

The 16th Annual Columbus Day Weekend of Evangelicals Concerned
Ocean Grove, New Jersey, October 5 – 7, 2018
Three Centennials on Christian Liberty, 1918 – 2018
Gardner C. Taylor, Billy Graham & Aleksandre Solzhenitsyn
Dr. Ralph Blair's Centennials Lecture and his Three Sermons for the Occasion

“Liberty – therefore, Patience”

Have you ever noticed that there's one very short sentence that's almost *never* spoken *patiently*? Here it is: “Be patient!” Now, of course, such obvious *impatience* may get tweaked with a bit of baby talk and a forced smile, but frustrated condescension can't really conceal the angry *impatience* that underlies it.

Impatience can be contagious, too. Yet the *initially* impatient person and the impatient *responder*, each adds to the stew of hostility by thinking that things really do “need” to be otherwise *right now*. So, both parties hold *themselves*, and *each other*, hostage to booby-trapped investments in irrationality.

Of course, patience cannot be ordered up on command – either by oneself, or by one's impatient opponent. Patience can't be *compelled*, whether in self or in others, since *impatience* is *involuntary*, though its *expression* can be quite deliberate, even orchestrated. The effort to command patience, in each case, is stuck, in scenarios that are saturated with a sense of insurmountable urgency. But, of course, a merely *experienced sense* of urgency does not, in and of itself, *verify* any need for urgency.

Impatience is the *emotional response* to one's *thinking* that something really does *need* to be otherwise – and the sooner, the better, like: *right now!*

To the degree that one fantasizes that something needs to be *different right now*, one cannot help but *feel fear* and *frustration* if it seems that it's *not* going that way right now – or, maybe, *never will* go that way. Trying to get on top of such troubling fear and frustration, one will, of course, *impatiently* resort to *anger*, whether by a foul *attitude* or a fatal *attack*.

An ancient term for “impatience” resonated by sounding a staccato of short snorts. All these short snorts gave vent to exaggeration that spurred on more spurts of snorts that then bred a big batch of reactions that fueled further fears, further frustration, further fighting and more counterproductive *impatience*.

Consequently, a supposedly “necessary” *outcome*, is made even *less likely*, and may, in effect, be rendered *impossible*. And, of course, all of the experienced helplessness inevitably continues. Way to go, stupid people! But there's another way to go.

Paul knew that Timothy's *youth, inexperience* and *immaturity*, understandably made him susceptible to *impatience* in dealing with others. And Paul well understood that a loss of temper could very easily be counterproductive in ministry. So, he cautioned his young cohort: “Flee youthful lusts”. (II Tim 2:22)

This text's English rendering confuses us today. It leads us to misunderstand *what* Timothy needed to flee. Paul *wasn't* telling Timothy to flee *sexual* temptations. He was warning Timothy to be on his guard against youthful *passions of impatience* and *impulsiveness* – very common traits of youthful *inexperience* throughout the ages. Even back then, the young so easily assumed that they were “woke”, to use the term of our day's “know-it-all”. As we're warned in the Proverbs: “Patience is smart, but impatience is stupid.” (Prov 14:29) Paul knew that *patience* is crucial in dealing with others who're just beginning to grapple with the *unexpected* and the

officially *censored* revelations of the Gospel of God's Grace and Peace in the crucified and risen Christ.

This weekend we've been reminded that, our *freedom* from sin and death is in the Christ of the cross that leads us to *living* this life in *gratitude* and in *humility*. And that freedom in Christ is the basis for *patience*, as well. There's a "therefore" there, too, *leading* to patience, for it looks back to our *liberation* in Christ and looks forward to the inevitable fulfillment, in the fullness of time, of all that Christ accomplished.

On this day in 1957, Billy Graham replied to a Fundamentalist who objected to the New York City Crusade's sponsorship. Graham told him: "It is my prayer that this difference of judgment as to sponsorship shall be swallowed up in a glorious realization that God has over-ruled and blessed despite the frailties of all of us, His servants". In other words: Let's "wait patiently for the Lord" to do His good and wise and sovereign will. (Ps 27:14)

Our patience is the fruit of our freedom in Christ, just as gratitude and humility are fruit of that freedom. As Paul told Galatian Christians, such patience for tolerance, restraint, endurance and forbearance, is just as much the "fruit of God's Spirit", as is love, joy, peace, kindness, and gentleness". All of this *fruit* is produced – not by ourselves, or on our own – but by God's Spirit, *alive* in us who realize that we are so deeply loved and liberated by God Himself. (Gal 5:22) Paul adds, even with a smile and maybe a wink of rhetorical flourish: "There's no law against any of these!"

Whenever one looks forward to having things go his or her way, say, *culturally*, as in wishing for some particular political or social change, there's some usefulness to a good sense of stoicism in anticipation of any outcome. It can *seem* that, very much is at stake in things going "*my way*". The fuel, though, for desiring a particular outcome is, of course, a *fantasy*. And, no matter what the fantasy, as it's but *fantasy*, it inevitably leads to disappointment – not only for those whose *fantasy* doesn't materialize *at all*, but also for those whose *fantasy* fails to materialize as *fully* as the fantasy foretold. And, of course, fantasy has an abominable track record. Each of these mixed outcomes in the wake of a fantasy is inevitable, but those who hold themselves hostage to fantasies are *too naive* to question beforehand, and *too resentful* to do so later.

Those, whose fantasies are dashed by not getting what they fantasized, now hold themselves hostage to fantasy scenarios of "if only" they had gotten their way. Those, whose fantasies are dashed by getting their way by some fairly objective definition, now hold themselves hostage to fantasy scenarios of "if only" that outcome would not come with all of the unintended baggage. But, of course, life is always a mixed bag, so it always comes with some baggage we, at least at first, don't want.

Still, as the poet William Cowper penned, even through all of his lifetime of depression: "God moves in *mysterious* ways, His *wonders* to perform". He moves, He acts, but not by the whims of our pet fantasies. That's why George MacDonald wisely wrote: "The *principal* part of faith is *patience*."

And, no doubt, it will be only in the ever-opening wonder of eternity in the New Earth and New Heavens that we'll be able even to begin to become aware of the multiplied manifestations of mercy we've received all along, through God's being in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.

But, for now, we're still too *unimaginatively shortsighted* and too *uncharitably self-centered* to readily contemplate, let alone, comprehend, *anything*, really. Is it not enough, then, to know that, *God is patient*? As Paul rhetorically reminds us, "Don't you see how patient God is *with*

you?” (Rom 2:4; I Pet 3:9) Woops! This was clear to the Psalmist, too: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, *slow to anger*, and abounding in love.” (Ps 103:8) Thus we get to live in faith-filled and confident hope for what is coming, sooner or later, but in God’s own time.

And of that hope of things to come, we read throughout the Scriptures. From Isaiah: “Look, I will create *new* heavens and a *new* earth. Former things will not be remembered, they’ll not even come to mind.” (Isaiah 65:17) From James: “Blessed is anyone who *perseveres* under trial, because when he’s *stood* the test, he’ll receive the crown of life that God has already promised to those who love Him.” (James 1:12) Paul, too, takes note: “As it is written, ‘Since the beginning of the world, no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has imagined the things that God already has prepared for those who love him.’” (I Cor 2:9; Isa 64:4) With such a promise, can we not be patient?

But in 1918, a modernist minister in Manhattan, Norman Thomas, imagined *he* could imagine the world, as it *should* be. So, he launched a socialist periodical, *The World Tomorrow: A Journal Looking Toward a Christian World*. The Fellowship of Reconciliation funded it as the, “militant [and] pacifist” voice of “Christian socialism”. It lasted until 1934.

It was also in 1918 that another devotee of Marxism, Max Eastman, founded *The Liberator*, a socialist monthly. But after Eastman’s own eye-opening, eye-witness experience of what, for Solzhenitsyn was far more brutally and personally experienced in the terror of the Soviet state, Eastman would finally write: “It was in 1933 that my resolute faith in the Soviet system began really to break down . . . just when my popular pro-Soviet lecture was becoming most popular and remunerative” – a bit of a closeted Capitalist, hmm? He nonetheless still tried to convince himself against his eyewitness evidence that world socialism would yet mean *world liberation*. He wrote: “I asserted, or my typewriter did, that [my socialist dream] was being realized in the Soviet Union”. Finally, he couldn’t fool himself further. He couldn’t deny all of the deadly atrocities that he himself witnessed and he gave up that hope.

Still, a modernist Protestant comrade of his, in spite of all of the evidence to the contrary, that he, too, witnessed, refused to believe that his Soviet dream was not – and these were his actual words – not “Christ’s Second Coming!”

A century later, others naively expected “Second Coming” benefits from a series of U. S. presidential elections. Again, the expectations were based in fantasies and, again, disappointment inevitably abounded, not only as some still held to fantasies of candidates who lost elections but as others still held to fantasies of candidates who won elections.

But as great as America has been and is, rooted in a Judeo-Christian heritage prompting historic liberty and justice, we’re all still fallen and we’re all still struggling in a fallen world that politics can’t redeem.

Our weekend’s teachings have focused on our *Christian liberation*’s prompting of gratitude, humility and patience. Each of our honorees lived in these *gifts of the fruit of the Spirit*, yet in each of their lifetime’s settings, there seems to be a clear picture of one of these fruits, in particular. Taylor’s *gratitude* was particularly clear, as was Graham’s *humility* and Solzhenitsyn’s *patience*.

In 1948, C. S. Lewis wrote yet another of his letters to a fairly new pen pal, Don Giovanni Calabria, an Italian priest who’d sent Lewis a fan letter the year before. They corresponded in Latin, for one couldn’t read English and the other couldn’t read Italian. What they both knew and experienced deeply was their shared faith in Christ Jesus.

In this particular letter of August 10th, 1948, Lewis brought these themes of *gratitude*, *humility* and *patience* into sovereignly providential focus. As he stated: “We ought to *give thanks* for all

fortune: if it is ‘good’, because it is good, if ‘bad’ because it works in us, patience, humility and the contempt of this world and hope of our eternal country.”

In another letter Lewis wrote to Giovanni – this one on St. Patrick’s Day, 1953, he agreed with Giovanni about the sad state of *this* world and again took note, quite patiently, of the glory to come at last: “No day do I let pass without my praying for that longed-for consummation.”

Lewis noted the difference between living in a post-Christian world and living in a world Before Christ. Said Lewis: “ ‘Post-Christian man’ is not the same as ‘pre-Christian man’. He is as far removed as virgin is from widow; there is nothing in common except lack of a spouse; but there is a great difference between a spouse-to-come and a spouse lost.”

The next year, at 81 years of age, this padre died. Thirty-four years later, he’d be beatified and, in 1999, canonized. But long before these honors were finally bestowed in this world’s meager ways, either on the padre or on the apologist and poet, Giovanni, since 1954, and Jack Lewis, since 1963, had already been in the nearer presence of their Bridegroom for whom they’d long looked forward with hope, in *gratitude, humility* and *patience*. Amen.