

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## Step Four: To Temperance Patience

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. (2 Peter 1:5-9, KJV 1900)*

We chuckle at the quip, "Lord, please give me patience, and give it to me right now." Perhaps the chuckle reveals that we have too often thought in terms of the quip, knowing that it contradicts the very attitude that we seek. Two words appear in the New Testament that seem closely related, patience and longsuffering. Some commentaries and New Testament language scholars suggest that patience refers to our reaction to **things**, while longsuffering refers to our reaction to **people**. The idea seems to mesh well with the passages where the two words appear. Whether the words draw this distinction or not, I observe that a study of Hebrews 11 will nudge us to view both things and people through the godly matrix of faith.

Paul wrote a highly instructive lesson on this thing called patience.

*And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. (Romans 5:3-5, KJV 1900)*

In this passage as in our present context, the order in which the various traits are listed is integral to the lesson that the Holy Spirit teaches. By our nature, we despise pressure situations and unexpected setbacks, "tribulations." Paul didn't indicate a warped pleasure in pain. He rather looks past the tribulation to the potential outcome and teaches us to look past the moment when we encounter difficult moments in our lives to faith's potential impact.

As you study this passage, be aware. The progression of godliness that Paul outlines in these steps is not automatic or guaranteed by any means. Some folks will cave under pressure and react in a mirror opposite way. The key to this godly progression appears in the first two verses of the chapter. We only realize the blessed outcome of tribulation that Paul outlines when we face and deal with our tribulations through faith. Trying to endure or eliminate your tribulation in any other way will produce a sadly less spiritual and less godly

outcome. Consider some of the trials that the disciples faced on the Sea of Galilee with Jesus. When they looked too much at the wind and the waves, they always created problems for themselves. Only as they turned from the problem to Jesus did they find their peace. The lesson is the same for us. When your tribulation slaps your face and shocks you into a bewildered mindset, how do you react? Do you increase your gaze at the problem? Or do you turn from the problem and ask the Lord to stand by you and lead you to the right answer to get through it?

Learn more from the Sea of Galilee experiences. When an unexpected and dreaded event invades your life, where do you focus your mind? Do we not most often focus on the problem and seek the Lord only indirectly? The longer we focus our thoughts on the problem the more fearful it will appear to us and the more we will faint before it.

*But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)*

Think of a little church in the first century. This church had its beginning with a small group of Jews who met beside a river on the Sabbath. (Acts 16) The Holy Spirit directed Paul to seek them out and preach to them. In fact, if we go back to the Holy Spirit's revelation to Paul, "Come over into Macedonia, and help us," this small group was the first of several churches that had their beginning with Paul's travels to Greece. (Acts 16:9) The Jews observed many traditions that had no ground at all in the Old Testament, some of them understandably practical, and some rather strange. The term "...where prayer was wont to be made" seems to refer to a small informal group that gathered on the Sabbath for reading of the Old Testament Scriptures and prayer. Normally this number was less than a dozen, a very small group by our modern perspective. They formed a synagogue only after their numbers increased. Although we read about large numbers of believers being added to the company of the faith in the early chapters of Acts, primarily related to the Church in

Jerusalem, later references to local churches in Acts and the New Testament letters make no mention of numbers. We do read occasionally of a church that met in someone's home. (Romans 16:15)

At the time of Paul's letter to the Philippians, we have no indication of the size of that church. Given their location in the intellectual, pagan culture of Greece, governed by Roman authority, we cannot imagine the hurdles and dangers that this little church faced. How easily they could have focused on the elitist philosophy that was so popular in their culture and imagined that they had no potential whatever to reach anyone with their faith. Ah, and how about us today? Do we look around us and see a wicked world and think that it is all but hopeless for us to encourage anyone to attend our church? We are too different from other churches and from the culture. Our church members have different personalities from those people, so they wouldn't find our church attractive enough to make it a permanent part of their life. We stack the hurdles high in our anticipation of failure. But do we look past those minor and superficial obstacles to our God who is stronger than any hurdle. I am amazed at the diversity of people and personalities in most churches. And seeing that diversity reminds me; feeding sheep is far more central to our Biblical charge than prequalifying people based on the superficial issues that we may discern. If we encounter someone who gives evidence of grace in his heart and hunger for righteousness, let's leave the obstacles to God. Show Biblical hospitality and invite them to church with you.

Paul comforts the Philippians that his God not only is able, but that He shall supply all of their needs from His rich storehouse in glory. We need this message refreshed in us and to us on a regular basis.

*For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. (Hebrews 10:36)*

Once again we see this noble trait of patience associated with saints under pressure. Paul's (I believe the writer of Hebrews) letter seems addressed to believing Jews who had left their synagogue and embraced the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although presently standing—barely so—in the faith, the weight of their trials was enticing these believers to abandon their faith and return to the synagogue. First century Jews who embraced the gospel were disowned and barred from their human family as well as their synagogue family. They were often persecuted fiercely by their former family and friends.

The idea of doing the will of God today and realizing a blessing in the next fifteen minutes is not at all Biblical. A believer might well do the right thing, but soon become discouraged and walk away from the place of blessing before the blessing

arrives. The Lord extends countless blessings to His children who remain steadfast in their faith—and in their faith-walk. However, our actually realizing those blessings requires that we not only act out the godly conduct commanded, but that we remain steadfast in that conduct. The Lord always sends the promised blessing, but He does not send it on our timeline. He sends it when we need it, not necessarily when we want it.

Hebrews 13 reminds these faltering believers that, though they have lost access to the altar of Jewish worship in Jerusalem, they have a far superior altar at which to gather in worship. Whatever the issue, serving God faithfully always makes our life better and our faith stronger.

When the Lord commands us to engage a specific behavior or action, He always makes it quite clear. Obedience to that command always brings a blessing. However, He knows everything about us, including how faithfully and how conscientiously we obey. If we obey superficially, but, deep within, we do so with little expectation of the blessing, He knows. If we obey superficially, but with a reluctant heart, He knows. Heart obedience fulfills the commandments of God far better than reluctant obedience. (Romans 6:17; especially note "...ye have obeyed from the heart...") If we bring our heart into submission and obedience to the Lord, our bodies will follow. If we allow unbelief and disobedience to reside in our heart, even as we superficially go through the external motions of obedience, He knows. The blessing always comes from heart-obedience and steadfastness in the faith through the pressures of tribulation.

It was this same Peter who wrote our study passage who abandoned this principle of patience when faced with the reality that Jesus had been crucified and buried. "I go a fishing" (John 21:3) sadly influenced other believers around Peter to join him. Not only had these men, Peter included, seen the resurrected Lord, but they were actually now in Galilee because He commanded them to go there where He would soon appear to them. When He didn't immediately appear to them, Peter succumbed to his native impatience and uttered these words of despair. We are such weak creatures of time. Since Jesus didn't burst into the room the moment the disciples arrived back in Galilee, Peter momentarily gives up and walks away. As it was with Peter, so it is with us. Our bad conduct is always observed by others and often leads them to imitate our sin. The Lord graciously appeared to Peter at His time, and Peter obeyed.

Your tribulation of the moment may not rise to the intensity of the trials that crowded into the lives of first century believers, but they crowd into your life and stifle your faith. Look away from the trial to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith. Keep your heart fixed on Him. Add patience to your spiritual growth. The joy down the road on this journey will far exceed the bitterness of the trial.

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.  
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