

Patience of God

by J. Glyn Owen

God's patience is an aspect of his goodness and kindness, and its purpose is to lead men and women to repentance and give them time to turn to him.

Duration: 47:32

Scripture: Exodus 34:6, Psalm 86:15, Lamentations 3:22-23, Ezekiel 18:32, Matthew 11:28-30, Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 5:20, 1 Timothy 1:16, James 5:7-8, 2 Peter 3:9

Topics: "Patience", "God's Patience", "Repentance"

Description

J. Glyn Owen emphasizes the profound patience of God, illustrating how it is a reflection of His goodness and kindness towards humanity. He explains that God's patience serves as a temporary truce, allowing individuals the opportunity to repent rather than face immediate judgment. Owen highlights that this divine patience is often misunderstood, leading some to take it for granted, while others may see it as an invitation to continue in sin. Ultimately, he calls for a recognition of God's patience as a means to lead us toward repentance and a deeper relationship with Him. The sermon concludes with a plea for individuals to respond to God's kindness before the time of grace comes to an end.

Transcript

We'll largely base our exposition of the subject tonight on verse 4 in that second chapter, though of course this fourth verse is very closely related to what has preceded it, and indeed with what follows from it. But let me read again, as largely the basis of our meditation, verse 4 in chapter 2. Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance, the patience of God? You will sometimes hear men speak of the patience of Job. I'm personally not quite convinced that Job was all that patient, but that's a matter of one's predisposition, I suppose.

But we very rarely hear men speak of the patience of God, and yet there is nothing which characterizes the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ more than his patience. And there is no doubt about the patience of God. If it were not for his patience, you and I would not be here this evening.

If it were not for his patience, we would long ago have been the objects of his judgment and sheer outright condemnation. Our lives would have been terminated in this world. Were it not for the infinite, the amazing, the unbelievable patience of God.

It is one of the unrecognized facets of his grace and of his mercy towards fallen and rebellious mankind. Paul, however, is not negligent, nor indeed is he afraid to speak of the God of patience. In chapter 15 and verse 5, he refers to God as the God of patience, as he does elsewhere speak of the God of peace, and the God of hope, and the God of comfort, and as his brother apostle Peter speaks of God as the God of all grace.

A very beautiful reference. We shall now consider the subject of the patience of God, then against this particular background, and we crave his mercy and enabling that we may understand or write these words before us. Now the first thing I would like us to look at is, I would like us to consider what patience is in principle.

What is patience? In answer to that, I would like to say in the first place, on the basis of what we have before us and of teaching that we have elsewhere in scripture, viewed generally, God's patience is an aspect of his goodness. God's patience is one facet, one aspect of God's own distinctive goodness. And that is how you have this translation here.

In some versions you have it, Do you show contempt for the riches of his goodness? Depends what translation you have, or in the NIV, Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness? The King James Version, Despises thou the riches of his goodness. The point is that God's patience is an aspect of his goodness, an aspect of his kindness. Now in the Greek language there are two main words for goodness.

One is agathos and the other is krestos. Agathos refers in the absolute sense to God alone. God alone is agathos.

God alone is good in the sense of agathos. The quality to which this word refers is very closely related to that of justice. The good man in this sense of the word goodness, the good man will never contravene the rules of right and wrong.

The good man is essentially just, meticulously just. He will do exactly that which is right. He will not go beyond it.

He will not come short of it. God then is good in this sense because he will not countenance wrong nor injustice. And he has pledged to straighten out the crooked and to right the wrong.

And when God has finished with this universe and this world, there will come into existence a new world in which righteousness is at home. And nothing, nothing that offends either creator or creature will ever, ever enter into it. God is essentially good in that sense and God alone.

As Jesus said, there is no one good in this sense but God. Our Lord Jesus Christ exemplified this same quality of goodness when twice during his earthly ministry, for example, he made a whip of cords and he overturned the tables of the unscrupulous money changers in the temple courts and chased them out. Now why did he do that? Was it because he had lost his temper as we say? Not at all.

It is because he was good. As God is good, he exhibited and manifested the inherent goodness of God and was pledged to undo that which was wrong. And these unscrupulous people had made his father's house what was meant to be a house of prayer, they had transformed it into a den of thieves.

In such circumstances, our Lord was good, he was agathos in that he was doing what justice clearly required and doing it single-handedly. But this other word for goodness or good, krestos, is the one that

we have here in Romans 2. The uppermost thought in this second word is that of undeserved kindness. It implies the necessity of sometimes not immediately demanding what is right, not immediately demanding what strict justice may require, and of showing undeserved clemency or mercy.

And our Lord Jesus Christ of course manifested this in many, many instances in his life. As for example, when he permitted a woman of very suspicious moral character to anoint his feet, he didn't immediately call down the judgment of heaven upon the woman, he was patient, he was kind. And his kindness took the form of patience.

Same goes for that other woman who was brought into the temple, caught in the very act of adultery, he did not immediately call down utter judgment upon her. But there's a width and a depth and a largeness to his kindness which is unbelievable. As the hymn we have just sung reminds us of, he showed krestos and his patience with sinners is an aspect of that goodness of his which does not necessarily immediately press home the judgment which men and women deserve.

The same quality of goodness then is evidenced in the manner in which God showers his providential mercies upon just and unjust alike. I'm quite sure there will be someone here who has been puzzled at some time or another with a way in which evil, evidently wicked and perverse and lawless men and women live long and comfortably. While so many of the saints of God have short lives, not only short lives but live physically uncomfortably, materially they're deprived of many things.

The wicked live long because God is patient. The wicked live long because God is good and he is patient towards even his enemies. This is part and parcel of the patience of God.

God's patience then is an aspect of his goodness, goodness in the sense of krestos. Now Paul takes us a step further, a step further nearer to the very heart of the meaning of patience when he uses another word here, it's translated tolerance in the NIV and forbearance in the King James Version. Here it is.

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience? It's that word tolerance in the NIV and forbearance in the King James. What Paul has already described generally in terms of goodness, he now proceeds to define more specifically in terms of this word. And the Greek word which underlies it is anoke, which really means a truce.

A truce. This word conveys the idea of delaying something or holding something back. It was most generally I believe, I believe most generally used with reference to a truce during wartime.

It may be the secession of hostilities by both sides in order to let soldiers gather up those that have been wounded and attend to them or collect the bodies of those who have died, who have been killed. And a truce would be called, an anoke would be called for a limited period during which you could minister to the needy and you could gather those, the bodies of those who had died. Now says Paul, God's patience is an aspect of his kindness.

But it is an aspect of his kindness which is a kind of truce. It has a limit to it. If God's patience continued ad infinitum, then it would appear that God was not the God of justice.

It would be questioned whether God was still holy and just for the goodness and against the evil. So his patience with sinners and evil men is a truce that he has offered graciously offered and it has a limit set to it. And that brings us to the very heart of the principle which underlies the biblical concept of patience.

Patience is expressive of the generous goodness of God in which he has called a temporary truce before the final execution of his justice and his judgment at the last day. And you and I are living now in the period of God's truce. The Old Testament is very expressive here.

I have sat in wonder as I've been thinking about this these last few days, how expressive the Old Testament is. We often take it for granted and gloss over some of these words but they are so vivid when you come to think of it. The Old Testament presentation of this aspect of God's goodness goes like this.

It generally makes use of a Hebrew word that means long or slow. God is said to be long-suffering. He puts up with things so long, long-suffering and he goes on and on.

He's long-suffering. Or on the other hand, he's slow to anger. In the expressing of his anger and of his judgment God appears to be like an old man who is incapable of moving very fast.

It is as if his feet were leaden or his legs are stiff and he just can't go. Of course that only appears so. I'm using the physical analogy.

There is no deficiency in God. At any moment he could bring in judgment. At any moment he could call it a day.

And he could say time up. But in moving to the day of judgment God is not in a hurry. On the contrary, he moves so very slow that some of his enemies say he's not going to judge.

He doesn't care all that much about right and evil. He's not moving that way. And they play with his justice and they play and trifle with his holiness.

He's slow to anger and his enemies misunderstand it. Could anything be more expressive than that? Thus does the Old Testament stress that in the execution of his altogether righteous indignation in judgment against sin God moves with infinite patience slow to anger. God is patient.

The New Testament takes up the same thought and adds something to it. The word for patience, *macrothumia* expresses the same fundamental thought as its Old Testament counterpart. Perhaps it is not quite as expressive.

It declares that God is long-tempered in the sense of delaying his wrath. The late Archbishop French described it as quote, a long holding out of the mind before it gives room to anger. In principle then God's patience is his temporary truce offered to the wrongdoer.

His temporary delay in demanding the righteous judgment which he could exact at any given moment in time but chooses not to out of his goodness. God's patience is his goodness where he has temporarily delayed final sentence upon rebellious men and women. And the fool may choose to interpret it as if God did not care about matters of right or wrong.

He does. But his patience is long-suffering and he is slow to anger. But one day he will declare to the whole universe that he is a God who is holy and who is just and the God of judgment.

He is holding his righteous wrath in check awhile. This is a day of truth. Now that is a very brief outline all too brief to be exact of the biblical doctrine of God's patience.

A patience expressed towards nations and individuals as well as congregations of God's people and the church at large. Now the next thing I would like us to consider is the patience of God as to its purpose and intention. Here Paul is very clear.

God's kindness or goodness leads you towards repentance. Although King James puts it the goodness of God of which his patience is an aspect the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Why is God patient? Why doesn't he unsheathe his sword immediately and the moment you and I sin why does not he come down in judgment upon us? Well here's the answer.

He gives us a period of truth in order by his goodness and compassion and patience to lead us away from our sin toward repentance. Now this is a great subject isn't it? And I think you and I would find great benefit if we pursued this theme on our own. It's something that makes you worship.

Something that makes you lord and magnify the almighty God who is so often maligned by his foes and sometimes out of ignorance by his own people. Now there are one or two things I want to say about the patience of God as to its purpose and intention. First, the goodness of God as it manifests itself in his patience is meant to perform a vital task a most important task namely to lead men and women to repentance.

You ask, what's God waiting for? Many people have asked. Why does he delay? Again we might go back to the question we posed earlier. Why are evil people allowed to go on and live well and long and do as they please? And you could ask many other questions.

Why not visit every act of sin with immediate punishment consistent with its gravity? That is what we try to do in society. This is what we generally try to do, apparently. The moment a crime has been committed we seek to detect it and when it is detected the process of justice is set in motion and pursued until justice is administered as soon and as quickly as possible.

That apparently is the principle behind the application of law in our society. Why does God act? Why does not God act that quickly concerning the sins of men? Well you see, God has this in view. He wants the sinner to repent.

God does not delight in the death of the wicked. I think it is necessary for us to grasp that. He does not will the death of the wicked.

He does not desire to see the wicked in hell. He has no delight in the lostness of any man or any woman. And he would that men should turn from their sins and return from their avenues of wanderings that he may pardon them.

And this is the rationale. This is the reason. This is the motivation.

This is why God is so consistently and unmovably patient with the most ridiculous kind of people. You and I were not so patient and have so much sin in us we would have acted differently of course. But God is patient and you and I are dependent upon that patience.

See repentance is so necessary. If there was no need for personal repentance and personal faith in Christ the Savior whom God sent well then it would be all right. But you see, repentance in the whole scheme of salvation is so very important.

What is repentance? Well repentance is a change of mind. It's a change of mind that comes to us by the Spirit of God showing us what wrong we have done and why it is wrong. How is it wrong? And he convinces us that something is wrong and he convicts us like a barrister, like a lawyer.

He convicts us, he arraigns us and he finds us guilty and he proves us guilty to ourselves and our consciences say that's right, I've done wrong. Now having convinced us and convicted us of our sin the Holy Spirit begins to draw us back to God in acknowledgement of that and in quest of his mercy. And this is the beginning of the change of heart you see which makes man into a new creature.

It shows that God is at work in the soul when he changes his mind about sin and returns to God. God has already been doing a work there. It couldn't happen without the Holy Spirit.

It couldn't happen without God being at work in the heart. And it is so important. Now says God, I am patient because I want men and women to come there.

May I ask you my friends, my brothers and sisters and friends that I know not in this congregation tonight, how long has God been waiting for you to repent of your sin and turn to him? How long has been God's truce with you? I know not, but of one thing I know in the very nature of the case the truce has to come to an end. And if it does not come to an end during my lifetime in this world then it will come to an end at the judgment day. Paul makes that clear in this context.

God's truce, God's patience is a respite to allow for this kind of possibility in the life of individuals that we may repent of our sins and return to God acknowledging the evil of our ways and accepting the provisions of his grace. He does not delight in the death of the wicked. Positively one of the prophets tells us he delights in mercy.

I think that is one of my favorite passages of scripture. The Lord delighteth in mercy. God does not grumble in being merciful.

God does not grumble in forgiving. When you come to him in penitence you'll never find a grumble in his heart or on his lips. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous manage thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and he will just pardon.

No, no, no, no. He will abundantly pardon. The color and the dye and the evil in our sins seems to be of no account whatsoever because the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son has met the exigency in his atonement and totally removed the curse that we may have forgiveness and peace to live.

And he will abundantly pardon. That's the meaning of it. You remember that.

You tend to get cross with some of the evil men in the world. So do I. Let's try to remember this. God's giving them another day's truce.

But will you and I be present to tell them that the day is hastening by and the night is coming and to tell them the way back to God through his Son. But then let me add this. God's goodness in such patience should be influential in judging objectively, I say.

It should be influential in leading men to repentance. It is a very staggering fact that it does not apparently do so in so many cases. The reference here by Paul is to the influence which God's goodness has expressed in his patience should ordinarily have.

It should lead us to repentance. It should make its appeal to the mind, to the intellect, for example. You see, that there is a God who made all things.

A God in whose hands we all are and all history is. And the end of things, they're all in his hands. He's the Lord of history, he's the Lord of time, he's the eternal God.

And yet he, the eternal God, my Creator, Lord and Judge, says, I won't hasten to judge him, to judge her. I will give her time to repent. Imagine that.

Doesn't the fact that God is a God like that appeal to your intellect? That he is a God who is worthy of your faith, worthy of your admiration, worthy of your worship, worthy of obedience? It should make its appeal to the heart, to the emotions. That God, who is all-powerful and all-holy, should restrain his righteous wrath against my sin simply because he wants me to repent. Oh, the amazing grace of God.

He wants to see me redeemed. He wants us to be saved. He wants us in his fold.

He wants us within his arms. He wants us. If there is an impenitent soul here tonight, I want this to be God's shaft to your heart.

God wants you in his arms. And the truth remains open because he loves you still and has commissioned that his word should be declared in your hearing tonight. And, of course, it should quicken the will to act.

Repentance requires this kind of action. It calls for a recognition of sin and a renunciation of it and a returning to God. But seeing this kind of activity in God should have its impact upon the mind and upon the conscience and upon the heart and upon the will.

We should be drawn. We should be influenced by this. Now, this goodness of God as expressed in his patience must lead us to repentance before the limited time of the truth expires.

And here I have to speak very bluntly. There are a number of things that could bring this truth to an end sooner than you think. Speaking at the end of another year, the last Sunday evening, let me mention these things without dwelling on them.

First of all, the objective offer of pardon may never come your way again. Do you know that? It is my great, my immense privilege tonight to be standing here for my Lord, offering mercy from God to any penitent sinner. You know, you may never be faced from this night forward by anyone who will come to you and say as bluntly to you, God wants to save you.

Not because of anything in me, but because God has ordained it so. And even though it be announced in your hearing, you may not hear it after tonight. Others may hear it sitting next to you, but you won't.

There is a hardening of the heart and of the mind and of the conscience that even if it is objectively proclaimed, it is not personally heard. It's a terrible thing. I have known it.

I have known, indeed, the night I came to Christ myself, I went into the service with a man who had a family who had been praying for him for years, a young man, probably from his childhood. And he was a far better living fellow than I was. A young man to whom one could look up to in so many, many ways.

But when he heard the gospel, it closed his heart to it. And from that day forward, in all my dealings with him over the years, I've lost contact now. He's got harder and harder and harder and more and more

careless.

And the gospel doesn't touch him anymore. He was shaken that night. The Spirit of God seemed to give him a shake.

But thereafter, he was never shaken at all. It never penetrated. The subjective impressions that may be real to you at one given moment in time may not always be as real unless you respond to them.

Again, the Lord Jesus Christ may return and wind up the affairs of the universe, and that will terminate the day of grace. The outstretched hand will then be withdrawn. I don't know whether you'll ever hear an evangelistic appeal then, but if you do, it'll never mean anything.

It cannot. But death may visit your home and take you away, or take me away. Men and women, it is not in vain that James says, Boast not yourself of tomorrow.

It doesn't belong to you. It's in God's hand to give you. And I say to you, ladies and gentlemen, you may die before you respond to God's kindness, unless you do it tonight.

Now, that to me is part of the seriousness of the gospel. Death has a finality about it in this regard. When men die, each person goes to his own place.

Not only Judas went to his own place. Every man goes to his own place. You'll be fitted for the place to which you go.

And your life fits you, prepares you. Your mind, your attitude of being here and now makes you such that you'll fit into the atmosphere of heaven or hell. And you know the answer to that.

Would you be at home in heaven tonight? That brings me to the last main thing I want to say. The patience of God as seen in its practical outworking. Do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience? Not realizing that God's patience leads you toward repentance.

Two things. There is the possibility of despising or showing contempt for the patience of God as well as for our respecting it. We can show it contempt or respect, either or.

Because the execution of judgment is delayed, we too may inwardly conclude that God is not all that concerned about matters of right and wrong. And we may trade upon that. And we may, as it were, sin that grace may abound.

God doesn't care, so I can live as I like. I guess this became very real to me on one occasion not all that long ago when in conversation with someone about the gospel, the lady said, It doesn't really upset me to be living such a loose life, she said, because my husband is very forgiving. And here she was, living with anyone who would come along, trading upon the fact that her husband was so forgiving.

And because forgiveness seemed to be so near at hand, even for the asking, she lived upon it and she thrived and she is sick. Brother and sister, you can't do that with impunity in your relationship to God. He will catch up with us.

His patience is great. His mercy is beyond comparison. But listen, you've got to come to terms with the fact that God is God and holy and righteous and just and sin is the antipathy of all this.

Are you guilty of regarding the patience of God as an invitation to continue in sin rather than an incentive to repentance? And then this. There are examples of both kinds of reactions to be found in the Bible. You may go after them.

I just want to refer to one on each side. Take, for example, an example of Nineveh in the Old Testament, the whole story of the book of Jonah. You remember how Nineveh was given 40 days in which to repent.

The truth. And God said to the prophet, there are 40 days for you to repent. A whole nation, a whole city.

Blessed be the name of God. Nineveh repented. Jonah wasn't pleased.

But Nineveh repented. And the city was saved. God was gracious.

But you see, history has so many examples of those who did not repent during the time of truth. I refer, for example, to Noah's contemporaries. Noah, a preacher of righteousness, declared the righteousness of God, that sin cannot remain unpunished.

And the day of judgment is coming. Now God does this occasionally. He punctuates history with an occasional intervention in judgment.

Generally, judgment is delayed until the day of judgment. But there are occasional moments in history when God intervenes, as it were, to indicate, I do mean business. I do hate sin.

This was one of them. As he put Adam and Eve outside the Garden of Eden, so he deluged the earth. And a whole generation was wiped out.

They would not repent. Do you remember how long they were given? But they would not repent. Patience that has been despised and misconstrued, goodness that has been viciously misrepresented, only serves to aggravate the state of guilt that is already apparent.

And to justify a condemnation that is already earned. Brothers and sisters, we have a peculiar capacity for transforming God's most precious gifts into curses. Of turning God's most precious provision into poison for our souls.

Change the metaphor. There is a kind of streak in fallen human nature that can turn every blessing into a curse. I beseech you, don't do that.

In refusing God's truth, as the opportunity to repent and to return to Him with all your heart and all your life, and to yield it all to Him, take advantage of that truth. For if you do not, it will only prove that you are doubly fit for judgment and doubly deserve the righteous condemnation of God. Ah, this is one of the dark threads in the gospel story.

I am guilty before God. Already in sin did my mother conceive me, and we have all from our childhood moved astray. Like sheep we have gone, every one of us, to our own individual ways.

In rejecting the gospel and God's patience, in turning it aside, in treating it lightly, we only add to the deserts of judgment. I close with a reminder that patience as understood in scripture, and as attributed to God, is a temporary phase only. For God to perpetuate His patient forbearance so that it becomes a fixed and eternal attitude would imply His total unconcern with justice and with truth, and that cannot be.

He would thereby lose His character, and He would cease to be the God of the Bible. We would have another God altogether. Being the God He is, the temporary truce must sometimes cease.

There is therefore an end to God's patience. Then the door that has been long held ajar will close. The hand that has been long outstretched offering mercy will be withdrawn.

And the voice that has pleaded so tenderly, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee. How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. O Israel, return unto the Lord your God.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. The voice that has sounded forth with loving concern to save the lost will be forever silent. God grant us grace.

In this day of His mercy, as 1985 is moving into history, God grant us grace. In honor of His name, in recognition of His sovereignty, and of His saviorhood, to return to Him from our sins, to place ourselves at His disposal as well as at His mercy, that whatever days remain for us, they may be days of doing His will and not our own. Let us pray.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we first of all acknowledge our sin of failing to appreciate the meaning and the wonder of your patience with us individually. For each one of us has been guilty of breaking your laws and of transgressing in one way or another, moving contrary to your purposes, even when we have known the way we should walk. Forgive us, we pray.

Grant us, O Lord, anew as these last days of an old year are swiftly passing by. Grant us to sense the influence of your spirit upon us, leading us yet to repent of all our sins, that we may find in you that wholesome and total forgiveness that makes us accepted in the Beloved One, your Son. O, lead us to the fount where sin is washed away.

Call us, and we will run after you. So grant us grace through Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

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