

On Patience

Tertullian of Carthage

Chapter 2 - God Himself an Example of Patience

To *us* no human affectation of canine equanimity, modelled by insensibility, furnishes the warrant for exercising patience; but the divine arrangement of a living and celestial discipline, holding up before us God Himself in the very first place as an example of patience; who scatters equally over just and unjust the bloom of this light; who suffers the good offices of the seasons, the services of the elements, the tributes of entire nature, to accrue at once to worthy and unworthy; bearing with the most ungrateful nations, adoring as *they do* the toys of the arts and the works of their own hands, persecuting His Name together with His family; *bearing with* luxury, avarice, iniquity, malignity, waxing insolent daily: so that by His own patience He disparages Himself; for the cause why many believe not in the Lord is that they are so long without knowing that He is angry with the world.

Chapter 3 - Jesus Christ in His Incarnation and Work a More Imitable Example Thereof

And this species of the divine patience indeed being, as it were, at a distance, may perhaps be esteemed as among “*things too high for us*,” but what is that which, in a certain way, has been grasped by hand [1 Jn. 1:1] among men openly on the earth? God suffers Himself to be conceived in a mother's womb, and awaits *the time for birth*; and, when born, bears *the delay* of growing up; and, when grown up, is not eager to be recognised, but is furthermore contumelious to Himself, and is baptized by His own servant; and repels with words alone the assaults of the tempter; while from being “*Lord*” He becomes “*Master*,” teaching man to escape death, having been trained to the exercise of the absolute forbearance of offended patience. He did not strive; He did not cry aloud; nor did any hear His voice in the streets. He did not break the bruised reed; the smoking flax He did not quench: for the prophet — nay, the attestation of God Himself, placing His own Spirit, together with patience in its entirety, in His Son — had not falsely spoken. There was none desirous of cleaving to Him whom He did not receive. No one's table or roof did He despise: indeed, Himself ministered to the washing of the disciples' feet; not sinners, not publicans, did He repel; not with that city even which had refused to receive Him was He angry, [Lk. 9:51-56] when even the disciples had wished that the celestial fires should be immediately hurled on so contumelious a town. He cared for the ungrateful; He yielded to His ensnarers. This were a small matter, if He had not had in His company even His own betrayer, and steadfastly abstained from pointing him out. Moreover, while He is being betrayed, while He

is being led up “*as a sheep for a victim,*” (for “*so He no more opens His mouth than a lamb under the power of the shearer,*”) He to whom, had He willed it, legions of angels would at one word have presented themselves from the heavens, approved not the avenging sword of even one disciple. The patience of the Lord was wounded in (the wound of) Malchus. And so, too, He cursed for the time to come the works of the sword; and, by the restoration of health, made satisfaction to him whom Himself had not hurt, through Patience, the mother of Mercy. I pass by in silence (the fact) that He is crucified, for this was the end for which He had come; yet had the death which must be undergone need of contumelies likewise? *Nay*, but, when about to depart, He wished to be sated with the pleasure of patience. He is spitted on, scourged, derided, clad foully, more foully crowned. Wondrous is the faith of equanimity! He who had set before *Him* the concealing of Himself in man's shape, imitated nought of man's impatience! Hence, even more than from any other trait, ought you, Pharisees, to have recognised the Lord. Patience of this kind none of *men* would achieve. Such and so mighty evidences — the *very* magnitude of which proves to be among the nations indeed a cause for rejection of the faith, but among us its reason and rearing — proves manifestly enough (not by the sermons only, in enjoining, but likewise by the sufferings of the Lord in enduring) to them to whom it is given to believe, that as the effect and excellence of some inherent propriety, patience is God's nature.

Chapter 4 - Duty of Imitating Our Master Taught Us by Slaves. Even by Beasts. Obedient Imitation is Founded on Patience

Therefore, if we see all servants of probity and right feeling shaping their conduct suitably to the disposition of their lord; if, that is, the art of deserving favour is obedience, while the rule of obedience is a compliant subjection: how much more does it behoove *us* to be found with a character in accordance with our Lord, — servants as we are of the living God, whose judgment on His servants turns not on a fetter or a cap of freedom, but on an eternity either of penalty or of salvation; for the shunning of which severity or the courting of which liberality there needs a diligence in obedience as great as are the comminations themselves which the severity utters, or the promises which the liberality freely makes. And yet we exact obedience not from *men* only, who have the bond of their slavery under their chin, or in any other legal way are debtors to obedience, but even from cattle, even from brutes; understanding that they have been provided and delivered for our uses by the Lord. Shall, then, *creatures* which God makes subject to us be better than we in the discipline of obedience? Finally, (the creatures) which obey, acknowledge their *masters*. Do we hesitate to listen diligently to Him to whom alone we are subjected — that is, the Lord? But how unjust is it, how ungrateful likewise, not to repay from yourself the same which, through the indulgence of your neighbour, you obtain from others, to him through whom you obtain it! Nor needs there more words on the exhibition of obedience due from us to the Lord God; for the acknowledgment of God understands what is incumbent on it. Lest, however,

we seem to have inserted *remarks* on obedience as something irrelevant, (let us remember) that obedience itself is drawn from patience. Never does an *impatient man* render it, or a *patient* fail to find pleasure in it. Who, then, could treat largely (enough) of the good of that *patience* which the Lord God, the Demonstrator and Acceptor of all good things, carried about in His own self? To whom, again, would it be doubtful that every good thing ought, because it pertains to God, to be earnestly pursued with the whole mind by such as pertain to God? By means of which (considerations) both commendation and exhortation on the subject of patience are briefly, and as it were in the compendium of a prescriptive rule, established.