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Exhortation

“The God of my life”

4. The God of patience

John Parkin

WE LIVE in an impatient age. The Apostle Paul also had to contend with impatience. God, however, is continually patient to undeserving mankind. “The God of patience” is the subject of a prayer in Romans 15:5: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another”. In this verse “patience” means ‘endurance’.

Paul wants believers to help the “weak” in their midst (v. 1). The Son of God “(gave no thought to his own interests) to please himself” (v. 3, Amplified New Testament), neither should the believers. He did not escape the hostility of the Jews. He bore the heavy burden of reproach and anger on his own shoulders (Ps. 69). Now that is strength. Paul associates himself with the strong in faith, and asks them to carry the burdens of the “weak”. It was a real test of patience. Some believers were shallow in belief and compromising in life style then, and some are today. We need spiritual strength to deal with this.

The apostle recommends reading the Scriptures for guidance. This takes time and involves patience, but is worth doing. Our hope of Christ’s coming is strengthened and our daily lives are enlightened. Early disciples thought being “strong” meant being powerful. The Lord taught them how wrong they were. He, their Master, came to minister to others. Humility is strength.

James sees strength in how patient we are when trials affect us: “the trying of your faith *worketh patience*. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing” (Jas. 1:3,4). He exhorts believers to rejoice when trials affect them. The sermon on the mount had forewarned them: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you . . . Rejoice, and be exceeding glad” (Mt. 5:11,12). When under trial, patience can actually grow. Persecution forces faith out into the open, uncovers deep or shallow commitment, weak or strong belief. Two World Wars compelled brethren and sisters to stand up and be counted. Today, in the mission field, some still suffer for

their faith. Any one of us may face unpleasantness at work or in our neighbourhood. If our patience is tested to the limit we should see it as God perfecting our character.

Add faith to patience and we discover a Divine perspective. It is revealed in Hebrews 6: “after [Abraham] had patiently endured, he obtained the promise” (v. 15). As the seed of Abraham, we long to see the promises fulfilled at the Second Advent. This may involve a long wait. Farmers can teach us a great deal about waiting: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it” (Jas. 5:7). That is James’s advice.

He sees Job as the prime example of patience, a man who experienced a wonderful reward after what seemed to be endless suffering: “Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy” (v. 11). Ultimately Job was vindicated and his character was purified. God’s holy Name was clearly demonstrated: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Ex. 34:6,7). We marvel at the actions of Abraham and Job.

What the faithful say also shows what they are. Take Peter. During his Master’s trial he was under tremendous pressure. He lost his patience, and the trial of his faith brought an oath and denial of his Lord. No wonder he went out and wept bitterly when he realised what he had said. His master had taught disciples, “Swear not”. Middle Eastern people still express strong feelings with oaths. James’s exhortation is still valid today: “let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay” (5:12). Believers must avoid impatient outbursts at all costs.

Let us then serve the God of patience, Whose Son’s endurance won through even to the cross. May we all be patient, even “unto the coming of the Lord”.