

Hope and patience embrace each other

Glimpses of eternity

«Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting... You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.» (Jas. 5:7-8)

At this moment, millions of people all over the world are confined at home, learning to wait. Sadly, there are also many who mourn the loss of loved ones to whom they couldn't even say goodbye. The path of suffering, in itself long and difficult, becomes even harder under these circumstances. *“I need to hold on to some good news”*, a young man, overwhelmed by the situation, tells me.

God's word is a balm that soothes wounds and a fountain of strength in the midst of pain. It brings light to two key questions in a time of waiting: How should we wait and what should we wait for?

Two words give us the answer: patience and hope. They are indeed our basic luggage to travel through this difficult path. **We should be able to transform the time of waiting into a time of hope and patience.** Then we will discover that God can **change our adversities into opportunities.**

1. The two arms of patience

The concept of patience in the Bible is so rich that two words are required to explain it. They are complementary terms interacting like the two arms of a person:

- Perseverance: to persist
- Fortitude of spirit: to resist

Patience is perseverance: to persist

«Therefore... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.» (Heb. 12:1-2)

The first arm of patience makes us **persevere**. It is the attitude that will help us to persist to the end of a situation or project. Of course, the harder the situation, the greater the need to persevere.

This virtue, characteristic of a mature person, helps us to face difficulties with the courage of the **marathon runner**. This is what the author of Hebrews means when he urges us to **run with perseverance the race** «so that you will not grow weary and lose heart» (Heb. 12:3).

This was a **key feature of the character of Christ**. That is why the author adds: «**fixing our eyes on Jesus...**». Patience made him «set my face like a flint» (Isa. 50:7; Luke 9:51) and allowed him to reach His ultimate goal, the cross, even in the midst of extreme suffering. What a consolation to «receive mercy» from the one «who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin» (Heb. 4:15-16).

To persevere is to win. Like Paul said to the Thessalonians, we pray that in this hour of trial «the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance» (2 Thess. 3:5).

Patience is fortitude: to resist

«But the fruit of the Spirit is... patience» (Gal. 5:22 ESV)

The second arm of patience is clearly supernatural, a part of the fruit of the Spirit. It is not merely human; it is divine. The word used in the original is active and positive, a far cry from the idea of patience as stoicism. It literally means **“great courage”**. It refers to a **strong spirit**, resilient, which stays **firm during adversity**. This kind of patience **does not give up or surrender** when confronted with difficult situations. It is the opposite of a coward or a faint-hearted person, who “drowns in a glass of water”.

This biblical view is a long way away from the popular concept of patience: *“What can we do? There is nothing we can do, therefore we must be patient”*. This is an attitude of surrendering to an impotent situation, a conformism born out of fatalism. On the other hand, the patience that is fruit of the Spirit does not give up, but fights. It does not shrink, but affirms itself in adversity. It is not passive, but actively searches for ways out.

Let us see now how these two arms influence our daily life, how patience is expressed in practice.

2. The practice of patience: Contentment

«I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation... I can do all this through him who gives me strength» (Phil. 4:11-13)

Paul wrote these words when he was confined in a Roman prison. An unexpected confinement in very difficult circumstances. He was not addressing his readers from a comfortable position, but from a deeply disturbing situation and in real danger of death. His life had changed overnight. Where did that fortitude of character come from so that he was able to send such a serene message amid this anguish?

He himself gives us the answer: «I have learnt to be content». One of the most important indicators of patience is contentment. The original word implies that we are not bound by our problems nor depend on our circumstances. When we **learn to be content**, therefore, **we are achieving an attitude of certain independence from vital events**.

Contentment leads us to see, think and live differently in the light of the unexpected or changing situation. Today we should talk about adaptation and acceptance, flexibility and resilience. All this is encompassed within this attitude Paul had learnt. Contentment **is a deep conviction that God is working his purposes in my life, not despite the circumstances, but through them**.

Paul concludes with a sentence that has inspired millions of people: «**I can do all things through him who gives me strength**». In other words, I can be stronger than any adversity, overcome any circumstance when I am in Christ; “connected” with Christ. Therein lies the supernatural element of patience and the secret of fortitude in our life.

3. Hope and glimpses of eternity

«You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near» (Jas. 5:8).

Patience cannot be separated from hope. In fact, it feeds off hope and, at the same time, it promotes and feeds back hope in a glorious divine circle (Rom. 5:4-5). We could say that patience and hope embrace each other.

What do we hope for? Our hope has, of course, a present dimension. We long for the end of the pandemic. But this hope is insufficient and may end in frustration if our expectations are not met.

Hope does not end in the here and now; it flies higher and reaches into eternity. **Life on this earth is a precious treasure, but it is not the supreme treasure**. The supreme good is eternal life. That is why the Lord warned: «Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul» (Matt. 10:28). We must note that this text precedes the amazing promise of God's care «even the very hairs of your head are all numbered» (Matt. 10:30).

James mentions the coming of the Lord twice when he talks about patience. It is not a coincidence. The vision of the second coming of Christ is **a vision of eternity and «affirms our heart»**. When we glimpse the glory of an eternity with Christ, our pain is relativized in such a way that **the present tribulation becomes “light and brief”** (2 Cor. 4:17-18). We anticipate that, in heaven, not just this pandemic will be over, but the Great Pandemic of Sin with its cortege of pain and death will be over forever (Rev. 21:4; Rom. 8:23-25).

Therefore, «fight the good fight of the faith. **Take hold of the eternal life»** (1 Tim. 6:12). Take hold, cling to eternal life. This advice from Paul to Timothy is what I gave the young man that was asking me for “some good news to hold on to”. We must grab the hope of eternity in the ferocious tremors of life here on earth. **Those glimpses of eternity bring light into our darkness and nurture our patience.**

Today more than ever the voice of the risen Jesus resounds with awesome authority and power: **«I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death»** (Rev. 1:18).

Indeed, **it is God who marks the hours on the clock of our life, not a virus**. Therefore, in the midst of the great trial, we rest confidently on He who promised:

«Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.» (Isa. 60:20)

Dr. Pablo Martínez

Dr. Pablo Martínez is a psychiatrist and he currently works at a private practice in Barcelona. He develops a valued ministry as lecturer and teacher in many European countries on topics like “Mind and faith”, “The therapeutic value of the Gospel in emotional problems” or “Taking care of yourself”. His books dealing with such issues have been translated into 16 languages. He teaches Pastoral Theology and his ministry as a Bible teacher is also very appreciated. He chairs the “Ravi Zacharias Foundation” in Spain and he is honorary president of the Grupos Bíblicos Universitarios (GBU - IFES).

The web **Christian Thought** gives information about the literary work of Dr. Pablo Martínez and his father Rev. José M. Martínez. Through this work the Christian thought of the authors flows covering a wide range of subjects; theological, psychological and ethical issues are considered from a biblical perspective with a relevant and practical application to current problems.

*Copyright © 2020, Dr. Pablo Martínez
Integral reproduction, without modifications, of this article is authorized
whenever the name of the author and its source are mentioned
(<http://christian-thought.org>)*