

essential to receiving God's message. It was the Jews complete unwillingness to carefully listen to the Apostle Paul's scriptural reasoning—even after he plead for patience from them—that kept them from being saved (Ac 26.3ff.). This same type of response by believers today blocks the work of righteousness in their own lives (Jas 1.19-21). It is sad to note how often preachers of righteousness today have sought to extract deceived believers from error, only to be angrily and impatiently repulsed by the child of God who is “tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” (Eph 4.14). If only such a person had the patience to carefully consider doctrine, he would escape the heartache and damage wrought by error.

Your testimony will be much more effective if you are patient. The exercise of patience in the face of persecution and rejection will commend your message to the sinner's conscience (2Co 6.3-6). It will keep you from giving the Christ-rejecter an excuse for discrediting your message (2Co. 6.3).

Patience is also required for effective ministry. Every Christian (1Th 5.14) and every preacher must minister the Word with “all long suffering” and doctrine (2Ti 4.2). Paul's life and ministry is a wonderful example of preaching the Word “in season and out of season with great patience and doctrine” (2Ti 4:2). Indeed, in perilous times (such as we live in now) when the majority of professing Christians have become pleasure-loving, selfish, empty professors (2Ti 3.1-9), the true minister of Christ will be known by his patient devotion to truth in the face of persecution (2Ti 3.10-11).

Patience is also essential to receive God's promised blessings in such an environment. The Jewish Christians in the book of Hebrews were suffering for Christ. Some began to waver, and the writer of Hebrews urged them to practice patience so that they may receive the promised blessings of God (Heb 6.12). Abraham is a great example (Heb 6.15). Again, patience is essential when believers are mistreated by the rich and powerful (Jas 5.7-8) or pressured by false teachers and a wicked society (2Pe 3.15).

Patience is also essential to church unity (Eph 4.2). The only worthy response to all the blessings that the Father has poured out upon us through Christ is a unified church (Eph 4.1-3). The church must never compromise Truth (Eph 4.14-15), but by speaking the Truth in a humble, gentle and loving way, and by the faithful exercise of patience by all, the unity of the Spirit

can be maintained in the bond of peace (Eph 4.2-3).

As we have seen, patience is incredibly valuable for every area of the Christian life. The Christian who lacks the patience of Christ is going to limit his effectiveness for the Lord and even wound his own life and soul. So then, how can we put on the patience of Christ? It is not something you can produce humanly. The natural man is incapable of Christlike patience (Ro 8.7). It is only acquired by the work of the Holy Spirit in your life (Gal 5.22). Like all things spiritual, it comes only through the two means of grace: the Word of God and prayer. You will have to pray for it (Lk 11.13). You should ask your pastor and other Christians to pray for you to have patience (Col 1.11). You will have to “set your mind” (Col 3.2) to put it on (Col 3.12). Quitting on God or seeking one's own revenge because of hardships must not be allowed. You must look to the coming of the Lord, (Jas 5.7), encourage and strengthen your own heart (Jas 5.8), considering the Lord's delay “to be salvation” for others (2Pe3.15) and patiently endure until He sets all things right (Jas 5.1-8). You will need to meditate upon what Christlike patience is like and compare that to your own lack of patience. And then you will need to confess your sinful failure to be like the patient Christ (1Jn. 1.9). You will have to meditate upon God's patience with hardened sinners (1Pe 3.20; 2Pe 2.5; 3.9) and the self-proclaimed greatest sinner of all time: Paul (1Ti 1.16). You should deeply consider the patience of saints like Joseph and Abraham, who endured so they could inherit the blessings (Heb 6.12). And by these means, the Holy Spirit will produce in you the blessed Christlike quality of patience.

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Are We Returning to Corinth?

Steven Thomas

In recent years a few voices have risen against alarming trends in twentieth century Christianity. They are barely audible above the din and clamor of Christians thronging to follow the pied pipers of the church growth movement. We are increasingly told that effective ministry depends on our marketing skills. We are encouraged to establish user-friendly ministries. In the name of relevance, we are challenged to eliminate aspects of the ministry that are not exciting and do not address felt needs. Man-centered, entertainment-driven, spectator-oriented ministries are springing up across the nation. In our day and age the ministry that is deemed “successful” is the ministry that provides whatever society wants. These trends are a philosophical return to Corinth.

The apostle Paul wrote the book of First Corinthians to address the scandalous behavior that was prevalent in that church. The basic problem at Corinth was that the congregation had allowed the values of the surrounding society to infiltrate the church and shape its ministry. The culture was enamored with philosophy and men of renown – so was the church. The society was tolerant of gross wickedness – so was the church.

Paul's message to the church at Corinth is a message sorely needed in the cultural morass of American Christianity. In 1.18–31, Paul taught that the effectiveness of our ministry is not determined by the status of our converts or by our acceptance in society, but by our faithfulness to the message of the cross. His argument in this passage is based on three timeless assertions that show why it is useless to pander to the favor of pagan society:

Biblical ministry will not be well received by the world because of the content of our message (1.18–19.) Our message is “the word of the

cross” (v 18). In Paul's day, the message of the cross was offensive because of the horror associated with crucifixion. Victims were often mercilessly beaten. Many failed to leave the whipping post alive. Swollen and bruised, lacerated from the whip, they were suspended on a rough hewn cross by nine-inch spikes driven through the wrists and ankles. Their position was unnatural and designed to intensify pain. Death often took days while they hung in agony. The end usually came through asphyxiation. So horrible was the scene that it was against the law for Roman citizens to be crucified except for treason.

Biblical ministry will not be well received by the world because of the content of our message.

We are culturally far removed from the historical horrors of the cross. It now hangs in gilded splendor around our necks. It dangles from earlobes. It crowns our church spires. Because of our familiarity with the sight of the cross, it has lost its original offensiveness. For most, the presence of the cross – if it means anything at all – says, “I am vaguely religious.”

If we suspended gallows from our steeples, or embossed our letterhead with the image of a guillotine, or carved the relief of an electric chair into our communion tables, we still could not begin to comprehend the offense of the cross in Paul's day. The word of the cross was a scandalous message.

Even though the cross is no longer culturally offensive, it is still theologically offensive. Rightly understood and proclaimed, the “word of the cross” is an accusatory message about man. It is a declaration of man's depravity. It reveals the ugliness of man's sin by stripping him of all self-righteousness and pride. It leaves no room for man's wisdom, efforts, schemes, or esteem.

The message of the cross makes irrefutably clear the fact that salvation is of God and God alone. Herein lies the real horror of the cross, both for Paul's hearers and for ours.

Biblical ministry will not be well received by the world because of the presentation of our message (1.20–25). God's chosen method for communicating the gospel of Christ is preaching. Man has exalted his own wisdom; therefore, in the sovereign plan of God, men will be saved only when they believe the word of the cross as it is proclaimed in its profound simplicity.

Preaching is disdained by the world. It has even fallen on hard times in Christian circles. Denominational seminaries churn out graduates who are convinced that preaching is the least productive aspect of the ministry. Why this rejection of true biblical preaching? Very simply, preaching has always been contrary to the world's demands. The Jews demanded that signs be given to validate the message of the Messiah. The Greeks demanded titillating, stimulating philosophical arguments. They did not want to hear the preaching of the cross; they found it scandalous and moronic (v 23).

The Corinthian church sought to accommodate these critics by molding ministry to fit pagan values. This is nothing more than what we see taking place in the arena of the twentieth century American religion. Find out what society likes, call it "felt needs," and give it to them. Provide tips on successful living, develop a political agenda, present an entertainment package, but above all, don't preach the doctrine of the Word of God! The problem with this approach is that "felt needs" are usually idolatrous desires. They must not be pampered but must be brought under the Lordship of the crucified Christ.

When Paul came to Europe for the first time during his second missionary journey, he found that things were not what he expected. He was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. He had to be smuggled from Thessalonica by night. He was hounded from Berea. At Athens he failed to establish a church. He then came to Corinth alone. He was shaken and afraid. In quiet moments of solitude he evaluated his ministry and determined that the only way to meet Greek culture, philosophy, and arrogance was to not change his message. "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (2.2). This is a resolve that we must share. Regardless of the latest fads in the church growth movement, regardless of the desires of our narcissistic culture, let us say with Paul, "We preach Christ crucified" (1.23).

Biblical ministry will not be well received by the world because of the product of our message

(1.26–31). A short time ago, a news article in a local paper featured a description of a new market-driven ministry in a suburb of Detroit. It stated that the church's outreach plan involved advertising by targeting zip codes in the "right tax bracket." This leads one to ask, "If our objective is to make disciples among all classes of men, what could possibly be the wrong tax bracket?" We have forgotten who we are!

The effectiveness of our ministry is determined by our faithfulness to the message of the cross.

Paul fought this preoccupation with the grandiose in Corinth. He began by reminding the Corinthians who they were not. God, in His sovereign plan, has not seen fit to call many who are wise, influential, or noble (v 26). As much as it may hurt our pride, we must remember that God did not call us to salvation because of our intellect, influence, or inheritance. Furthermore, Paul reminded them of who they were, namely the foolish, weak, lowly, and despised (vv 27–28). This is a description of the product of the message of the cross, those whom God has saved. He has demonstrated through us that He alone is the answer to man's dilemma.

How often do we peer longingly at the pseudo-sophistication of this cosmos? We see the residents of the cosmos engaged in self-praise, self-love, and self-promotion. Too many have been wooed away from the work of biblical ministry by longing for the acceptance and accolades of these residents of the cosmos. We must be reminded that their value system is unbecoming to citizens of heaven. We are "aliens" in the cosmos (1Pe 2.11), called out by God for His purposes and for His glory. There is no room for the pursuit of stardom in the ministry; there is no place for personal glory in the Father's business. We are but unworthy servants of the One who will not share His glory with another.

Let us, therefore, give attention to His work: the clear, accurate, and authoritative preaching of His Word. Let us care little for the opinions of men and less for the promotion of self. The effectiveness of our ministry is not determined by the status of our converts or by our acceptance in society, but by our faithfulness to the message of the cross.

"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD. *Jeremiah 9.23–24*

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Putting on the Patience of Christ

Steven Owen

The Laodicean Church was a self-satisfied, wealthy, materialistic church (Rev 3.17). Proud and self-centered, she was blind to the fact that Jesus Christ was not even in her midst (Rev 3.20). She could not see her own spiritual poverty. Our Lord advised her to "buy" from Him "gold refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed, and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see" (Rev 3.19). In other words, He advises the Laodiceans to truly trust Christ ("gold refined by fire" cf. 1Pe 1.7), pursue Christlikeness ("white garments" cf. Rev 19.8), and receive from Him true spiritual sight (v18; cf. 1Co 2.14-16). In Colossians 3 & 4 the Holy Spirit outlines for us the steps to acquiring the white garments of Christ. This month we are considering how every Christian can put on the patience of Christ.

The Greek word here translated 'patience' is *makrothumia*. It is one of two Greek words translated "patience." The other word, *hupomeno*, has reference to patiently enduring untoward circumstances or things. But *makrothumia* has reference solely to *having patience with people*. It is a compound word formed by *macro* ("long" or "far off") and *thumos* ("anger, passion"). It refers to a person who is "a long way from anger," or slow to anger. In all of its various forms it occurs about 25 times in the NT. A person with *makrothumia* does not explode with uncontrolled anger when others provoke him. He patiently endures provocation without losing his temper.

If we wish to understand what the patience of Christ is like, we must consider the character of God Himself. Patience is eminently a character quality of God. It was God's patience that held back His righteous wrath for 100 years in order to save 8 people while Noah built the ark (1Pe 3.20). His glorious patience even

sought the salvation of those wicked sinners who were provoking Him as the Spirit of Christ preached repentance through Noah, a preacher of righteousness (1Pe 3.19-20; 2Pe 2.5). And it is God's patience now that has held back His wrath upon this world of lost sinners so "that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us [Christians]" (Ro 9.23-24). You will note that the Bible says that God actively (Greek active voice) "prepared beforehand (i.e. predestination) vessels of mercy (i.e. people who would receive God's mercy)". In order to show His mercy upon the elect, God had to "endure with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" (Ro 9.22). Man's sin provokes God's wrath. Our God endures "indignation every day" (Ps 7.11). It is essential to note that the phrase "prepared for destruction" is in the passive voice. In other words, although God prepared some to receive mercy, He did not prepare "vessels of wrath" for destruction. They prepared themselves by refusing to repent. And God is currently

Patience is eminently a character quality of God.

exercising patience right now, even though He is resolved (the Greek behind "willing") to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known against them (Ro 9.22). Our God exercises such incredible patience in order that people might repent (2Pe 3.9). He has not determined for anyone to perish (2Pe 3.9). The riches of his patience and kindness are designed to bring sinners to repentance (Ro 2.4). Such patience under extreme provocation is one of the ingredients of love (1Co 13.4). Our God is full of patience. However, it may surprise you to note that there is one area in which the Lord is not patient. He will not delay long to answer the prayers of His elect! (Lk 18.7). Therefore believers should never be discouraged in their prayer life. Our God will speedily answer our prayers.

It is this kind of patience that every believer is commanded to put on (Col 3.12). Such patience is indispensable in five areas of the Christian life. It will aid your own personal growth in righteous, your testimony, your effectiveness in ministry, your ability to receive God's promised blessings, and to keep the church unified. *As for spiritual growth*, patience is