

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS PATIENCE

Matthew 18:21-35

Newbegun United Methodist Church

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Rev. Dr. Roger Braun

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. I came across an analogy while preparing for the message this morning and I think it is a good one for the fruit of the Spirit. As I have said before, Paul calls this the fruit of the Spirit, single, not plural, because they are all interconnected. Paul begins with love, so think of love as the blossom on a fruit tree. There will be no fruit unless there is first a blossom. Without love, there will be no fruit. From there we can say the joy is love rejoicing; peace is love resting in God; patience is love enduring; It is love that is durable, lasting, and not easily broken.

Patience is probably the most sought after of all the fruit. People are forever saying that they need more patience because that is the fruit they have the least of. At this point I need to tell you that there is a very good reason why that is. Patience is going against a very strong human condition. Impatience is built into our DNA. You see, in Genesis 3:17-18 it tells us of one of the consequences of sin. God tells Adam, "Because you have eaten of the forbidden fruit, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you." In other words, humans will work all day and will find their work frustrating and unproductive. Frustration breeds impatience. No wonder we have to work at patience, it was a difficult thing for us to have from before we were born. Yet, we all have the fruit

of patience; we just need to know what it is and how to practice it. And that is what this series on the fruit of the Spirit is trying to do. Remember we made two promises – to prepare our hearts to receive each message and we promised to practice each fruit for each week. So far we have practiced love, joy, and peace. Are there any stories; any victories this week about peace? I just thought I would ask. Anyway, I know several who have told me they brought some peace into the world this week. God bless you all!

Back to patience. What kind of patience is God looking for? I will give you two examples – one I call SHORT ENDURANCE and the second I call LONG ENDURANCE. As I was creating the bulletin for this morning I was getting very frustrated with the UM Hymnal. There was no hymn on patience. At least, not one I could find. I went through the entire book three times and then I threw the book across the room and put a hole in the wall! (Not really, this is just a parable about short endurance) After that I calmed down and settled on picking out three unrelated hymns just for the fun of it. Is that kind of short endurance the fruit of the Spirit? Did throwing the hymnal and destroying property help me find a hymn? Not at all. Short endurance is not very helpful. Do you know people like that? People with a “short fuse?” Those who act in haste and repent in leisure? That is not fruit of the Spirit patience.

The second example is long endurance. The example is also a parable, but one that Jesus told. Peter asked how many times does he need to forgive someone. Jesus said 70 times 7. Peter probably thought, “Uggh, I don’t have the patience for that!” Then Jesus told them a parable about a king who forgave a great debt and a servant who couldn’t forgive a minor debt. The servant obviously had only short endurance, while the king had long endurance. So long that the king would never get his money

back and he was OK with that. Where the servant really went wrong was that he followed the example of human's short fuse instead of the example his king who just showed him the long fuse. And the same is true for our fruit of the Spirit that is patience. The world is fast food; pizza delivery in 30 minutes; on demand; micro-waves; concord jets (remember them?); drive thrus; and express lanes. The world is working against us, as always. However, our example is not the world, but our God. **AND GOD IS EXTREMELY, ETERNALLY PATIENT WITH US.**

Now, pay close attention because this is very important for our understanding. This is the reason why God is so patient. God is patient with all of us because it is about the salvation of the world. 2 Peter 3:7 – “The Lord is not slow in his promise as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any one to perish, but to come to repentance.” The goal and purpose of God's patience is salvation for all. God wants us to have an intimate and loving relationship with him. That is also why God wants us to have patience. To practice and exemplify the same patience as God, for the same reason – so God can use our lifestyle of patience to reconcile people to God. And to do so God gave us the fruit of patience to use. That is the reason we cultivate patience

Now, how do we do that? It all comes down to this - it is long-endurance patience we are given to practice. Slow to anger is our goal. Patience, someone said, is the ability to put up with people you'd like to put down. Every fruit I know has a protective outer layer. A layer you have to remove to get to the sweet fruit. The outer layer serves a purpose. It keeps moisture in the fruit during dry times. It also protects. If the outer layer gets cut or damaged then the fruit will rot and spoil. Patience is what

God gave us to protect our soul from getting rotten. It keeps our hearts sweet toward others so we can continue to love them and disciple them to Jesus. The practice of patience is to protect relationships; show mercy instead of hate; to forgive instead of seeking revenge. Can you practice that? Like God, our patience is to endure in order to someday they might seek salvation.

Colossians 3:12-13 says, "Therefore, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another." With patience we build bridges, not fences. "Preach the Word," Paul said to Timothy, "be prepared in and out of season; correct; rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction."

It is slow to anger that is our goal. We practice patience with each other because God is so patient with us. We have been given the fruit of the Spirit which is patience. The only thing we have to remember is that this fruit is not about us, it is about the other. Patience is our witness and our discipleship. Do you still think you could use more patience? Of course you do! We all do! And I guarantee that before the day is over, you will have an opportunity to practice patience, and that is all I can offer. Don't pray for patience, you already have it. Exercise your patience and it will grow stronger. Practice patience and you will get better and better at it. Keep it in the front of your mind that patience is for the sake of God and God's salvation to humanity and not for you. That is your incentive to practice patience. God bless you and let me know how you do this week. Amen.