

Patience | Galatians 5:22 & Matthew 18:21-35 | 4 February 2018

Once again, I am struck by my natural default being individual and self-implicated. Whereas the Biblical theme pertains to others and how I treat and deal with them. It seems my take on these “fruits” of the Spirit, these “gifts” of God to me, must take on new horizons. I find myself in need of my mind being renewed. What a delight that my Father desires me to be transformed into the image of Christ, my savior and Lord. May God grant you wisdom as you learn and grow toward maturity, just as myself.

1. What is the difference between “patience” and “forbearance”?
2. What situation in the Gospels reveal to you the “forbearance” of Jesus?
3. Share a relationship where this “forbearance” has had a positive effect in your life.
4. Share a relationship where you need God’s gift of “forbearance” today.

Gordon Fee, God’s *Empowering Presence*

Forbearance. It is common to translate this word as “patience.” To be sure, in some cases it carries that meaning. But in English, “patience” tends to be individualistic; i.e., one is “patient” about all kinds of nonpersonal matters pertaining to life in general (burnt toast, for example). But in Paul *makrothymia* and its corresponding verb are always used in contexts involving one’s forbearance toward others. As such it often occurs, as it does here, as the passive side of love, of which its companion “kindness” is the active side. For instance, Paul describes God’s attitude toward human arrogance as one of forbearance and kindness (Rom 2:4); these are the first two words that describe (God’s) love in 1 Cor 13:4, and thus they occur together in Col 3:12 as part of Christian dress when one “puts on Christ.” 449-450

Thus “longsuffering” has to do with one’s long forbearance toward those who oppose or distress one in some way. Nowhere else does Paul attribute such forbearance to the direct working of the Spirit: but its appearance here shows that Spirit-empowering is not simply for joy and miracles, but for this much-needed quality of “putting up with” those who need long and patient love and kindness (cf. Col 1:11). This is the antidote to “outbursts of rage” (vr 20) or “provoking one another” (vr 26). 450

Patience = *makrothymia*

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Patience, Steadfastness, Endurance – All the words dealt with under this heading refer to man’s endurance when faced with the adversities of life, whether his reaction be one of passive submission or of courageous resistance. *Makrothymia* [patience, longsuffering] almost always expresses the idea of passivity, while *kartereo* [be strong, steadfast, persevere], rarely does so. Being strictly military terms, the various words are readily used as metaphors in connection with the battles of life. The word with the widest range of meaning is *anechomai* [bear, endure], which originally meant to hold up, lift up, then, intransitive, to cease, and middle, to hold oneself erect, to endure. *Kartereo* means to be strong, steadfast, also to do something persistently in the face of opposition; in Greek ethics it is a technical term for the upright bearing of the wise man. On the other hand, *makrothymia*, which is rare in Greek, denotes resigned submission to a situation which is to all intents and purposes irremediable. In theology, however, the word acquires a more positive meaning: the *makrothymia* of God is his longsuffering or forbearance, standing between the extremes of wrath and grace. *Hypomeno* [be patient, persevere, endure] means in the first instance to remain behind, to await. It acquired then the more active sense of overcoming difficulties; to persevere, stand firm, stand one’s ground. 764 *Old Testament*: *makrothymos* frequently denotes an attribute of Yahweh... (Num 14:18; Ps 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Nah 1:3). These words are, therefore, inseparably linked with the idea of restrained wrath, forbearance being exercised for a limited period only. The Israelites made frequent reference to God’s forbearance (Exod 34:6)... Patience increasingly became a virtue required of the wise (Prov 19:11). The meaning of *makrothymia*

tended to degenerate into mere lenience, a tendency opposed by the rabbis in their discussions of the word. They considered that God's purpose in exercising forbearance was to lead men to amendment and repentance. 769

New Testament: In the NT forbearance is a characteristic both of God and of the man who is united with Jesus Christ. The noun is used only in the epistles; none of the words occurs in the writings of John. The subject is treated thematically in Heb 6:9-15; Jas 5:7-11; and to some extent in 2 Pet 3:4 ff. 769

The connection between divine and human patience is made clear in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:21-35 (note the use of the verb **makrothymeo**, have patience, vr 26, 29, not the noun). This parable may almost be said to sum up the whole NT teaching on the matter. The parable immediately follows instructions on what to do if a brother sins against one (Matt 18:15-20 and Jesus' injunction to Peter to be willing to forgive not only seven times (which exceeded the common rabbinic maximum of four times and the three occasions just mentioned in the instructions of Jesus). The follower of Jesus should be willing to forgive seventy times seven, i.e., a virtually unlimited number of times. The number recalls the words of Gen 4:24 concerning vengeance: "If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold". The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates the divine attitude to forgiveness and to our dealings with our fellow men. The first servant owed the king ten thousand talents (18:24), or something like a billion pounds, a sum which he could not possibly repay. He asks the king to have patience (**makrothymeson**) and he will repay everything (18:26). But the king does actually more; he remits the whole amount. But the servant then demands the repayment of a hundred denarii (perhaps four or five pounds; a denarius is a labourer's daily wage in Matt 20:2 ff.) from a fellow servant. He even puts him in prison until he should repay the debt, despite the man's pleas to have patience (again, **makrothymeson**, vr 29). On learning the true facts of the case, the king has the first servant put in prison "till he should pay all his debt" (vr 34). The parable concludes with the pronouncement. "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (vr 34). It recalls the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our debts just as we forgive our debtors (Mt 6:14 f.). "The duty of the servant to forgive is not dependent on ordinary human feelings, but is linked directly to the attitude shown to him: 'as (or because) I had mercy . . . so must you.' This, in a sense, is the real point of the story and the key to the obvious allegorization: the unforgiving will be excluded from God's mercy (vr 35); and those who receive God's pardon must show the same forgiving attitude to others" (D. Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible*, 1972, 278). 769-770

A contrast is drawn between a debt so enormous as to defy repayment, and one which could easily be met out of normal income. This is a vivid way of expressing the incomparable greatness of God's longsuffering. At the same time longsuffering makes possible our entry into newness of life. Similarly in Rom 2:4 Paul reminds us that God's forbearance leads us to **metanoia**, repentance, by which he means the obedience of the man who has been delivered from the power of sin. In Ro 2:4, as elsewhere, the background is that of God's righteous anger, but his patience, being linked with kindness (**chrestotes**), assumes the character of benevolence. If this longsuffering were to be regarded merely as an opportunity given to men for self-improvement and amendment of life, then his wrath would be rendered innocuous. Paul puts the matter clearly in Ro 9:22; in his patience God suffers those who are appointed to wrath, in order to display his power and mercy in the salvation of the elect (cf. 1 Pet 3:20). 1 Tim 1:16 speaks of the patience of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), but likewise stresses its revelatory character: "But I received mercy, for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life." Paul is a living example of divine patience, a proof of God's mercy to sinners, and thus Timothy should follow his example of patience (2 Tim 3:10; 4:2). 770

In the parable of Matt 18 human patience is shown to be related to (and dependent on) divine patience. God in his longsuffering holds open the door to newness of life, but such new life in the believer is proved genuine by the fact that he practices forgiveness. Thus **makrothymia** comes into its own in the NT list of virtues. Paul incorporates these lists in his practical exhortations: the virtues referred to are "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22; cf. Col 1:11; 1 Thess 5:14; 2 Tim 3:10) or our "walk in the Spirit" (Eph 4:2; Col 3:12). 770-771

