

GOD'S PATIENCE AND IMPATIENCE

By Paul Penno Jr.

May 18, 2011

Time magazine is worried. "To the victor goes a nation divided, . . . split over its basic values. . . . No matter who wins, the Uncivil War is likely to continue. After such a venomous campaign, will it be possible . . . to reunite the United States?"

Is "uncivil war" in the very air we breathe? Are there "two" anywhere who can "walk together, . . . agreed" as Amos 3:3 asks? Is there even a church anywhere in the world that is not riven with disagreements, even strife? Is there any group anywhere that believes for sure just what is the truth? For several hundred years "we" have talked about "the signs of the times" that herald the coming of Christ; will the "signs" be getting more serious now? Could it be that "men's hearts [will be] failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth"? Will we soon be watching "the powers of heaven . . . shaken"? (Luke 21:25, 26). Is God's patience beginning to wear thin with modern "Babylon"? How close are we to Belshazzar's Feast? Let's be awake!

On the last night of the existence of Babylon as a world empire the national comedians had great fun and the government leaders rejoiced in their military and political supremacy. Likewise on Sodom and Gomorrah's last night the elite reveled in their pleasurable but sinful luxury, but God couldn't find even "10" there whose hearts were right. (Ezekiel

tells us there must have been a slum section where the slaves of the wealthy had to live in squalor [16:49]).

The Bible warns us that the world will experience another last night as did Sodom (Jude 7, 8). It's time for God's people to do some serious heart-searching. If somber thoughts are published even in *TIME*, shouldn't those who seek to "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" begin seeking to be "one"?

Last night a wild storm in our foothills blew our electricity off for hours. Then this morning our water supply quit. I carried some in from the pool to flush the toilets, but . . . then I began thinking, What would life be like in our modern cities without electricity and without water? Both are supplied through precarious conduits.

Then I thought, Have I remembered to thank God for electricity and water, yes, and food, and security? Jesus says that His sacrifice has been the unseen Source of all that makes life possible on this planet: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. . . . And the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world . . . Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (Jn. 6:51, 53). Every meal, every glass of water, for believer or unbeliever, renders him/her indebted to the Son of God. The only decent thing any honest person can do is to say "Thank You!" and then be loyal to "the Savior of the world" for life (Jn. 4:42).

There is a strange text tucked away in the Bible that pictures God in a different light than we like to view Him, in Proverbs 1:24-31. It represents God as

having lost patience at last. He has appealed to people constantly but they would not listen and ridiculed Him over and over until finally, He says, He will withdraw the blessings He had graciously given them. Well, no, it's not that He withdraws His blessings, but He withdraws His gracious intervention which has long shielded them from the results of their own wicked folly. Then He says, "I will mock when your fear cometh, . . . when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer. . . . They shall not find Me." Nowhere does the Bible say that God's patience is infinite. If we intend to pray to Him when calamity comes, shouldn't we begin to thank Him for blessings we enjoy now? And realize what they have cost Him to provide? It's only fair. Maybe it's only to the one who has been appreciative that He says, "Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure" (Isa. 33:16).

Does God love everybody? If you believe what John 3:16 says, you have to answer YES.

But does God admire and respect everybody for what he or she is? Is it possible for God to love someone and at the same time "abhor" him/her? Yes! If God "abhors" someone it doesn't mean He doesn't love that person, but only that God is disgusted with the pride, arrogance, selfishness, willful rebellion, of that person. Yes, God loves and pities a fool, but according to very clear teaching in the Bible He must have a very hard time respecting a fool. And there is nothing in the Bible that even faintly suggests that even though He is

"longsuffering," that God's patience with fools is everlasting.

For example: "The great God that formed all things . . . rewardeth the fool" (Pr. 26:10). How? "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools" (19:29, the "stripes" are an evidence of God's love for the fool).

The Bible does not picture God as delighting in hurling lightning bolts at fools: those who "hate knowledge" and "despise" all of God's reproof shall simply "eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools ["it's the economy!" say those who don't care about decency or uprightness in national leadership] shall destroy them" (1:29-32).

And there is this insightful gem of divine wisdom: "The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; he who is abhorred of the Lord will fall therein" (Pr. 22:14). In the eyes of heaven such a person does not have any respect. But let's not forget: God still loves a fool. David was one—he walked right into the "pit" with his eyes wide open. But oh, how he repented! In dust and ashes forever after! It's a great prayer to pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" but maybe it's an even greater one to pray, "God be merciful to me a fool!" The Good News? God hears that prayer.

Almost everybody is expecting another thousand years of present life to go on, in the words of Peter, saying "all things [shall] continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (see 2 Pet. 3:4). But Peter says that they are willfully ignorant of a

profound truth—the flood of Noah. God’s patience with the antediluvian world was not infinite. He brought an end to that wicked, violent, sensuous, adulterous generation. Peter adds that the same heavens and earth are “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (vs. 7). And Jesus says that before His second coming, the world will again become as it was “in the days of Noah,” yes “gay” in flaunting the solemn message that God sends in mercy (Mt. 24:37-39).

We don’t know the day nor the hour of Christ’s second coming when He will call the world to account. But even if one disregards what Peter says, common sense makes clear that if the world tries to go on for another millennium, it will choke itself to death in suicide. The Holy Spirit is steadily being withdrawn from the earth—there is constant deterioration of morals and decency. A millennium of life on a planet where the Holy Spirit has been withdrawn would be hell on earth. And it’s not God who takes the initiative in withdrawing His Spirit; people drive Him away, reject Him, just as they murdered His Son two millennia ago.

But in 2 Peter 3 the apostle goes on to give us wonderful Good News: (a) God is not willing that even one of us “perish”; (b) He gives the gift of “repentance”; (c) in the midst of wickedness we can live “in all holy conversation [lifestyle] and godliness”; (d) we can “be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless”; (e) His “longsuffering is salvation” for us; (f) we don’t have to “be led away with the error of the wicked, [or] fall from our steadfastness,” but (f) we can “grow in grace, and in

the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Are you thankful for His “longsuffering” with you? If “yes,” you have the key to happiness today, no matter how soon Christ does return.

What does God think about the passage of time? Some Bible statements imply that God does not sense the passage of years or millennia as we do, but we must be careful not to take them out of their true context. “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8), Don’t rush off with this and conclude that God cares nothing for the passage of time or that time means nothing to Him.

The over-all context of the Bible indicates that He does feel the passage of time and that He is impatient with delay. In Christ, God became man, “Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Mt. 1:23). “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son” (Gal. 4:4).

Does God ever get tired? Two Bible texts appear on the surface to give totally contradictory answers: “The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary” (Isa 40:28). The answer appears to be No. But listen again: He says to His people, “You have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me

with your iniquities" (43:24); and "You have wearied the Lord with your words" (Mal. 2:17). Now the answer is Yes. It's two kinds of "weariness": physically, the Creator is not tired; He holds up the universe in His hands. But in heart, God is wearied with human sin, and all the misery which it has produced "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who reverence [fear] Him. For He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13, 14). Speaking of those whose human hearts are sensitive to suffering, Isaiah says: "He became their Savior. In all their affliction He was afflicted. . . In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old" (63:8, 9). God is indeed a personal Heavenly Father to all whose hearts cry "Abba, Father!" (Rom. 8:15). A child who suffers does not

feel the agony as keenly as the sympathizing parent. When Isaiah says "He redeemed them," it's the entire human race whom He redeemed. As our second Adam, the new Head of the race, and suffering with us and dying our second death (Heb. 2:9), God feels the pain, the tears, the despair of millions. Can you and I share a bit of that suffering? Imagine yourself on Death Row when you know for sure in your heart that you are the innocent party (recently we have heard of a number of cases of mistaken convictions). Imagine yourself guilty, you did make a tragic mistake, and now you are locked up for life (there are enormous numbers there!). God shares all that pain and agony. Add to that, all who are hopelessly ill, the captives held in the grip of terrible addictions, the broken homes and disappointed marriages, the tears of parents

weeping for their children; yes, imagine yourself with your helpless little ones clinging to the branches of a tree in flooded Mozambique—well, Jesus wants to come and put an end to all the suffering in this world. We speak of His coming as our “blessed hope.” Have we ever thought about how it is His “blessed hope”? The clock of the universe has ticked away for thousands of years of sin history; it’s time now for God’s people to begin to view matters in the same light in which He views them. Then we will be able to pray intelligently, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

God is very much concerned about the cries of His people through the ages, “How long, O Lord?” (Rev. 6:10). He sympathizes with them in their distress, because He too knows distress and disappointment. For example, the long delay of the Bride of Christ getting ready for the wedding has been a trial to Jesus (Rev. 19:6-8).

The passage of time has been a heavy load for Him to bear. “You have burdened Me with your sins, and wearied Me with your iniquities,” He says (Isa. 43:24). God has entered into the thinking of time-conscious humanity and has shared their longing for the end of suffering to come. He feels all the agony of people who suffer. He is not the impassive Buddha-like Figure that many have thought Him to be. “The tabernacle of God is with men” (Rev. 21:3). The key element of Bible religion is “the great controversy between Christ and Satan,” the cosmic conflict of the ages between these two persons.

Of course, God longs for it to be over, not for His own selfish comfort, but for the good of the universe. Every follower of Christ is involved in the conflict; to be content to remain mere spectators is tantamount to treason. The conflict would long ago have been over and won for Christ if His followers had identified themselves with Him in the conflict.

It can well be said that the final preparation of a people for the second coming of Christ is precisely that identification with Christ in His struggle. It’s a “growing up into Christ,” reaching maturity in Him, leaving behind our self-centered childish concerns for “me and mine.” Yes, God is concerned about the passage of time, for it was never His intention that the “great controversy” would drag on and on, “world without end” (another Bible phrase often lifted from its context!).

Is the divine Son of God still also a human being? We read that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . .

. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father . . ." (John 1:1, 14). Yes, we believe.

Now can we ask a question: is this divine Son of God still with us as a human Being?

If the answer is Yes (and we believe it is!), can we ask another question: does He know human impatience for His "marriage of the Lamb [to] come"? Doesn't any bridegroom who truly loves the "woman" committed to him long for the wedding day to come? (Assuming of course that he hasn't already moved in with her in violation of God's commandments, taking prematurely what God has not yet given him in holy, public marriage.)

Can we say that Jesus has no feeling of urgency for His marriage to come?

Does He truly love that "corporate woman" with a desire to be "one" with "her"?

If the answer is yes, is He beginning to be impatient with those who are hindering it, "frustrating the grace of God" (cf. Gal. 2:21)? They are shying away from the "honeymoon" which of course must come, the time of intimacy together?

Before the Lord Jesus can come in the clouds of heaven in fulfillment of His promise in John 14:1-3, the grand end time events of earth's history must first come, including the close of human probation and the time when the "corporate woman" of His choice must "dwell in the sight of a holy God without a Mediator" and endure as "seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

The answer to all these questions is "Yes!" And yes, the Lord Jesus Christ, still human as well as eternally divine, wants those final events to be now: He is tired of the anguish and suffering of the "have-nots" in the world as well as of the useless vanity and pure selfish pleasure of its "haves." He longs to answer every prayer for relief from pain.

If you "know" Him, in your intimacy with Him you can clearly sense that divine-human impatience, that longing which He cannot hide any longer. If we are following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4), we will participate in that impatience, too.

Much is being said as thoughtful people of all religions (and none) ponder if and how a Being known as God can relate Himself to the unmitigated horror of our great tsunami. How we can say that He is a heavenly Father, a God of love, and also permit this hell to come on His children on earth. It all happened "just next door." It's happened to us!

1. Speaking in behalf of the world, the scribes and Pharisees condemned the One whom the Father sent to save the world, "Crucify Him!" They expelled Him; He had nowhere to go except back to heaven where He had come from. The corporate "carnal mind" of man is still "enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7). It's often said and its true that if Jesus Christ were to return in person as He came 2000 years ago, "we" would again reject Him. That "carnal," self-worshipping "mind" is still corporately with us.

#2. "The prince of this world" is not Christ, it's Satan, by "our" own choice ("we have no king but

Caesar!” “we” said, John 19:15; 14:30). We know the crucifixion of the Son of God was “our” deed.

#3. That malevolent “prince” is also described in Ephesians 2:1, 2 as “the prince of the power of the air.” It’s true in a spiritual sense but the implication is clear that Satan is “the prince” of physical destruction and disasters on earth. He never creates, he can only destroy what God has created. And he loves to.

#4. Even so, the God of love (*agape*) has set bounds upon that evil “prince.” After the monstrously destructive flood of Noah, He promised, “Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood, neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 9:11, KJV). In that “air” that Satan is “prince” of, God set His rainbow of promise (vs. 13).

#5. Even though there are miles of hell-on-earth-shoreline, God set a limit on that evil “prince of the air,” Satan. God again said to the ocean, “Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11, KJV). There is still mercy!

#6. But a God who is a heavenly Father of righteousness, is no heavenly Wimp. Let Him wrestle with His own explosive righteous anger (He is a Person!). Let us confess we do not fully understand Him. Like the arrogant king Ahab who spent his life doing evil but finally repented and “went softly,” let us walk humbly before an infinite God of righteous love whose patience must be, has to be, far from being infinite (cf. 1 Kings 21:27). He

is trying to tell us something: don’t presume on that divine patience!

#7. In walking “softly,” thank Him for everything you have, even the bread you had for breakfast.

Back and forth the solemn debate goes, on the Internet and in the media and in church pulpits: is this recent disastrous tsunami a judgment from God? Or just a quirk of nature?

Christian people who loved the Bible said that the terrible Lisbon earthquake of Sunday, November 1, 1755, was a judgment from God. John Wesley thought so (he labored to save dissolute England from a similar fate). Voltaire of course said no, there is no God who could care, and he offered arguments to counter the conviction that many God-fearing people had. But 1755 made an impact on history. It led to the discovery of Revelation and its predecessor, Daniel.

Those who believe the Bible today accept that the natural disasters of the flood of Noah and the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were judgments from God to condemn the wickedness of the time as a lesson to the whole world. And we must confess that these Bible stories have sobered many selfish people, and much ministry of mercy to needy people has been the fruitage. (“This was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread and abundance of idleness, . . . neither did they strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw good,” is what the prophet Ezekiel reported God as saying (16:49, 50.)

There is similar wickedness all over the world today; why would God single out Japan and New Zealand for such a severe rebuke? The great cities of the West have wickedness in them. Is there judgment in store for them?

Thoughtful people have seen God's great blessings on the United States of America's two centuries of history as a divine recognition of God's pleasure that this nation has from its beginning led the world by embracing in its Constitution the two principles of civil and religious liberty. At least it made an impact. According to one of its revered ex-presidents (Jimmy Carter), it has now become the Roman Empire *redivivus*. If or when this great nation abandons those holy Constitutional principles, what could happen? Then it will be time to live Psalm 91 in our daily life. (Well, isn't it time anyway to live in that psalm?)

Most of the Song of Solomon (S. S.) is joyous, upbeat love. How could two people be more deliriously happy with each other?

But there is one of the "songs" that is sung in the minor key. It has been said that the path of true love is never smooth. The love of these two is strained to near the breaking point in the drama of chapter five. As we study we must remember that the "two" are Christ and His bride-to-be; their path to the "marriage of the Lamb" has been rocky!

It's not the Bridegroom who has been fickle; sorry, it's the "girl." He has "chosen" her, "elected" her; His love has been steady. Their courtship has led them to the point of commitment, what we would call "the engagement." He is "ready" for "the marriage," long

delayed. In chapter five He has come to her in a time of world history when He especially needs her to stand by His side as a "help meet." There is a climax to the crisis of the ages when the Lamb of God who rides His white horse into the final battle of time needs His bride, His one true church, to cooperate with Him as only nuptial love can do. But is her love nuptial? Sadly, no; the story tells how she callously enjoys her selfish comfort, leaving Him knocking, knocking, vainly on her door.

The story is told in S. S. 5:2-7. Finally she realizes she has repulsed Him and belatedly gets up to let Him in, only to discover that His divine patience after years of delay, has been strained too far; and He is "gone." The story of her search for Him in the dark streets of the city is pathetic. Decades of prayer and fasting for a renewal of "the latter rain" and "the loud cry" power have not as yet healed the wound in the relationship.

But. . . He still loves "her." Why not choose a new "bride"? Revelation 19 says the same one will repent and "make herself ready," because His love is not fickle. That, incidentally, is our only hope.