

Taking Things Patiently

F. B. Meyer

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What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." (1 Peter 2:20)

The servants here addressed were the household servants and slaves, so largely employed in the great establishments of that age. Wealth and position made special boast of the vast number of dependents that were maintained. Life was held cheaply enough; and when a slave was once purchased, he cost little to keep. The Roman empire swarmed with bondmen; and they became her ruin.

It is not surprising that large numbers of these poor creatures fled to the shelter of the Christian church, as the outcast seeks fire and food. There at least was liberty for the captives, and love and equality between slave and owner, master and servant. The purchase of the soul of the slave had cost the Son of God an equal amount of suffering with that He had endured for the wealthiest. The love that bent over the hut where an Onesimus sheltered, was as strong and tender as that which pleaded with a

Philemon. The heaven which awaited the dying Lazarus, was as fair as that which beckoned a martyr Apostle. And so there was in the Gospel a marvellous fascination for the slave; and if we may find any conclusion on the fact that large portions of the Epistles are addressed to them, and that some of the noblest passages are written for their special benefit, we must admit not only that they were to be found on the church rolls, but that the

sacred writers entertained towards them a strong and tender sympathy.

The one message which the Spirit of God had for them, and which is so often repeated, may be gathered up in the words: Submit, endure; be subject; take it patiently.

We must remember that they were not able to give notice and leave at their will. Wherever they could do this, without blame, and without detriment to the trust committed to them by God or man, they were at perfect liberty to do so. "If thou mayest be made free, use it rather" (1 Cor. 7:21). But this was seldom possible. For the most part they had no alternative but to stay where they were till death released them. It was to such that these special exhortations came.

There is a great restlessness among employees throughout society.

Servants giving notice. Young people trying to better themselves. Men changing from situation to situation. As a rule, there is not much gained, even in a worldly point of view, from successive changes. It is the steady plodding life which most quickly leads to success and comfort. Still, there is no sin in making a change, if it be not made simply from selfish motives, or with an eye to worldly advantage. When the Christian testimony has been clearly given, and perhaps clearly rejected; when our presence is rather an irritant to ungodliness than a persuasive to Christ; when we feel able to ask God clearly to open another door for us, and He has done as we request; when it is possible to take another position without compromising the interests committed to our care; when we can do better for the kingdom of Christ

by a change - then there is assuredly no reason against it.

But in many cases, as with these household servants, there is no honorable way out of a position in which God seems to have wedged us. We may be in daily contact with grinding tyranny; with almost unbearable cruelty; with an envenomed tongue; with an irritating, captious, trying temper, never satisfied, never pleased - a child with the mother; a nurse with an invalid; an apprentice with an employer; a woman with her husband - in some position which must be borne to the end. Here then is the unfailing

Divine recipe: when reviled, do not revile again; when buffeted though doing well, do not retaliate; when unjustly accused or punished, be still and take it patiently. And out of all this will come a life which shall not only be like His life who hath set us an example, but which shall also exert a remedial and saving influence on the most violent opposers of his Gospel, while it mounts up to God as an odor of a sweet smell, eliciting his smile of loving approbation.

I. Buffeted for Faults. We have all made mistakes, and know what it is to be reprimanded or punished. But under such circumstances we have had no just ground for complaint; and our true policy when so situated must be not to excuse ourselves, nor to cast the blame on others or on our circumstances; not to flash forth with indignant words; but to take it patiently - or if speaking, to confess our wrong, and ask to be forgiven.

In this the royal Psalmist has set us a memorable example. When he was slowly descending the long slope of Olivet towards the Jordan, there came out a man of

the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, "and as David and his men went by the way, he went along on the hill's side over against them, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust". And Abishai chafed at it, and asked permission to quench his abuse in blood. "No", said the king, "let him curse; because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David" (2 Sam. 16:5-13).

It was as though he felt that his sin demanded public reprimand, and he meekly accepted the permission of God as his appointment. In such a spirit as this should we bear all buffeting which comes to us for our faults. Be still. Sit alone and keep silence. Put your mouth in the dust. Give your cheek to him that smiteth you. The Lord will not cast you off for ever; He will take you again to Himself. Only remember there is nothing to glory over in this. It is your common duty. "Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (Ja. 1:4).

II. Buffeted, Though Doing Well. Our superiors, or employers, may be froward, difficult to please, always finding fault; and, though we do our very best, we may meet with nothing but buffeting and rebuke. Still, we are to take it patiently.

There is no harm in quietly and temperately explaining the untruth or the unreasonableness of the accusation; or in showing how we have striven to do our best. When our Master was accused of casting out devils by collusion with their prince, He showed how unreasonable the charge was; and when smitten with the palm of the hand, He said: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou

Me?" (Jn. 18:23) It is open for us to give a soft answer like this; but if it does not turn away wrath, we must "take it patiently".

Be sure that your patience is not mean-spirited cowardice. There is no virtue in that. But let it arise from conscience toward God. Offer your soul's patient endurance to God upon that altar which sanctifies the gift; and the motive which prompts the sacrifice will be precious in his sight. "This is thankworthy."

"This is acceptable with God" (1 Pet. 2:19-20). And the Greek might bear such a rendering as this: God says, Thank you. Yes, so it is. If in some great house some poor servant, or if in a school some persecuted child, will dare for God's sake, to choke back the passionate outburst of indignation, and to endure grief, suffering wrongfully, there is a thrill of delight stated through the very heart of God, and from the throne God stoops to say, Thank you. The hero-explorer may be thanked by his country and his Queen; but the weakest and obscurest saint may receive the thanks of the

Almighty.

We may cultivate this grace of patience by many considerations. Though that particular allegation may be wrong, yet there have been many occasions in our lives when we have received more praise or thanks than were our due. Balance one against the other. And such is the evil of our hearts, that the germs of sins, which have been wrongly imputed to us, are latent, and only await the opportunity of breaking out; they would have broken out before, but for the grace of God. Besides, does not this desire to receive the praise and esteem of all

betoken a very worldly heart? Why should we want human applause?

If we had our desserts, instead of one buffet in a life of caresses, we should have but one caress in a storm of buffetings. If the sinless, guileless Savior was dumb as a sheep before its shearers amid the torrents of abuse that beset Him, surely it becomes us to be still, for there are plenty of causes for rebuke in us, to justify the worst things ever said against us, and many worse than these. Our case is like that of a criminal who had better hear quietly a sentence for a crime he has not committed, lest by too much outcry he induce investigation into a list of offences, which are not charged against him, because not known.

And in addition, let us think tenderly of the condition of our persecutors. Alas, for them! How sad, how pitiable are they. Surely they need pity rather than wrath, mercy more than vehemence. Perhaps our uncomplaining meekness may touch them as no words of indignation would; as the sighs and agonies of the early martyrs were pricks and goads in the consciences of their persecutors, driving them to the Lord.

Moreover, it is after all but a small thing to be judged by man. If he praise, what does it amount to? If he blame, what is it but a puff of smoke, a blank cartridge, a meteor exploding in the air? Life at the longest is short. Eternity is near, even at the doors. And the kiss of God, as we step across the threshold of his presence-chamber, will make us even thankful to have been put into such circumstances of rebuke as enabled us to win so large a reward.

And is it for a moment to be supposed that God will not vindicate us? Of course He will. "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto

Him? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily" (Lk. 18:7,8). "He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness" (1 Cor. 4:5). "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Ps. 37:6). We can afford, then, to give place unto wrath, since He has said, "Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense" (Rom. 12:19). Let us commit ourselves, as Jesus did, to Him who judgeth righteously, and we shall find that He will clear us and cause our enemies to bite the dust, as when Haman led Mordecai in triumph through the streets of Shushan.

III. The Inducements to Patient Endurance:

(1) As we have already seen, God says, Thank you. And those thanks will be heard one day by the raptured soul, as it stands almost dazed in his presence. "When did I aught to deserve all this?" And in answer, many a trivial and forgotten incident of Christian gentleness and meekness under misrepresentation and rebuke, will be recalled. "This, soul, I beheld in thee; and it made Me glad.

Welcome! and well done!"

(2) For this we were called. Not to be happy, or saved, or glorified, but to suffer as Jesus suffered. He was the Master of the house, but they spat on Him, smote Him, derided and crucified Him; yet He threatened not. And we have been called to live His life. To make his meaning clear, the Apostle uses words which children could follow. When the Greek schoolmaster taught writing, he made his letters faintly, and the scholar

wrote over his outlines. This is the Apostle's thought, and we have been called to repeat each line and turn and curve of the Master's life, so that the world may ever have a living copy of His life before its eyes.

"Leaving an example".

(3) We know we are on the right way for our home. Our Master has gone through the world, leaving traces of his path behind Him; as in the dense bush of

Australia a man will blaze the trunks or snap the twigs, that those who follow may find the way. So, as we encounter hatred and rebuke - not for our misdeeds but because we belong to Christ - and are able to bear it patiently, we are sure that we are on His track; which leads down into the grave, and through it to the Resurrection lawns, and up the Ascension steeps, to the banks of the river of water of life, where they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

And is this patience possible? Not to your unaided efforts; but as the gift of the God of Patience through the Holy Spirit. Thrice we are told of the patience of

Jesus, who bore threat and wrong without a word of retaliatory threat. Oh, marvellous grace! And it was wrought out by Him, not for Himself alone, but for all who believe. It awaits our appropriation. Let us claim it in all moments of irritation and calumny, saying with Robert Hall, "Calm me, Lamb of God, calm me!" or whispering softly,

"Thy patience, Lord!" So may God the Holy Spirit direct you into the patience of

Jesus Christ!