

Patience

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[0 : 00] If you are visiting with us today, you will not know what we have been doing over the last number of weeks in our morning worship. We have been looking at our faith in Jesus Christ as the foundation of our lives and as a result of that, the kind of characters that we seek to be forming because Christ lives in us by the power of His Spirit.

To do that, we have been looking at some words in Galatians and the fruit of the Spirit that is mentioned there. We have been looking at an individual characteristic each week, Galatians 5 verse 22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith and gentleness and self-control.

We are going to look at one of these each week leading up to Christmas time and we will continue to do it up towards Christmas time. Jeremy preached very powerfully last week on peace and today we are going to look at patience.

As Neil mentioned a couple of weeks before, it is not that we are looking at these as individual fruits that we can pick and choose.

I am a patient person but I am rubbish when it comes to goodness or self-control. Just take one or two and cull out the best ones that we can cope with or we would like.

[1 : 26] This is one fruit, so if you use the analogy of the fruit, it is maybe not a basket of fruit like bananas and apples and pears and oranges where you pick the one you like. This is an imperfect illustration but it is more like an orange and it is the segments of an orange.

They are all a bit similar but at least they are all part of one fruit and there is differentiation and there is separateness. Do you get that? I know they all look the same, which these characteristics do not, so it falls down a little bit.

It is not so much a basket of fruit, it is an orange with segments. We are looking at, because the orange comes from one tree, you do not get apples from an orange tree. From a Christian who is, remember that we looked at that the first week that we were grafted into Christ, there are certain characteristics that we share.

This is a list of some of these characteristics that to a greater or lesser degree we are sharing. Today we are looking at patience. They are all shades of grace then, shall we say, in our lives that we are to pray for and look for and we need God for in our lives.

We need God for these things in our lives. For a moment I want to change personality and I want to change character. You have to go with me, you have to be awake and you have to listen and you have to pretend that I am Saul or Paul, just for a moment or two.

[2 : 47] I am the apostle Paul, but I am the apostle Paul before he became Paul, before he became a believer when he was called Saul. I absolutely cannot stand Christians.

I hate them. There are a bunch of nutcases, our fundamentalist lunatics. I hate them and I hate everything to do with them and they have got a really rubbish savior.

Who would possibly follow some miserable Jewish crucified savior who nobody would know. He did not have any power or any fame or any responsibility.

He is an idiot and they are following this nutcase themselves. They are willing to die for it. They are so stupid, but I know much better. I have grown up with the Bible, with God's Word and I know what God wants and I know the kind of things that God will reward me for.

But I am going to spend my life nailing these Christians. They are just a flying omen, they are a pain in the neck. I am going to destroy them. If I meet them, I will catch them by the throat.

[3 : 54] I will imprison them and if I get away I will murder them. I cannot stand them and I cannot stand their savior. Christ is a joke. Okay.

Now, if you were God, what would you do with someone like that? Remembering that Christ is God and that Christ comes in the flesh, comes to die in the cross for our sins.

I do not know how we think God would deal with them. But we do recognise and know Scripture tells us that God is patient, hugely patient with Saul or with Paul.

We read that in the passage earlier on in Timothy where he speaks about God's incredible patience to him. Here is a trustworthy saying, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst.

For that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

[5 : 06] Absolute patience, long suffering, did not nail him, did not get rid of him, did not exterminate him, did not judge him. I was patient with him, longing that he would come to know the love of God through Jesus Christ in his life.

Great grace. You know, you really can't separate his patience from his grace. The two go so much together and I will see that a little bit as we go on. And I hope you find that although we are going through this theme, I am hoping there will be some relevance to the baptismal service today.

And not only Paul but Peter in Scripture recognized the great patience of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 2 and verse 23.

Remember Peter? Peter knew all about Jesus' patience because Peter swore blind that he didn't know Jesus as best friend when he was in trouble.

But he knew Jesus was patient with him and Peter says, when they hurled insults at him, he didn't retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

[6 : 25] He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. The Lamb becomes our great shepherd because he was patient. And we see that, don't we?

And that's why I am introducing it with Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ is not only our motivation and an example but becomes the power that enables us to live with this grace filled patience as well.

We see it, don't we, in Jesus' life as God. Forget his childhood and his upbringing and just move on to his public ministry.

The number of times that he was rejected or treated ignorantly, a fickleness of the crowd, loved him one day, hated him the next day, thought he was a superstar at one point and soon after we're crying out for his crucifixion, the temptation, the Satan, the betrayal of his friends, the darkness of the garden where it seemed that nobody around really cared what he was going to do.

And this was God and he was about to face our death and the wrath of God for us. Nobody seemed to care. Even his very closest friends all abandoned him.

[7 : 50] And all moved away then the cross itself and the forsakenness, even as it were from his father on the cross, patience and perseverance marks out the life, the earthly life of Jesus Christ as the one who comes to redeem us.

Even when we're not even that bothered about that, when we're not even that interested, when we're not that thrilled or enthused by him, he still is the one who has patiently and has persevered in his work of salvation and continues to do so for us on our behalf.

So grace, patience is grace's left tenant, shall we say. If we know the grace of God in our lives, if we know that we are saved by his grace, that we haven't really deserved anything and that there's nothing we can do to earn it, but we've accepted that he loves us and freely has paid the price for our sins and wants to be our saviour and loves us hugely if we know that then. Patience will be the left tenant in our life.

It will be part of our life in other words because it goes very much hand in hand. As we peel off one segment of the orange of grace, then we'll find that patience is very much part of that. We spoke there of the fruit and it just mentions that word, patience.

And biblically, the word really kind of means, well, it gets to different shades of meaning, but it really means long. In the Old Bible, it was long-suffering.

[9 : 24] You know, and that's a good description. It's a good way to describe that word, suffering long or long-suffering. It's the ability not to react when under pressure or when persecuted or when suffering.

It's a generosity of spirit. It's an ability not to be irritable, short-tempered. It's the opposite of rage. Yeah, rage from within us. That resentment, that anger that's within us to a greater or lesser degree.

It's that forgiving spirit which all comes under grace in our lives. It's the opposite of demanding, now. I want to know. I want to answer now. I want it to happen now.

The immediacy of much of what our life is about, isn't it? Needing answers now or even needing to get even or revenge. All of these kind of things come under the meaning of patience in the Bible.

And it's impossible to know this kind of grace of patience without the grace of Christ in our lives. There's a kind of natural patience which we can all have.

[10 : 38] But this is the patience that's motive is the love of Jesus. The motive is because He's been patient with us. The motive is that He's been long-suffering on our behalf.

And because we've been forgiven and He's been patient with us, that's how we react to others. It's self-control in our lives because we're content that He's in control, that we don't need to be in charge of everything.

That it's not all about us. That we don't need to fix everyone's lives and be in charge of what everyone does and of everyone's characters.

But that we can allow for failings and faults and immaturities in others because it's not up to us that we are able to be self-control because He is the one who is Lord of our lives and in control.

So I wonder, as I asked the question for myself and throw it out to you, is that our experience? Is that the experience we have in our lives as Christians?

[11 : 46] Have we thought about that? Have we spent time thinking about the way Christ has treated us over the years? The many years before we became Christians, how patient He was, how many opportunities He gave us, how long-suffering He's been with our grumpiness, our unbelief, our selfishness, our pride, the fact that we've taken all the glory for living to ourselves and we've stuck two fingers up and we've got no time for Him.

Are we thankful that He waited and waited and waited and that we received Him by grace? And as Christians, since we became believers, are we thankful to Him for His outstanding patience?

For we're slow learners and He teaches us things and we remember it once, but by a week later we've forgotten it and we're making the same mistakes and we're being the same selfish people and we're nailing others when we ourselves have been forgiven and we're bitter and gent, unkind when we have been treated so kindly and gently and yet He's so patient with us and He forgives us when we come back to Him again and again and again, seventy times seven.

This great loving patient caring God in our lives. Are we aware of that and can we thank Him for that? And therefore, as we are aware of it, will we show that in our own lives?

Or if you're not a Christian, if you're an unbeliever, will you take the time to consider whether Christ is real and the reality of God and if so, His patience with you, even to the point of bringing you here today to hear His Word, His patience with all the time that you've spent away from Him, His patience with all the time that you've gone your own way and made the decision that your Lord, your sovereign, your King, your God and He is no part and no place in your life.

[14 : 00] The invitation is that you come to Him today, that you come back to Him, that you recognize His patience and His grace and His love and that you accept Him today as your Lord.

So we are challenged and I hope encouraged to think about patience. The patience of God, the grace of God in our lives and consider it for ourselves.

So can I just apply that briefly for a few minutes with respect to living that patience in our lives as Christians? Because we're looking at the life of faith, aren't we?

And we're looking at the fruit of faith and that part of the fruit of that faith is this mark of patience. We're all unique, we're all individual as Christians, but we all bear the likeness of our heavenly Father.

We look for that, we pray for that, we need the Spirit's help to be like that. So there's uniqueness, but there's also a commonality so that we share the likeness of Jesus, our Savior.

[15 : 08] So do we live this patience? Do we live it in our life with God? Now I know it's different talking about being patient with God. Very often when we talk about patience, we need patience because other people drive us nuts or because people do us wrong, we've been wrong.

But that's never the case with God, we might think that obviously with God sometimes. Maybe Dana will think that, who knows? You know in times of great tragedy we think we've been dealt unfairly with God.

Now I'm not suggesting for a moment easier, try answers, but if we lose sight of this foundational truth of God's ultimate goodness even when we can't understand it, then we begin to worship a devil.

You see we can't have that. However much from our perspective we can't see, our faith is in a good God and like children we're asked to trust in Him in that.

So even with God from our point of view where we can't see clearly and don't know, I guess that patience is required in the sense of trust.

[16 : 24] Will we trust Him when things are bad? It's great, it's easy to trust Him when things are good, isn't it? No problem, we can all do that. But when we don't understand, when we're in the dark, when tragedy strikes, will we be patient and wait on God then?

We can't trust Him and show that fruit of persevering strength, persevering through difficult times, you know, that's really the root meaning of the word. Will we do that?

And we need Him to help us do that. So with God that healing, healing will always take time. You know it's great, you go on to God TV and bang!

God heals you in an instant, just sign the check and put it through the post and you'll be healed. God will heal you in an instant, as if it were that easy for us in life.

We would be monsters if that were what we received all the time because it would feed out egos and it would feed our selfish desires so often, we'd shove other people out of the way, yeah, I want to be healed.

[17 : 25] Healing takes time in our lives, the impatience of our life, the self-centeredness, the pride, the ignorance. It's a lifetime, the sanctification takes and sometimes it will be not physical healing, we need so much as a deep-seated spiritual healing, so patience with God.

But also patience maybe more practically with family and friends. That's where we need grace most, isn't it? It's not in church, it's easy to be graceful in church, it's only an hour or a little bit more, maybe, a Sunday or a baptism.

It's easy to look good in church and be patient, well, maybe it's not easy to be patient, but it's easier to be patient, but you know when we get home, we can put the barriers down and it's not quite so significant and easy to be patient and to show grace, that's where we need grace most, isn't it?

When we take off whatever it is we put on in public, when we're ourselves, when our guards are down, when maybe sometimes as a dad or a mum we feel the need to be in control of everything that's happening in the home, where we can be unforgiving within the family-friend context, whereas husbands we can have unreal expectations of our wives, or wives of husbands or parents of children and even children of parents.

You know, where we need that patience, where we need to put into practice, if we're Christians, and it's a baptismal service, okay?

[19 : 00] When they talk about family, that's where we need patience most, the grace of God in our everyday living. And I'm not speaking here about suppressing anger, I'm not saying, pfft, just learning to keep it all bottled up.

That's not healing, that's not dealing with it, that's just learning to be angry inside, it's just learning not to show it. But it's recognizing the sinful rage that sometimes lies within us, that is easily exposed in a family setting and taking it to God and asking for His help.

And for us, we're going to always get it right, we lose the head, we'll do things wrong, we'll be impatient. But that's what the Christian life's about. So we're recognizing that and taking it to God, taking it to Christ.

We need to wrestle with the mentality of the world, which says, two wrongs make a right. Someone's wrong me, I'll wrong them. Tit for tat.

But rather that we recognize that there are times when we're asked and required to be patient. Maybe it will involve counting to ten in a family context, your set to explode.

[20 : 17] Maybe it will involve thinking before, certainly it will involve thinking before we speak. It may even involve praying before we speak in our Christian lives. But as parents, for example, in the home, there is nothing, nothing that will test your Christian grace and patience more than children.

Make that as a categorical fact statement. That will be the case. They will challenge you and you'll be asked to cope with things that you never thought you would need to cope with.

And you'll need to deal with immaturity and with their loneliness to learn and with their mistakes and the fact that they're not growing up just like you were the perfect child.

I know I can't really say that today because my mother's here. But how is a Christian parent? Myrtle, Pam, how are you going to cope when your five-year-old crayons on your newly painted wall with indelible crayon ink stuff that doesn't come off?

Okay, that's an everyday ordinary example. But how do we deal with these things as Christians? Teenagers, how do you deal with the ignorance and stupidity of your parents who know nothing and who keep telling you to do things that seem so utterly ridiculous like make your bed and put your dirty washing in the dirty washing basket?

[21 : 51] Now, these are small and significant things, but they can become big things, can they? They can become significant and we need to recognize that patience is required and grace is required in the family setting of our lives.

And it all comes under the rubric of grace. You know, if we're animals in the home before God, it doesn't matter how great we look in the world, a grace begins at home with those closest to us and patience is a very important part of that.

But also, can I just say briefly in the Christian community, we bear patience in our family, in the church that is our Christian family, there's often isn't so much anger or so much impatience.

Church can be a desperate, first community can be a desperately impatient place and surprisingly a place of little forgiveness, quickness to judge.

But if we understand ourselves, and that's why I began with Paul or with Jesus and with his patience with us, if we understand his patience with us and his longsuffering and his constant grace, we will be longsuffering with others.

[23 : 14] That is just a given, but it is something we do work at, because the church here, St. Columba's for example, it's our playing field.

It's where people, where our Christianity is it wears on display. It's where people see our Christianity as we interact with one another, not just in the worship service, but in our lives and that's what we're aiming for, this Christian community, not just the one hour on a Sunday, but a living community of people that people see that will invite our friends to a quiz night and they'll see us interacting with one another.

And that's our playing field, it's where our Christianity is on display. Now I'm not saying we hypocritical and act differently, I'm saying act naturally as a Christian by being graceful and by working at grace.

When people are watching and when people aren't. So that in the congregation here, you know, be patient with people who are young in the faith. Be patient with new believers. Mary's a young Christian.

And there's many young Christians here in the congregation, Mary will be baptized today. We'll be patient with young Christians. Recognize that we make mistakes. Oh, we make mistakes, sorry, including myself there, young Christians.

[24 : 24] Recognize that they will make mistakes. Recognize there's many things within the congregation we don't know. There's many answers we don't have. There's different theological hues and thinking within the congregation.

Be patient with that. Be patient with one another. We're not God. We don't have all the answers. We respect and we learn from one another.

So often I think within the church it's about control. See, control shows itself in impatience. Well, they don't act like me. They don't think like me.

They're not the same as me. Because it's about uniformity and about all being the same. That isn't what ought to be in Christ. Yes, we have this fruit.

Of course we have that. Yes, we have God's word, which is our guide. But there's many things God's word doesn't speak about. There's many things that He gives liberty on. There's many things that are unclear for us.

[25 : 21] But the important, basic realities of fruit are absolutely clear and easy. Of course that's never easy, is it? Never easy to be together.

But very often when the problem is everyone else in the church, it's not really, is it?

Problem isn't necessarily with everyone else. Although everyone else will have problems. Problem is sometimes with ourselves. Because that's what He's wanting us to do. He's wanting us to look at ourselves, because if we're then filled with grace and forgiveness, then that will be the perspective that we have with others.

It's easy for us to walk away. It's easy for us to lose the head. It's easy for us to lose our temper. We're required to think and act differently. I'm very glad that for 22 years I've been a minister.

I've been moderator of church sessions. That is moderators of the elders, the leadership team. And I'm glad to say that over that 22 years in different congregations, I've never once had a vote on the church session about anything.

[26 : 33] We've sought consensus. Now that doesn't mean that everyone's agreed with everything. It doesn't mean that I've always got my way, or another elder's always got his way. It means that we've had to give and take. It means we've had to discuss and talk.

We haven't always got it right. We've made lots of mistakes. We've cried. We've laughed. But we've sought to be patient. You can't work with other people unless there's patience, unless there's grace, unless there's give and take in the shadow of grace.

It requires a great amount of prayer in our lives. And lastly, as well, and probably in the world, as Christians, we have to show that patience of grace.

Now we're raging at the ignorance, or unbelief, or antagonism in the world. Do we seek the revenge of God upon an unbelieving and secular age?

I hope not. We call down judgment and fire from heaven on those who don't believe what we hold so dear.

[27 : 41] God isn't doing it. He's patient. Do we think we have the right to call down such judgment on others? I'll probably say this once or twice in the next few weeks.

I was at Tim Keller's church in Redeemer in New York last Sunday, and I'll probably repeat much of what he says over the next few weeks. But he said a very interesting thing, just what she was speaking about in relation to his sermon, about a response of his wife after 9-11.

He was in New York at the time of 9-11, and there was programs on the television at the time, and there was a commentator who was saying at that point that he was talking about the tragedy that had happened.

He says, religious fundamentalism always brings with it violence. And he said he was interested by his wife's response. She said, it depends on what your fundamentals are.

He said, have you ever seen an Amish terrorist? And if we believe in a Saviour who loves his enemies, then that will obviously colour our response to a world of unbelief in our lives.

[28 : 54] We live by grace in the world. We live by grace when we drive the car, in terms of patience. A very real practical out-working of that coming to church here today.

It's from Larbert, where I was preaching at half past nine. Half past eight, half past nine, had to finish by ten, rushing through, didn't break the law, liar.

And then came all the way in, we had ten minutes to spare, everything was going well, came to the western approach road. Roadworks, ten minutes. I'm not going to make it, I'm going to be late for the baptism.

Lord, I'm preaching on patience. What am I going to do? So I turned the car around and went another way, and came through Gorgie, and got here on time, thankfully.

But I thought that was maybe quite relevant. But as you wait in a queue, as you play sports, your teamwork at work, your colleagues, fellow students, am I going on that long?

[30 : 03] Okay, I take the hint. Okay, who's in control? Obviously, in this instant, not me. But with our employees, are we showing patience?

Are we showing grace? Are we showing love? So let us make patience the difference in our lives.

And shortly you'll be taking vows as a congregation for Mary and for Samuel. You'll be vowing to pray for them. You'll be vowing to be patient when the kids disrupt the service.

You'll be vowing to love them as children and as grown-ups. So please bear in mind the patience that's required. That is real, isn't it? It's not kind of just make-believe, it's real.

And it's not just a human trait. Remember the motive is what Jesus has done for us. It's his patience and his grace, his perseverance to go to the cross on our behalf, to dine our place and to wait for us to believe.

[31 : 15] Amen.