

Be Patient in Suffering – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – James exhorts believers to be patient in every way as they wait for the Lord
2. aim – to cause us to demonstrate our faith as a patience in every kind of suffering
3. passage – James 5:7-12

b. outline

1. Patience in Waiting (James 5:7-8)
2. Patience in Relationships (James 5:9)
3. Patience in Steadfastness (James 5:10-11)
4. Patience in Consistency (James 5:12)

c. opening

1. the **final stage** of the letter (**James 5:7a** – the closing “bookend” of the letter)
 - a. **IMO**: the author is returning to his original point from **1:2** in order to begin to “wrap things up”
 - b. **5:7-12** is a “restatement” of the theme that opens the letter = in the midst of a life filled with trials and testings, the true follower of Christ is to “*count it all joy*”; he is to be “*patient*” as he endures what is happening to him, considering the **long-term value of his trials**
2. the **final work of faith** in the letter
 - a. **genuine faith is characterized by a strong sense of patience in the believer, willing to wait for the Lord to grant him comfort and willing to accept the sufferings of the present knowing that (eventually) all will be made right**
 1. **those who have a promised existence beyond this life are able to be patient in this life**
 2. **LOW: the Christian has an entirely different perspective on life – he has joy!**
 - b. the “*patience*” of the Christian comes from **embracing two inescapable truths**:
 1. **truth #1**: we may *not* be blessed by God to enjoy a comfortable and healthy life of pleasure or prosperity in this world – we may be ordained by sovereign decree to experience a life of “lack”
 2. **truth #2**: we *may* be cursed by God to suffer pain, injustice, opposition, persecution, and hatred in this life *for the sake of Christ* – we may be ordained by sovereign decree to experience a life of hostility from the world (including physical suffering) because we have trusted in Christ
 - c. **now**: James relays three (3) specific applications of how/why patience is to characterize the life of the Christian – **LOW**: he moves from *vertical patience* (i.e. waiting for the return of Christ) to *horizontal patience* (i.e. how patience appears in this life, in that which is “around” us)

II. Patience in Relationships (James 5:9)

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a. do not grumble against one another

1. “*grumble*” (grudge not, KJV) = to groan; to moan; to sigh; lit. to complain or to whine
 - a. **e.g.** Jesus “*sighed*” in **Mark 7:24** when he opened the ears of the deaf man (i.e. he let out a form of exasperation about the constant stream of sin-induced maladies he was being brought)
 1. not a *sinful sense* of complaint, but a genuine sense of *mourning* over what sin had done in the world *and* how healing was becoming (for many) the “center” of his public ministry
 - b. **e.g.** human beings “*groan*” according to **Romans 8:23** over the fact that we are subjected to the effects of sin in this fallen world (see also **2 Cor. 5:2, 4**)
 - c. **e.g.** church members are instructed in **Hebrews 13:17** not to make the accountability provided by the elders a “*groaning*” rather than a joy (i.e. by failing to take instruction)
 - d. **here**: a word meaning (**in context**) to complain (or whine) about what someone else *has* or what someone else *is in comparison to* one’s own circumstances or position in life
2. **reality: our lack of patience (and faith!) is often observed in relation to others, far more than in our understanding of (or confession of) eternity**
 - a. **i.e.** we say we trust that Christ will resolve all things when he establishes his kingdom, but we often demonstrate *impatience* as we “compare” ourselves to others *now*
 - b. **LOW**: our “comparisons” reveal our impatience – why is *he* blessed, but I’m not? (or, why am I cursed to suffer, and he gets to go on without any struggles?)

b. so that you may not be judged

1. “the Judge is standing at the door” = a clear reference *back* to the “coming of the Lord” (v. 7a)
 - a. **note:** the ESV capitalizes “Judge” because of the *definite article* (i.e. the) – the translators “see” the word as a title, specifically (in context) of the role of Jesus, thus they capitalize it accordingly
 - b. James connects our actions and **attitudes** now with the role of Jesus in his judgment:
 1. **principle: it isn’t just our actions that determine our judgment, but our attitude also**
 2. **i.e.** to *begrudgingly* obey is (almost) as bad as disobedience, *especially* when it comes to our view of circumstances vis-à-vis the sovereignty of God (e.g. religious activity)
 3. **the sovereign God has decreed these circumstances both good and for our good**
 - a. **Romans 8:28:** “all things work together for good” = God has purposed all things in the life of the elect to be good according to his eternal purpose of glory in us
 - b. **Hebrews 12:11:** “all discipline seems painful [later] yields righteousness” = God has purposed all things in the life of the elect to be useful to his eternal purpose of glory in us
 - c. true, the *circumstances themselves* may be evil (i.e. caused by sin), but their reality in our lives is *ordained* by God in order that he may do good (for us and him) through them
 1. **e.g.** the cross of Christ was the single greatest evil in history, and not *circumstantially* good for his Son, but it was “good” in that God used it to accomplish redemption
 - d. so, to “grumble” by comparing ourselves to others is to deny the goodness of where God has placed us, **regardless of where he has placed others**
 1. **e.g.** for Christ to “grumble” about going to the cross would be to deny the good in it – it would demonstrate a lack of *faith* in the purposes of God over him
2. **James warns his readers: be careful about comparing yourself to others – it may reveal more about you than it does about them**

III. Patience in Steadfastness (James 5:10-11)

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a. the example of the prophets

1. James reminds his audience to consider the life of the prophets as an “example” of patience
 - a. **note:** because his audience was *Jewish*, no specific point of the prophet’s lives are developed – James simply *assumes* they would know what he’s talking about:
 1. **e.g.** they would remember God’s words to Isaiah in **Isaiah 6:8-13** – he patiently preached to Israel, but it only produced blindness and deafness amongst the people to the message
 2. **e.g.** they would remember how Jeremiah “wept” in **Jeremiah 13:17** – he came with tears to a people who utterly rejected him and persevered to preach to them until exiled by them
 3. **e.g.** they would remember the persecution of Daniel in **Daniel 6** – he lived in exile and was persecuted for his faithfulness, but would patiently prophesy from the Lord throughout his life
 - b. he appeals for them to consider how, *in spite of massive opposition*, the prophets patiently carried the message of God to the people (**see also Matthew 5:11-12**)

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
2. “steadfast” = to endure; to continue; to await; lit. to hold one’s ground or stand one’s ground
 - a. **note:** a verb in the aorist tense = an action as a snapshot of something started in the past; to “be” something that began earlier and is now real in one’s life – i.e. to *persevere* in something
 - b. **IOW:** a **consistency** of belief and practice that flows through life – a faith that began somewhere in the past, but is continuing even now **with its attendant characteristics** (like patience)
 - c. **IOW:** a *synonym* of patience – to continue *patiently* without becoming *impatient*

b. the example of Job

1. James reminds his audience to consider the life of Job as *another* example of steadfastness
 - a. **note (again):** because his audience was *Jewish*, no specific point of Job’s life is developed:
 1. **e.g.** they would remember that Job remained faithful to the promises and Word of God *in spite* of his circumstances – he suffered, listened to his wife and his friends, and rejected their message of doom, waiting to hear what God himself would say (**Job 2:9f; 42:1-6**)

“Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips ... Then Job answered the LORD and said: “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”
 - b. **principle: what you are experiencing is no different from anyone else – everyone suffers in life, and our comparison may be only superficial**
 1. **i.e.** the life that appears so great in someone else may be hiding suffering you cannot see

2. **James exhorts his readers: if you *must* compare yourself to others, at least compare yourself to those that provide an excellent outward example of what it means to be patient**
 - a. **i.e.** so that you can *learn* from them by trying to *emulate* them – seek *good examples*

IV. Patience in Consistency (James 5:12)

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a. be consistent in your word

1. **note:** the imperative is virtually identical to Jesus' own words in **Matthew 5:33-37**
"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' [Lev. 19:12] But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from [the] evil [one]."
 - a. **i.e.** Christians (those who belong to the kingdom) speak truthfully and consistently – they do not need to "swear out an oath" for their word to be believed **because their words are consistent with their beliefs and actions over time**
2. **principle: patience is demonstrated in consistency – to "waffle" all over the place in terms of belief and/or the practices of faith is to show a lack of patience in the process of sanctification**
 - a. if the Spirit of God is truly working in us to conform us to the likeness of Christ, such work *will* show in the gradual changes that take place in the ways we think and act
 1. **remember James 3:1-8:** one of the *works of faith* is **transformed language**
 - b. those gradual changes will include greater and greater consistency in every aspect of ourselves, including how we speak and how we confess truth and how we make promises, etc.
 - c. so, **our consistency in word belies our level of patience** – the impatient man makes rash promises because he is looking for something *now* – the patient man simply speaks the truth, and waits for whatever comes of it over time
 1. **e.g.** the politician will "tell you what you want to hear" (lie) in order to get your vote
3. **James commands his readers: be careful about making promises hoping it will "avoid" some suffering or "speed up" something you want – patience demands consistency**
 - a. **genuine faith is characterized by a strong sense of patience in the believer, willing to wait for the Lord to grant him comfort and willing to accept the sufferings of the present knowing that (eventually) all will be made right**