

# The Love of God and the Patience of Christ

Feb. 20, 2011

Scripture:  
2 Thessalonians 3:5

Series: *Staying the Course When  
You're Tired of the Battle:  
Priorities for the Front  
Lines* (8/10)

By: Colin Smith

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.  
(2 Thessalonians 3:5, NIV)

The word "perseverance" can also be translated "patience." If you have a King James Bible, that is what you will find there, "the love of God and the patience of Christ."

## *What's On the Surface*

### **1. I need love and patience, especially when I am tired of the battle**

This whole letter was written to Christians who were experiencing the draining effects of the difficulties of life.

You may say, "Well, that's me." You have difficulties at home, tensions at work. You're experiencing endless visits to the doctor, the wearing effect of ongoing pain. You have difficulties in your marriage, a wayward son or a wayward daughter. And you find yourself saying, "I need love and I need patience!"

### **2. God can give me the love and patience I need**

Notice something wonderful about this verse. Paul is not asking Christians to do something for God. He's asking God to do something for them!

He's saying to these Christians, who are being persecuted, "I see what you're up against, and I'm asking God to do something special for you. May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience."

The whole point is that our heavenly Father is able to give His children the love and patience we desperately need.

### **3. I can ask God to give me what I do not have**

If these Christians were brimming with love and overflowing with patience, there would be no need for this prayer. So, what's the point of this prayer?

Paul is asking God to give them what they do not have, “Lord, give me the love and patience I need. You have love and patience in abundance. I don’t. Give me what I do not have.”

This is a wonderful prayer. You can ask God to do this for you, “Fill my dried-out heart with Your love. Fill this frantic life with the peace and the patience of Christ.”

Here are three simple observations from this one verse: “May the Lord direct your hearts into God’s love and Christ’s patience.”

1. I need love and patience when I’m tired of the battle.
2. God can give me the love and patience I need.
3. I can ask God to give me what I do not have.

This is a very simple meditation on this verse of Scripture. You can do this for yourself as you read a few verses of the Bible every day.

I want to encourage you to do this. Read a few verses. Then pick one, and write out two or three sentences to restate and apply what it says. Children can do this!

Write out the verse. Then write out, in your own words, what the verse says and how it helps you. Get a hardback notebook. As you begin this practice, 20 years from now it will be your joy to look back on what God has taught you.

Don’t just read the Bible and rush on. Take what God is saying into your life. Do this for a few minutes every day, or at least start by doing this a few times a week. As you do this you will get better at it. God’s Word will bear fruit in your life.

Some of you are in the habit of reading devotionals. That’s good, but if you have been doing that for many years it may be time for you to move beyond feeding your soul on other people’s thoughts.

Try feeding your soul on the Word of God directly. Ask God to help you. Get a friend to encourage you. A year from now, you will be amazed at how much you have grown.

## *Delving Deeper*

Karen and I have enjoyed visiting Mackinaw City on several occasions. When you cross the Mackinaw Bridge, you can look to one side and see the vastness of lake Michigan, and look to the other side and see the vastness of Lake Huron.

Our Scripture passage is like that, bringing together—not two lakes—but two oceans, two worlds, two galaxies: The love of God and the patience of Christ. Paul prays God will direct the hearts of Christian believers into the vast depths of God’s love and Christ’s patience.

**What do you know of this in your own life?**

How much do you know of this? How would you describe your own experience of God's love? What is your experience of Christ's patience?

Most of you know that our church enjoys a close relationship with *Live at Peace*<sup>1</sup> ministries, a Christian counseling ministry serving people all over the Chicago area. They are now working out of our Barrington Campus.

We were drawn to them because they place the love of Christ and the transforming power of the Gospel at the center of their work. Some of you have already been greatly helped by their ministry.

*Live at Peace* is headed up by Judy Dabler, who, among other things, teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield. I want you to picture her class—120 folks who feel called to some kind of Christian ministry, and they're preparing themselves for it. Judy asks them this question: Do you believe that God loves you?

Out of 120 Christian students preparing for ministry, how many do you think said, "Yes?" *Two!* The rest gave answers like this:

1. "I know I'm supposed to say, 'Yes.'"
2. "I know the Bible says He loves me, but I don't feel it."
3. "I'm not sure I can really say I believe it."

## How can this be?

Surely every Christian knows the love of God. Did we not learn this in Sunday school? "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

Jonathan Edwards used a simple analogy to get to the heart of this:

There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.<sup>2</sup>

You can know honey is sweet, because someone tells you, but you don't really know its sweetness until you've tasted it. You can know God loves you because your Sunday school teacher told you, but you don't really know God's love until you've tasted his love.

Many Christians live at a great distance from this felt experience of the love of God. So much Christianity in the West is shallow and satisfied. It affirms a creed but it so often lacks spiritual life.

Across the country there are millions of people who have a faith, who've been brought up to believe Jesus died and rose, they've gone to church, but they have no living experience of God's love.

We need this prayer! May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience. This is a prayer for Christians. He's writing to the church. It's a prayer that God will do something in us who believe, but do not always feel that God loves us.

I want to use this prayer to open the door of your mind and heart to something more than you may have already experienced. Here are Christians going through great difficulties, and Paul says, "My prayer for you is that God will direct your hearts into the love of Christ."

That means it's possible to endure persecution and not to feel the love of Christ. It's possible to go through seminary and not to feel the love of Christ. It's possible to worship in the seats of an evangelical church like this for 20 years and to not feel the love of Christ.

I don't want to be there! And neither do you. People who are not Christians endure great pain and carry great sorrows. They do it by gritting their teeth. They do it in Britain with a stiff upper lip.

Paul is saying to these believers, "I want something better for you. I want your soul to be filled with the love of God." Let me give you some real life examples of the love of God flooding a person's soul, so that you will be encouraged to pray for more of this yourself.

### **a. John Wesley**

Wesley was a pastor. He had preached on two continents—in England and in Georgia, here in the States. Something happened to him on the 24th of May, 1738, while he was listening to a man read the preface to Luther's work on Romans in Aldersgate Street in London. Here is Wesley's description of what happened to him:

About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup>

What is so amazing about this is that this man had been preaching in church for years, but now he tasted the love of God. He had a new sense of its sweetness. His life and ministry was transformed.

### **b. Jonathan Edwards**

In 1737 Edwards rode out into the woods for time of prayer:

I had a view, that was for me extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God... and His wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love.<sup>4</sup>

He went out into the woods, tied up his horse and saw the love of Christ in a way that he had not seen it before. He had a “view” of it. He got a glimpse of it. Its sweetness came home to His soul

### **c. Dwight L. Moody**

In 1871 Moody's church building was destroyed in the Chicago fire. He went to New York to seek financial help:

I began to cry as never before for a greater blessing from God. The hunger increased... I kept on crying all the time that God would fill me with his Spirit.

Well, one day in the city of New York – oh! What a day, I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name... I can only say, God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand.<sup>5</sup>

His soul was so overwhelmed by the love of God that he said, “I can’t take it anymore.”

### **d. Blaise Pascal**

One of the most intense descriptions of this kind of experience comes from Blaise Pascal, a Roman Catholic. Pascal is especially interesting because he was a mathematician and a scientist.

It would be easy for some of us to dismiss the message today by saying that there are certain more emotional types of people who have these experiences.

Pascal had an extraordinary experience of the love of God that lasted for about two hours. He wrote some scribbled notes of what happened to him, and then he sewed them into the inside of his coat, where they were found after his death:

This day of grace 1654  
From about half past ten at night, to about half after midnight

Fire!  
God of Abraham, God of Isaac God of Jacob  
Not of the philosophers and scholars.  
Security, feeling, joy, peace  
God of Jesus Christ...

Greatness of the human soul...  
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy...

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ

May I never be separated from him.<sup>6</sup>

What happened to him? His heart was “directed into the love of God and the patience of Christ.”

## *How to Experience More of God’s Love & Christ’s Patience*

### **a. Become dissatisfied with your present spiritual experience**

Cultivate a holy discontent. The person who prays this prayer is looking for something more than he or she already has: “Lord, direct my heart into your love.”

We live in a “been there, done that” culture, and the great danger is in developing a “been there, done that” form of Christianity: “I know God loves me, that Jesus died for me and that my sins are forgiven. So, what’s next?” Then one day someone says, “Do you really believe that God loves you?” And your shallowness is exposed.

A. W. Tozer says:

We have been snared in the coils of a spurious logic which insists that if we have found him, we need no more seek him... In the midst of this great chill there are some who will not be content with shallow logic. They want to taste, to touch with their hearts the wonder that is God. I want deliberately to encourage this mighty longing after God.<sup>7</sup>

Don’t settle for a faith in which you cannot feel the love of God and the patience of Christ

### **b. Ask God to direct your heart into His love**

This is a prayer, so use it. Make it your own. The Scriptures tell us what we should pray for. Last week we saw that we’re to pray that the Gospel may run. This week we’re learning to pray that God may direct your heart into His love.

Some of you carry a lot of baggage on this. Whenever you think about God, your first instinct, though you believe, is to picture him with a frown on his face. You feel that he is angry with you and that he is condemning you. You need this prayer.

Listen to this wise counsel from Richard Sibbes:

Present God to yourself as he is presented in the Gospel. The devil he puts other colours upon God: he presents him as a tyrant, as a judge, as a revenger.<sup>8</sup>

Remember, the devil does this because he hates God.

John Owen says:

So long as the Father is seen as harsh, judging and condemning, the soul is filled with fear and dread every time it comes to Him... But when God... is seen as a Father, filled with love, the soul is filled with love to God in return...

All that we learn of God will only frighten us away from Him if we do not see him as loving and merciful to us. But if your heart is taken up with the Father's love... it cannot help but choose to be overpowered, conquered and embraced by him.<sup>9</sup>

Some of you think God is cold and aloof and harsh and demanding, and these thoughts are deeply rooted in your mind. You need this prayer: "Father, direct my heart into your love!" Ask God, and go on asking, until like the snow that melted in the warmth this week, your heart begins to thaw in the warmth of the love of God.

### **c. Gaze into the love of God in Jesus Christ**

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek Him in His temple. (Psalm 27:4)

Have you ever noticed this? People who don't like each other will *glance* at one another. People who like each other will *look* at one another. People who are desperately in love will *gaze* at each other.

Isaac Watts used another word to say the same thing in his famous hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Survey, gaze, ponder and meditate on the love of God. The patience of Christ, take this into your soul: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience.

### *Two Responses to this Scripture*

One response you may have is that something is awakened in you—deep calls to deep. Maybe you're thinking, "I want more of what he's talking about." For you this Scripture sounds like a church bell drawing you in, calling you to seek after God.

Settle it today, in your heart and in your mind, that you will pursue a sweeter taste, a deeper experience, a clearer glimpse of the love of God and the patience of Christ. Go after it. And don't ever stop.

Others may be thinking, "When is he going to wind up this message and let me go home?" For you this is not so much like the sound of a church bell drawing you in, as the sound of an alarm clock waking you up.

If you have no response to the love of God, shouldn't you be concerned about the condition of your soul? I hope you'll ask, "What is wrong with me? I have no interest in the love of

God. Why am I so satisfied, when others are hungry and thirsty for God?" I pray you'd ask this question.

Perhaps God will use this to awaken you from the deadness of spirit in which you have been sleeping for far too long.

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<sup>1</sup> "Live at Peace" ministries can be found on the web: <http://liveatpeace.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Jonathon Edwards, from the sermon "*A Divine and Supernatural Light*," 1734,

<sup>3</sup> Wesley, cited in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "*Joy Unspeakable*," p.79, Doubleday, 2000

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 80

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 106

<sup>7</sup> A. W. Tozer, "*The Pursuit of God*," p. 16-17, Christian publications, 1982

<sup>8</sup> Richard Sibbes, "*Works of R. Sibbes*," vol. 6, p. 393, Banner of Truth, 1983

<sup>9</sup> John Owen, "*Communion with God*," p.18, 32, Banner of Truth, 1991