

# The Patience of the Lord

SERMON

By

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**TEXT:** 2 Peter 3:14-18

**PROP:** When it comes to the patience of the Lord we must see that he is patient for the great benefit of his people.

## **2 Peter 3:14-18 (ESV)**

**14** Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. **15** And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, **16** as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. **17** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. **18** But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Peter has informed us that, "*-- the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*" (2 Peter 3:10, ESV) Not with metaphor or by analogy does Peter tell us this, but with straightforward fact. Everything in the universe including the earth as we know it and all that is in it will be burned up and dissolved and all the works done on it will be exposed. We learn therefore that the destruction of the universe will be done in connection with the final judgment. The present earth will not be destroyed as the inevitable result of physical decay or falling into the sun. It will be destroyed so that its wickedness will be brought to light. "*But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*" (2 Peter 3:13, ESV)

The *new heavens and earth* will exist in a dimension of reality that we know nothing about. Although the present earth was created as a habitation for God's people, for the purpose facilitating the redemptive plan of God in Christ, the new heavens and earth will be the eternal habitation for God's people in the presence of God with Christ their risen Savior. This eternal habitation does not require light from the sun and moon "*-- for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,*" (Revelation 21:23-24, ESV)

Therefore, says Peter, since we are waiting for the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells, we are to be found by God without spot or blemish, and at peace. We are to count the **patience of our Lord** as salvation and take care that we are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose our own stability. And finally, we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:14-18, ESV) The destruction of the known universe is certain to happen just as the Lord promises, but he appears to be slow in bringing his promises to pass. Why does he delay? The world is growing older and its wickedness is increasing yet the Lord does not come.

His patience with us is the reason for his delay. We are not yet destroyed and not yet judged for our iniquity. God even seems slow to answer the prayers of his own people, for he is patient, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. We are often mystified by this. We don't understand it. Twenty centuries have passed and our churches are still not full and the great majority of the world continues to hate Christ. Media sewers spill their garbage into our homes and lives in ways never known before. Modern technology and science may have improved the quality of life for most but hostility to God's people has not diminished and millions continue to be tortured and killed for Christ's sake. The brothels of society and gross wickedness continue to abound and are more open and available to us and our families than they have ever been. Yet the Lord delays. Why does God continue to permit pain and misery? Why is he patient with sin?

One of the reasons we are bewildered by the patience of the Lord is seen in the fact that we do not have much patience ourselves. We tend to be more like Jonah than Jesus. Jonah as you will recall was displeased that God delayed the destruction of Nineveh for her sins. Perhaps we often are like James and John who would have called fire from heaven upon those who rejected the Savior. We are in such a hurry to see progress against evil and to see that punishment is brought upon the wicked. We are displeased when Jesus tells us to forgive not just seven times but seventy times seven. When the Lord forgives seventy times seven and still delays his judgment we are amazed because we do not think God's thoughts after him. The ungodly use God's patience as license to further themselves in sin. "Where is the promise of his coming?", they say, because he does not immediately judge them. The atheist defies God saying, "strike me dead if you exist." When God does not rise to the challenge he claims it as proof that God does not exist. So we are bewildered by God's delay.

However, if God were to rise to such a pagan challenge would he not be just like the Gods of the Greeks and Romans? Jupiter and Zeus were nothing more than extensions of the people that invented them. Their violence and volatility was merely a reflection of those who believed in them. But the true and living God is infinite in his love and patience with sinners. Rather than disproving his existence it serves to establish his

existence. Yahweh is the true and living God for, if he had been less than that, he might have struck the arrogant atheist dead; but, being infinitely patient, he condescended to delay his answer. Who is any man, a mere speck of dust, to move the infinite Yahweh God. God is not easily moved, even by the blasphemies of the ungodly.

Peter tells us, "*Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.*" (2 Peter 3:14, ESV) It is a foregone conclusion that God's elect are waiting for the new heavens and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We were created and brought into this world to be called, justified and glorified. Therefore spot and blemish and lack of fellowship with God are completely out of character. If we have been regenerated by God's Spirit and are being sanctified by his holy work in us, we will turn away from the filthiness and blasphemy and immorality of the pagan world around us. How can we be without spot and blemish and at peace with God when we take his blessed name in vain and use the filthy language of those whose who are enemies of Christ? The only ones who are able to pursue holiness are those who are really waiting for the new heavens and the new earth. Therefore Peter gives no idle command to the elect of God. This is what is expected of us who have been born again to a living hope. This is the inevitable fruit of true repentance. Some profess to love the doctrines of grace, yet they have little diligence to be found holy and blameless before the Lord. My brethren this ought not to be. May God grant us diligence to love him and serve him as we ought.

And when it comes to the patience of the Lord we must see that he is patient for the great benefit of his people. God tarries for the day when all the elect are called, justified and glorified but he also gives us time to grow in grace. We are given time to improve in our diligence to be found with spot or blemish and at peace. We are given time to learn the Scriptures so that we will not be carried away with the error of lawless people and lose our own stability. And we are given time to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter writes, "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*" (2 Peter 3:18, ESV) We must note immediately that Peter does not say anything about grace growing; he does not say that grace grows. It tells us to "grow in grace." **There is a vast difference between grace growing and our growing in grace.** God's grace never increases; it is always infinite, so it cannot be more or less. We are to grow **in** the grace of our Lord Jesus. We are in God's grace; we are in the covenant; we are in the plan of redemption; we are in union with Jesus; we are eternally secure through the blood of our Savior. But while the grace of God is always infinite and unchanging, we can grow more in it, and thus it is said that **we grow in** grace. That is to say, we progress in our sanctification.

That is to say, we are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. We are not made completely holy when we are converted, but an inexorable process commences such that we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our eyes are open to truth and we respond with diligence to be without spot and blameless and at peace. Our ears are opened so that we hear the commandments of God and do them. Our tongues are made free to speak the praises of God instead of the blasphemies of the wicked. And God delays his judgment so that we have time to grow up in the grace of the Lord.

You will surely not say that a young man, who has been converted for a few months knows as much of grace, understands as much about it, and has as much faith, and as much love, as the man who has for the last twenty or thirty years been earnestly engaged in his Master's service. You cannot tell me that a man, who rarely attends upon the preaching and teaching of the word of God, and who is spiritually starving, is in the same state of spiritual maturity as a man who is laboring for his Master, whose love is evident to all, and whose faith is testified before the whole congregation. You cannot either tell me that a man who is dull of hearing and appears to be spiritually dead is being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the infinite Yahweh God and who can resist his powerful working of sanctification? Certainly one may have greater faith than another and greater love and diligence to pursue holiness than another, but there is growth in grace in all who are converted. And God gives time to develop and blossom and bear fruit. Is this not of great benefit to us?

There is no such thing as dead orthodoxy. Orthodoxy or "straight thinking" bears the inevitable fruit of holiness. Dead people cannot think straight. Neither can people who are dull of hearing think straight. When we have been enabled by the Holy Spirit to understand the word of God and believe it we begin to think straight and we leave our ignorant and unstable twisting of God's word. Those who ignorantly twist the word of God do so to their own destruction and do not grow in grace. This runs directly counter to the work of God's Spirit to sanctify us.

Now growth in grace takes time to be sure but spiritual growth cannot be measured by days and years. The rate of growth differs in all. Many start their spiritual odyssey with great zeal and thirst for the knowledge of God only to reach a plateau with little further gain. The vicissitudes of life and the distractions of the world take their toll in spiritual lassitude and lethargy. Worry is a most debilitating enemy to growth in grace as is love for the world and its insipid treasures. Even when we make progress in our fight against such enemies of growth, many of us experience times of rapid growth and times of struggle. Sometimes I struggle for days with the meaning of a text of Scripture and other times the Holy Spirit opens my understanding in an instant. And I think that is the way it is with us all who love the Lord. We seem to grow in spurts. We sin against God and our

fellowship with him diminishes. We find it hard to pray and difficult to read the Bible. Then as William Cowper puts it,

**Sometimes a light surprises  
The Christian while he sings;  
It is the Lord who rises  
With healing in His wings:  
When comforts are declining,  
He grants the soul again  
A season of clear shining,  
To cheer it after rain.**

Growth in grace continues through all our ups and downs. Its progress is certain and inescapable because it is the work of God's Spirit. We cannot conclude that we are not growing because we feel old and decrepit. Neither must think we lack growth in grace because we are discouraged or depressed. The Holy Spirit leads us to the word of God and convicts us of our sin and we are refreshed to move onward with renewed zeal and love for God. You see the Holy Spirit is at work in those that are his to strengthen us and help us. It is not the same in all but the light that surprises always comes to cheer us after rain.

Spurgeon wrote, "Do not suppose, when you are depressed, that, therefore, you are not growing. Many of God's plants grow best in the dark, and he often puts them in the dark to make them grow. When you are growing upwards, recollect that there is such a thing as growing downward. You may have had, yesterday, a divine manifestation that took you up to the top of the Delectable Mountains. You must not think you are big because you are up on high, for pigmies perched on Alps are pigmies still; and if you were ever so little, it would not make you any bigger if you were taken to the top of St. Paul's. If, on the other hand, you are deep down in a mine, do not imagine that you are any the smaller for that reason. I can tell you that you will often grow faster in the dungeon than on the top of a mountain; but it is not a pleasant place to be in. When our depravity is revealed to us, when our desolation of spirit, and our utter hopelessness and powerlessness are uncovered and made manifest by God's Holy Spirit, we grow, I believe, even faster than we do when, on the wings of seraphs, we are privileged to mount on high."

Peter tells us to grow in the grace and knowledge of our lord and Savior Jesus Christ. God is patient with sinners to their great benefit by allowing time for them to grow in grace and grow we will. But we must understand that growth in grace is intimately and necessarily related to knowledge of Jesus. There cannot be any grace for us apart from

knowing Christ unto salvation, and we cannot grow in grace apart from our knowledge of Christ. If we think we are not growing in grace perhaps we should see to the quality of our knowledge of Christ. Do we really study the Bible and the Christ of the Bible? Increase in the knowledge of Christ, indicates growth in grace as well as causing growth in Christ. Our love for Christ and others depends on our knowledge of Christ but if we are honest with ourselves we realize how little we know of our Savior. Many like to sing the chorus,

**O how I love Jesus,  
O how I love Jesus,  
O How I Love Jesus,  
Because he first loved me.**

Do you really love Jesus? Can you lift your hearts to heaven with such words on your lips? What do we know of love? Indeed, what do we know of Christ? Can you sing with any truth to it,

**My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine;  
For thee all the follies of sin I resign;  
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art thou,  
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.**

I sincerely hope each one of you can say that you love Jesus but if you realize that you don't love him as you should then the way to love him more is to know him better. Why is our faith so feeble? It is because we don't know him as we should. If you would increase your faith then you must know Jesus. You must live near the cross. Think more of him. Study Jesus in the word of God then you will grow in grace and your knowledge of Jesus. Perhaps you are ashamed of Jesus. You lack the courage to stand up for Jesus in your workplace or in your home. When we understand from the Bible that Jesus is Yahweh God how can we be ashamed of him? Indeed, how can we bring shame to him with our sinful mouths and behavior for all those around us to hear and see? We are prone to sinful behavior because we really do not know Jesus as we should. We lack zeal for Christ and his kingdom because we are lacking in our knowledge of him who died for us. To many it is fashionable to be pious and church-going and red-white-blue American, but where is our zeal for Christ? We too easily get into the old rut of tradition but we have little real love for Christ and zeal for all that is his. Why? Because we do not know him as we ought.

**We have not known Thee as we ought,  
Nor learn'd Thy wisdom, grace, and power;  
The things of earth have fill'd our thought,  
And trifles of the passing hour.**

**Lord, give us light Thy truth to see,  
And make us wise in knowing Thee.**

May God in his great mercy cause that each one of us grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May he be pleased to have patience with us until we learn of Jesus and are brought to our knees before Christ our Lord and King. May his kingdom grow and his people exalt him as they should by their words and deeds.