

## PATIENCE

### **“But let patience have her perfect work” (James 1:4 KJV)**

God, as you know, is a God of patience (Rom. 15:5). He is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but all come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). His Holy Spirit also produces patience within us (Gal. 5:22), and this patience enables us to “possess our souls” (Lk. 21:19). Like a farmer waits patiently for the early and latter rain, we are also to be patient because the coming of the Lord is near (James 5:8).

Now let us apply this principle to the commission of Christ to His followers to evangelize the world. Jesus commanded His disciples to go to **“all nations”** (Matt. 28:19); **“all creation”** (Mk. 16:15); **“all nations”** (Lk. 24:47); **“the ends of the earth”** (Acts 1:8). Yet, some ten years later we are told explicitly that they were preaching “only to the Jews” (Acts 11:19).

The patience of God with the early Christians in this regard, is illustrated by His patience with Peter. Like a loving Father, God patiently guided Peter through his first three years of Christian growth and maturity. God overlooked Peter’s gaffes, errors, and mistakes, and was even willing to forgive him for denying Christ three times on the same night. It was some ten years later, however, before Peter actually preached to the gentiles. Even then the same vision had to be repeated three times, and Peter had to be specifically commanded to go preach to a gentile centurion “without hesitation” (Acts 10:20). The fact that God was so patient with Peter encourages us to believe that He will also be patient with us.

Or, consider God’s patience in the life of Paul. God had set him apart from birth to be an apostle to the gentiles (Gal. 1:15). It was still some ten years after Paul’s conversion that he actually did what Christ had commanded him to do. Paul spent years in Damascus, Arabia, Jerusalem, and Tarsus, preaching to Jews, before the Holy Spirit finally separated him from the church at Antioch to actually preach to the gentiles (Acts 13:1-3; Acts 26:16 - 18). If God was patient with Peter and Paul, perhaps He will also be patient with us.

All of history, both sacred and profane, confirms that the apostles of Christ died doing precisely what He commanded them to do. Yes! It took years for them to grasp the concept of world evangelism, but when they finally understood, they obeyed.

The wise parent is not concerned when a five year old boy is not yet shaving. We are patient with him because we know that in due time he will mature. Perhaps we need the same type of patience with respect to world evangelism.

The Huarani Tribe in Ecuador does not even have a word for “world”. At the time they made the front cover of Life Magazine for killing five American missionaries there were only 500 of them left on the earth. In the 350 years that anthropologists have been aware of the tribe they were never known to have a chief, council, or government of any kind. Sixty percent of the deaths within the tribe came when they killed one another. Not long ago, however, two Huarani men spoke at the International Conference of World Evangelism in Amsterdam. Representatives from the tribe have also witnessed for Christ in India, Africa, the U.S., Canada, and other countries of the world as well. God has obviously been patient with them for many years as they have grown and matured in Christ! We pray that God will also be patient with us.

There comes a point, however, when even God gives up. Paul reminds us of this in his letter to the Romans. When men knew God and deliberately refused to glorify Him or give Him thanks, the Sovereign of the Universe gave them over to sinful desires and shameful lusts (Rom. 1:21 - 32). There is a difference between the child who “can’t” mature, and the child who “won’t” mature. One is retarded, and the other is rebellious, and God knows the difference. Noah and his family found grave in the eyes of the Lord, and everyone else was condemned.

In this regard it is wise for us to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). Yes! God is patient, but failing to ever mature is a serious sign that something is wrong (Heb. 5:11 - 6:6). Those who refuse the commands of Christ are said to be like those who crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame!