

The Greek word used in Ephesians 4:2 for patience is *makrothumía* [*being self-controlled in the face of provocation*¹]. . . some argue that when the word *makrothumía* is used, it is largely to indicate patience in respect to persons, while the word for endurance [also translated steadfastness or perseverance] [*hupomoné-the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty*²] connotes patience in (or putting up with) things or circumstances. The words sometimes appear together (see 2 Cor. 6:4, 6; 2 Tim. 3:10; James 5:7-11). Do you find yourself tempted to impatience more often with people or with circumstances? (70)

1. Patience is the ability to accept a difficult situation from the Lord without accusing Him of wrongdoing or giving Him a deadline to remove it. (67)

...when trying to help someone identify impatience with people, I look for a couple of attitudes. The first is an unwillingness to work any longer on the relationship. Relationships take effort. But impatient people are too quick to throw in the towel on friendships and even family relationships that are difficult...I am often asked “how long” type questions when counseling people who are going through difficult relationships. Patient people are committed to handling relationships and the “difficult” people in them biblically. They are willing to go the second and even the third mile with them. They are willing to persevere through not just one or two conflicts but, if the Lord wills, many years of them. This is so because some relationships are very difficult to terminate without sinning. And in the midst of each conflict they have with difficult people, patient people understand that, if the conflict can be resolved at all, it is apt to take longer than it would with people who are not so difficult. The second attitude that lets me know that I’m dealing with an impatient person is one that unduly pressures or even demands that a loved one change according to one’s own (subjective) schedule. I sometimes tell them, “If the Lord were to show you all your remaining sin in one moment and told you that you had until the end of next week to ‘get things together,’ how would you like it?” The Holy Spirit has His own sanctification agenda for each of us. And that agenda is almost certainly different for our loved ones than we might like to think. Superimposing our agenda for another person’s sanctification over that of the Holy Spirit’s is not only a manifestation of impatience, it’s the epitome of spiritual arrogance. When we are in conflict with another believer, it is easy for

¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 613.

² Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 1039.

us to become angry and impatient with the immaturity of our opponent. We sometimes wish that we could argue with someone more mature. But a patient person accepts the fact that his opponent is where he is spiritually and does what he can to spur his opponent to greater maturity – without allowing himself to be provoked into temporarily obscuring his own maturity by sinful responses. (71-72)

Many Christians fail to understand that solving problems God's way usually involves not only putting off sinful behaviors but also putting on biblical alternatives. Consequently, where they fail to "do things God's way" is in trying to simply stop doing what is wrong (getting angry, for example) without making it their goal to become proficient in the corresponding biblical antithesis (kindness, tenderheartedness, forgiveness, and gentleness.) Indeed, often the best way to put off a character flaw is by putting on its corresponding character trait. (footnote #2)

2. Patience is the ability, while experiencing physical or mental distress, to keep one's emotions (grief, fear, and anger) from developing into sinful thoughts, words, attitudes, or actions (especially toward God and others). (72)

So it is with our trials. If we value God's purposes in our trials more than man's purposes, we will be able to endure the trial with grace. If we value man's purposes more than God's, we will be tempted to all manner of sin (Mk 8:33). (74)

Several communication issues are associated with impatience (an unwillingness to wait):

- ❖ Interrupting others while they are speaking (not waiting until others have finished expressing their thoughts before I express mine)
- ❖ Jumping to hasty and unfounded conclusions (not waiting until I have collected all the information necessary to come to a biblical conclusion)
- ❖ Judging motives (not waiting until I have asked others what their real motives are before I accuse them of having improper ones)
- ❖ Demanding immediate answers to difficult questions (not waiting until those I question have had sufficient time to consider their response)

- ❖ Pressuring people to finish what they are saying quickly (not waiting until others have finished expressing their thoughts before I express mine)
- ❖ Finishing others' sentences (not waiting until others have finished expressing their thoughts before I express mine)
- ❖ Taking vengeance verbally (not waiting for God to execute His justice in His time)
- ❖ Prematurely terminating a discussion in order to do something more pleasurable (not waiting to do what I want until after I do what God wants me to do)
- ❖ Prematurely terminating conflicts due to an unwillingness to tolerate the sinful attitudes of my opponent. (75-76)

3. Patience is the ability to endure tribulation without resorting to any sinful means of deliverance. (77)

Impatient people are often on the prowl for something – anything – that will bring them relief (e.g., divorce, suicide, rebellion, gossip, manipulation, running away, or even neglecting personal responsibilities). Sometimes those I counsel can feel trapped by their trials – sort of like they are in stocks in the dungeon themselves. And, with every day that goes by, the shackles seem to become more unbearable. Occasionally it even appears that the stocks are tightening on their limbs and that they will soon be crushed by the ever-tightening walls of the prison dungeon. (78)

Which “sinful ways of deliverance” from conflict have you attempted (or been tempted) to employ?

- ❖ Personally attacking your opponent (or his argument) so that he will get angry and walk away (or you will be able to walk away and blame him for prematurely ending the conflict)
- ❖ Lying your way out of the conflict (saying “yes” when you mean “no”) just to “get it over with”
- ❖ Falsely accusing your opponent (or exaggerating his culpability)
- ❖ Intimidating (bullying) your opponent into agreeing with you
- ❖ Manipulating your opponent into agreeing with you through guilt
- ❖ Becoming excessively emotional so that your opponent will back off

- ❖ Purposely misusing Scripture
- ❖ Unjustly pulling rank (abusing your position of authority over your opponent)
- ❖ Saying “whatever” and walking away
- ❖ Becoming physical (pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, pinching, and so on) (80)

4. Patience is the ability to endure suffering while continuing to acknowledge and be thankful for God’s sovereignty, justice, wisdom, love, and goodness. (80)

Patience is required for us to see what God is up to and how He is going to work our trials together for our good. When we are facing trials, one of the most profitable things we can do is to spend some extra time studying God’s perfections. (81)

5. Patience is the ability to keep a biblical perspective about one’s troubles by not magnifying a tolerable trial so that it appears to one’s mind as an intolerable one. (82)

Patience is a mind-set. It’s a matter of how the mind interprets life – of how one views reality... Although we may see our need to depend on God’s grace more in the larger trials than in smaller ones, for the Christian all trials are tolerable because of the grace that is promised to us throughout any trial we may experience (see 1 Cor. 10:13). It may be more accurate to say that we don’t so much magnify the trial as we minimize our view of God in proportion to it (make Him not as large as it is). (82)

6. Patience is the ability to rejoice in the assurance that one’s present distress will produce godly character, which is of great value not only in this life, but also in the next. (83)

Trials are often God’s catalysts for our sanctification. We grow, mature, are completed and perfected, become more Christlike, develop proven character, or whatever other biblical synonym you care to use for progressive sanctification, through trials. I daresay that most of us wouldn’t grow much at all apart from them! (84)