving their judgment in God's hands. "Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, And wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. **Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him**; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. **Cease from anger, and forsake wrath**; Do not fret-- it only causes harm. For evildoers shall be cut off; But **those who wait on the Lord**, They shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace." (Psalms 37:1-11).

"The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The **patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit**. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For **anger rests in the bosom of fools**." (Ecclesiastes 7:8-9).

We need to keep in mind that God is the judge of us all, and he will ultimately render to each according to his works: "...who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': **eternal life** to those who by **patient continuance in doing good** seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness--indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 2:6-9).

## **(2) Patience in enduring trials.**

We must learn to suffer injustice and trials patiently, maintaining faith and hope in God.

We've already discussed how Jesus Christ suffered persecution, and even crucifixion, patiently, though he had done no wrong.

Many of the faithful in the Old Testament period, as well as the faithful throughout most of the history of New Testament Church, suffered various trials and persecution. We are admonished in Romans 12:12 to be "**patient in tribulation**." We are even told in Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

Among those who suffered persecution during the New Testament era were the Christians at Thessalonica. Paul wrote to them: "...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 1:4).

One of the reasons God allows us to endure trials, is to develop godly patience. We may not see how this can be of any benefit now, but I have a strong suspicion that this patience will be very rewarding in the future for those in God's kingdom. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that **the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work**, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4).

### **(3) Patience in waiting on God to fulfill his promises and complete his plan for mankind.**

We must wait on God, until he chooses to intervene in our personal affairs, and in the affairs of the world at large. This means we must above all wait on his kingdom. Inheriting the rewards of God's kingdom requires patience.

The book of Lamentations was written in response to the destruction of Jerusalem in the sixth century B.C. It was a time of national calamity, when extreme sorrow and affliction prevailed.

Yet in the depths of suffering and despair, Jeremiah wrote: "'The Lord is my portion,'" says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!' The Lord is good to those **who wait for Him**, To the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should **hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the Lord.**"(Lamentations 3:24-26).

God promises salvation for those who faithfully seek him. But salvation rarely comes immediately, we must wait on it.

"I would have lost heart, unless I had believed That I would see the goodness of the Lord In the land of the living. **Wait on the Lord**; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; **Wait, I say, on the Lord!**" (Psalm 27:13-14).

Ultimately, only God can deliver us from our trials. Only God can deliver the world from the catastrophe towards which it is headed. But we must wait patiently.

"Truly my soul silently **waits for God**; From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved." (Psalm 62:1-2).

Jesus said, in the context of tribulation and persecution, "By your **patience** possess your souls" (Luke 21:19).

Down through the ages, many have sought to hasten the coming of God's kingdom. Many have made predictions concerning the timing of the coming of Jesus Christ, and many have been wrong. We're not given a specific date for the second coming of Christ. What we are given is the admonition to be patient, no matter how long it may take.

“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. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. 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 5:7-11).

So let's strive, with God's help, to be patient in dealing with other people, patient in enduring trials, and patient in waiting on God's salvation.

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