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John Gill's

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 17

OF PATIENCE

Without patience there can be no real self-denial, nor true submission to the will of God in adversity; nor contentment in every state; nor thankfulness for every mercy; it is what accompanies every grace, as faith, hope, and love; hence we read of "the work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope," as together in the same persons, remembered by the apostle (1 Thess. 1:3), and to the exercise of every grace this of patience is to be added (2 Pet. 1:5,6), and this, with other graces, is to be eagerly pursued, closely followed after, and constantly exercised (1 Tim. 6:11), it is so necessary in the things of God, that one a stranger to this grace, as Tertullian observes, cannot undertake to perform any command, nor do any work that is acceptable to the Lord. Concerning which may be inquired,

1. First, in what it lies, or wherein is the exercise of it.

1a. In patiently bearing afflictions, of whatsoever kind it pleases God to exercise with; hence the exhortation to "be patient in tribulation" (Rom. 12:12), afflictions are the lot of the children of God, who are described as a poor and afflicted people; these are what they are appointed unto, what Christ has given them reason to expect in this world, and of which all the children of God are partakers; for if without them, they are bastards, and not sons; and therefore should be patiently bore: every follower of Christ has a cross, his own peculiar cross; which he is to take up willingly and bear cheerfully; "Christianus est crucianus;" a Christian is a cross bearer, as Luther used to say; nor should we be impatient under it. Afflictions lie in the way to the heavenly glory, which is a "narrow way," *τεθλιμμενη οδος*, an afflicted way, strowed with afflictions; and through this rough way all Christian pilgrims and travelers pass, and enter the kingdom; so did Christ himself; and ere long they will come to the end of it, and out of great tribulations, and therefore should patiently endure them. They are no other than fatherly chastisements, given

in love, and for good; and sooner or later apparently issue in good, either here or hereafter, and therefore to be yielded to with filial reverence and subjection; and though in themselves not joyous, but grievous; yet since peaceable fruits of righteousness follow them, those who are exercised with them, should be content to bear them. Now to the exercise of patience under afflictions, murmurings, and repinings at them, and complainings of them, are opposite. Nor should saints be in haste to be rid of them, but wait the Lord's time; nor make use of any unlawful methods to get out of them; but should be willing they should take their course, and should let patience have its perfect work.

1b. The exercise of patience lies in bearing reproach and persecution for the sake of Christ and his gospel; they that will live godly in Christ must expect these things; they are not to be thought new and strange, as if they were never before known or heard of; nor should saints be impatient under them. Moses esteemed reproach for Christ's sake greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; and the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ; yea more than this, the followers of Christ have been called unto in all ages, especially in the first ages of Christianity, under Rome pagan, and since under Rome papal, even to endure the most cruel persecutions and severe deaths; after an account of which this observation is made, "Here is the patience and faith of the saints;" that is, the trial of their patience and faith; and we are not yet out of antichristian times; the reign of antichrist is not yet at an end: and whatsoever saints are called to suffer for the sake of Christ, is cheerfully to be submitted to and patiently endured; nor should they desert their station, nor withdraw themselves from their duty, nor drop their profession, nor forsake the fellowship of the saints, and be like the stony ground hearer, who by and by is offended, withdraws himself, and is gone.

1c. Patience is tried and exercised in and by the temptations of Satan; our Lord suffered much himself, being tempted; and with what patience did he endure his sufferings by them, repelling every temptation only by saying, "It is written" so and so; though at the last temptation, and which was the most insolent and audacious, he added, "Get thee hence, Satan." Saints have reason to bear them all patiently; since Christ their High Priest not only sympathizes with them, but helps them when tempted, and prays for them, that their faith fail not; and still the more, since he assures them his grace is sufficient for them, to bear them up under temptations, and carry through them, and that his strength shall be made perfect in their weakness, to deliver out of them.

1d. Patience is exercised by divine desertions, and lies in quietly waiting for the Lord's gracious manifestations of himself unto his people again. Sometimes they are impatient on this account, and inquire the reason of it, and say, "Why hidest thou thyself?" and complain of the length of time, and ask, "How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?" (Ps. 10:1; 13:1), thinking the time of desertion so long as to be a sort of eternity; and, indeed, unbelief sometimes suggests, that God has cast off for ever, and will be favorable no more; but at other times we find the saints more patient,

and in more quiet and waiting postures; as the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 8:17), and more especially the church, under the hidings of God's face (Micah 7:7-10).

1e. Patience is exercised when answers of prayer are deferred, and it lies in a quiet waiting for them. Sometimes the Lord's people are very uneasy and impatient because they are not immediately answered, and imagine that God has covered himself with a cloud, that their prayer cannot pass through; or that he has turned a deaf ear to them, and will never regard them; though the vision is for an appointed time, and therefore should be waited for till that time comes, when it will not tarry; and so it has been found by experience; as by David (Ps. 40:1,2).

1f. This grace appears and shows itself in a patient waiting for the heavenly glory; sometimes the saints are impatient, and want to depart, and be in the enjoyment of it before God's time, because of the afflictions, trials, and exercises they meet with in life; which does not become them; instances of which were Elijah, Job, Jonah, and others: but afflictions are to be endured patiently, in expectation of glory; since it is but a short time they will last; a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry; and therefore they have need of, and should exercise patience in doing the will of God, that they may receive the promises; and should consider that their afflictions are but for a moment, as well as light, when compared with the eternal weight of glory that will shortly follow; and therefore should hope and quietly wait for it (Rom. 8:25). I shall next consider,

2. Secondly, the causes of this grace, and from whence it comes.

2a. The efficient cause is God, from whom every good and perfect gift comes; and as this is a gift, as every grace is, and a good one in its nature, use, and consequences; and is a perfect one, when it has its perfect work and effect, it must come from God; and hence he is called, "The God of patience," because he is the author of it, as well as requires it, and it is exercised towards him, by whom seems to be meant God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:5,6). We read also of the "patience of Christ," and of being directed into it, as well as into the love of God (2 Thess. 3:5), and which may signify, not only the patience exercised by Christ in his human nature, amidst all his afflictions and sufferings; but what he works in the hearts of his people, and encourages them to exercise; for as he is the author and finisher of faith, so of patience; and the saints are companions of one another in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ: and even his patience as man is the exemplar and pattern of theirs; for he has left an example of it, that they may tread in his steps; and certain it is, that longsuffering, or patience, which is the same, is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), so that all the three Persons are concerned in it.

2b. The instrumental causes of it are the scriptures, and word of God and Christ; which are written, "that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope;" which, as they are the means of instruction and consolation, so of patience. The word of God encourages to it, furnishes with arguments for the exercise of it, and gives instances and examples of it, exciting thereunto; hence

Christ calls it, the word of his patience; "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience" (Rev. 3:10), and this word, accompanied with a divine power, and received into a good heart, made so by the Spirit of God, "brings forth fruit with patience," and patience is one of its fruits (Luke 8:13).

2c. Afflictions themselves are a means of increasing it, for afflictions try faith; and the "trying of faith works patience," and brings that into exercise, and inures unto it; yea, it is expressly said, that "tribulation works patience," that is, when sanctified; otherwise it produces impatience and murmurings (Jam. 1:3; Rom. 5:3). I proceed to observe,

3. Thirdly, the usefulness of this grace, and the exercise of it. As,

3a. It makes a man comfortable and happy in himself; without this a man cannot enjoy himself, his mercies and his friends; hence the advice of Christ to his disciples, "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19), an impatient man can have no enjoyment of himself, nor of anything he has; he is always restless and uneasy, and has no peace in himself; whereas a man possessed of patience, and in the exercise of it, has a peace which the world can, neither give nor take away, a peace in the midst of tribulation.

3b. It is of great use in running the Christian race; "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1), by the race is meant the Christian's course of life in this world, and what still remains of it to be run out; the prize run for is the prize of the high calling, the heavenly glory, the crown of life, glory, and righteousness, laid up in heaven; this race is "set before us," the way is marked out in which we are to run; the rubs, the troubles, the impediments to be met with in the way are appointed; the mark to direct and steer the course by, and which is always to be had in view, is Christ, who is the hope set before us in the gospel; the length of the course to be run is fixed, the whole time of life, every year, month, day, and moment: and it requires patience to run it; partly through the length of the race, which sometimes appears tedious; and partly because of the troubles, difficulties, and discouragements in the way; and likewise because of the prize saints long to be in the enjoyment of.

3c. There is need of it, and of its exercise, in "doing the will of God," in order to receive the promise (Heb. 10:36), by doing the will of God is not so much meant obeying the preceptive will of God, as to submit to the will of God respecting afflictions and sufferings for his sake; for it is given, and it is the will of God, not only that men should believe in Christ, and follow him, but that they should "suffer for his sake;" and to do this requires patience, and a quiet submission to the will of God; which is the way to be quiet, patient, and humble under his mighty hand, while suffering according to his will (1 Pet. 4:19), and so patience is necessary to receive the promise, the promised glory, after the will of God is done in a way of suffering; for the promise is made to him that endures patiently; "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, afflictions with patience; he shall receive the crown

of life; obtain the promise, as Abraham did, and through faith and patience inherit it" (Jam. 1:12; Heb. 6:12,15).

3d. Another use of the grace of patience is, that when it has its perfect work, saints become perfect also (Jam. 1:4 this grace is imperfect, as all others are, faith, hope, love, knowledge, &c. and even in the best, and in such who have been most eminent for it, as Job particularly; and yet what impatience was he guilty of at times? though it may be increased, as every other grace; for as there is such a thing as growing in grace in general, so in any grace in particular, and in this also: when it is said, that "tribulation works patience," the meaning is, that it is the means and occasion of increasing it. And it may be said to be perfect, when it appears to be sincere and genuine, as it does by its being tried by afflictions; and it has its "perfect work" when it is constant in its exercise, and continues to the end; and then will the saints be perfect, which they are not now in themselves, only in Christ their head; but when this grace, and every other, shall be perfect, then will they be perfect in holiness and happiness, as they will be at the resurrection in soul and body, and be entire, complete, and want nothing.

4. Fourthly, the motives or arguments exciting to the exercise of this grace, may next be considered,

4a. It is what God calls his people to; as to suffer for well doing, so to take suffering for well doing patiently; "For even hereunto were ye called," that is, to take it patiently (1 Pet. 2:21), hence these frequent exhortations to it; "Be patient in tribulation; be patient towards all men; be patient, brethren;" and again, be ye also patient; and which is enforced and exemplified in the case of the husbandman, patiently waiting for the fruits of the earth, after much trouble, toil, and labour; see (Rom. 12:12 1; Thess. 5:14; Jam. 5:7,8).

4b. The exercise of this grace is taken notice of, approved of, and commended by God (1 Pet. 2:20), hence Christ, in his epistles to the churches, frequently observes, with commendation, their patience among other things; "I know thy patience" (Rev. 2:2,3,19; 3:10).

4c. It is commendable in the sight of good men; Solomon extols it (Eccl. 7:8), and the apostle Paul glories in the Thessalonians for it (1 Thess. 1:3; 2 Thess. 1:4), a meek and patient Christian is not only in the sight of God of great price, but is very amiable in the sight of good men.

4d. The patience of God exercised towards his people may be improved into an argument exciting to it. The Lord is patient and longsuffering towards his people before conversion, while they are doing those things which might justly provoke the eyes of his glory; fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, being by nature children of wrath, as others; yet he is patient, and bears long with them, waiting to be gracious to them, and to have mercy, on them (Isa. 30:18), and after conversion, he bears with their many provocations, backslidings, and revoltings from him; and,

indeed, his patience with a wicked world, in not destroying it sooner, is for the sake of his chosen ones, waiting until they are called and brought to repentance; the longsuffering of the Lord is salvation to them (2 Pet. 3:9,15).

4e. The example of Christ, and of his patience, is very strong and forcible, and engaging to it; "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example," not of sufferings only, but of patience in them, that we should follow his steps in the exercise of this grace, and learn patience of him, as well as meekness and lowliness of mind (1 Pet. 2:22,23), we should consider him who "endured the cross" with so much patience, and the "contradiction of sinners against himself" with so much mildness and meekness; lest we be "wearied, and faint in our minds," and grow impatient; this may animate to patience and long suffering.

4f. The examples of the saints in all ages may serve to encourage to the exercise of patience; of the prophets of the Old Testament; of the apostles of Christ; and of the martyrs of Jesus; and of other saints; and particularly Job; "Ye have heard of the patience of Job," who was remarkable for it, when his afflictions came so thick, and fast, and heavy upon him; "and have seen the end of the Lord," in his afflictions, and how they issued (Jam. 5:10,11), and those examples are on record to encourage the saints to be "followers of them" (Heb. 6:12).

4g. The near coming of Christ is made use of to stir up to patience; it is but a little while and he will come that shall come; and then there will be an end of all afflictions and sufferings; "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord: —again, Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Jam. 5:7,8), redemption draws near, suffering times will soon be over; the summer is at hand, halcyon days will come; peace will be like a river, and the glory of the church like a flowing stream!