

PATIENCE

AND ITS PERFECT WORK

ENDURING SUDDEN AND SORE
TRIALS WITH JOY



A MODERNIZED EXPOSITION
OF JAMES 1.1-5

THOMAS GOODWIN

PATIENCE

AND ITS PERFECT WORK

ENDURING SUDDEN AND SORE
TRIALS WITH JOY



A MODERNIZED EXPOSITION
OF JAMES 1.1-5

THOMAS GOODWIN

Copyright ©Monergism Books

Patience and Its Perfect Work

Enduring Sudden and Sore Trials with Joy

A Modernized Exposition of James 1:1–5

By Thomas Goodwin

For a striking account of the origin of this remarkable treatise, see the *Memoir of Dr. Goodwin* by his son (see p. lxxiv). It was originally published anonymously in a small volume (18mo) and is one of the rarest of all Goodwin's writings. As evidence of its extreme scarcity—aside from the very high price it commands, often equivalent to the cost of the entire Works of Goodwin in this series—it is worth noting that bibliographers and others usually refer to it as a sermon only, indicating that they had likely never seen it. We are indebted to the rich Puritan collection of the Rev. A. B. Grosart of Kinross for the use of the copy from which this reprint has been made.

Table of Contents

[Publisher's Note](#)

[Section I: Introduction](#)

[Section II: What is Patience & How is it Wrought](#)

[Section III : What is the Perfect Work of Patience?](#)

[Section IV: If Any of You Lack Wisdom](#)

Publisher's Note

This modernized edition of *Patience and Its Perfect Work: Enduring Sudden and Sore Trials with Joy* presents a faithful rendering of Thomas Goodwin's exposition of James 1:1–5. First penned in the crucible of 17th-century suffering and devotion, Goodwin's work remains one of the most searching and tender treatments of Christian endurance ever written.

The goal of this edition is not to abridge, summarize, or reframe the original, but to render its full content in clear, contemporary English—retaining its structure, depth, and pastoral warmth. Every effort has been made to preserve Goodwin's theological precision, devotional fervor, and the Puritan richness of expression, while replacing archaic vocabulary and grammar to make the text accessible for today's reader.

In an age that often seeks comfort without cross, Goodwin calls the Christian to embrace trials as divine appointments for spiritual maturity. May this work instruct, convict, and comfort all who desire that patience should have its perfect work.

Soli Deo Gloria.

JWH

PATIENCE AND ITS PERFECT WORK

SECTION I: Introduction

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered abroad, greetings. My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him. — James 1:1–5.

Christian patience is my subject—especially the perfect work of patience mentioned in verse 4. But before addressing that directly, I must first open up several matters from verses 1 and 2.

I. Preliminary Observations

- 1. As for the persons to whom he writes:** They were “the twelve tribes scattered abroad,” those who had been dispossessed of their inheritance in their native land. Having abandoned that, they had resorted to exile. A great number of them—not all, as we learn in Acts 8:1—had left, for there it is written, “At that time there was a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” And in Acts 11:19, we find that they traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and

Antioch—some of them eventually journeying into more distant lands. Another apostle, writing to the same people, comforts them with this in 1 Peter 1:4: they had been born again to a better inheritance than that of Canaan, which they had now lost.

2. **Although they had already been made desolate and homeless**, forced to seek a livelihood for themselves and their families in foreign countries, still further and greater troubles continued to follow them—like one wave rolling in after another. They were constantly encountering various trials of every kind. God, as it says in Job 7:18, “tests us every moment.” We are “chastened every morning” (Psalm 37:13), and “killed all the day long” (Romans 8). God had not yet finished His work in them.

3. **In this context, James utters one of the strangest paradoxes ever expressed**: “My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations.” He states this directly and abruptly, without softening the blow—except by the affectionate address, “my brothers.” The opening command, “count it all joy,” seems at first to contradict what follows, “when you fall into various temptations.” The latter appears to render the former impossible. Yet this is the very duty to which they are exhorted.

Let us then examine carefully **eight particular aspects** of this strange and challenging exhortation:

II. Detailed Consideration of the Paradox

1. **Were they merely commanded to rejoice**, it would already seem unnatural, considering their afflicted state. But James says more: “count it joy.” Not merely moderate or suppress your

sorrows—which was the highest aspiration of philosophy or Stoicism—but the gospel calls us to rejoice precisely because of these trials. That is the first step: “count it joy.”

2. **Not merely joy, but “all joy.”** That is, the highest and fullest joy. “All joy” must be understood to include every degree and expression of rejoicing.
3. **And this joy must be counted beforehand.** Not only once they have seen the glorious outcome of these trials, but before they see any benefit. They are to consider it joy in anticipation—as if they already possessed what God has promised will certainly result, just as in Jeremiah 29:11, where He declares, “I know the plans I have for you...to give you a future and a hope.”
4. **It is not merely when afflictions are looming,** but when they have actually fallen upon them, and they are under the weight of them.
5. **Nor is it a slow descent into suffering,** as if they were led step by step. No, James speaks of a sudden “falling into” trials—an unexpected plunge into suffering, like falling into a pit.
6. **Nor are they dealing with a single hardship,** but with many. The word translated “various” is rendered elsewhere “manifold” (1 Peter 1:6), which suggests multiplicity and abundance.
7. **And these trials are not all of one kind.** They are diverse: afflictions upon their reputations through slander and reproach; upon their bodies and souls; upon their families—wives, children, and friends. These are both internal and external trials.

8. Finally, the word “fall into” (περιπέσητε) implies being surrounded—like falling into a pit or trap, with snares on every side. All supports are gone; everything collapses under and around them. They appear utterly sunk and overwhelmed in ruin.

To "count it all joy"—to shout as those do in harvest, or as those who have seized great spoils—when their miseries are so severe that they seem unbearable, and yet their joy must be so great that no greater joy could be expressed: this is the hardest duty ever required of the afflicted hearts of men. Yet God would not require it if it were not attainable; and it is attainable only by the principles of Christianity. This reveals that our Christian faith, which is the only true wisdom (verse 5), possesses such a spirited and sovereign power that it can lift the soul to such a height of glorious perfection even in this life.

But some might say, "You have presented to us this difficult and extraordinary duty—what reason or foundation is there that could persuasively and effectively move our hearts to it? What considerations could stir up this joy, and how can we be brought to it?" For God never gave any commandment without also providing a full and sufficient reason to enforce it.

James gives them two grounds for this joy. The first is in verses 3 and 4: “Knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” This is a reason drawn from what results in this life. The second ground is found in verse 12: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.” This is the reward that follows in the life to come; and in the hope and expectation of that, you may count it all joy when you are now tried—for the end and outcome of such trials is a

crown of glory, as in 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, produces for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

I will begin with the first reason—what ground there is in this life that should cause us to rejoice in such trials. This is stated in verses 3 and 4: “Knowing”—that is, deeply considering and reflecting upon this principle of our Christian profession—“that the testing of your faith produces patience.” This is the first reason, in which the Apostle silently assumes a foundational maxim and builds upon it. It lies at the root, though not explicitly stated. It is this: that to have our graces—especially faith and patience—tried, exercised, and drawn forth in us to the glory of God is the greatest blessedness a Christian can enjoy in this life.

That this is the foundational reason is evident. Why else would he present this above all others, with a “for,” a conjunction that introduces the reason for what he has just said? Since their faith and other graces, such as patience, will be exercised through these trials, they should therefore “count it all joy.” My brothers, if we had spiritual eyes to see and consider it rightly, we would recognize that just as possessing grace that accompanies salvation is the greatest mercy anyone can receive in this world, so to have that grace tried, exercised, and drawn out to the fullest is among the most significant spiritual privileges we can experience after having received grace. Therefore, when trials arise, we should say within ourselves, “Now my graces will be tested; now has come that which will exercise them.” This ought to be the cause of the greatest joy for us. For it is from this very reason that the Apostle exhorts them to count it all joy. He mentions no other reason here, for this alone is the greatest advantage a Christian can attain in this life—and this life alone is the time in which grace is exercised.

The reason for this lies in the fact that for grace to prove itself to God in a manner most pleasing to Him—and thus to receive His approval and commendation—and for a man's sincerity to be acknowledged by God (as was said to Abraham, "Now I know that you fear Me")—this is the highest privilege a saint can have, and it should be the source of his greatest comfort. This is our highest glory, according to 2 Corinthians 10:17: "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord," which Paul says in connection with verse 18: "For not he who commends himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commends." These statements were Paul's own comfort and even his boast—that the Lord had approved him. Job likewise found comfort in this: Job 23:10, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." The Apostle says, "The testing of your faith is more precious than gold," and he refers even to the very means by which your graces are tested—the refining fire itself. The Greek word he uses—τὸ δοκίμιον—refers to the crucible or the fire used for testing. Even that testing process is more precious than gold. How much more, then, are the graces themselves, which are tested through it? Therefore, by τὸ δοκίμιον the Apostle means the very afflictions and temptations through which we are tried. These are the crucible, the refiner's fire.

You would rejoice if someone gave you a quantity of gold. Then rejoice even more that you have received afflictions to test your gold—that is, your faith. That your graces are so highly esteemed by God is the reason He subjects them to trial; He would not go to the trouble and cost of doing so otherwise. And once they are tried, and are proven to be genuine and true gold, then they receive His approval through that testing. He places upon them His royal mark and seal, secretly in this life—and this same approval will be made public to all the world on the last day.

So it is written in 1 Peter 1:6–7: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you are grieved by various trials, so that the testing of your faith—being much more precious than gold that perishes, even though tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” It will indeed be found to bring praise then, but even now it brings praise before God, just as truly as it will then.

He mentions faith—“for the testing of your faith”—in the first and foremost place, as that grace which is most frequently tried, and as that which, when tested, sets all the other graces into motion. I need not dwell long on this. It is faith that will be accounted for honor and glory in that day, having been tested. It is faith which bears up under, and by which we endure, the weight of all temptations. It is by faith that we overcome: as it is written in 1 John 5:4–5, “This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world? He who believes,” and so on.

A second and more specific principle or maxim, pertaining to this life and which ought to move us to rejoice, is that faith, when tested, produces patience; and that if patience is allowed its full effect, it will render us perfect Christians. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

He does not further expand on faith, except to bestow upon it the honor of being the mother grace—especially of patience—when it itself is tested. But as soon as he mentions patience, he proceeds at length, and pours forth the highest commendation and praise of it: “Let patience have its perfect work, and it will make you perfect.” Now there is no opportunity, nor any field for the exercise of patience, except where there are trials. And the work of patience can extend only as far as the affliction presses. Thus, his second

argument is built upon this principle: that the full and complete operation of patience in our souls is, among all other graces, the highest form of Christian maturity; and therefore, “count it all joy when you fall into various trials.” For by them you will have that grace—patience—brought forth to its fullest expression, elevated to its highest point; which cannot happen unless the trials are suitably weighty. And in all your afflictions, if patience is allowed to move freely and fully, it will render your character perfect—that is, as perfect as one can become in this life.

Question.—In what way does it make us perfect?

Answer.—Not merely in this sense—though there are two possible meanings to the phrase—that if a person has exercised all other graces but has lacked the opportunity to exercise this one, then upon adding this, he becomes a perfect Christian. But that is not the meaning here, for the same could be said of any other grace: that if a person has been active in all but one, and now begins to exercise a new one, then in that sense he is perfected. As Paul says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 8:7, “As you abound in everything else, see that you also abound in this grace.”

But the sense here is different. The Apostle’s intent is not to extol a perfection that patience shares in common with other graces, but rather to assert a unique and singular perfection that belongs to patience alone: “Let patience have its perfect work, and that alone will make you eminently perfect.” His aim here is to comfort them against the greatest trials and afflictions of their lives—“various temptations.” Therefore, a special and distinctive commendation is given to patience, which is the shield by which we endure such trials.

My brothers, to express the full meaning of this, I will present a supposition. Imagine a Christian who has enjoyed the privilege of

living in the exercise of all the graces in an active manner—that is, he has lived in sweet communion with God, and has walked in the light of God’s countenance all day long, as in Psalm 89:15. Moreover, he has had many opportunities to do good, and has accordingly done much good in an active way, having been abundant in good works, holy duties, prayer, reading, godly conversation, and so on. Yet all this time he has been free from suffering, so that there has been no call for or exercise of patience.

Now suppose another Christian who has been hindered and obstructed from such an active life, lacking the liberty to do good in the way just described. God, in His providence, has appointed him to a life of suffering, and all his days he has been confined to it. In that condition, his patience has been exercised under all kinds of trials. Moreover, suppose that patience—with all its gracious tendencies and inward dispositions, which I shall describe later—has been allowed free and full expression in his heart. It has operated in all directions and under all the various shapes of affliction he has experienced. That alone would so activate and develop all the graces, and bring them into unity and strength, that one might rightly say, “This man is a perfect Christian.” May I say, even more perfect than the former? At the very least, the text declares that this makes him a perfect man.

Or again, imagine someone who has been very active in earlier periods of life, having served God with a large and willing heart; and then, at the end, after having fulfilled the will of God, he is, as a final adornment and crowning of his character, subjected to great sufferings through which his patience is drawn forth and exercised. That person is perfect in every way. Until then, he lacked what constitutes the highest perfection. He was not yet fully equipped and complete in the sight of God.

For proof that patience is the eminent perfection of a Christian:

1. Consider the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What constituted Christ's perfection? He had already been perfect in all active obedience, complete in every grace, yet the glory of His perfection is ascribed to His sufferings and His patience. Hebrews 2:10 says, "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." This patient endurance is what elevated and magnified His obedience: Philippians 2, "He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death," and so on. This endurance in suffering was the obedience He learned: Hebrews 5:8, "Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience through what He suffered." The active part of obedience was natural to Him, being the natural Son and the Holy One of God, having the law of God within His heart; it was His delight—His food and drink—to do the will of God (Psalm 40:8; Hebrews 10). This was natural to Him. But to suffer, being the Son, and to be patient in suffering, being so great a person—this was something to be learned, as it was not proper to such a person as the Son to suffer. And yet, this, I may say, is what perfected His natural excellence. It was a lesson beyond the usual course, entirely foreign and extraordinary. He therefore had to go to school to learn it, for so the text implies. This was the lesson He must learn—one that would perfect Him above all others.

And indeed, to this end it is added in verse 9, "And being made perfect"—that is, by what He suffered, as the previous verse and chapter 2 have already stated—and as that which perfected Him more than all His other obedience and rendered Him more acceptable to the Father. Now it was in His patience and endurance

that His obedience chiefly lay. Accordingly, this is often spoken of Him, as in Hebrews 12: “He endured the cross” (verse 2), and “He endured such hostility from sinners” (verse 3). The same word is used here as is used for patience; the verb and the noun are of the same root. “Enduring” is used throughout the New Testament—especially in this epistle—to express patience, as in James 1:12, and chapter 5:8, 10, 11. Christ thus endured: “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and He opened not His mouth.” Hogs cry out, but sheep make no noise when led to the slaughter or when their throats are cut. And this was Christ’s own peculiar and transcendent perfection. Therefore, He is set forth as an example of suffering and patience for us, and also as an example of the glorious end and result of such suffering. As it says in James 5:11, “You have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the end of the Lord”—that is, the Lord Christ—whose sufferings many of these Jews, to whom the Apostle wrote, had either seen with their own eyes or known as events of their time. They saw Him suffer, and now they behold Him crowned with glory and honor (Hebrews 2). That was the end of our Lord and of His sufferings, which made Him perfect.

2. And as patience was Christ’s perfection, so also it was the mark of the most eminent saints. Look again into this epistle at James 5:11, and you will find the prevailing principle among them to be this: “Behold, we count them happy who endure.” It is again the same word used for patience, as mentioned earlier. That is, we Christians commonly judge those to be the happiest people in the world who are most afflicted with sufferings and yet are armed with patience to endure them. They are happy to the point of a “Behold!”—and so, in our shared estimation, they are perfectly blessed. “Behold, we count them happy!” It was a well-known and celebrated maxim among them at that time, and the reality itself was held in highest regard. Then—

3. “Take the prophets as an example,” he says in James 5:10. He commends them not only for their prophecies but also for their patience. Though he describes them by the phrase, “who spoke in the name of the Lord,” that serves only to magnify their example in suffering and patience all the more. He places the crown on the head of that grace. He does not mention any of the good they accomplished—nothing of that—but highlights solely their sufferings. He then specifically names Job. God had boasted of Job to Satan for his former active life of holiness, but the Apostle makes no mention of that, nor does the New Testament anywhere. Instead, Job is celebrated for his suffering and his patience alone, as that which endeared him to God more than all the prior part of his life.

Lastly, consider the apostles. The Apostle John in Revelation includes it in his coat of arms, as a mark of spiritual nobility and a part of his divine heraldry: “I, John, your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 1:9).

For proof that patience is the eminent perfection of a Christian—

Now, upon all these grounds, if you are genuine and sincere Christians, and if you understand—as the Apostle’s word signifies—how to place a right and proper value upon that which is your greatest privilege and interest in this life, namely, the proving and testing of your graces, and particularly this grace of patience above all, as the highest perfection of a Christian, even of Christ Himself, and that which was the most eminent commendation of prophets and apostles—then, if you desire to be rendered most pleasing to God, count it all joy when you fall into various temptations.

For now you have God and Christ—the supreme, sovereign Lord and the chief architect and ordainer of these spiritual contests—setting His most gracious eye upon you, taking delight in observing how valiantly, wisely, and faithfully you conduct yourselves and discharge your duty. He sits in heaven as the great spectator of these spiritual combats, these jousts and tournaments, which are to Him as spectacles—just as earthly games and displays are to us. The Apostle alludes to this in 1 Corinthians 4:9, “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last of all, as those appointed to death; for we are made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.”

Rejoice, therefore, as good soldiers would, to enter into these contests in the sight of their great general and king, to whom they have wholly devoted themselves and whom they long to please. Thus it is said in 2 Timothy 2:4, “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, so that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

Therefore, free your hearts and loosen them from all those entanglements that arise from attachment to the things of this world, and from the inordinate affections that cling to the matters of this life, which will only hinder and weaken your ability to patiently endure the losses and trials you encounter in it. Know also that you cannot more fully please the Captain of your salvation, nor more commend yourselves to Him, than by patient endurance. This is what the Apostle exhorts in the previous verse to that same passage in Timothy—verse 3: “Therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” And, in its context, this follows because “it pleases your general to see it.”

In Colossians 1, the Apostle first offers a general prayer in verse 10, “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him.” This

pleasing of the Lord consists, first, in fruitfulness in good works—the active obedience of the Christian life—“being fruitful in every good work,” as the same verse states. But also, and especially, in “being strengthened with all might, unto all patience and long-suffering,” as the second and chiefest, and most glorious part which the Christian must perform to complete the former. For this reason, it requires a more excellent and glorious power to effect it than the active obedience did, as verse 11 shows: “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering.”

Thus far for the explanation of these words, in preparation for that which I shall more deliberately address in what follows.

SECTION II: What is Patience and How is it Wrought

I have three general topics to address:

I. What patience is.

II. How patience is produced.

III. What it means for patience to have a perfect work.

I. What the Grace of Patience Is

Taken in its full extent—that is, in its comprehensive sense—patience is a steadfast perseverance, whether in doing the will of God without growing weary, or in bearing the will of God with submission, quietness, and cheerfulness, continuing to the end of one’s life. In this broader view, it pertains both to doing and to suffering. The good ground, in the parable of the sower, is said to bring forth its fruit—with all its fruit—through patience.

First, it pertains to doing the will of God: Romans 2:7, “To those who by patient continuance in well-doing”—the Greek phrase is, “the patience of a good work”—“seek for glory and honor,” and so forth.

The reason patience is necessary for every good work is because there is a difficulty attached to every duty. To exercise any grace, we must have patience to perform the duty consistently, and to persevere in the practice of that grace. There is difficulty not only from our own sinful nature, to which the commands of God are burdensome, but also from the circumstances of the times, places, and persons among whom we live—even if they do not openly persecute us. For example, to refuse to join in the same excesses and corruptions of society; to speak or act in ways that displease the company around us. To live chastely in a place like Sodom was a trial for Lot. To condemn the world through a godly lifestyle—such as by being more strict than others on the Lord’s Day, or by maintaining family worship and the like—is to go against the current. To be distinct, Matthew 5:47, and similar examples.

Hebrews 12:12 says, “Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees.” From this I observe that in performing good deeds of any sort, we are not only spiritually lame and halting, which makes us awkward in our duties, but we are also prone, because of this weakness, to stray from the path—especially when it is rugged. The

members we walk with are feeble; the hands we act with hang down. Therefore, the performance of good duties is difficult. To go uphill in the path of obedience—even in private and personal matters—without growing weary, to keep a straight course without selecting or avoiding what lies before us, and not to neglect the work God sets before us (Ecclesiastes 9:10), especially not to faint when approaching the summit of our efforts—this involves great weariness. What chiefly strengthens and encourages us in all this is patience, as stated in Hebrews 12:1, “Let us run with patience the race set before us.” We need patience for every step, both in doing and in suffering.

And in the verse just before that exhortation—verse 11—the Apostle attributes calm and steady progress in holiness to patience, which is formed through suffering: “Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyful, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Therefore, a calm, determined, and strong performance of all duties of righteousness comes from patience and is greatly the result of that patience we acquire through afflictions. A life of suffering greatly contributes to a life of action; for as patience is needed in doing the will of God, so also suffering His will prepares the heart for it.

However, this patience in well-doing is not, in the strictest sense, the patience that is spoken of in my text.

Patience is, more precisely, the enduring of the will of God in any form. This is where patience is most clearly and fully displayed. And this is the renowned patience which we frequently encounter in Scripture, and which the text here calls for—patience in the face of sudden and unexpected trials and temptations, which men fall into,

as mentioned in verse 2. This is not the patience required for the ordinary and continual path of personal obedience in the duties of the Christian life.

Objection.—But you will say, My sufferings are not for the gospel, as were those of the believers here addressed. Rather, they are merely providential events that have befallen me through ordinary providence, and such as equally come upon the ungodly. They do not arise from outward persecution for Christ’s sake or for the sake of my profession, but from the sovereign hand of God.

Answer.—I shall give a reply to this objection once for all.

1. The very words of this text offer some comfort in this matter. It speaks of “trials” in general—trials arising from sudden plunges into affliction—of whatever kind they may be. The Apostle does not strictly limit his meaning to temptations arising from persecution, though those are chiefly in view. His words may rightly be extended to other occurrences under God’s providence. The Greek word ὑπομονή, translated “patience,” signifies a remaining under pressure, enduring beneath a burden without breaking—whatever the burden may be. It primarily applies to sufferings for the gospel, yet it is not confined to those alone.
2. Moreover, in his argument, the Apostle plainly includes other kinds of sufferings beyond persecution, as shown by the examples he cites to encourage this grace of patience. Among others, and above them all, he brings forward Job—named specifically—as well as the prophets generally. Christ Himself said of the prophets that they were persecuted (Matthew 5:12). Thus, in James 5:11, “You have heard of the patience of Job.” His reference to the prophets in verse 10 is general: “Take the

prophets”—without naming any—“as an example of suffering and of patience.” But Job is cited singularly and by name. Surely, he would not choose for his strongest example someone whose case does not fall within the scope of the very exhortation he is giving. Let us therefore turn to the case and history of Job.

Job’s afflictions came solely by providence from God. The Sabeans and Chaldeans plundered his possessions and slew his servants. “The fire of God,” or fire from God, as his messengers described it in Job 1:16, “has fallen from heaven.” It is true that it was Satan, out of malice, who stirred them to do these things; but they did so not in a spirit of persecution, but as ordinary enemies, like the raiding of one region by another. God and Satan had determined the matter together. Indeed, it was God who first gave Satan the occasion and permission to bring these things to pass. Therefore, Job’s trials were not for the gospel’s sake, nor were they suffered in a context of persecution. Furthermore, Job knew nothing of this transaction between God and Satan while he was enduring his afflictions. During the entire course of his patience, he perceived all to be from the hand of God, though it came in extraordinary form.

If you now desire a definition of patience as it pertains specifically to the suffering of God’s will, we must provide it according to the height at which Scripture sets it, for the Word of God itself is the rule and measure—not the imperfect workings found within our own hearts. Yet what follows will confirm every word of this definition, as it is drawn chiefly from the examples of saints in both the Old and New Testaments. These demonstrate that this grace is attainable, albeit with those imperfections that accompany all graces in this present life.

Patience is a steadfast, thankful, joyful endurance—persevering to the end of one’s life through all trials, however grievous, however great, however long, however devoid of visible hope for relief. It mortifies and subdues the disorder of opposing passions—such as fear, sorrow, worry, and anxiety—which naturally rise in times of affliction. It involves submission to the will of God, for His glory and according to His good pleasure, blessing and sanctifying His name in all things. It waits upon God, sustaining itself by faith in the blessings that are found in God and received from Him through communion with Him and the experience of His love in this life. It also lives in expectation of that glory which is the promised reward once this life is ended.

I might here confirm every word and phrase of this definition, whether by the examples of godly men or by the precepts given in Scripture. But I will refrain from assembling all such proofs at this point, since in the subsequent details that follow, this entire definition will be supported throughout.

SECOND GENERAL HEAD

How Patience Is Wrought

Brethren, while I explain how patience is produced, I am also showing you the way and means by which it may be obtained; for it is by the same means that it is produced, nourished, and maintained. And I shall not depart from the text to do this.

There are two principles set forth here that produce patience. The first is faith: James 1:3, “Knowing this, that the testing of your faith produces patience.” And because, in Galatians 5:6, it is written, “faith works by love”—that is, faith accomplishes whatever it accomplishes

through love—therefore we must understand that love also produces patience. And this we see in James 1:12 as well: “Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Why does the Apostle mention “those who love Him” while speaking of those who endure temptation, unless it is because love enables one to endure temptation? Thus, it is faith in the first place, and then faith working through love in the second place, that produces patience or endurance.

The affirmation of these two principles will confirm the latter parts of the description of patience I previously gave—particularly that aspect whereby the soul finds relief through faith in what may be found in God, and received from God.

I. How does faith produce patience?

Answer.—First, in general: faith is the substance of things hoped for, and indeed of all things revealed in the Word. That is, it makes them real and present to the soul. Faith gives substance to them, as Hebrews 11 shows. Accordingly, faith brings to the soul all the motives and considerations that the Word of God contains. All of these, faith presents as realities, capable of sustaining the soul in trials. Faith is the instrument by which everything is conveyed to the soul—it is the channel that fills the vessel. And by thus bringing home to the soul all the considerations contained in the Word—those which may incline a man toward patience—it works patience. This is the general view.

These considerations in the Word are countless, and I cannot enumerate them all; I will speak only of those most specific to faith.

First of all, faith has a humbling, emptying effect. It strips the soul of all its own worth, righteousness, and self-perceived excellence, and gives it a deep sight of the sinfulness of sin—especially of spiritual sins—and of all that is contrary to holiness and to faith. It fully convinces the soul of its utter guiltiness before God and of its just desert to be destroyed completely. Therefore, any and every affliction it suffers is less than it deserves. Seeing this, faith lays the soul low—as a poor, empty, naked, and wretched creature in every spiritual respect—in the sight of God, and in its own eyes. And this deeply contributes to producing patience.

You will observe, in that golden chain of graces where each subsequent link depends upon the previous—Matthew 5:3–5—that poverty of spirit is placed first: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” that is, those emptied of themselves, who see themselves as possessing nothing, deserving nothing, and able to do nothing spiritually. This true poverty of spirit comes through faith; for blessedness is declared only upon those who believe, and upon the fruits of faith in them, according to Romans 4:7–9.

Second, follows: “Blessed are those who mourn”—that is, those who mourn over their sins. And then third: “Blessed are the meek,” those who, having seen their poverty and sinfulness, lie prostrate at God's feet, so humbled and affected that they are willing for God to do with them whatever He pleases. Such is their condition when they have been emptied of self—when they have seen their sins, understood their just desert of destruction, and have been humbled and brought to mourning because of them. These previous dispositions lead to meekness and submission toward God. They leave a man with nothing to say in protest against whatever God may do, but instead to justify God in all and condemn himself. All of these attitudes

render the soul willing and patient to receive whatever comes from the hand of God.

It is a most excellent and fitting word spoken by the Church in that humbled frame of heart described in Lamentations 3:39: “Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” The Church declares it to be a brutish, irrational contradiction—entirely unbefitting a man—that there could be anything more absurd. What? A man complain for the punishment of his sins? A man murmur—yes, the word used is to murmur—against God? A sinful man against the holy God, his righteous Judge? Surely not! And it is certain that “thinking much” of one’s own suffering is the root of all impatience; on the contrary, a heart that is submissive to God is the root of all patience.

But why does the Church also include this additional phrase, to press the point even more: “a living man”? “Why should a living man complain?” Are you still alive? Are you still a living man in this world? Then you have little cause to complain, whatever your misery may be. If you are alive, then you are not destroyed. Consider that hell and everlasting destruction is your deserved portion, and that your present suffering is infinitely less than what you deserve. Therefore, you have no cause for complaint.

Earlier, the Church expresses this very recognition and perception in verse 22: “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.” She does not say it is because our possessions are not consumed, or that our houses are not burned—for in truth that was the Church’s actual condition when she spoke these words. Jerusalem was in ruins, women had been violated, goods were plundered, bodies famished—as you read throughout the book of Lamentations. Yet there remained a remnant who were not consumed. And this, she says, is

due to the Lord's mercies—His tender mercies, from the depths of His compassion, as the Hebrew indicates. This fact—that their condition was something less than total destruction—is the basis for that earlier question in verse 39. It is also the reason for her profound submission expressed throughout verses 22 to 39.

You find the same reasoning used elsewhere, as a ground for patience, after the return from captivity: Ezra 9:13, “You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great trespasses.” Shall a living man then complain for the punishment of his sin, when it is so infinitely less than he deserves?

This consideration produces patience, and rightly so. If a man deserves to be hanged, drawn, and quartered, and he is only branded on the hand, shall he complain? Let that man fall on his knees before the judge or the king, and give thanks that he has not received what he truly deserves—the gallows.

This same consideration also brings a man to accept the punishment of his iniquity, as we read in Leviticus 26:41: “If they accept the punishment of their iniquity”—that is, if they kiss the rod. What causes a man to accept the punishment of his iniquity? It is this: “Oh, the punishment of my iniquity is infinitely less than I deserve; for damnation is my rightful portion.” This is the first thing that works patience: the consideration of our own worthiness to be destroyed. And this is produced by the humbling, emptying work of faith.

Secondly, faith brings home to the soul the dominion of God—His sovereign right and power over a man's life and person—to do with them whatever He pleases; and this alone may well silence and still the heart. Consider Job 9:12: “Behold, He takes away”—destroys a city or a nation, for example, as it is said in Job 12:23, “He increases

the nations, and destroys them; He enlarges the nations, and then brings them low again”—“and who can hinder Him?” And again, in Job 9:12: “Who will say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’” As it continues, “If God does not withdraw His anger, even the helpers of the proud are brought low under Him.” Or, as the margin reads, “the helpers of strength”—they bow before Him. He took away your goods, and who could stop Him? The fire consumed the city, though its inhabitants were numerous and resourceful enough to have extinguished it; yet the strong stood powerless, only watching, weeping, shaking their heads, and crying out, “Alas!” Why? Because none could prevent Him. They all bowed before Him.

Likewise, in Job 34:31, “Surely it is fitting to say to God, ‘I have borne chastisement, I will not offend again.’” And in verse 33, “Should it”—that is, the evil or the good that He chooses to bring upon you—“be according to your mind?” (The Hebrew reads, “Should it be from with you?”)—that is, based on what is in or from you. Must He first ask your counsel and know your opinion? “He will repay it,” or dispense it, as He pleases, “whether you refuse or whether you choose”—whether you are pleased with it or not—“and not I.” (This is Elihu speaking on God’s behalf.) That is, “Should you govern these matters for Me, and not I Myself?” says God. This must silence every man, just as it did Job. For it continues, “Therefore speak what you know,” as if to say, “If you have anything to object to this, then speak.” But in truth, this is not something to be argued, but to be fully submitted to.

But, my brethren, faith brings home to the heart a message of a higher sovereignty still—namely, the sovereignty of God’s love toward you—and declares to all of you who sincerely profess to belong to God that He has already displayed His absolute dominion in the greatest possible way: by saving your souls. That is absolute

dominion, as Romans 9 makes clear. What else is the meaning of that statement, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy”? It is a declaration of divine sovereignty. Well then, has God displayed His sovereign dominion in saving your soul—has He shown this dominion on the side of mercy? Then surely you may be content for Him to exercise dominion over all else that concerns you. You may well be willing that He should display His dominion over your earthly possessions and outward comforts. He could have exercised His dominion by destroying both your soul and your substance, as He did with the Sodomites when He burned their city.

Thirdly, faith brings home to the heart the love of God, the soul’s interest in Him, and the experience of communion and fellowship with Him. These strengthen the soul with patience even in the greatest afflictions. Consider David at Ziklag—this is a fitting example. The city was burned, his possessions plundered, and his wives taken captive. “And David was greatly distressed,” for the people spoke of stoning him. Yet it is said, “But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). His assurance of his interest in God, and the love of God coming home to his heart as his God, gave him courage and strength in the face of all.

Likewise, in the midst of extreme famine—when there was no bread, no oil, no wine, no meat—faith wrought the same steadfastness. Habakkuk 3:17–18 declares, “Though the fig tree shall not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields yield no food; the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” Every necessity for supporting life and nature is here stated as absent. These are the very things you fear to lose—your food, your livelihood, your goods. Yet the prophet says, “I will rejoice in the Lord.” A man still has all in God. Faith brings all that is in God

home to the soul—or lifts the heart up to God to draw comfort from Him in the greatest extremities.

Two things are distinct in this text. First, he says, “I will rejoice in the Lord”—even in what God is in Himself: a God blessed forever. Amen! If God is blessed and happy forever, the soul that rejoices in Him says, “I cannot be miserable.” That soul delights in this: that God remains infinitely blessed. And as long as these thoughts and this disposition continue in the heart, it has all that it needs.

The second is this: that He is my God, the God of my salvation. As Habakkuk says, “I will joy in the God of my salvation.” And then, surely, while He is happy, I shall be truly happy. “The Lord is my portion, says my soul” (Lamentations 3), even in the midst of all troubles. The Lord grant us such faith.

My brethren, the love of God, brought into the soul by faith, will enable a man to endure in any condition. Consider that passage in Romans 8, where the Apostle triumphs in the love of God: verse 31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” And again in verse 35, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword?” Mark his resolution in verse 37, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” That phrase, “No, in all these things,” is a triumphant dismissing of all he has just enumerated—every circumstance that could seem formidable, or that might be judged adverse to our comforts in this world. And yet he speaks as though faith, grounded upon the love of God and of Christ, treats such adversaries as too low, too weak, and too poor to be worthy of even trying their strength against us. It is as if he were saying, “Are these all that come out against us and threaten us? Are these indeed all?” Then he concludes, “If these are all, we are safe

enough; we are more than conquerors in all of them.” And how does this come to pass? He adds, “through Him who loved us.” This means not only that Christ, in loving us, joins His strength to ours to sustain us, but it also refers to the love of God and Christ itself, as it is apprehended by faith. It is this love, as the object of faith, that strengthens the soul. “Through Him who loved us” is meant objectively—Christ’s love, taken in by the soul, and shed abroad in the heart—supports and strengthens us in all things, enabling us to overcome all. As faith possesses all that is in God for our rejoicing, and thereby helps the soul to patience, so especially it lays hold of His love in every kind of distress.

Fourthly, faith assures us of a good outcome in the life to come—and even in this present life, in those things that relate to the world to come. Luke 21:18–19. In that chapter, Christ had spoken of the greatest distresses that could befall men, as is clear from the preceding verses. He also foretold what would happen to the people of God, personally and particularly, in addition to the general judgment that would fall upon the nation of the Jews. Speaking to His disciples, He says in verse 12, “But before all these things, they shall lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to synagogues and prisons, and putting some of you to death.” This is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. And again in verse 16, “You shall be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends; and some of you they shall cause to be put to death. And you shall be hated by all men for My name’s sake.”

Yet, for their comfort, He declares in verse 18, “But not a hair of your head shall perish.” What an astonishing statement, after just having said they would be put to death! How can He say, “Not a hair of your head shall perish”? Because the outcome will be so glorious that it will make amends for every loss. The soul will testify, “I have lost

nothing—not even a hair.” Moreover, for those of you who are not put to death, you shall receive a hundredfold in this life in spiritual blessings. And faith, keeping these promises in view, strengthens and consoles the soul.

Note the very next verse, verse 19, which applies this truth directly to our present topic: “In your patience possess your souls.” That is, you may well keep your souls in patience, because I have told you that the outcome will be so blessed and so glorious.

Fifthly, faith sets heaven before us as the reward for patient endurance. James 1:12 declares, “Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” This is the Apostle’s conclusion to his teaching on patient endurance. “When he is tried” means when his trials have been completed and endured faithfully, and when his faith, throughout the course of his affliction, has worked patience. It is perseverance—faith’s enduring patience—that receives the crown. Other graces may strive, but faith and patience are crowned.

Moreover, the degree of reward will be in proportion to the measure of a man’s trials and the degree of patience with which he endured them. And faith, in beholding that glory, gives strength to patience. Romans 5 confirms this. Faith causes us first to “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (verse 2), and then it enables us to “glory in tribulations also” (verse 3), because our hope in that glory strengthens us. That hope is increased by tribulations, which produce patience (verse 4). And patience, in turn, produces experience—that is, repeated and fresh experiences of our own graces and of God’s dealings with us in the midst of trials. These experiences further strengthen and refine our hope—a hope so firm

that it does not make us ashamed (verse 5). This is not only because our hope will not be disappointed at death, but also because our hope in our hearts, even now, will not fail us. For in addition to those former experiences, “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.” This shedding abroad of God’s love is no less than the earnest and foretaste of that coming glory. And this, too, is given as the reward of our patience and our tribulations—which are but the loss of earthly things, in exchange for which we receive the hope and beginning of everlasting glory.

Suppose you had possessed all the brass and pewter in your house, and they were melted in a fire—but then, by the same fire, transformed into gold. Suppose the stones paving your yard, or the bricks and mortar of your walls, were changed into precious stones; your glass windows, which were shattered, turned into diamonds—would you then have reason to complain of your loss? Rather, you would rejoice. Now read Isaiah 54:11–12: “O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted: behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your windows of agates, and your gates of carbuncles, and all your borders of pleasant stones.” And if by these losses you have gained any increase of grace, then much of this promise in Isaiah has already been spiritually fulfilled in you. And these restorations occur in this life. But in addition to these, you have “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1), which is ready and waiting for you.

Those believing Hebrews were well able to endure the loss of their goods with joy, because they had, as it were, received sealed bills of exchange in their hearts, guaranteeing their full recovery in eternal treasures above. That was their exact situation: “You took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that you have in

heaven a better and enduring substance” (Hebrews 10:34). And this same blessed portion shall be yours, if you respond to your losses with faith and patience. That same chapter of Hebrews continues: “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which has great recompense of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise” (verses 35–36).

Thus far for the working of patience by faith.

II. Our Love to God Works Patience

Love to God within us works patience—faith working through love, as I showed from verse 12. Love to God causes us to cling to Him, and thus to follow Him through all seasons of suffering and trial. That great convert, in whom faith and love abounded at the time of his conversion—1 Timothy 1:14—was moved, through love for the name of Christ, to utter in the strongest terms, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). It was love for that name that inflamed his heart. Indeed, his love rose to such an intense height that he could even wish to be accursed from Christ, if it might lead to the salvation of his brethren, as he says in Romans 9. One may wonder how he would have exercised patience under that curse—if it meant hell itself. But the love that enabled him to wish it would have enabled him to endure it; so he believed, or he would never have wished such a thing.

On a similar account of love for Christ’s name, those two apostles rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). Love makes the glorifying of God and Christ—and the will of God, which is always aimed at His glory—dearer to us than

anything else. Yes, that God should have His will for His own glory —“if it be the will of God,” says the Apostle, with respect to our sufferings—calms and quiets the heart in all things. It is true, I may be chastened in affliction for my sins, and I humble myself under that. But beyond this, it is the good pleasure of God to ordain it so; and love rejoices that His will is done—not only that it is done by me, but that it is done upon me. And the word of the Lord is good in both, and blessed be His name.

In Romans 8—where, as we saw, we are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us”—it is the love of God to us that is expressly mentioned. Yet, our love to Him is also silently implied as a concurrent cause. For the very nature of those words suggests that the soul, apprehending the love of Christ—τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντος, “of Him who loved”—is thereby stirred, out of a reciprocating love, to courage in the conflict and victory in the trial. There is one small word in verse 36 that further reveals this: “For Your sake we are killed all the day long,” our lives in danger continually, “we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” This phrase, “for Your sake,” is taken from Psalm 44, which Paul quotes: “As it is written, ‘For Your sake,’” etc. Clearly, it is the love within us toward God, and our steadfast adherence to Him in that love, which causes us willingly to suffer and endure, because it is for His sake.

Though the Apostle’s discourse centers on magnifying God’s love and Christ’s love toward us—as the primary power, when received by faith, that produces such endurance—the Psalmist, on the other hand, presents the church’s love for God as a cooperating cause: “All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You, nor have we been false to Your covenant” (Psalm 44:17). And in verses 18–22: “Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from Your way, though You have crushed us in the place of jackals and

covered us with deep darkness. If we had forgotten the name of our God or stretched out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Yet for Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” If faith and love together can say, “It is for Your sake, O God,” then patience answers, “I can bear it—yes, even rejoice in it—for the sake of Him who loved me.” Just as the Apostle says he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him, so love can do all things for Christ, who loved him and gave Himself for him.

To conclude this point:

If our love for our brethren—which flows from our love for God—produces such great patience toward them, as described in 1 Corinthians 13: “Love suffers long and is kind; it envies not, rejoices not in iniquity; it bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things”—all of which refer to our love for men—then how much more must love to God, the root of that love, enable us to exercise the same patience toward Him? He can do no wrong, nor cause any injury. He is holy and righteous in all His ways, and all His dealings with us are mercy and truth. It is for His sake, also, that we bear with our brethren. And He has loved us and given His Son for us.

It was a profound and godly saying from a saint under an unkind trial from man: “If it had been a man who treated me thus, I could hardly bear it” (as David said, Psalm 55:12), “but it is God—and I can take anything well at His hand.”

And thus much for the second general head.

SECTION III: What Is the Perfect Work of Patience?

THIRD GENERAL HEAD

What Is the Perfect Work of Patience

In general, a thing is said to be perfect when all the parts that belong to it are brought to completion. Thus, the creation of the world is described as perfect when, as it is written in Genesis 2:1–2, “The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” In the same way, when the whole work of patience, in all its distinct parts and operations, is fully accomplished, then patience has its perfect work.

There are four components of this head which together complete the notion of patience being made perfect:

1. Its **privative** work (that is, what it restrains and puts off).
2. Its **positive** acts (what it actively performs in the soul).
3. Its **positive** fruits (what it produces as outcomes).
4. Its **adjuncts of perfection** (what accompanies and completes it as a full and finished grace).

All of these elements combine to make patience perfect. And the evidences and testimonies concerning each will serve to confirm every detail of the earlier description of patience already given.

•

First Branch—The Privative Work of Patience

I begin with the privative work of patience. This lies in this: when faith, through patience, mortifies those turbulent passions that continually arise and are contrary to it. Just as love, when perfected, casts out fear (1 John 4:18), so also patience is perfected when it expels those opposing affections—or even when it restrains excessive thoughts and fretting over our afflictions and crosses, to the extent that our minds are imprisoned by them and drawn away from all other things.

I include “thoughts” here, because Christ says in Luke 24:38, “Why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Why are you troubled?” For when afflictions weigh heavily, they stir up many anxious thoughts—just as when weights are placed on a clock, they make its wheels spin rapidly. Inordinate affections generate an inordinate multitude of thoughts, fixing our minds on a single object—such as what we have lost or expect to suffer. But perfect patience corrects and regulates the excess of all these passions. It brings the soul back into possession of itself—as Christ says in Luke 21:19, “By your patience possess your souls”—so that a man dwells within himself again. For otherwise, the violence of such passions drives us out of ourselves, as it were, and casts our souls out of doors, leaving us not at home within.

To give specific examples of such passions:

1. Inordinate Grief.

You know how Job’s patience is praised, even by our Apostle James. When Job suffered the loss of all his children and

possessions, he expressed no grief, no inner turmoil, so far as the account records. If there had been such expressions at that time, Scripture would surely have noted them—as it does later record other occasions of impatience under heavier afflictions of a different nature. But in response to those outward losses recorded in chapter 1, all that is said of him is pure patience and submission to God: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away”—acknowledging the Lord in both actions—“blessed be the name of the Lord.” And, the final verse says, “In all this Job did not charge God foolishly.”

2. Envy and Passionate Anger.

(1.) *Envy*, which often rises when we observe that others have been spared similar losses or afflictions. “Why should such and such a one—who is my equal—escape with his possessions intact, while I suffer such loss?” says the troubled heart. This is a silent complaint. Even good people are often tempted to this. “The spirit that is in us”—even in saints—“lusts to envy” (James 4:5). But God, in the end, “gives more grace”—that is, when men are humbled and broken under afflictions, as the same passage notes.

The contrast between the holy apostles and other Christians in the early church illustrates this kind of patience. No men were more eminent in suffering, except for Christ Himself, than the apostles. Yet, consider how they regarded the condition of others—such as the Corinthian believers (1 Corinthians 4:8–9), who were prosperous. “Now you are full, now you are rich, you have reigned as kings without us.” Corinth was a wealthy city, and the Christians there enjoyed an abundance of outward things. But as for us, says Paul, “God has set forth us apostles last, as it were appointed to death... You are honored, but we are despised... we hunger and thirst, are

poorly clothed, mistreated, and homeless... we labor, working with our own hands... being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it; being defamed, we entreat... we have become as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” Yet, Paul did not envy their fullness. No, he wished them true and spiritual prosperity: “Would to God you did reign,” he says (verse 8), meaning, in spiritual blessings. He wished them all the inward riches of God and Christ, together with their outward abundance.

What had rooted out envy from Paul and his fellow apostles? Their sufferings, their afflictions, their being made a spectacle to men and angels. These trials had worked their spirits into that submissive and patient frame.

In the Old Testament, even Joshua—a man of a noble spirit—when still young in years and grace, was moved to envy for Moses’ sake. “Eldad and Medad are prophesying,” he said (Numbers 11:29). But Moses rebuked him: “Are you jealous for my sake?” And then he expressed his own spirit, saying, “Would to God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!”

From where did this gracious disposition arise, this freedom from envy? The next chapter reveals another example that sheds light on both his lack of envy and his patience under envy directed at himself. That was a sharper trial: the envy of his own brother and sister. They resented that God had chosen Moses as His mouthpiece and revealed Himself to him in a way unlike any other (Numbers 12). “Has the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not spoken by us also?” they asked (verse 2).

But what was the inward condition of Moses’ spirit that enabled him to bear both their envy and his earlier trial? Verse 3 gives the answer:

“Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth.” Moses himself would have let the matter go without a word—but God heard it and took notice, for Moses’ sake.

What had tamed and subdued Moses into such meekness and calmness? Undoubtedly, his great afflictions. His faith, exercised by them, had wrought patience. Hebrews 11:24–25 says, “By faith he chose rather to suffer affliction,” and accordingly, he lived forty years as a lowly shepherd—an exile from Pharaoh’s court, stripped of its honors and pleasures. It was a sudden trial—he fled for his life on short notice—and a long one: forty years of hardship and servitude. These sufferings, as great as any endured by any man of his age, made him “very meek.” The Dutch Annotations render it “very patient.” Ainsworth notes that the Hebrew word has an affinity with afflictions, as if to say, they taught him patience—just as Christ learned obedience through suffering (Hebrews 5:8), of whom Moses was a type. These trials subdued both anger and envy in Moses, and patience had its perfect work in him. Otherwise, we do read of occasions when he was provoked to anger: Exodus 11:8, 16:20, 32:19; Leviticus 10:16; Numbers 16:15, 31:14, 20:10–11, as Ainsworth has collected them.

Christ our Lord has also taught us a lesson against envy in Matthew 20:15: “Shall I not do what I will with My own? Is your eye evil because I am good?” All things are Mine, He says. Will you envy Me because I have taken something from you and not from another? Shall a man be sick at heart because another is in health?

3. Inordinate Fears. When excessive trouble falls upon us, we are prone to fear excessively in the moment, and we tend to imagine a thousand future miseries—such as poverty and destitution. These fears seize upon us especially when we see

that the Lord's chastening has begun, and we do not know what the end will be, or how severe it may become. But Christ says in Revelation 2:10, "Fear none of those things which you shall suffer: be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." Here, faith and faithfulness to God—meaning constancy and endurance even unto death—are set in direct opposition to fear. Faith produces patience, and patience consumes fear.

Fortitude and courage differ from patience in this way: a bold and courageous man may overcome fear if he sees any prospect of escape. Courage will rally his spirit to resist and defend. But patience, even when it sees no prospect of deliverance in this life, and looks upon nothing but present death, will still strengthen the heart to bear it. Patience makes a man faithful unto death, steadfast and unwavering, even in the absence of hope, without being overcome by fear.

4. **Murmuring Against God.** Patience also expels this. Consider Job: the devil schemed to bring about blasphemy against God from Job's lips. "He will curse You to Your face," said Satan. He was confident in this, and took it upon himself to prophesy what Job would do—even prophesying before God. But the devil was deceived and exposed as a false prophet. Job, far from blaspheming God, blessed Him. "In all this, Job did not charge God foolishly." I may say of this scene what is said twice of the saints in Revelation: "Here is the patience of the saints." In Job's case, it was the patient frame of spirit that God had worked in him—so highly praised in Scripture—that enabled him to act in this way.
5. **Inordinate Cares.** Faith, working through patience, mortifies these as well. In view of the great calamities that were about to come upon the Jewish nation—including the believing Jews

among them—before the destruction of Jerusalem (which would try every vein of their hearts), Christ gave two special exhortations in Luke 21, in addition to several others.

The first is found in verse 19: “In your patience possess your souls”—meaning, possess your soul through that distinctly Christian patience which is rightly yours. The second comes in verse 34: “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be weighed down with the cares of this life”—μέριμναι. These “cares,” as the Greek word implies, distract the soul, tearing it apart with anxious thoughts and scattering it in all directions. But the patience which Christ first exhorts to gathers all the soul’s powers together and keeps them at home. It calms the heart so that a man regains possession of his soul, rather than being cast into disorder.

Philippians 4:6–7 offers similar instruction: “Be anxious for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God...” etc.

Consider also the difference between the two types of soil in the parable of the sower, as recorded in Luke 8:14–15. Of the thorny ground, it is said that “the word was choked with the cares of this life.” But of the good ground, in contrast, it is said that it “brings forth fruit with patience.” Patience stands opposed to cares, just as it does to restlessness and every other inordinate affection.

Thus far concerning the **privative work** of patience.

Second Branch of the Third General Head—Its Positive Acts

I come now, secondly, to the positive acts and operations of patience, which are many. Let us begin with the lowest and ascend to the

higher.

1. Patience includes an act of waiting upon God and His good pleasure. Waiting is the continuation or extension of faith; where faith, by itself, would falter or grow short-breathed, patience sustains and lengthens it out. The daughter helps the mother, as it were, with an expectation of a blessed outcome. You find waiting as a principal act of patience in James 5:7: “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain.” In the same manner as the husbandman waits, so the Apostle exhorts the Christian to do. Likewise, Micah 7:7: “Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me... until He plead my cause and execute judgment for me,” verse 9.

2. It is a waiting with quietness. This also belongs to the work of patience. Patience is not mere endurance by necessity—what we call “patience perforce”—but it is accompanied with quietness of spirit. In Lamentations 3, the church, in her mournful condition, expresses the movements and exercises of her soul. Though she speaks in the third person, which is a common mode in Scripture, she clearly means herself: verse 26, “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.” This was spoken while under the yoke, and so it is a fruit of patience. Verse 27 adds, “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.”

Faith, by its nature, quiets the heart in God—*fides habet vim quietativam*. Isaiah 26:3: “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.” And again, Isaiah

30:15: “In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.” When faith produces patience, it quiets the heart even more deeply. Patience speaks of quietness even in its very sound. Why? Because it is accompanied by strength. Colossians 1:11: “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.” Thus, to the degree that faith and patience strengthen the heart, the soul is able to bear affliction—and to bear it with peace and quietness.

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” says Christ in John 14. Why? “You believe in God, believe also in Me.” Faith in both the Father and the Son dispels trouble from the heart. This is a large part of what Christ means when He says, “By your patience possess your souls”—that is, dwell quietly within your own spirits, as a man abides in his house, which, by the laws of men, is termed his castle.

3. Patience carries the heart forward without fainting or discouragement. “For this cause we faint not.” Isaiah 42:4 speaks of the meekness and patience of Christ: verse 2, “He shall not cry, nor lift up His voice in the street.” Then follows in verse 4: “He shall not fail nor be discouraged”—or, as the Hebrew more literally renders, “He shall not be broken”—meaning, in His spirit, so as to give up the work God had given Him to do or to suffer. He would continue faithfully until His mission was accomplished.

4. In all suffering, patience submits to God and to His will. The Apostle diligently adds, “if it be the will of God,” whenever he speaks of suffering—and he does so repeatedly. 1 Peter 3:17: “If it be the will of God that you suffer.” And again in 4:19: “Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him.” Also, in 1:6: “If need be,”

meaning, if God deems it necessary to bring such trials. These phrases, inserted even parenthetically, show how intent the Apostle is to link all afflictions to God's will. The more intense the suffering, the more decisively is it willed by God. And it is patience in the soul that yields and bows to that divine will.

Psalm 39:9: “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because You did it.” Consider when David confessed the sin concerning Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. He made no mention of the injury to them in comparison with the offense committed against God: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight,” Psalm 51. And when a judgment for that sin came upon him—through the rebellion of Absalom and the cursing of Shimei (as many interpreters believe to be the occasion for Psalm 39)—David again laid aside all thoughts of the human instruments and looked only to God. He submitted, “because You have done it.”

Though he confessed to being in a passion at first, despite his settled resolution not to murmur, yet his corruption boiled up, as is often the case. Psalm 39:2–3: “I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then I spoke with my tongue.” And what he spoke bore the tone of weariness with life. He even asked God to reveal when his end would be, verse 4. So impatient was he. Yet when grace was more fully stirred in his heart, and patience began to have its perfect work, he recognized God's hand alone in the matter—how God had stirred up those wicked men—and he understood that his contest was with God, not with man. Then he was truly dumb and silent.

Indeed, if the occasion was Shimei's cursing and Absalom's rebellion, then David's spirit at that time was as meek and submissive to God

as ever in his life. His words in 2 Samuel 15:25–26 confirm this: “If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both the ark and His habitation. But if He should say thus, ‘I have no delight in you’—behold, here I am; let Him do to me as seems good to Him.” He surrenders himself wholly to God’s will. It is as if he had said, “If it is good in His eyes to deal thus with me, it shall be good in mine also.” He casts himself entirely upon God’s sovereign pleasure—even entertaining the most painful supposition a godly man can imagine: that God might have no delight in him. Yet his will fully conforms to God’s.

Earlier in Psalm 39, he had said, “And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.” And now he adds, “I was dumb.” Thus he expresses his submission for the present, and his resolution for the future: “I will be dumb.” Piscator and the Dutch Annotations read it in both tenses.

5. Patience leads a man not only to silence, but to put his mouth in the dust. This expresses even deeper humility and submission. To lie prostrate before God with one’s face in the dust is to go as low as man can go—to lay himself where, if God would trample upon him, he is ready and willing. In this posture, the soul offers itself to God, declaring readiness to receive anything from His hand.

In Lamentations 3, the church not only waits (verse 25), and waits quietly (verse 26), and sits alone and keeps silence (verse 28), but also “puts her mouth in the dust” (verse 29).

But you may say, “All this was done while the soul still had hope,” as is evident from those words in Lamentations 3:26: “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord;” and verse 29: “He puts his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be

hope.” Indeed, David in Psalm 39, as well as in those passages cited from 2 Samuel, also expressed hope in the particular affliction he was submitting to, as seen in verse 7 of the psalm: “And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.” He then mentions the deliverance he hoped for in verses 8–10. Likewise, when Shimei cursed him, his soul gathered hope upon it, believing that God might return blessing for that cursing. 2 Samuel 16:12: “It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for his cursing this day.” Yet, it must be noted that both David’s hope and the church’s hope rose only to the level of “it may be.”

6. But gospel patience, sixthly, will produce its effect even when there is no hope concerning the things and circumstances of this life. David and the church said, “If there may be hope;” but patience says, “Even if there is no hope”—that is, no hope in this life that one should ever emerge from affliction. Previously, I distinguished patience from mere fortitude in this: the apostles referred the early Christians to the day of the restitution of all things and the refreshment that will come then. Thus James 5:7–8 exhorts: “Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it, until he receives the early and latter rain. Be also patient; establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” As if he had said, “As for your afflictions, I can give you no hope of release in this life. Let your hearts rest fixedly upon that spiritual refreshment which shall come with Christ at His return.”

His example of the husbandman supports this: verse 7, “Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth.” The poor man does not gather this precious fruit until harvest. He sows precious seed—and for him, it is, until harvest-time, as good as lost. The

Psalmist uses the same imagery: “They sow in tears, but shall reap in joy... bringing their sheaves with them.” Brethren, a harvest is coming. Joy is sown for the upright in heart for that day. It is now but seed, yet it shall spring forth.

Although the husbandman, to all appearances, regards his seed as lost until the harvest, yet in the meantime he receives the early and the latter rain, which encourage his hope, as he sees God blessing the ground with fruitfulness. This is the apostle’s metaphor. In spiritual terms, the early and latter rain signify those heavenly downpourings—those refreshing dews which the Holy Spirit grants to the soul as pledges and foretastes of the eternal harvest to come. These are given as earnest payments from heaven, assuring the patient believer of the full reward God has determined according to the measure of his faith and waiting. Yet all these hopes still pertain to the life to come.

As for this life, the apostle offers no such promise. Nor does the writer to the Hebrews, in Hebrews 10:36: “You have need of patience,” he says—even until the end of life. For it continues, “that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.” Patience is still needed, all the way to your last breath.

We use the same phrase with someone whose condition is beyond remedy: “You need patience,” for the situation is not likely to improve. These Hebrew believers had already endured the spoiling of their goods, verse 34, and had “endured a great fight of afflictions.” Yet the apostle says the trial is not over. “You have need of patience still.” They were not likely to recover their possessions or estates. Therefore, the only hope offered is that of the final restitution of all things, which shall come at the day of judgment. Verse 37: “For yet a little while, and He who shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Therefore, verse 35 exhorts: “Cast not away your confidence, which

has great reward.” The only temporal hope is that the time remaining will not be long.

7. A seventh operation of patience is that it causes the soul to sanctify God in the heart in every way. I shall again refer to Job’s conduct, whose patience is so highly praised by the Apostle. When Job’s outward losses—his children, his property—had all come upon him, and the sorrowful news reached his ears and heart by messenger after messenger, until nothing was left to lose, what did he do? Job 1:20 says, “He fell to the ground and worshiped.”

He had been diligent in worship before, especially concerning his children—interceding that they might not sin, as verse 5 shows. Yet all his former prayers and sacrifices did not prevent the loss of his children, nor of his possessions. But now, when everything is gone, the first thing he does is to fall down and worship.

Question.—What does that act of worship contain in it?

Answer.— I will limit myself to what Job’s speech expresses and what the posture of his worship signifies, for both plainly reveal what was in his heart that moved him to act in such a way, and what was moving within him in the act itself.

1. **He adores God in His sovereignty**, both in his falling to the ground and in his words: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away.” He acknowledges: “He is the Lord.” That is, the sovereign Lord of all. All that I had was His own; and shall He not do what He wills with what is His own? (Matthew 20:15). I am the clay, and He is the potter. He is the Lord of me and of all that belongs to me. Job had prayed for his sons—just as we have prayed for our city—so far as he could, according to the light he

had concerning what may affect them. Yet despite his faithful prayers, God removed them by a violent death. In this, God appears to have shown displeasure even with Job's prayers, just as He may have done with ours for the city. Still, Job begins to worship again and adores the Lord afresh, even after all this loss. And this was the very first thing he gave himself to.

Faith and patience move the heart to turn toward God in all circumstances, and will cause it to express gracious affections in one form or another. To adore God—which was most fitting for the condition he was in—is a higher act than merely praying, though it is most often expressed within prayer. As he did at the beginning, so he continued in this practice and principle. Though he became troubled and restless when his sins and God's wrath came upon his conscience, yet even in the midst of his impatience, he returned again and again to this posture of adoration and humility before God.

In Job 23:11–12, you see how this afflicted man bows before God and submits himself. He begins by affirming his integrity in verse 10 and expresses his faith that the outcome of these trials would be for his good: “He knows the way that I take; when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot has held fast to His steps,” and so forth. As if to say: “Though He knows I have walked uprightly with Him, yet His purpose and determination to try me continues; and none of my former prayers could prevent it,” as he says in verses 13–14: “But He is of one mind, and who can turn Him? What His soul desires, that He does. For He will complete what He has appointed for me.” In other words, whatever portion God has allotted to me—as this trial has been—I must accept it and submit. “And many such things are with Him”—many strange, unusual, and wonderful dealings—and we must glorify Him in all. Here you see that Job is adoring God's sovereignty. This passage is among those noble declarations of

patient submission for which Scripture commends him, and even in his most troubled moments, we find him still revering and bowing before God.

2. He humbles himself to the dust—he falls to the ground.

First, as a creature, poor and stripped of everything. “Alas, what am I?” he might have said, “and what do I have to claim as my own? What do I possess, or what am I, that I have not received?” I came into the world a poor, naked being; and now, stripped of all, I am just as poor and naked as then. And as naked shall I depart. I had nothing at the beginning; I have nothing now; and I shall carry nothing with me into the life to come. This is how he speaks.

When Jacob feared the loss of his goods and children, as Job actually experienced, see how he humbled and abased himself beforehand, as recorded in Genesis 32:10. “I am not worthy of the least of all Your mercies,” he confesses before the Lord. “I am not worthy of a morsel of bread, and You have given me all that I have.” He reflects, as Job did, on his original condition, both in terms of wealth and family: “I crossed this Jordan with nothing but my staff,” he says, “and now I have become two bands,” both of cattle and children. If God should now take all, he is only returned to the place where he began—where God first found him.

Jacob’s best human strategy at that time was to attempt a compromise, hoping he might preserve at least half of what he had. “If I can only save half my estate and half my children,” as he reasoned in verse 8, “then, considering the risk of losing all, I will be content.” But now, he brings his entire cause to God and surrenders it all. His self-abasement occurred before any loss, in the hope that

God might preserve what he had. Job's humbling came after the loss of all. Yet both men display the same deep humility.

And as you see Job here humbled as a poor creature—one as destitute as any has ever been—so elsewhere you find him just as deeply broken over being a sinner. He confesses himself to be as naked and empty in regard to any righteousness of his own, or any ground on which he could stand before God. The great Apostle does not more thoroughly divest himself of all confidence in the flesh in Philippians 3 than holy Job does in Job 9:2: “I know it is so of a truth: but how can a man be just with God? If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.” And even more deeply and explicitly he says in verses 20–21, “If I justify myself, my own mouth shall condemn me: if I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse.” His meaning is this: even if I had the highest degree of inherent holiness, yet if I appear before God seeking justification, “I know not my own soul”—that is, I pay no regard to anything within myself, I utterly renounce all confidence in it. Yes, “I would despise my life”—that is, I would regard all the holiness I have exercised throughout my life, and all I possess in myself, as worthless; I would count it as dung and refuse. Though in the matter of sanctification and uprightness, he boldly maintained his integrity even before God, yet as to justification, he utterly abases himself.

We find that other saints, in their afflictions, have shown this same patience in light of their sins. One might consider David, how he humbled himself in the great distress we mentioned earlier—distress that silenced him, as you saw in Psalm 39. “Deliver me from all my transgressions,” he says in verse 8. The remembrance of his sins struck him dumb before God, for in the very next verse he says, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth.” Likewise the church, in Micah

7:9, declares, “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him.”

3. A third act, which is part of Job’s worship of God, is his blessing of God, as shown by the words that accompanied his worship. This blessed disposition of spirit was the fruit of his faith working through patience in the midst of his suffering. Behold—his great afflictions cause him to bless the Lord. “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” he says. He blesses God for having given to him in the first place—acknowledging with gratitude the blessings of children and possessions that he had enjoyed for so long. “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” He is thankful for what he had received, and he deems it only reasonable that, having received good from God, he should also accept adversity if God so wills, as he later says in Job 2:10.

He blesses God also because he perceives that God had given him heavenly blessings that could not be taken away. He finds the love of God to be unchanging. It is a sure principle that we never truly bless God unless we first perceive that God has blessed us; just as we do not love God unless we are first assured that He has loved us. When the soul experiences that, even in afflictions and trials, God is still blessing it, this stirs the heart to return blessing to God. Then the soul says, “It is not only the will of my Father—shall I not drink the cup He gives me?—but it is the blessing of my Father; and shall I not bless Him for it?”

“In everything give thanks,” says the holy Apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. That is, no matter what the condition may be, there is always reason for thankfulness—and therefore always reason to bless God.

Third Branch of the 3rd General Head.—The Fruits of Patience

These the Apostle calls “the peaceable fruits of righteousness” which chastening produces in those who are trained by it (Hebrews 12). These fruits are gained through patience wrought by afflictions.

1. The first fruit is contentment—a holy contentment—which adds a perfection to the previous operations of this grace. As Paul writes in Philippians 4:11–12, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” He had learned this, as Christ learned obedience, through suffering, and through having experienced a wide variety of conditions.

A man may be content even when he is not fully satisfied. When God orders a man’s condition to match his will, then he is satisfied, as in Psalm 17:14, “whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure.” But contentment is another matter. It is not when my condition conforms to my will, but when my will is brought into conformity with my condition. Then I have as much contentment in little as in abundance, for, as Christ said, “a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” It is true that a man would prefer, as Paul expresses, to have abundance; yet patience inclines his judgment to approve of his present state as that which is best for him, seeing it as that which God’s wisdom has appointed. His will is so bent into alignment with God’s will that he rests in contentment.

2. A second fruit of patience is self-sufficiency. This is the meaning of the word in 1 Timothy 6:6, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” The Greek word μετ’ αὐταρκείας, here translated

“contentment,” carries a deeper meaning. “Contentment” is too narrow and limited a word; the Greek more fully signifies “self-sufficiency.” In 2 Corinthians 9:8, the same word is translated “sufficiency,” but in the original it includes “self,” implying a sufficiency within oneself, a supply that does not depend on external things. The verse reads, “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.” Let us consider this.

It is true that in the expression “all grace,” Paul includes outward blessings—such as material provisions—so that they might always have enough for themselves and still abound toward others in generosity. But the primary emphasis lies on the inward grace of self-sufficiency, without which no external abundance could bring satisfaction or a heart disposed to give. A man's natural lack of this inward sufficiency—his restlessness and grasping spirit—makes him narrow and unsatisfied within, and thus he would not be content even if he possessed the entire world. Therefore, this inward grace is what the Apostle chiefly commends.

From this, we can rightly infer that if, on the other hand, a true Christian is in great need, or reduced to extreme poverty—whether in comparison to what he once had, which is the case for many godly souls now, or in contrast to others who still live in abundance—yet if God grants him this inward grace of self-sufficiency, he may still be as content and as spiritually full as those whom Paul wishes to abound in outward things.

The reason is that the sufficiency of even the wealthiest does not lie in the abundance they possess, but in this inward grace—this spiritual frame of heart—which God gives through patience.

This is made clear in that earlier passage to Timothy, where Paul uses the same word to comfort believers who were living in a state of material want, as the context of verses 6–8 shows: “Godliness with self-sufficiency is great gain”—yes, virtually as much, or more, than possessing all the world, according to Christ’s own words. Paul continues: “for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, let us be therewith content.” For so much, God has undertaken to provide.

The holy Apostle also testifies of himself, that he had learned to be just as content in want as in abundance. This same spirit is evident elsewhere in the midst of all his needs and sufferings—proving that patience, through affliction, had taught him well. In 2 Corinthians 6, after cataloging his sufferings (v. 4), he concludes with these remarkable statements (v. 10): “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.” In these few words, he encapsulates the very truth we have seen both in that chapter and in the paradox of our present text. His “being sorrowful, yet always rejoicing,” corresponds with “count it all joy when you fall into various trials,” as James exhorts. His “having nothing, yet possessing all things” mirrors the state of those Corinthians who were said to “always abound in all things.” And in his “being poor, yet making many rich,” he surpasses them all—for no wealthy man, however generous, could ever claim to enrich others as he, the Apostle, did through the gospel.

Thus, we see it is possible, and even attainable, that a Christian, though stripped of all, may yet have an all-sufficiency in himself—surpassing the fullness of the richest man. And all of this is the fruit of patience—of steadfast endurance under affliction. For Paul speaks of these things in the very context of his sufferings. And thus, patience, having its perfect work, shall make you perfect and

complete, lacking nothing—even in outward things—though you may have lost all.

If you ask me, From where does a Christian derive this self-sufficiency within himself, and wherein does it lie?

I answer: If God and Christ dwell in the heart; if I have the earnest of the Spirit for my salvation, or am made a partaker of His holiness, and possess that grace which accompanies salvation; if I delight in the will and glory of God, and in pleasing Him—then I possess a self-sufficiency within me. As it is written in 1 John 4:16, “We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love; and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him.” Then we have all things within ourselves. It is as if a man had all necessary provisions stored within his own house so abundantly that he has no need to go outside for anything—so it is with us when God dwells in us.

3. A third fruit of patience is joy. As Paul writes in Colossians 1:11, “Strengthened with all might, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.” You also find it in James 1:2, “Count it all joy,” and in Romans 5:3, “We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces patience.”

You might ask, How can this be? Does not the Apostle say in Hebrews 12:11, “No chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous”? And does not our Savior say, “You shall weep while the world rejoices,” and the like?

I give these answers:

First, the object of your joy is not the afflictions themselves. No man can delight in sufferings simply considered in themselves—they are grievous, as the Apostle says. But your joy is in what results from them, in the end and reward of your trials. That is the matter of your joy and the reason you are to “count it all joy.” To rejoice in the affliction itself is one thing; to rejoice in the expectation of its outcome is another.

Second, notice how gracious the wording in James is: “Count it all joy.” That is, esteem it so. He does not say you will feel all joy at the present moment. But even if you do not feel it now, you may reckon it as a matter of joy—that is, you may consider and judge it to be so, as many interpreters explain. You may reason your way into joy with your understanding, even if the emotional experience of joy is presently absent.

Third, Jesus Christ Himself, when He endured the cross, was not filled with the emotion of joy at that time. While He hung upon the cross, and earlier in Gethsemane, His soul was sorrowful unto death. Yet it is said in Hebrews 12:2 that “for the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross.” He is presented there as our example: “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.” It is sufficient if you fix your eyes on the joy that is set before you, which you confidently expect to come, even though you may not presently feel that joy.

Fourth, you may not experience much joy now, yet in time—after being much exercised in patience—it may grow up in you. This is precisely the point the Apostle makes in Hebrews 12:11: “Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” On the strength of this hope,

he encourages them in verse 12 to “lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”

Fifth, some Christians have experienced, and you may also experience, actual joy in the very moment of affliction. These two—great trials and great joys—can indeed dwell together in the same heart. The Apostle reconciles them in 1 Peter 1:6: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.” The phrase “you greatly rejoice” points beyond merely counting it joy for what is to come; it describes actual present joy. Thus, the affection of joy may be deeply stirred even while, at that very same moment, outward circumstances bring sorrow. They are compatible. And Paul, in Colossians 1:11, speaks of the saints being strengthened with glorious power to endure “with all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.”

Why else would the Apostle so insistently say, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice”? He does not stop at saying it once, as if he merely wanted them to rejoice a little. No, he repeats it because they are to rejoice abundantly—and not just occasionally, but always, in all conditions and at all times.

Paul himself is the example of this coexistence: “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

Fourth Branch of the 3rd General Head.—Some eminent properties or adjuncts of patience, which, added, make it and its work perfect

1. When a person's spirit is brought to perform these duties with ease, such that he does not need to chide his own heart into a patient frame, nor force himself into it—this is one mark of perfect patience. Just as Ezra is said to be a ready scribe, Ezra

7:6—that is, he was thoroughly prepared for his work, his heart having been trained and accustomed to it, verse 10—so patience has its perfect work when it prepares and disposes the heart to act in such a way with readiness. Thus, the Apostle declares in Acts 21:13, “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” His heart was so completely prepared that he hesitated not at all; indeed, it was a grief to him that his friends sought to dissuade him: “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?” It was through long endurance and the habit of patient suffering that such a disposition was wrought in him—his heart was not unready or untrained.

2. A second adjunct or property that adds perfection to patience is durability and constancy in its practice.

First, that it is not merely by fits and starts. That was Jonah’s fault. Oh, he was a broken and humble man when in the belly of the fish; but how quickly did he return to rage when delivered! In contrast, Moses exemplified patience through its consistent and enduring exercise. Hence he was honored with the title of “the meekest man on earth.” And it was not merely due to a gentle temperament or natural virtue—though these may have contributed—but it was a spiritual grace, the grace of meekness, and consequently of patience, wrought in him by the Holy Spirit and cultivated through much suffering. Chiefly for this reason he was a type of Christ, in accordance with God’s promise to raise up a prophet like unto Moses—like in many ways, and especially in this grace. As Moses is commended for it, so Christ in the Gospels presents Himself as an example: “Learn of Me, for I am meek,” etc. Consider how persistently Moses bore with that perverse, murmuring, and rebellious nation—patiently enduring their provocations against both

God and himself, and continually interceding on their behalf. So also does Christ continue to bear with and intercede for us. And although Moses was, at times, justly angry—indeed, exceedingly so, as recorded in several instances collected by Ainsworth—yet it was most often in God’s cause. The general tenor of his spirit remained meek, for which he received that renowned commendation. We only read of one occasion where he was significantly overcome with impatience: Numbers 20:10–11, compared with Psalm 106:32–33.

Second, patience is perfect when it continues to the end. A color is said to be perfect when it is durable—like a dye soaked in grain, or the enduring colors of India, which last as long as the fabric itself. So also, “he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 24). You will find that long-suffering is added to patience in two places: Colossians 1: “Strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering.” There, patience refers to the weight or intensity of affliction, and long-suffering refers to its duration. The other instance is in Paul’s personal testimony, 1 Timothy 3:10: “You have fully known my long-suffering, charity, patience.” Likewise, James 5:7 speaks of the husbandman, whose example is given to persuade us to patience—he “has long patience.” This is true perfection: to bear long and to the end. “Be faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). It is one thing to carry a great burden for a short time—a quarter of an hour shows some patience. But to carry it for a day, or a week, or longer—that is long-suffering indeed. Why is it said in Hebrews 10:36, “You have need of patience, that after you have done the will of God you might receive the promise”? It is because, even after a long and active life of obedience, when you are near to the promise, your patience may then be most severely tested.

3. A third property or requirement of perfect patience is that it be universal. This occurs either when a person has been tried in all

ways and has endured all sorts of temptations, or when he has responded with some degree of patience in every trial he has experienced, even if his trials have not encompassed all possible forms. A person's natural disposition might help him be patient in some matters, while in others his heart fails and he cannot endure. He may say, "Any cross but this one, Lord." Yet it is certain—just as God tested Abraham in Isaac—so too will He test the children of Abraham in whatever is most dear to them. Yet He will also enable them to endure, as promised in 1 Corinthians 10. Therefore, in the epistles, you will find "all" joined to "patience and long-suffering," both when these graces are prayed for, as in Colossians 1, and when they are exhorted unto, as in 2 Timothy 4:2. Though such universality is to be prayed for and aimed at—as that which constitutes perfect patience—it is well if, in the great trials of life, we bear with some degree of fitting patience, and resolve henceforth, with God's help, to endure.

And it may seem a strange thing that many who appear to bear great trials between God and themselves with much submission and calmness may be easily disturbed by lesser matters involving their dealings with men. Reasons for this may be given.

SECTION IV: If Any of You Lack Wisdom

Although I have completed the subject I first intended, yet I find myself compelled to go a little further in the exposition of verse 5, in order to address a significant discouragement, which I know has

been, or may yet be, present in many readers' hearts, while I have been speaking of these great matters concerning the perfect work of patience. I also wish to leave behind the most fitting and helpful direction for how to attain this patience in its perfect form. And I shall not depart from my text to do so.

AN EXPOSITION OF THE 5TH VERSE

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and reproaches not; and it shall be given him.”

The discouragement I know is this: “Oh, how far off have our hearts been from this perfect work of patience!” Yet some of the saints have attained it in such a great measure, as the notable examples given from both the Old and New Testaments have shown. What then, says such a soul, shall I think of myself for the present? And for the future, what shall I do?

Why, truly, God has made full provision in the text to answer these concerns and complaints of yours—both to relieve you in your discouragement at your lack of these graces, and also to direct you to the most proper and effectual, if not the only, means by which they may be obtained.

1. As to the present discouragement over your lack, and the great falling short of this spiritual maturity which you now feel so deeply, those opening words in the text, “If any of you lack wisdom,” will be found to speak most powerfully to your comfort in this regard.
2. As to a direction for what you should do in the future in order to obtain such wisdom and patience, those following words, “Let him ask of God,” point you to the most suitable and effectual remedy, and the way in which supply may be found in this case.

3. With this great encouragement added—first, drawn from the very nature of God: “Ask of God, who gives to all men liberally, and reproaches not;” and then, seconded with the sure promise, “and it shall be given him.”

Of these three points, I will now speak briefly:

I. To the discouragement

The unfolding of these words, “If any of you lack wisdom,” will serve greatly to ease your heart concerning that trouble. The outcome is this: that the Apostle plainly supposes true believers may both actually, and especially in their own sense and experience, find themselves greatly lacking when it comes to patience in the face of trials. And this fact alone should afford you significant relief from the common discouragements that arise in such moments.

That this is the Apostle’s supposition becomes evident by opening four particulars:

1. That by “wisdom” here is clearly meant patience, along with the perfecting of it, of which he has just spoken.
2. That he is addressing those who are true believers—“if any of you.”
3. How it may rightly be said that true believers, who possess all grace and the principles thereof, may nevertheless be said to lack this or that grace.
4. The very intimate and immediate reason that prompted the Apostle to express himself in this manner—“if any of you,” and so forth.

For the first point: wisdom is sometimes taken broadly to mean all grace and every gracious action; and sometimes it is taken more narrowly to mean a specific grace. To determine which sense is intended in any given place, one must consider the scope of the passage where the term is used. Now, in this place, wisdom is to be taken in the narrower sense: that is, for that particular grace, or kind of spiritual wisdom, by which a person learns how to conduct himself under trials—especially those that are great, severe, and unexpected—with patience. This happens when the soul, by faith, receives and digests the many principles which the Christian faith abounds in, and which instruct and enable the soul joyfully to welcome such trials and temptations, and to endure and pass through them with a consistent joy.

For just as the word "grace" may be taken either comprehensively for all grace, or distinctly for each particular grace (as when it is said, "As you abound in every grace, so you abound in this grace also"), in like manner, all grace is called wisdom in a general sense—as is often seen throughout the book of Proverbs. Yet, at the same time, a particular grace may also be called wisdom, as James 3:13 shows: the grace of meekness expressed in speech and behavior is styled "the meekness of wisdom," or a "wise meekness," meaning a meekness that arises from and is guided by wisdom.

Thus Calvin and most interpreters understand wisdom here in this text to mean this special grace, which is consistent with the context and flow of the Apostle's argument. For true patience arises from such wisdom as enables the soul to skillfully endure trials, so that patience may reach its perfect work in the believer. It is this particular grace he had been discussing, and still is.

There is also a specific reason why this patient endurance should be called wisdom in an especially elevated sense. For what he had previously spoken of—rejoicing in afflictions and exhorting believers that patience should have its perfect work—these are the most difficult lessons in Christianity. Therefore, they require the most advanced principles of divine wisdom, both doctrinal and practical, to be deeply impressed upon the heart in such a way that they bend and shape the soul into real obedience and willing conformity to these divine commands. For only then does knowledge deserve the name wisdom. This is why our entire faith is often called wisdom—not because it ends in bare knowledge (which differs from wisdom), but because it makes people wise in the actual practice of the things it teaches.

And this ability to endure temptations, as it has been described, most especially deserves the title of wisdom, because it far surpasses and lies above the reach of all philosophical or worldly principles—even of those who professed themselves wise in the virtue of patience. For theirs, in truth, was but a sullen endurance; and while they professed wisdom, they became fools. Christianity, however, infinitely surpasses them in that very thing they boasted of most.

Secondly, that he addresses this to those he considers true believers—and to them as such—is evident. Though at first glance these words might seem directed to unregenerate people who altogether lack true wisdom and grace (and so might appear as an encouragement to such to seek saving grace from God in prayer), yet the surrounding context clearly shows that he speaks to those already in the faith.

For in the very next words he exhorts the same people to “ask in faith,” thereby presuming that they already possess true faith. Otherwise, it would have been more fitting, and indeed necessary, to

have first exhorted them to seek faith itself—and then, from within that faith, to seek this wisdom or grace of endurance. Moreover, he addresses them as “brethren”—and says, “if any of you,” speaking to those who profess the Christian faith and are thereby exposed to various temptations, especially persecutions. These are the same people whom he exhorts to “count it all joy,” and here to ask God for the wisdom to suffer well in their profession.

Furthermore, this wisdom—being the maturity of patience—presupposes that there is already some measure of patience and other graces begun in them. To have exhorted unregenerate persons, who are entirely void of grace and thus removed from any danger of suffering for the gospel, and to have directed them to make this their first request to God—that they might be able to endure temptations, and that patience might have its perfect work—would have been utterly inappropriate. It would have been like setting before them the most advanced lesson in Christianity, before they had learned even its alphabet.

Thus far, then, concerning the persons addressed: he speaks to those already born again and assumed to be in the faith.

The third matter we proposed was this: How can it be said that believers, who must be supposed to have all true grace within them, nevertheless lack this grace of wisdom? Why does he say of them, “If any of you lack,” and so forth?

Answer—This expression, to say that such and such a Christian “lacks” such or such a grace, is neither strange nor unusual in Scripture, when it refers to their failure to exercise that grace. For although Christians have received the principles of all graces, as in 2 Peter 1:3, yet they may fail to stir up those graces, or may fall out of the habitual practice of some. Why else, and to what end, does the

Apostle in that very same chapter exhort them to add grace to grace, as in verse 5? And in such cases a Christian may truly be said, and indeed is charged, to lack that grace or those graces whose exercise is absent.

For so, in that same chapter, verse 9, when speaking of a sluggish and negligent professor—though a true believer—the Apostle uses this very expression: “He that lacks these things.” As I have elsewhere explained that passage, it is all one, in such cases, for a thing not to be, and not to be used—*idem est non esse et non uti*—especially when the very being of a thing is intended for use and operation. Such is the nature of grace: if it is not employed, it is as though it were not present at all. And the contrast between adding grace to grace in verse 5—that is, exercising one grace upon another—and lacking grace in verse 9, clearly shows that the phrase must be understood not of the complete absence of grace, but of its non-exercise.

The fourth matter to be considered is the underlying reason or occasion upon which the Apostle speaks in this way: “If any of you lack.”

This will be evident by reflecting upon three points:

First, he had just exhorted them to a task that is exceedingly difficult—to “count it all joy” when they fall into various trials. This calls for deep and high principles of spiritual understanding concerning the benefit and blessing that lies in trials, especially in their outcome. Such principles must be deeply ingested, as it were, and thoroughly digested in the heart before any soul can reach this frame.

Second, among those to whom he wrote, there were doubtless many poor and weak souls—new converts, for example—who, though

sincere-hearted, being aware of their own weakness, would feel themselves so far removed from such spiritual maturity that they would be at risk of utter discouragement. When they heard this exhortation, they would think, “What! Count it all joy? Is this what you call us to?” They would say, “Alas! our hearts tremble even at the thought of entering such sudden and severe trials as you speak of. And of all graces, this grace of a patient and enduring spirit is precisely what we lack. We do not know how to conduct ourselves wisely under such afflictions so as to glorify God—and not rather to bring dishonor upon His name. Indeed, if we were to fall into such trials, it is far likelier that we would faint and fall away entirely, rather than rejoice in them.”

Third, there may also have been many mature Christians—strong in the more active parts of the Christian life—who yet were inexperienced in this passive grace of patient endurance. Like newly enlisted soldiers at the outset of battle, they might falter when faced with sudden and heavy affliction, especially when trials come, as it were, by a fall or unexpected collapse, overwhelming the soul with terror. Such Christians, even though strong, may be stunned for a time, just as a man is staggered by a sudden blow and cannot immediately stand upright or find his footing. Until they recollect themselves through prayer and faith, they may find themselves without the confidence of spirit needed to bear up under the trial. But once they do recollect themselves, they may then recover and obtain again this spiritual wisdom and composure.

Now to such as these, whether newly converted or surprised by affliction, the Apostle in these words, “If any of you lack,” applies himself, and in doing so he speaks directly to their very hearts—especially to the first sort, the weaker Christians. Indeed, he gives voice to their very fears and inward thoughts and self-apprehensions;

he articulates the very misgivings of their hearts in the very language they would use. “Oh, I lack these things,” says the soul. “If any of you lack,” says the Apostle. And it is no small consolation for such a soul to hear an Apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declare that even true and sincere Christians may be in such a condition—lacking, and caught unprepared.

Thus much concerning the removal of their principal discouragement, which was the first thing proposed.

II.—The Direction

“Let him ask of God.” Having thus spoken to their fears and apprehensions concerning their shortcomings in regard to this high duty of joy and patience, he now points them to the most appropriate and sovereign means by which this grace may be obtained—namely, faithful and persistent prayer: “Let him ask of God.”

Here again, he speaks to the heart of every true Christian, even the weakest; for the refuge of all believers in their need is to cry out to God for the supply of what they lack—especially when they are conscious of that lack, and sense the pressing need of some grace that is necessary for them in a time of trial. Whatever the Apostle’s exhortations and arguments might not be able to accomplish alone in stirring them up to this grace, prayer—flowing forth from faith and persevering in earnest supplication—will assuredly bring down and obtain. By this means, their hearts shall at last be lifted up and shaped unto this grace, so that they shall be able to abound in it also.

For even weak faith, when it cannot yet find the strength to suffer or even to venture into trials, can still pray. And thus it cries out with unutterable groanings to be made able to suffer and to endure trials in the joyful manner to which the Apostle calls us. And the soul that

perseveres in this kind of pleading—faint though it may be, and broken—shall in the end obtain what it seeks; for so it is here promised: “It shall be given him.”

I shall not expand further upon this point. For when an Apostle singles out one specific means—one only—for obtaining such an eminent grace as one stands in need of, then that means ought to be earnestly pursued and diligently employed, and no further urging is needed.

Only note how, in this exhortation, he does not direct them to pray primarily for the removal or avoidance of trials and temptations, nor even to ask for deliverance from them, though such petitions are lawful and proper in their place. Not a word of these appears here. Instead, he turns the chief focus and intention of their souls toward prayer for grace—how to be patient, how to rejoice under affliction, and how to glorify God in all—this, above all, is the direction he gives.

III.—His Encouragements to Pray

His encouragements—whereby he assures the believer that he shall obtain what he seeks—are drawn first from the gracious nature and disposition of God, who “gives to all men liberally, and upbraids not.”

1. First, he is described as a God “who gives to all men.” This, however, must be rightly understood. It is to be limited to all those men who have applied, do apply, or shall apply themselves to God by faithful and earnest prayer. For the Apostle had already said, “Let him ask of God,” and therefore God’s giving here must be understood as a giving to him that asks. Though it is true that faith works patience, it is prayer that draws down the

power of God into the soul—power that works both faith and patience, and every other grace. Prayer is the midwife by which faith, the mother, brings forth patience within the heart.

2. This gracious disposition in God's giving is further described:

(1) That He gives *liberally*. The word *aplos* signifies both a free-hearted giving, with pure simplicity of purpose—giving that arises not from any worthiness in us, but purely from His own heart, from the divine motives which arise out of His gracious nature. He gives freely. We commonly say, “out of His free grace,” which expresses the same meaning as the word used by the Apostle here. Therefore, let this grace be your plea before Him when you pray—whether for this wisdom or for anything else.

(2) The word also means *abundantly, richly, and generously*, as it is used in 2 Corinthians 8:2, and so translated there. You find both senses in that passage from David, 2 Samuel 7:21: “According to thine own heart”—there is His simplicity and freeness—“hast thou done all these great things”—there is His abundance and liberality.

“And upbraideth not.” This is a second attribute of God's manner of giving. It means, first, that no matter how often or how much He has given before, He does not upbraid the one who returns to Him again in need. Men often do. The most generous man, if the same person comes again and again to ask, will in time excuse himself or say something like, “Why do you keep coming back?”—a subtle way of reproaching the one who asks, by alluding to past benefits. But God never does this.

Calvin, and Estius following him, rightly explain this clause as showing that no one should be afraid or ashamed to come to God repeatedly. One should not hesitate to return again and again, nor be

discouraged by the length of time before the answer comes. God is not wearied by our prayers. He is so free, so simple-hearted and generous in giving, that the more often you come, the more welcome you are—especially when your request is for grace. He thereby invites us, from the abundance of His own heart, to come continually—to ask, to pray, and to keep praying without ceasing. This is the very point of that parable in Luke 18:1, which was spoken “to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” Thus, by this declaration, we are urged to continue in frequent, constant, and importunate prayer, until we receive.

There is a second intent in adding this clause. Though God does indeed upbraid the impenitent for their sins—as Christ did the unrepentant cities—yet He never does so to those sinners who come to Him in humility for more grace. He does not reproach them even when they come seeking help against the very corruption that has caused their previous sins. And how much more gracious He is when the request is not simply for deliverance from affliction, but for grace itself! In such a case, He will not remind them of past ingratitude or unworthiness. He will pass by their former sins and will not upbraid them. This is a profound encouragement, for it is the guilt of sin and the remembrance of past unfaithfulness that most often keep men from coming to God. They fear He will cast their sins in their teeth. But here the promise stands: He will not.

“And it shall be given him.” He confirms this hope of obtaining what is asked with this firm and certain promise: “It shall be given him.” When the soul is made thoroughly aware of its need, and is stirred to seek grace itself—seeking the gift of some holy disposition, rather than merely deliverance from the trial—then God, who is the God of all grace, is never more ready to give. Indeed, there is no request more pleasing to Him, or more in accord with His divine

nature, than this: to give grace when it is sought sincerely for His glory. The soul that makes this request—making grace its highest and most earnest plea—does so because it desires above all else that God should be glorified. And this is what most moves God to answer.

The God of grace is most generous in giving grace. Thus Christ says, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” And the Apostle James, in another place, tells us that although the spirit that dwells in us lusts to envy, “yet He giveth more grace”—that is, grace sufficient to counteract that lust—to all who humbly seek it. As in James 4:5–7: “Do ye think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But He giveth more grace. He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.”

I shall now step outside the text only to bring in one additional point. I observe that when the Apostle, in his particular prayer for the Colossians, comes to that part where he desires they might be filled “with all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness”—which exactly corresponds to the very matter exhorted in this text—he appeals to the glorious power of God, saying, Colossians 1:11, “that you may be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” And it is to fix your hearts upon this glorious power of God, and to direct your prayers to it, that I now speak.

Indeed, the consideration of this one point bears broadly upon all three parts treated in the preceding fourth section.

First, it should be no great surprise if many of us have been so deficient in this grace, for it is not the ordinary power of God—that which assists us in the usual exercises of holy walking—that will

suffice. A *glorious power* is required to bring this grace to its perfection. This proves how difficult the exercise is, how far removed from our nature, which we, failing to recognize, have perhaps not earnestly sought with appropriate fervency the aid of such great power.

Second, this explains why prayer, above all other means, should be the particular direction given by the Apostle, and be earnestly pursued by us as the most effectual—indeed, the only—means to obtain it. Since the power lies outside ourselves, in God, it must be drawn down through prayer. Faith and prayer are the graces by which the soul, sensing its utter insufficiency, reaches out to God, imploring Him to exercise His gracious will. Through them, this divine power is drawn into the heart.

Third, this offers the strongest encouragement that we may indeed attain this perfect work of patience, no matter how distant our current spiritual frame seems from it. For if even the strongest Christians require so glorious a power for it to be accomplished in them, then certainly that same power is sufficient to work it in the weakest.

Let us therefore pray with all fervency for ourselves, as the Apostle did for the Colossians, that this glorious power may strengthen our inward man, as it is said elsewhere, Ephesians 3:16. The might in us is the result of that glorious power in God working within us.

For just as this patience must be an *all-patience*, or else it does not have its perfect work, so also the strength must be *all might*—a full supply of divine strength sufficient to support such a patience. The strength you had in one trial will not suffice for the next. A new, particular strength is required for each new trial. Your dependence on God is great for this perfect work of patience—but so too are your

encouragements. For if it is necessary that God exert His glorious power to uphold you in trials, then know this: He has promised to give it, and to give it freely and abundantly to those who earnestly and consistently ask for it. His grace, when sought, obliges His power.

This should be a great support to the weak-hearted soul that sees itself so far from such a patient spirit, and feels itself void of any inward strength. Yet such a soul has reason to believe that this glorious power of God is freely engaged to act mightily when it is diligently and constantly sought. “This,” says the weak heart, “this glorious power will do it.” And indeed, even by past trials, the soul has learned that the strong God, joined with a weak heart, can prevail over anything—even over the whole world.

Therefore, when you feel your trials to be more than you can bear, remember the glorious power of God that is present to help you. “His glorious power”—what a weighty and mighty expression! No greater attribute could be mentioned to bring comfort. It is a word of strength and virtue, able to uphold the heart against any trial.

True, your present affliction may indeed surpass the strength you have previously experienced in walking sincerely and uprightly with God. A child may have strength enough to walk about a room with the help of furniture, but to go up a staircase requires more—it must be carried and supported by the strong arms of another. So it is with us. The active part of the Christian life—walking fruitfully with God—requires power, yes, but the Apostle says we are kept by the power of God through faith. Yet when it comes to patience, longsuffering, and *all* patience—when a trial comes that will exhaust every part of patience in you—then he names “His glorious power,” and not before. For nothing less will suffice.

And so the promise, in such a case, is that “the Spirit of glory shall rest upon you,” not merely the Spirit of grace (1 Peter 4:14). Take heart, then, and find comfort especially in this: as your trials abound, so this glorious power of God shall abound also toward you, to sustain you. Amen.

MONERGISM BOOKS

Patience and its Perfect Work (Modernized) by Thomas Goodwin,
Copyright © 2019

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By downloading this eBook, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions March 2019 Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068