

Patience for Eternity

By Nathan Warner

Eternal – “without beginning or end; lasting forever; always existing (opposed to temporal): eternal life.”

Temporal – “of or pertaining to time.” (Dictionary.com)

Our world today worships instant gratification, and we are conditioned to despise patience. We want faster internet speeds, quicker checkout lanes, and up-to-the-second news. We eat “fast-food,” and we Facebook and Twitter so everyone knows what we are doing the very moment we are doing it. We hardly ever have to wait for food or fruit to come in season anymore – it’s available all year round, whenever we want it.

One way the world conditions us is through advertising. Advertising is the voice of the world, appealing to our flesh. Have you ever noticed that advertising never says, “Wait for it, because it’s worth it”? Ads are almost always about getting something faster with less effort, indulging whenever you feel like it, and always getting what you want when you want it. The transmission of our culture seems stuck accelerating faster and faster to get what it wants, and woe betide anyone trying to inconvenience them with the misery of patience. And why not? After all, time is running out, and we only live once...or do we?

Yet, patience is a critical quality of a Believer’s life, and Scripture is filled with examples of patience in Believers’ lives (Noah, Abraham, Moses, Hannah...the list goes on and on). The Word of God calls Believers to patience in this epic spiritual struggle that we call life.

Patience only exists because of time. Time governs our mortal existence here in the world. Without time, there would be no need for patience. God is not governed by His creation of time, as He is immortal: “*To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen*” (1 Timothy 1:17). He is also eternal: “*The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms*” (Deuteronomy 33:27).

We, however, are governed by time in this world, and we have a tendency to never be entirely happy with the time we’re in. We often wish time would speed up or slow down. Many parents wish their kids would stay their little children forever, just as many children want to be grown up already. And then there’s that elephant in the mirror we call aging. People are starting to talk about aging as a “disease” that must be cured. “Can’t we just stay young and live forever?” is the question many people are asking science.

Do you want to live forever? In this world? Think for a moment about living in this world governed by sin for eternity with its endless cycles of peace and war, gentleness and violence, plenty and famine, pleasure and pain, health and disease, restoration and decay. I’ve often thought what a “hell” it would be to be trapped here in the World for all time. What a blessing then that we pass on in death to an Eternal Life in a New Heaven and a New Earth that escapes the cycles of sin which have governed our planet since the Fall: “*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ And he said to me, ‘It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without*

payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:3-8).

Amazing! We as Believers have an immortal eternity with God as our inheritance. So, why on earth do we have to wait for it? Why can't we just have it now, since we've made our decision to follow Christ?

Patience is a sign of commitment tested by time. Patience proves we understand the value of something. When we wait for something we value, we struggle against temptations to abandon it when the going gets tough to seek a quicker or easier solution. Patience must struggle against doubt and confusion. “Is this really what I should be doing with my time?” “Is this really worth my time and effort?” “When will I receive what I am waiting for?” Jesus taught us in the Parable of the Sower what can happen to those who do not patiently wait for His Eternal Inheritance: “*As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful”* (Matthew 13:20-22). True Believers should be like the good soil: “*As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty”* (Matthew 13:23). It takes patient commitment to tend a seed properly until it bears fruit.

As Believers, we are instructed by Paul to engage in Communion as a proclamation of the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). Communion is a testament not only to Christ's sacrifice but also to patient endurance for an Eternity with Him when He returns for us: “***I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom”*** (Matthew 26:29). Jesus was promising to wait until we are with Him in His Father's Kingdom before He will take Communion with us again. Taking Communion as Believers is a memorial of Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, a testament of our patient commitment to Him, and a firm, fixed gaze ahead to the Glory of Christ's reign in the New Heavens and the New Earth that we are patiently waiting for. “*To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life”* (Romans 2:7), “*for in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Peter 1:11).

A poet once said, “Time is the Fire in which we burn.”¹ In many ways, this is true. Time refines those of us who patiently seek for the precious stones of immortality and the silver and gold of God's glory, which we will not witness in this world, while it devours those who seek prefab or easy build-it-yourself monuments of spiritual hay, wood, and stubble for self-glory in this world. Those who live only for the temporal, mortal flesh are already dead by God's eternal standards unless they repent. “*If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned”* (John 15:6).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the

last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

(1 Peter 1:3-7)

”Calmly We Walk Through This April Day” (poem)
by Delmore Swartz