

PATIENCE: ENDURING CHALLENGES IN GOSPEL WORK

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. This great privilege, though, comes with many challenges and difficulties, including persecution and discouragements as you try to influence others for Christ. But if you give up and do not endure the struggles, you will never experience the victories available through Christ. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures to help you learn to show patience in your gospel work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:10-4:5

As hard times were coming (vv. 1-9), Paul reminded Timothy of his example of patience and endurance (e.g., in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra; Acts 13-14). Despite persecution and suffering in gospel work today, you must hold firmly to what you have learned from the Scriptures (Galatians 6:7-10; 1 Corinthians 15:57-58). Even though hard times would exist and there would be many evil people doing and teaching many false and evil things, gospel workers must be persistent in preaching God's word (both when people want to hear it and when they don't). Still, preaching, correcting, rebuking, and encouraging must be done with great patience and teaching. For, it often takes people time to accept the teachings of Scripture and to change their lives. This means that gospel workers must not become harsh, quick-tempered, or overly frustrated when people change slowly. Instead, the gospel worker must be patient in giving people opportunities to grow and mature, be willing to repeat and explain the same instructions multiple times, and be gentle in correcting error while people are genuinely trying to understand. Thus, self-discipline is essential in gospel work to endure the hardships and be patient in teaching!

1 THESSALONIANS 5:14

Disciples of Christ must be patient with everyone. In doing so, consider some categories of people: The idle/disorderly, the discouraged, and the weak. Certainly, anyone who gets involved in gospel work

will soon recognize that people respond to the gospel in different ways and are in many different circumstances. Each situation requires a unique demonstration of patience. For example, those who are not living as God desires must be warned and corrected in a way that recognizes lasting change often takes time. Those who are discouraged must be patiently comforted and encouraged over time. Those who are weak in the faith must be patiently supported and grown. And, every person (even outside these categories) will require patience to be demonstrated toward them, as they struggle through life and strive to follow Jesus Christ! This involves enduring people's slowness in growth, not giving up on them, and continuing to teach, encourage, and help them along the way!

MARK 3:20-30

On this occasion, Jesus encountered and endured several points of opposition (from His family and from the scribes). He was accused of being out of His right mind and possessed by Beelzebul (perhaps a reference to Satan). Yet, Jesus responded with patience by responding calmly and logically. He reasoned with them to demonstrate the accusation could not be true and then proceeded to warn them about what they were doing. Even though they were opposing Him, He patiently urged them not to miss out on their last opportunity (when the gospel would be preached through the Holy Spirit, starting in Acts 2). Thus, He still was focused on their salvation – and some later came to believe in Him (some of His family, Acts 1:12-14)!

MARK 4:35-41

Jesus spent a lot of time with His apostles. Despite them having seen Jesus demonstrate great power (Mark 1-3), they acted as though they had no knowledge of who Jesus was in this difficult moment. They accused Jesus of not caring, acted as though the situation was hopeless, and demonstrated a lack of faith in Jesus. Jesus's response demonstrated that they should have believed in Him more by that point. Jesus addressed their failure and continued teaching them, trying to help their faith mature over time with additional exposure to Him (including by calming the storm). Therefore, Jesus's patience with His disciples demonstrates how gospel workers must be patient with others through repeated misunderstandings, a slow recognition of truth, and a gradual strengthening of faith.

GALATIANS 4:15-20

At one time, the Galatians (who Paul had taught the gospel, Acts 13-14) loved Paul deeply, received his message eagerly, and would have sacrificially helped him. But, false teachers had now turned them away from the truth and Paul (Galatians 1:6-10; 3:1; 5:1-4). This deeply hurt Paul, as they were like his children whom he had labored for. Yet, Paul endured this hurt and still loved them enough to patiently speak the truth, even when it hurt and would not have been what they wanted to hear. Furthermore, Paul's endurance focused on doing what he could to reach them (wishing he could be with them and change his tone), as he desired to help Christ be formed in them! Therefore, patience in gospel work involves enduring hardships when others disappoint and even change attitudes toward you, telling the truth even when it creates tension, and focusing on long-term spiritual growth in others.

MATTHEW 7:6

This teaching gives an important boundary for patience. Sometimes there will be people who simply have no interest in changing what they believe or how they live to conform to the teachings of the gospel. Christ does not expect His gospel workers to constantly pour energy, time, and resources into such people who have rejected the gospel so as to create a greater degree of hurt and discouragement. Instead, patience in gospel work involves righteous judgment and stewardship in finding the best opportunities for kingdom growth in those who are teachable and interested. For, even Jesus would change His approach toward those who demonstrated they were not interested in the truth (Luke 23:8-10; Matthew 15:1-20; 23:1-36) – and urged His followers to do the same (Matthew 10:11-14; Luke 10:5-11; Acts 13:42-52).

CONCLUSION

Being patient and enduring hardships and discouragements is critical for the long-term growth of the gospel. There will undoubtedly be frustrations, obstacles, and persecutions faced by the one who is trying to spread God's saving gospel. For, it takes time for the seed of God's word to take root in a person's heart and grow into a fruit-producing disciple of Christ. Then, there are obstacles that each person you help will also experience that threaten the growth of the gospel in their lives. However, while gospel work takes significant time and investment in others, there are no shortcuts to long-term growth, and you must patiently commit to God's process!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Why is patience needed in gospel work?

Why is patience necessary for your own faith?

Why is patience necessary to teach others?

How will patience respond to different people in different circumstances in different ways?

How does patience respond to being falsely accused and rejected?

How does patience respond to disappointment and slowness in growth?

How does patience respond to being hurt?

How does patience eventually require moving on?

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