

THE PATIENCE OF GOD

THE DEFINITION OF GOD'S PATIENCE

- Patience is a divine quality that is often best understood in contrast to our lack of patience as humans
- One of the greatest struggles in parenting is being patient with a child's childish ways and disobedient behavior
- Parenting often reveals that we are not as patient as we once thought
- Lack of patience in the human realm is also seen in our tendency to erupt in anger over other's faults, frustration over difficult circumstances that seem unending, and general irritability toward others
- "An irritable person is someone who cannot tolerate inconveniences in their life...Life's inconveniences are allowed by God so that we are strengthened and encouraged...so that we grow...When we are irritable, we are demonstrating a lack of trust in God's sovereignty and His ability to use our trials in our sanctification... Irritability is really just internal anger that hasn't found its fullest expression visibly. It's the kind of attitude that says, "Nothing is to inconvenience me today. I don't want the impingement of family, children, or anything else bothering me."¹
- Against the backdrop of human impatience, the longsuffering of God is best seen
- God is exceedingly patient, an attribute of his which is closely connected to his goodness and mercy
- Many scholars have not treated God's patience as a perfection which is separate from his mercy...largely due to the fact that his mercy and patience are often seen in the same contexts

Exodus 34:6 ~ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

Numbers 14:18 ~ The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.'

Psalms 86:15 ~ But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth.

Psalms 145:8 ~ The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

- Certainly, there is a close connection between God's mercy and patience
- "God's slowness to anger is a branch...from his mercy"²
- However, God's patience and mercy/goodness are not one and the same and must be distinguished
- "...mercy is God's goodness toward the *miserable*, grace is God's goodness toward the *sinful*, and patience is God's goodness toward *those who have provoked Him*."³
- "Personally, we would define the Divine patience as that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them...It is at...[this] point, we think, that God's patience is most clearly distinguished from His mercy. Though the creature is benefited thereby, the patience of God chiefly respects Himself, a restraint placed upon His acts by His will; whereas His mercy terminates wholly upon the creature. The patience of God is that excellency which causes Him to sustain great injuries without immediately avenging Himself."⁴

¹ [https://s3.amazonaws.com/graceinmanuel.sermonaudio/PDFs+and+docs/Essay+On+Irritability+\(by+Jerry+Wragg\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/graceinmanuel.sermonaudio/PDFs+and+docs/Essay+On+Irritability+(by+Jerry+Wragg).pdf)

² Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, 2:482.

³ Terry Johnson, *The Excellencies of God*, 45 (emphasis original).

⁴ A. W. Pink, *The Attributes of God*, 62.

- The phrase “over himself” is the key to understanding God’s patience...whereas mercy is God’s kindness primarily expressed to the person, patience is primarily concerned with God himself
- Patience refers to the restraint that God places on himself as a result of provocation by his creatures
- Charnock further defines God’s patience as a “property of the divine nature that signifies a willingness to defer, and an unwillingness to pour forth his wrath upon sinful creatures...he moderates his provoked justice, and forbears to revenge the injuries he daily meets within the world...he restrains his arm from punishing them according to their merits...[such that divine punishment is] less than is merited by the unrighteous rebel, and less than may be inflicted by a righteous and powerful God.”⁵
- Louis Berkhof defines patience as “that aspect of the goodness or love of God in virtue of which he bears with the flawed and evil in spirit of their long continued disobedience.”⁶
- “God’s longsuffering speaks of his being perfectly placid in himself and toward sinners in spite of their continual disobedience and disregard for his warnings. God does not “lose his temper” but rather acts calmly with proper affection according to his eternal sovereign plan. Tranquility implies not that God lacks affections but rather that God’s affections do not overwhelm him or cause him to act against his nature.”⁷
- “God’s patience means God’s goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time.”⁸
- A noticeable element in each of these definitions is God’s self-restraint over a long duration of time while under constant provocation
- In other words, God does not respond to our first provocation of sin...he waits...he forebears the many occasions presented to him
- He doesn’t respond to our sin impulsively or rashly...he doesn’t respond with a knee-jerk reaction, nor does he rush to judgment
- He is longsuffering...a term which literally means “long of nose”...as opposed to “short of nose” during times of anger
- God is frequently described as being slow to anger and longsuffering

Nehemiah 9:17 ~ They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; And You did not forsake them.

Psalms 103:8 ~ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.

Joel 2:13 ~ And rend your heart and not your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness And relenting of evil.

Jonah 4:2 ~ He prayed to the LORD and said, “Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

- There is a close connection between God’s power and his patience...the reason he is slow to anger is because he is great in power...he is able to restrain himself even under provocation
- Thus, there is greater power in God’s patience than in his wrath

Nahum 1:3 ~ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And the LORD will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet.

⁵ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 2:477.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 72.

⁷ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 183.

⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 200.

THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S PATIENCE

He is Patient with Those Deserving Divine Judgment

- It is in God's nature to show patience...in one sense, the whole Bible is a record of God's patience...first with Adam and Eve...then with rebellious Gentiles...then with his stiff-necked people Israel
- God would have been justified in pouring out his wrath and justice on sinners prior to Christ's work of atonement...but he was incredibly patient

Seen in Warnings

- God is slow to anger and graciously provides long periods of warning so that judgment can be avoided

1 Peter 3:20 ~ who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.
- God waited for 120 years while Noah, a preacher of righteousness, built the ark and warned about impending judgment
- "This emphatic statement by God specifies that He, the Creator, was giving man only 120 years more until He, the God and Judge of all things, would bring an end to this world."⁹
- Moses and the prophets also frequently warned about impending exile for Israel before the invasions by the Assyrians (722 BC) and Babylonians (586 BC)
- God delayed the destruction of the Canaanites for 400 years, "until the iniquity of the Amorites was complete" (Gen 15:16)
- 40 years passed between the death of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem

Seen in Reluctance

- Although God will display his wrath and judgment, he is reluctant to do so
- His preference is to delay justice...when it comes, he punishes with regret...he is ready to pardon and relent

Genesis 6:6-7 ~ The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. 7 The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

Genesis 18:20-21 ~ And the LORD said, "The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. 21 "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know."

Psalms 103:10 ~ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

Lamentations 3:33 ~ For He does not afflict willingly Or grieve the sons of men.

Ezekiel 18:23 ~ Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"

Matthew 23:37 ~ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.

⁹ Henry Morris, *The Book of Beginnings*, 220.

- “Eventually the day of wrath comes, patience runs out, and the day of reckoning arrives, sometimes in this life, sometimes in the next. Yet until that time, the Lord reaches out with compassion and contemplates wrath with reluctance, and so must we. We speak of judgment and wrath with a heavy heart, with sorrow, with love for the lost. We don’t relish the destruction of the ungodly. We don’t contemplate judgment with eager anticipation. We must tell our world to ‘flee from the wrath to come’ because judgment is coming, and there’s no guarantee that it won’t hit today or tomorrow or the next instant.”¹⁰

Seen in Kindness After Being Provoked

- God’s patience is all the more remarkable when we consider how hateful sin is to him and how vile wicked sinners are toward him
- The world despises God...hates him...rebels against him...is hostile to him...many even reject or deny him
- And yet God is not only patient with them, he is exceedingly kind to them, giving them more than they deserve

Psalm 73:3-5 ~ For I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like mankind.

Matthew 5:45 ~ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Acts 14:16-17 ~ In the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways; 17 and yet He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.”

- “How did the riches of his patience preserve multitudes of such disingenuous persons, and how many millions of such haters of him breathe every day in his air, and are maintained by his bounty, have their tables spread, and their cups filled to the brim, and that, too, in the midst of reiterated belchings of their enmity against him?”¹¹

He was Patient Before the Time of Christ

Acts 17:30-31 ~ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Romans 3:25 ~ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

- Notice that Paul describes the “forbearance of God” in which he “passed over the sins previously committed”
- This means that for centuries God did not visit men with wrath commensurate with their sins
- He was doing what Psalm 103:10 says ~ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our iniquities
- God did not always punish sins in the past...that doesn’t mean he forgave them...just that he passed over them
- He would have been just to wipe out each person the moment they sinned...it would have been perfectly consistent with his nature and divine wrath
- But he didn’t...he withheld his judgment for thousands of years
- Didn’t the OT sacrifices satisfy God’s wrath/anger against sin? → They covered them, but didn’t ultimately satisfy God’s righteous indignation

¹⁰ Johnson, *Excellencies of God*, 50.

¹¹ Charnock, *Existence and Attributes*, 2:499.

Hebrews 9:9-10 ~ Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, since they *relate* only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

Hebrews 10:1, 4, 11 ~ For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near...4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins...11 Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins

- The OT sacrificial system was never designed by God to remove or forgive sins...it was meant to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah
- It showed the seriousness of sin such that even a temporary covering required a sacrifice
- It also revealed the reality of God's holiness and righteousness by indicating that sin had to be covered

He Shows Patience to Bring Salvation

- God is patient, giving time and opportunities, largely because he is willing to wait for rebels to repent

Romans 2:4 ~ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

1 Timothy 1:16 ~ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

- God's delay to judge is a consequence of his design to save
- He creates space for repentance...he provides opportunities for conversion
- He patiently endures until he overcomes our rebellion and we come to him for salvation

Romans 9:22-23 ~ What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? 23 And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

- Verse 22 asks: "What if God, even though He desired to send men to hell for their sin immediately, withheld his judgment and was patient toward those deserving judgment?"
- The gist of this verse is that God has been very patient with unsaved, rebellious people ("vessels of wrath") who oppose, insult, hate, and rebel against him
- He has the right to destroy them...condemn them...judge them...send them to hell immediately
- But he patiently endures their rebellion rather than giving them what every sin immediately deserves
- He is exceedingly patient with "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction"
- "prepared for destruction" means "to be ripe"...the thought is that they have been and are in a state of readiness or ripeness to receive God's wrath
- The verse doesn't necessarily state who prepared these people for destruction (no subject in v. 22)
- Verse 23 states that it is God who prepares vessels of mercy (which **He** prepared beforehand for glory)...v. 23 has an active agent
- But v. 22 has no active agent...it doesn't say who prepared the vessels for destruction
- It is possible that Paul wishes to present a contrast between v. 22 and v. 23...i.e. that, while God is the active agent in forming vessels of mercy, the people themselves are the active agents in making them vessels of wrath
- This idea is substantiated by the fact that the verb "prepared" could be a middle voice verb meaning it is reflexive...i.e. they prepared themselves
- The people who continue in their sin and rebellion and hardness of heart have actually prepared themselves as vessels of destruction

- It is also possible that the verb “prepared” is in the passive voice (the form for middle and passive are identical)...so it may mean “they were prepared”
- But, even if that is the case, v. 22 doesn’t tell us who prepared them as “vessels of destruction”
- It may be that God has prepared them for destruction...that would fit the point of v. 18 and the analogy of the potter/clay in v. 21
- But even if we assume that God is the one who prepared these vessels of wrath, we must understand it as meaning that the hardening of their hearts and their “preparation for destruction” was a punishment for their own action of hardening themselves
- So, it is still by their own rejection of him that they become vessels of wrath...God doesn’t make people sinful
- God has never prepared anybody for destruction...he simply leaves them in the sin they have chosen
- And in doing so, they become “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”
- This is what we see in a couple of other passages in the NT

1 Peter 2:7-8 ~ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone,” 8 and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Jude 1:4 ~ For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

- Regardless of whether they prepare themselves as vessels of destruction or whether God prepares them as vessels of destruction by giving them over to the hardness of their own hearts, Paul’s point is that God is exceedingly patient with them
- God has patiently endured their antagonism to Him
- But their judgment is coming...God will “demonstrate His wrath and make His power known” (v. 22)
- In this sense, they have become “ripe” for destruction
- Delay is not cancellation...justice will have its way soon enough
- But why does God delay his judgment on the wicked? Why is he patient with so much wickedness running rampant in the world? → v. 23 ~ And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory
- God has mercifully designed some out of the rebellious, wicked people of the world to be vessels of mercy, vessels into which God lavishes his undeserved kindness and compassion and forgiveness!
- These were “prepared beforehand for glory”...before the foundation of the world
- He designed some to be these vessels so that they might experience “the riches of His glory”...trophies of his grace
- The patience of God displayed in delayed judgment on the wicked is for the purpose of displaying abundant grace to “vessels of mercy”
- His delay of justice is for the display of patience

2 Peter 3:1-9

- Peter says that in the last days there will be skeptics who claim that judgment isn’t coming (v. 4)
- This delay in judgment calls into question the power and justice of God
- This is the attitude reflected in Ecclesiastes 8:11 ~ Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil.
- This delay of justice leads to defiance

- “Many people see injustice in the world. They see oppression and violence continuing unchecked and unrestrained and conclude that God is unjust, indifferent, or weak... ‘Why hasn’t the Lord returned? What is He waiting for? Where has He been? If He were going to return, He would have done so by now’... Many conclude that there will be no judgment, interpreting the delay as denial, and denial as a license to sin.”¹²
- But Peter reminds us that people thought similarly prior to the flood (vv. 5-6)
- History should convince the skeptic that their reasoning is not correct... there is a coming judgment (v. 7)
- We must not assume that a delay in God’s judgment indicates it won’t happen because the passing of time, though important to us, is as nothing to him (v. 8)
- The ultimate cause of the delay of judgment is not God’s indifference to time, but his patience (v. 9)
- And he is patient because he doesn’t wish “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (v. 9)
- God’s delay of justice is so that many more people can come to salvation in Christ
- That’s why Peter says in 2 Peter 3:15 ~ regard the patience of our Lord as salvation
- God’s patience comes not from indifference to or ignorance of sin; rather, it comes out of his compassion for sinners... he delays justice so that he can create opportunities for conversion
- “Where would you and I have been had it not been for [God’s patience]?”¹³
- “I know not whether I should more wonder at man’s perverseness or at God’s patience.”¹⁴

God is Patient in Not Immediately Responding to Calls for Justice

- Despite the pleas of the martyrs for vindication, God delays it

Revelation 6:9-11 ~ When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF GOD’S PATIENCE

A Caution to Avoid

- We must not abuse God’s patience... it is not a license to sin or reject him
- “Because He doesn’t strike dead the adulterer, the drunkard, the idolater, the liar, the cheat, the arrogant, or the irreligious, some people conclude He won’t strike down them either.”¹⁵
- Many people go on sinning, seeing nothing happening, and concluding they can continue in their vices

Psalm 10:11 ~ He says to himself, “God has forgotten; He has hidden His face; He will never see it.”

2 Peter 3:4 ~ and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.”

- Don’t be like Pharaoh and soften under God’s judgments, only to grow harder still when he relents
- Don’t neglect the day of salvation or a life of holiness
- The truth of God’s justice and power will be revealed one day when his patience runs out

¹² Johnson, *The Excellencies of God*, 44.

¹³ D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Expository Sermons on 2 Peter*, 183

¹⁴ Thomas Adams, *An Exposition on the Second Epistle General of St. Peter*, 691.

¹⁵ Johnson, *Excellencies of God*, 54.

A Comfort in Affliction

- God's patience is a great comfort to us in the midst of trials and troubles of life, knowing that he cares for us

Psalm 103:14 ~ For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.

Isaiah 61:1 ~ The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners;

Matthew 11:28 ~ Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 12:20 ~ A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.

Hebrews 2:17 ~ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 4:15 ~ For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

A Reciprocation Toward Him

- We are to be patient with God in how he deals with us... fulfillment of his promises doesn't come immediately
- We are to be patient... as opposed to becoming angry with God and abandoning the faith

James 5:7, 10 ~ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains... As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

- We must not become discontent with our situation because it quickly gives way to impatience, which leads to grumbling against God, thinking we deserve better from God
- "We lose patience in traffic, when our schedule or timetable is delayed, when our goals or aims are obstructed. Are these not taken up in the providence of God? Should we not patiently bear with them, as God has patiently borne with us?"¹⁶

A Replication Toward Others

- The patience God has shown us ought to compel the patience we are to show others

Galatians 5:22 ~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...

Colossians 3:12 ~ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience

1 Thessalonians 5:14 ~ We urge you to admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

2 Timothy 2:24 ~ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged

2 Timothy 4:2 ~ preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

- Because God has demonstrated great patience to us, we must display the same to others, meaning we look past their quirks, weaknesses, even sins

¹⁶ Ibid., 57.