

God's Patience

God's patience is a marvelous thing. He sent His Son and the very people to whom He sent them rejected Him (John 1:11). Unfortunately, this lack of foresight continues to this day, a continued source of puzzlement and grief. It is hard to believe that anyone, given such a great gift, would reject it, but so many do (Matthew 7:13-14). Yet, God continues to be *"longsuffering, not willing that any should perish"* (2 Peter 3:9), to this very day.

However, this divine forbearance should not be mistaken for an exemption from justice. There is a point at which God turns away and allows rebellion to reap its fruits, *"even as I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same"* (Job 4:8). To suffer under the delusion that God's patience is inexhaustible is best manifested in those who put off until tomorrow the changes in their life they need to make today and wind up lost eternally. How sad!

Such was the case of God's people as recorded in Judges 10:11-16. The children of Israel had fallen into idolatry and their punishment was an Ammonite invasion in which all of them would suffer and many would perish. *"We have sinned against You"* (Judges 10:10) they said and, with this confession, you would think that God would now save them; but God's patience was exhausted. In fact, God got kind of blunt with His rebellious children, saying: *"Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress"* (Judges 10:14), which, of course, false gods cannot do. It was not until the children of Israel *"put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord"* (Judges 10:16a) that God responded positively; they had to truly repent.

It is not until true repentance occurs that God changes His perspective toward those who feign fealty since God is *"of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness"* (Habakkuk 1:13a). The lip-service of pretenders, whose lives display no change of direction, no commitment to shed sin and imbibe Christ, is repugnant to God. *"So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm"* (Joel 2:13). Further, the degree to which God is affected by our struggles is succinctly stated: *"and His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel"* (Judges 10:16b). What a magnificent expression of God's love for his straying children.

My friend, God has that same love and concern for your wellbeing today and truly wants you to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). Many, however, will not be (Matthew 7:13). And why is that? Simply because people refuse to change and, as much as rebellion breaks His heart, God will not lie to excuse sin (Titus 1:2). To know to do right and not do it is sin (James 4:17), and your delay is trying God's patience.

Jeff Sweeten