

"THE ART OF PATIENCE"

INTRODUCTION

A story is told about a little boy who stood watching a telephone repairman on a telephone pole in front of his home. The repair man was connecting a test set, and then trying his connection with the test board back at the exchange office. After listening to the man for several minutes, the little boy suddenly turned and ran into his house calling for his mother. "Mother, mother...come quickly. There's a man on the telephone pole talking to someone up in heaven". The mother said quietly, "And how do you know he's talking to someone in heaven?" And the little boy replied, "I just heard him say, 'Hello, hello'....'Good Lord. What's the matter up there? Can't anyone hear me!"

We smile at the story. It simply serves to remind us that there are many impatient people constantly barking at heaven to hurry up and do something about everything. Many of us have big plans, and we want to get on with them. We don't like to wait. In fact, we insist on running even if we run in circles. This is not always good. Sometimes God has things for us that we get in no other way than by waiting for them. The art of patience is one of the important disciplines of life. As Christians we would do well to explore its possibilities and discover its secrets.

TURNING TO THE BIBLE

We need to deal with the problems of patience in a religious spirit. Turning to the Bible, we find advice on this subject. It was Isaiah who said:

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint".

It was Jesus who said:

"He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. In your patience, possess ye your souls".

The Apostle Paul adds his thought on the matter:

"But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control".

It's important, however, that we do not confuse patience with laziness or moral indifference. To be sure, there are times when God wants us to exhibit a righteous impatience. Patience does not mean giving up or giving in. But rather it is an attitude toward people and things, an attitude toward life in general that can be creative and enriching. Suppose we consider several aspects of the art of patience.

WE CAN ALWAYS ENDURE MORE THAN WE THINK WE CAN

The first thought is that we can always endure much more than we think we can

The distinguished scientist - engineer, Charles Kettering, likes to tell of an experiment that took place in one of the

laboratories under his direction. For some time, Dr. Kettering had been looking for stronger steels, and had been testing many samples. One day he gave a sample to one of the assistants asking that he drill it in order to get some shavings for metallurgical tests. The assistant returned a few hours later with the sample saying that it was too hard to drill. Kettering asked him if he had used a diamond pointed drill. The diamond pointed drill had not been used, so they tried it, and it worked on that hard sample of steel. They got the shavings they needed for the tests. Dr. Kettering later pointed out to the young assistant that the steel hadn't been too hard, but that the drill was too soft.

And so it is with us. The experiences that we complain about are not too hard. The trouble is that we're too soft. When we come up against the hard samples of life, we are tempted to think that we can't make it. We need to be reminded that God has given us diamond pointed tools of faith that can cut their way through any situation. There is great power in patience.

Now this applies, I think, not only to those situations in life that we might classify as desperate, but it also relates to our ambitions and our hopes for ourselves and the world. Any great task can be a discouraging task. We know that small ambitions can be easily realized. But the larger ambitions of men require a patience that calls for great endurance. We should never be tempted to forsake great ambitions by fearing that we do not have the stuff to endure. God has given us the capacity to stand more than we think we can.

Michelangelo, the great artist, lay flat on his back on a scaffold in the Sistine Chapel for twenty months painting his great masterpiece. He only stopped to eat and sleep, and that was only when he was so exhausted that he was apt to fall from the platform. He threw himself into bed with his clothes on, not even bothering to take off his shoes. Although he was lame and suffering from a broken nose, he completed all 343 figures on the ceiling, a task so great that its completion is still beyond relief.

~~Part of our trouble is that we do not have the endurance to be patient. Remember - great goals demand great efforts. And when life calls on us to be patient, it is not asking us to take it easy. It demands sternness, sacrifice, discipline and perseverance. For we can always endure much more than we think we can.~~

HIDDEN VALUES

A second aspect of the patient life is that we can always find hidden values in any situation.

David Dunn in his little book entitled, "Try Giving Yourself Away", points out that many of us labor under the delusion that we will be happy WHEN. We'll be happy, for instance, when we arrive at a certain goal. We'll be happy when we get a better job, or when our schooling is complete, or when we get married, or when the baby is born, or when we recover from illness, or when we get moved into a new home, or when some disagreeable task is completed. Then, to our great surprise, we discover that life has a way of facing us with new complications as fast as the old ones are settled. We need

to learn that even these periods of waiting may be fruitful. We need to learn to find our happiness where we are, or we're likely to miss it altogether.

Some years ago, a young man was very dissatisfied with his job. He was an artist, but the routine of his everyday job as a magazine illustrator just bored him to death. He began experimenting on his own in his spare time. He drew pictures on cards. One day he showed the cards to his editor. On each card there was a picture of a rabbit, and as he flipped the cards rapidly, the rabbit seemed to jump and run away. The editor made fun of his idea, but for the young man it was the beginning of a new career in the field of film cartoons. And so it was that Walt Disney used his waiting period by working on this idea at night in his garage. There are hidden values in every situation. No period of patience need be unproductive.

WE CAN ALWAYS ACHIEVE SO
LONG AS WE KEEP ON TRYING

achieve so long as we keep on trying.

A third aspect involved in cultivating the patient life finds expression in this phrase: we can always

A Roman legion in the year 109 AD built an aqueduct in Spain. For eighteen hundred years that aqueduct carried water. Around the turn of the century, the Spaniards decided to relieve the aqueduct of its burden and preserve it for posterity. They laid modern pipe lines and diverted the water. Soon afterwards, the walls of the aqueduct began to crack under the hot sun, soon it fell apart. What years of service could not destroy, idleness ruined rapidly. It's a parable of life. So long as we keep our heads up and keep on going, we live and serve. When we quit and give up trying, we stagnate and die.

I know there are times in our lives when the tasks of everyday living get the best of us. There are times when we're tempted to throw up our hands and get out from under the responsibilities we carry. Discouragement takes hold of us. But we need to remember that the battles of achievement are won by patient, plodding effort in the heat and smoke of the day. It is the day by day, never ending labor of hand and heart that brings victory. Sir William Osler has words for us at this point:

"Throw away all ambition beyond that of doing the day's work well. The travelers on the road to success live in the present, heedless of taking thought for the morrow. Life neither in the past, nor in the future, but let each day's work absorb your entire energies and satisfy your widest ambitions."

Many years ago a man by the name of Edward Gibbon wrote in his diary, "It was at Rome on the 15th of October, 1864, as I sat musing among the ruins of the capitol that the idea of writing the decline and the fall of the city first entered my mind". And nearly 23 years later, he made this entry: "It was on the night of June 27th, 1887 that I wrote the last lines of the last page". During those 23 years, Gibbon had done a fantastic amount of research. His great work, "The

Decline and the Fall of the Roman Empire" fills six volumes. And All of this time, Gibbon was an invalid. The rewards of patient, plodding effort bring great satisfaction. This is the way that the work of the world gets done. We can always achieve so long as we keep on trying.

WE CAN ALWAYS TRUST AND SERVE GOD
WHEREVER WE ARE AND IN WHATEVER WE DO

The fourth suggestion related to the patient life is this: we can

always trust and serve God wherever we are and in whatever we do.

When Albert Palmer was pastor of the central Union Church in Honolulu, the congregation erected a new building. The architect called on the pas+or to select an inscription for the chancel high above the central cross. In order to fit the space, the inscription would have to be eighteen letters and spaces in length. After a great deal of research, Dr. Palmer chose the words that he felt would fit the situation. The words would be suitable for the brides as well as the bereaved. The sentiment would speak to old and young alike, both at Easter and Christmas. These were the words he chose: LOVE NEVER FAILETH. Eighteen letters and spaces. The words have a special meaning for all who are called on to walk the way of patience. No matter how confused or how uncertain the way, the love of God - the father - is ours to sustain us and guide us. As we learn to trust him, our impatience dies away.

A vermon editor said of warren Austin, as he struggled with the perplexing problems of the United Nations in that decade following the 2nd World War, "He isn't a hero. Warren Austin is just a good Vermonter doing the job that God laid out for him to do". Austin himself, a religious man, thought of his work in much the same way. It was this that gave him patience before the baffling issues of the world. It was his faith that anchored him down, and gave him the courage to keep facing the seemingly endless struggles that he faced. Many people wrote to him expressing their concern and their prayers for him. And to such letters, Austin replied by referring to those words of Longfellow:

"Thy calmness bends serene above,
Thy restlessness to still;
Around me flows thy quickening life,
To nerve my faltering will.

Embosomed deep in Thy dear love,
Held in thy law, I stand;
Thy hand in all things I behold,
And all things in thy hand.

Remember then: we can always endure more than we think we can. We can find hidden values in any situation. We can always achieve so long as we keep on trying. We can trust and serve God wherever we are and in whatever we do. Of such is the art of patience.

LET US PRAY: Our Father and our God, give to us the measure of patience needed for living in these days. Help us to see thy hand in all things, and all things in thy hand. Amen