

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Patience, *Galatians 5:22-23*

God calls Christians to change their character. He calls angry people to be peaceful. He calls lazy people to be productive. He calls unloving people to be loving. He calls impatient people to be patient. God calls people to remodel their character so that it reflects His own character. That call for character transformation lies at the heart of the fruit of the Spirit Paul lists in Galatians 5:22-23, a list outlining features of the character that should define God's people. We are considering the individual fruits included in Paul's list and, in this lesson, we will explore the fruit of "patience".

"The LORD, the LORD, a God...slow to anger"¹

- The book of Hebrews encouraged Jewish Christians facing persecution to be "imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" God issues to His people (*Hebrews 6:12*).
- The patience the Hebrews author wanted his audience to embrace aligns with common conceptions about patience – it is the ability to put up with difficult people or circumstances for the purpose of reaching a goal (i.e., inheriting the promises).
- Christian patience, however, pursues a goal bigger than merely inheriting promises; **Christian patience seeks to mirror God's own patient character** (*Galatians 5:22; Exodus 34:6-7*).
 - God's patience focuses on rebellious people and creates opportunities to save them from the consequences of their rebellion (*2 Peter 3:9; cf. Psalm 103:8-14*). For example:
 - God exercised patience in Noah's day, delaying judgment to afford people a chance to escape the coming flood (*1 Peter 3:20*).
 - Paul wrote that God's patience combines with His kindness and forbearance to lead people to salvation (*Romans 2:4*).
 - Peter wrote that Christians should consider "the patience of our Lord as salvation" (*2 Peter 3:15*).
 - God's patience in delaying the punishment of rebellious people also allows Him to "make known the riches of his glory" He has planned for obedient people (*Romans 9:22-24*).
 - God's redemptive patience finds its fullest expression in Jesus.
 - God's patience resulted in Jesus intentionally enduring suffering to create opportunity for rebellious people to reunite with God (*John 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:21-24; Isaiah 53:4, 6, 12*).

¹Exodus 34:6. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- Paul illustrated that opportunity when he, for example, wrote that the mercy Jesus showed him displayed “his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (*1 Timothy 1:16*).
- Our patience, modeled after God’s own patience, does not merely wait to get what we want, but focuses on creating and maintaining proper relationship with one another. Consider:
 - **1 Corinthians 13:4** – love motivates our patience.
 - **Ephesians 4:1-3** – we practice patience in our relationships with one another so that we can maintain unity.
 - **Colossians 3:12-14** – our patience includes practicing the forgiveness that motivated Jesus’ saving mission.
 - **1 Thessalonians 5:14** – we are to be patient those who are idle, fainthearted, and weak.
 - **James 5:7-11** – our patience in waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises involves “not grumbl[ing] against one another”.

Applications

- Because God’s patience focuses on saving people, it motivates Him to:
 - Put up with people’s betrayals far longer than (we might consider) reasonable (*cf. Hosea 1-3*).
 - Always accept people who turn to Him with soft hearts and genuine humility, regardless of what they have done (*cf. Hosea 11:8-9*).
- Our patience, modeled after God’s patience, should motivate us to:
 - Put up with people’s betrayals far longer than we consider reasonable (*cf. Matthew 18:21-22*).
 - Always accept people who turn to us for help and forgiveness (*cf. Matthew 18:23-35*).

God calls us to be patient people and sets out His own patient, longsuffering identity as the standard for our patience. We should consequently ask ourselves whether our relationships reflect a patience that mirrors God’s patience.



DON'T TEST GOD'S PATIENCE...

Isaiah 7:10-17

The prophet Isaiah delivered a surprisingly sharp response to king Ahaz's statement that he would "not put the LORD to the test" (*Isaiah 7:12*). Ahaz's seemingly good statement and Isaiah's harsh response (he announced that God would send the invading armies of Assyria into Ahaz's kingdom because Ahaz was 'wearying' God, *Isaiah 7:10-17*) indicate that the incident extends beyond the little bit recorded in Isaiah chapter seven.

To begin, we need to consider the Bible's assessment of Ahaz. Ahaz, a descendant of king David, ascended to the Judean throne in 735 BC. Chronicles describes Ahaz as a king who "walked in the ways of the kings of Israel", who made "metal images for the Baals", who offered sacrifices to the gods "on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree", and who even "burned his sons as an offering" (*2 Chronicles 28:1-4*).

Near the time of his ascension, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel joined forces to oppose Assyria who, after coming out of a period of dormancy, had turned its attention to the lands of Syria, Israel, and Judah – the only navigable land route moving people and goods between Asia and Africa, between the lands of Assyria and Egypt. Syrian king Rezin and Israelite king Pekah tried to persuade Ahaz to join their anti-Assyrian coalition, but, when he refused, the two kings "came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it" in effort to force him to join them (*Isaiah 7:1*). Despite the wickedness that characterized Ahaz, God sent the prophet Isaiah to the king with a promise to protect him and to tell him he could "ask for a sign" to prove God's intentions (*Isaiah 7:3-10*). Isaiah responded harshly to Ahaz's reply that he would not "test the LORD" because he knew Ahaz had already sent messengers to Assyria asking for their help (*2 Kings 16:5-9*); he had already decided not to trust God. God consequently announced that He would use the Assyrians Ahaz trusted to afflict him instead of strengthening him (*2 Kings 28:19-21; Isaiah 7:10-17*).

The Ahaz story reminds us that, while patient, God's patience has limits. As we consider the patience the Holy Spirit seeks to create within us, a patience that mirrors God's own patience, we will use this class to discuss its limitations.

Consider God's two responses to sin in Isaiah 43:22-24 and John 3:16-17. What insights might the two passages offer into God's patience?



How might Jesus' patience with people help us better understand God's patience? Why, for example, was Jesus patient with people like the disciples while seemingly impatient with others like the scribes and Pharisees (*cf. Matthew 11:1-8*)?

We do not have the benefit of knowing peoples' hearts as do God and Jesus. How might that lack of knowledge play a role in the exercise of our patience?

Jesus told his disciples to patiently practice forgiveness (*Matthew 18:21-35*) while he also told them to exercise judgment (*Matthew 18:15-20*). How might we know when to practice patience and when to practice judgment? Are the two responses contradictory?

What other challenges confront our patience and what steps can we take to overcome them?

