

PATIENCE

by Tertullian

CHAPTER 1

Confess to the Lord my God that I certainly have courage, not to say presumption, to have dared to write on patience, a virtue which I am utterly unfit to practice, being, as I am, a man of no account. For, those who undertake to set forth and recommend any virtue should first give some evidence of practicing this virtue, and they should give proper direction to their constant admonition by the example of their own conduct, lest they be put to the blush at the discrepancy between their words and deeds.

And would that the blushing brought an improvement, that the shame (we feel) at not doing what we have suggested to others would teach us to do it! But, of course, it is with certain virtues as with certain vices: their greatness is so overwhelming that only the grace of divine inspiration can help us to attain and practice them.

For, that which is in the highest sense good belongs in the highest degree to God, and no one dispenses it save He who possesses it, to each one as He sees fit.

It will be, then, a comfort to discuss that which it is not granted us to enjoy, somewhat in the manner of the sick, who, when deprived of health, cannot refrain from proclaiming its blessings.

Thus, in my pitiable state, ever suffering from the fever of impatience, I must sigh after the health of patience which I do not possess, and I must beg and beseech it, remembering and reflecting, as I consider my weakness, that one does not easily attain the good health of faith and the soundness of the discipline of the Lord unless patience lends assistance thereto.

Patience has been given such pre-eminence in matters pertaining to God that no one can fulfill any precept or perform any work pleasing to the Lord without patience.

Even those who do not possess it pay recognition to its excellence by giving it the honorable title of 'the highest virtue.' In fact, the philosophers, who are regarded as creatures possessing some degree of wisdom, attribute such value to it that, while there are disagreements among them because of the various inclinations of the schools and their opposing tenets, they are, nevertheless, of one mind with regard to patience alone, and in this alone of their interests they enter into agreement. With regard to this they are in accord: for this they band together, with one mind they apply themselves to it in their efforts to attain virtue; every display of wisdom they usher in with a show of patience.

A great compliment it is to this virtue to be the moving force behind even the vain pursuits of the world to their praise and renown! Or is it rather an insult that divine things are involved in the doings of the world?

Let them see to it who will one day be ashamed of their wisdom when it is destroyed and brought to disgrace along with this world!

CHAPTER 2

There has been given to us as a model in the practice of patience no (merely) human product fashioned of the

dullness of Cynic indifference, but the divine ordinance of a life-giving and heavenly way of life which points out as an exemplar of patience God Himself.

Long has He been scattering the brilliance of this light (of the sun) upon the just and unjust alike and has allowed the deserving as well as the undeserving to enjoy the benefits of the seasons, the services of the elements, and the gifts of all creation.

He endures ungrateful peoples who worship the trifles fashioned by their skill and the works of their hands, who persecute His name and His children, and who, in their lewdness, their greed, their godlessness and depravity, grow worse from day to day; by His patience He hopes to draw them to Himself. There are many, you see, who do not believe in the Lord because for so long a time they have no experience of His wrath (directed) against the world.

CHAPTER 3

This is, indeed, a picture of the divine patience which exists, so to speak, far away from us, the patience, we might say, which prevails on high. But what about that patience which exists openly among men on earth, which is, as it were, within our reach?

God allows Himself to become incarnate: in His mother's womb He awaits (the time of birth) and after His birth suffers Himself to grow into manhood, and, when an adult, shows no eagerness to become known, but bears reproaches and is baptized by His own servant and by His words alone repels the attacks of the Tempter.

When He, (begotten) of the Lord, becomes a master teaching man how to avoid death, He teaches him for his own good how to offer reparation to outraged patience.

He did not wrangle or cry aloud; neither did anyone hear His voice in the streets; a bruised reed He did not break, a smoking wick He did not quench. (Now, the Prophet--or, rather, the testimony of God Himself, placing His own spirit in His Son with all patience--has not lied!)

He did not force one who was unwilling to stay close to Him; He scorned no one's table or dwelling; in fact, He ministered personally to His disciples by washing their feet.

He did not despise sinners or publicans, He showed no anger even toward that city which refused to receive Him, even when the disciples wished fire from heaven to fall upon such a shameful town; He healed the ungrateful, yielded to His persecutors.

More than this, He even kept in His company the one who would betray Him and did not firmly denounce him. Why, even when He is betrayed, when He is led like a beast to the slaughter--for thus (is it written): 'He does not open His mouth any more than does a lamb in the power of its shearer'--He who could have had if He wished, at a single word, legions of angels from heaven to assist Him did not approve of an avenging sword on the part of even one of His disciples.

It was the forbearance of the Lord that was wounded in (the person of) Malchus. And so, He actually cursed for all time the works of the sword and by healing him whom He had not Himself struck, He made satisfaction by forbearance, which is the mother of mercy.

I say nothing about His crucifixion; it was for this that He had come. Still, did there have to be such insults attending the death He must undergo? No; but as He went forward to His death, He willed to have His fill of joy in suffering: He is spat upon, beaten, mocked, disgracefully clothed, and even more disgracefully crowned.

Marvel at the constancy of His meekness: He who had proposed to escape notice in the guise of man has in no degree imitated man's impatience. For this reason particularly, you Pharisees, you should have recognized the Lord! Patience such as this no mere man had ever practiced!

Such were the manifestations (of His patience), the very magnitude of which is the reason why pagan nations reject the faith; for us they are its rational foundation. For those to whom there has been granted the gift of faith they suffice to make it very clear, not only by the words our Lord used in His precepts, but also by the sufferings which He endured, that patience is the very nature of God, the effect and manifestation of a certain connatural property (of His being).

CHAPTER 4

Now, if we see that all servants of righteous character and good disposition live according to the mind of their lord--obedience, as you know, is a facility in rendering service, but the principle of obedience is compliant submission--how much more does it behoove us to be found modeled upon our Lord! Servants indeed we are of the living God whose sway over His (creatures) consists not in manacles or the granting of the slave's cap, but in allotting everlasting punishment or salvation.

To escape His severity or to invite His liberality one needs diligence in obeying which is proportionate to the threats uttered by His severity or the promises made by His liberality.

Yet, we ourselves exact obedience not only from men who are bound to us by the bonds of slavery or who, because of some other legal bond, are under obligation to us, but also from our flocks and even from the wild animals. We understand that they have been provided and granted by the Lord for our purposes.

I ask you: in the practice of obedience, shall those creatures which God has made subject to us surpass us? In a word, creatures which obey (their masters) acknowledge (their condition as creatures): do we hesitate to heed Him to whom alone we are subject, namely, the Lord? Why, how unjust it would be, and in addition how ungrateful, for you not to make a return of what you have obtained from others through the kindness of a third party, to him through whom you obtained it!

But, no more about the manifestation of the obedience which we owe to the Lord our God. For, in the act of recognition of God one understands sufficiently what is incumbent upon him. However, lest we seem to have inserted something irrelevant to this discussion of obedience, (let me remark that) obedience itself also stems from patience: never does one who is impatient obey nor does a patient man ever refuse obedience.

Who, then, could deal adequately with the value of that patience which the Lord our God, the model and patron of all that is good, has displayed in Himself? Who would doubt that those who belong to God have an obligation to strive with their whole soul for every good, since it has reference to God? By these considerations our recommendation and exhortation on the subject of patience is briefly established in a summary, as it were, of the prescribed rule.

CHAPTER 5

Now, to thrash out a question about essential points of faith is not wearisome, since it is not without profit. Verboseness, though a fault at times, is no fault when it tends to edification.

Therefore, if some good is being discussed, the matter demands that we examine also the evil which is its opposite. You will throw a better light upon what one should strive for if you discuss in connection with it what should be avoided.

Let us, then, with regard to impatience, consider whether, as patience (exists) in God, its opposite was born and discovered in our adversary. From this it will appear how impatience, more than anything else, is opposed to faith.

For, that which is conceived by God's rival is certainly not a friend to the things of God. There is the same hostility in the things as there is in their authors. Furthermore, since God is infinitely good, and the Devil, on the other hand, is superlatively evil, by their very difference they bear witness that neither one effects anything for the other; it can no more seem to us that some good is produced from evil than some evil from good.

Now, I find the origin of impatience in the Devil himself. Even when the Lord God subjected to His own image, that is, to man, all the works He had made, the Devil bore it with impatience.

For, he would not have grieved, had he endured it, nor would he have envied man, had he not grieved; he deceived man because he envied him; he envied him because he grieved; he grieved because he certainly had not borne it with patience.

What the angel of perdition was first--I mean, whether he was first evil or impatient--I do not bother to inquire; it is clear that, whether impatience had its beginning in evil or evil in impatience, they entered into combination and grew as one in the bosom of one father.

For, as soon as he perceived that it was through his impatience that he had committed the first sin, having learned from his own experience what would assist in wrong-doing, he availed himself of this same impatience to lead men into sin.

Without delay, and would say not without forethought, he contrived a meeting with the woman, and simply and solely through their conversation she was touched by his breath, already infected with impatience. But never would she have sinned at all had she preserved her patience according to the divine command!

And what of the fact that she could not endure having met (the Devil) alone but, being unable to remain silent about it in the presence of Adam--he was not yet her husband, nor as yet under any obligation to lend her his ear--she makes him the carrier of that which she had imbibed from the Evil One?

Thus, a second member, too, of the human race falls through the impatience of the first; and his fall, too, results from his own impatience committed in two ways: with regard to the forewarning of God, and with regard to the deceit of the Devil; for he was unable to observe the former or to oppose the latter.

Condemnation began with him in whom sin originated; God's anger began with him by whom man was induced to offend Him. God's patience began with him who had aroused His indignation; for at that time He was content with simply cursing him and He refrained from inflicting punishment upon the Devil.

What sin previous to this sin of impatience can be imputed to man? He was innocent and a close friend of God and a tenant dwelling in paradise. But, when once he yielded to impatience, he ceased to relish God and could no longer endure the things of heaven.

From that time on, as a man delivered up to the earth and cast away from the eyes of God, he began to serve as an easy instrument for impatience to use for everything that would offend God.

For, immediately, that impatience which was conceived by the seed of the Devil with the fecundity of evil gave birth to a child of wrath and instructed its offspring in its own arts. Since it had plunged Adam and Eve into death, it taught their son, also, to commit the first murder.

Vain were it for me to ascribe this sin to impatience, had Cain, the first homicide and the first fratricide, accepted it with equanimity and without impatience when his offerings were refused by the Lord; if he had not been angry with his brother; if, in fine, he had killed no one.

Therefore, since he could not commit murder unless he were angry, and could not be angry unless he were impatient, it proves that what he did in anger is to be referred to that which prompted the anger.

Such was the cradle of impatience which was then, so to speak, in its infancy. But to what proportions it soon grew! And no wonder: if it was the prime source of sin, it follows that, being the prime source, it was therefore also the sole fashioner of all sin, pouring forth from its own abundant resources the varied channels of crimes.

Homicide has already been mentioned. It sprang originally from anger, and whatever causes it finds for itself afterwards, it ascribes them to impatience at its origin. For, whether one commits this crime through enmity or for some gain, the original cause is that one is overwhelmed by hatred or greed.

Whatever is the motivating force, a crime could not be perpetrated unless one lacks patience. Who has ever attempted adultery save one who was unable to withstand his lustful desires? Even the fact that (disgrace) is forced upon (some) women for a price, that sale of one's honor is certainly set in order by an inability to set at naught despicable gain.

Impatience is, as it were, the original sin in the eyes of the Lord. For, to put it in a nutshell, every sin is to be traced back to impatience. Evil cannot endure good. No unchaste person but is intolerant of chastity; no scoundrel but is irked by righteousness; no negligent person but resents his obligations; no agitator but is impatient of peace. Although anyone may become evil, not everyone can persevere in good.

Why, then, should not this hydra-like generator of sins offend the Lord, who condemns all wickedness? Is it not clear that Israel itself, through its impatience, was ever sinning against God?

Forgetting the heavenly arm whereby it had been rescued from the afflictions of the Egyptians, it demanded of Aaron gods to be its leaders, while it poured its contributions into an idol of its own gold. For, it had borne without patience the delay necessitated by Moses' meeting with the Lord.

After the rain of manna as food, after the water that followed and flowed from the rock, they gave up hope in the Lord, unable to endure a three-days' thirst. For this, too, they were charged with impatience by the Lord.

But, not to range over individual instances: never would they have been destroyed had they not fallen into sin

by impatience. Why did they lay hands on the Prophets, except that they could not bear to listen to them? And more than that: they laid hands upon the Lord Himself, being unable to endure even the sight of Him. But had they acquired patience, they would now be free.

CHAPTER 6

Such is the patience which is both subsequent to and antecedent to faith. Accordingly, Abraham believed in God and it was credited to him by God as justice. Now, he proved his faith by patience, when he was commanded to offer in sacrifice his son--I do not say for a trial, but rather for a typical attestation, of his faith.

But God knew the man whom He had reputed for his justice. This severe command, which the Lord did not intend should be carried out, Abraham heard with patience and, had God so willed, he would have fulfilled it. Rightly, then, is he blessed because he was faithful; and rightly was he faithful because he was patient.

Thus faith was illuminated by patience, since it was sown among the heathens by the seed of Abraham which is Christ and added grace to the Law, and it has made patience its helpmate in amplifying and fulfilling the Law, because in times past this was the only thing lacking to the teaching of justice.

Heretofore, men demanded an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and they returned evil for evil. As yet, patience was not found upon the earth, for as yet, you see, there was not faith. Meanwhile, impatience was enjoying the opportunities occasioned by the Law. It was easy when the Lord and Teacher of patience was not on hand.

But after He came and united the grace of faith with patience, no longer was one permitted to do injury with so much as a word, or even say 'Thou fool!' without being in danger of the judgment. Wrath was forbidden, passions were kept in check, unruly hands were restrained, the poison of the tongue was removed.

The Law acquired more than it lost when Christ said: 'Love your enemies and bless those who curse you and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven.' Just see what a Father patience acquires for us!

CHAPTER 7

The entire practice of patience is compressed within this fundamental precept whereby not even a lawful injury is permitted. But now, as we run through the causes of impatience, all the other precepts, too, will correspond in their own context.

Is the mind disturbed by the loss of property? In practically every passage of the holy Scriptures one is admonished to despise the world, and no greater exhortation is there to an indifference toward money than that our Lord Himself is without it.

He always justifies the poor and condemns the rich. Thus He has set disdain for wealth ahead of the endurance of losses, pointing out through His rejection of riches that one should make no account of the loss of them.

Hence, we need not seek wealth, since our Lord did not seek it; and we ought to bear the deprivation of even the theft of it without regret.

The Spirit of the Lord, through the Apostle, has called the desire of money the root of all evils. We may infer that this consists not only in the desire for that which belongs to another; even that which seems to be our own belongs to another; for nothing is our own, since all things belong to God to whom we, too, belong.

Therefore, if we feel impatient when we suffer some loss, we will be found to possess a desire for money, since we grieve over the loss of that which is not our own. We are seeking what belongs to another when we are unwilling to bear the loss of that which belongs to another.

The man who is upset and unable to bear his loss sins, you might say, against God Himself by preferring the things of earth to those of heaven. For, the soul which he has received from the Lord is upset by the attractiveness of worldly goods.

Let us, then, with glad hearts, relinquish earthly goods that we may preserve those of heaven! Let the whole world fall in ruins provided I gain the patience to endure it! In all probability, a man who has not resolved to bear with fortitude a slight loss occasioned by theft or violence or even by his own stupidity will not readily or willingly touch what he owns for the sake of charity.

For, what man who refuses to undergo any operation at all at the hands of another puts a knife to his own body? Patience to endure, shown on occasions of loss, is a training in giving and sharing. He who does not fear loss is not reluctant to give.

Otherwise, how would one who has two tunics give one of them to him who is destitute, unless the same is one who can offer his cloak as well to the one going off with his tunic? How will we make friends for ourselves with mammon if we love him only to the extent that we do not share in his loss? We shall be damned together with the damned.

What do we find here where we have (only something) to lose? It is for pagans to be unable to sustain all loss; they would set worldly goods before their life perhaps.

And they do this when, in their eager desire for wealth, they engage in lucrative but dangerous commerce on the sea; when, for money's sake, they unhesitatingly engage in transactions also in the forum, even though there be reason to fear loss; they do it, in fine, when they hire themselves out for the games and military service or when, in desolate regions, they commit robbery regardless of the wild beasts.

On the other hand, in view of the difference between them and ourselves, it befits us to give up not our life for money but money for our life, either by voluntary charity or by the patient endurance of loss.

CHAPTER 8

Our very life and our very body we have exposed in this world as a target for all manner of injury and we endure this injury with patience; shall we, then, be vexed by the deprivation of lesser things? Far be such shame from the servant of Christ, that his patience, trained by greater trials, should fail in trifling ones!

If one tries to provoke you to a fight, there is at hand the admonition of the Lord: 'If someone strike thee,' He says, 'on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.' Let wrong-doing grow weary from your patience; whoever be struck, the one who strikes, weighed down by pain and shame, will suffer more severely from the Lord; by your meekness you will strike a more severe blow to the wrong-doer; for he will suffer at the hands

of Him by whose grace you practice meekness.

If a spiteful tongue bursts out in cursing or wrangling, recall the saying: 'When men reproach you, rejoice.' The Lord Himself was accursed before the Law, yet He alone is blessed. Let us, then, His servants, follow our Lord and patiently submit to maledictions that we may be blessed!

If, with slight forbearance, I hear some bitter or evil remark directed against me, I may return it, and then I shall inevitably be bitter myself. Either that, or I shall be tormented by unexpressed resentment.

If, then, I retaliate when cursed, how shall I be found to have followed the teaching of our Lord? For it has been handed down that a man is not defiled by unclean dishes, but by the words which proceed from his mouth; and, what is more, that it remains for us to render an account for every vain and idle word.

It follows, then, that our Lord forbids us to do certain acts, but at the same time admonishes us to endure with meekness the same treatment at the hands of another.

(We shall speak) now of the joy which comes from patience. For every injury, whether occasioned by the tongue or the hand, coming in contact with patience, will meet the same end as a weapon which is flung and dashed upon a hard, unyielding rock. An ineffectual and fruitless action will lose its force immediately and will sometimes vent its passion and strike with the force of a boomerang upon him who sent it forth.

This is true, of course, since one insults you with the intention of causing you pain, because the one who inflicts the injury reaps his reward in the pain of the one injured. Consequently, if you cheat him of his reward by not showing any pain, he will himself inevitably feel pain because he has lost his reward.

Then you will go off, not only uninjured (which of itself should suffice for you) but over and above that you will have the pleasure of seeing your enemy frustrated while you yourself are preserved from pain. Herein lies the advantage of patience and the joy which derives from it

CHAPTER 9

Not even that form of impatience which results from the loss of our dear ones is excused, although in this case a sort of rightful claim to grieve justifies it. Observance of the precept of the Apostle must be put first: 'Grieve not,' he says, 'over one who has fallen asleep even as the gentiles who have no hope.'

And rightly so. For, if we believe in the resurrection of Christ, we believe in our own, also, since it was for us that He died and rose again. Therefore, since there is sure ground for faith in the resurrection of the dead, there is no grief associated with death, and no inability to bear grief.

Why should you grieve if you believe that (the loved one) has not perished utterly? Why should you show impatience that one has been taken away for the time being if you believe he will return? That which you think of as death is merely the beginning of a journey. He who has gone ahead is not to be mourned, though certainly he will be missed. But this lonesomeness must be alleviated by patience. Why should you be inconsolable over the departure of one whom you are soon to follow?

Moreover, impatience in such things is a sad indication of our own hope and gives the lie to our faith. Likewise, we injure Christ when we fail to accept with resignation (the death of) those whom He has called, as though they were to be pitied.

'I desire,' says the Apostle, 'to be welcomed home now and to be with the Lord.' How much better a prayer he holds forth! As for the Christians' prayer, then, if we bear it with impatience and grief that others have attained their goal, we ourselves do not want to attain our goal!

CHAPTER 10

There is another, and very strong, motive which gives rise to impatience, namely, the desire for revenge, which busies itself in the interest of either reputation or wrong-doing. Now, reputation is everywhere empty, and evil never fails to be hateful to the Lord, especially in this situation when, occasioned by wrong-doing on the part of another, it takes the upper hand in executing vengeance and, in paying back the evil, does twice as much as was done in the first place.

Revenge mistakenly appears to be a soothing of one's pain, but in the light of truth it is seen to be only evil contending with evil. What difference is there between the one who provokes and the one provoked except that the one is caught doing wrong sooner than the other? Nevertheless, before the Lord each is guilty of having injured a fellow man and the Lord forbids and condemns every act of wrong-doing.

There is no hierarchical arrangement in wrong-doing, nor does position make any distinction in that which similarity makes one. Therefore, the precept is unequivocally laid down: evil is not to be rendered for evil. Like deed merits like treatment.

But how shall we observe this precept if, in loathing (evil), we have no loathing for revenge? What tribute of honor shall we offer to the Lord our God if we assume to ourselves the right to inflict punishment?

We who are matter subject to decay, vessels of clay, are grievously offended when our servants take it upon themselves to seek revenge from their fellow slaves; as for those who show us patience, we not only praise them as slaves who are conscious of their lowly position, men attentive to the respect they owe their lord, but we recompense them even more than they had themselves anticipated. Is there any risk for us in such a course when we have a Lord so just in His judgments, so powerful in His deeds?

Why, then, do we believe Him a judge, but not also an avenger? Of this He assures us when He says: 'Revenge is mine and I will repay them,' that is: 'Have patience with Me and I will reward your patience.'

When He says: 'Do not judge, that you may not be judged,' is He not demanding patience? What man will refrain from judging another except one who will forego (the right) of self-defense? What man judges with the intention of forgiving? And if he does forgive, he has but shied away from the impatience of a man who judges and has usurped the honor of the true Judge, that is, God!

What misfortunes has such impatience, as a rule, brought upon itself! How often has it regretted its self-defense! How often has its obstinacy become worse than the occasions which provoked it! Now, nothing undertaken through impatience can be transacted without violence, and everything done with violence has either met with no success or has collapsed or has plunged to its own destruction.

If you are too mild in your self-defense, you will be acting like a madman; if your defense is excessive, you will be depressed. Why should I be concerned about revenge when I cannot regulate its extent because of my inability to endure pain? Whereas, if I yield and suffer the injury, I shall have no pain; and if I have no pain, I shall have no desire for revenge.

CHAPTER 11

Now that we have, to the best of our ability, set forth these principal provocations to impatience in the order of their intensity, with which of the rest that (we encounter) at home and in public life should we concern ourselves? Widespread and extensive are the workings of the Evil One who extends innumerable incentives to impatience which, at times, are slight, at times very great.

The slight ones you should ignore for their insignificance; to the great you should yield in view of their invincible power. When the injury is not very important, there is no need for impatience, but when the injury is more serious, then there is greater need for a remedy against the injury, namely, patience.

Let us strive, then, to bear the injuries that are inflicted by the Evil One, that the struggle to maintain our self-control may put to shame the enemy's efforts. If, however, through imprudence or even of our own free will we draw down upon ourselves some misfortune, we should submit with equal patience to that which we impute to ourselves.

But if we believe some blow of misfortune is struck by God, to whom would it be better that we manifest patience than to our Lord? In fact, more than this, it befits us to rejoice at being deemed worthy of divine chastisement: 'As for me,' He says, 'those whom I love I chastise.' Blessed is that servant upon whose amendment the Lord insists, at whom He deigns to be angry, whom He does not deceive by omitting His admonition!

From every angle, then, we are obliged to practice patience, because we meet up with our own mistakes or the wiles of the Evil One or the warnings of the Lord alike. Great is the recompense for practicing it, namely, happiness.

Whom has the Lord declared happy? Those who are patient; for He said: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Assuredly, no one but the humble man is poor in spirit. And who is humble but the man who is patient? No one can take a position of subjection without patience, the prime factor in subjection.

'Blessed,' He says, 'are those who weep and mourn.' Who can endure such things without patience? To such, then, is consolation and joy promised.

'Blessed are the meek.' Certainly, in this word one cannot by any means include the impatient. Likewise, when He applies this same title of happiness to the peace-makers and calls them the children of God, I ask you: Do the impatient share in this peace? Only a fool would think so!

And when He says: 'Rejoice and exult when men reproach you and persecute you because your reward is great in heaven,' certainly this promise of great joy is not made to the impatient, for no one will rejoice in adversity unless he has first come to despise it; no one will despise it unless he possesses patience.

CHAPTER 12

As for what pertains to the practice of this peace so pleasing to God (I ask you): What man, completely given over to impatience, will forgive his brother, I will not say seven times and seventy times seven times, but even once?

What man, taking his case with his adversary to a judge, will settle his trouble to the accommodation of the other party, unless he first puts an end to his wrath, his resentment, his harshness and bitterness, that is, his impatient disposition?

How will you forgive and experience forgiveness if you cling to your injury through a total lack of patience? No one whose mind is violently disturbed against his brother will complete his offering at the altar unless first he has been reconciled to his brother through patience.

If the sun goes down upon our anger, we are in danger. We may not live a single day without patience. Yet, since patience governs every aspect of a salutary way of life, what wonder that it also paves the way for repentance which, as a rule, comes to the assistance of those who have fallen?

What benefits it produces in both parties when, in spite of their forbearance from their marriage rights--provided it be only for that reason which makes it lawful for a man or woman to persist in their separation--it waits for, hopes for, wins by its prayers repentance for those who will eventually be saved. It purifies the one without causing the other to become an adulterer!

So, too, in those examples in our Lord's parables there is a breath of patience: it is the patience of the shepherd that seeks and finds the straying sheep (for impatience would readily take no account of a single sheep, whereas patience undertakes the wearisome search) and he carries it on his shoulders, a patient bearer of a forsaken sinner.

In the case of the prodigal son, too, it is the patience of his father that welcomes him and clothes him and feeds him and finds an excuse for him in the face of the impatience of his angry brother. The one who had perished is rescued, therefore, because he embraced repentance; repentance is not wasted because it meets up with patience!

Consider now charity, the great bond of faith, the treasure of the Christian religion, which the Apostle extols with all the power of the Holy Spirit: how is it learned except by the exercise of patience?

'Charity,' he says, 'is magnanimous.' It derives this from patience. 'It is kind.' Patience works no evil. 'It does not envy.' Envy is certainly a characteristic of impatience. 'It is not pretentious.' It has derived its contentment from patience. 'It is not puffed up, is not ambitious,' for that does not befit patience. 'It is not self-seeking.' It suffers (the loss of) its own goods provided that it be to another's advantage. 'It is not provoked.' What, then, would it have left to impatience? Therefore, he says, 'charity bears with all things, endures all things.' Of course it does, because it is itself patient.

He is correct, then, in stating that it will never fall away. Everything else will pass away and come to an end. Tongues, knowledge, prophecies are made void, but there persist faith, hope, and charity: faith, which the patience of Christ has instilled; hope, to which the patience of man looks forward; charity, which patience accompanies, according to the teaching of God.

CHAPTER 13

Thus far (we have been speaking), however, of a patience which constitutes simply and uniformly and solely an operation of the soul, whereas in various ways we should strive for this same patience also in the body in order to attain the good pleasure of the Lord, inasmuch as it was practiced by the Lord Himself as a virtue

also of the body; for the soul, as the directing agent, readily shares the inspirations of the Spirit with that wherein it dwells.

What, then, is the operation of patience in the body? Primarily, mortification of the flesh as a sacrifice acceptable to the Lord. This is an offering of (one's) humility, since it offers to the Lord a sacrifice of mourning dress along with meager rations, contenting itself with plain food and a drink of clear water, joining fast with fast and persevering in sackcloth and ashes.

This patience on the part of the body contributes to the value of our petitions and strengthens our prayers for deliverance. It opens the ears of Christ our God, dispels His severity, elicits His mercy.

Thus, after offending the Lord, the King of Babylon lived for seven years in squalor and filth, an exile from human society. By this offering of the patient endurance of bodily (discomfort) not only did he regain his kingdom, but--and this is even more desirable in a man--he made satisfaction to God.

Now, if we go on to consider the higher and more blessed degrees of bodily patience, (we see that) it turns continence, too, into an opportunity for sanctity: this it is which preserves the widow (in her state), places its seal upon the virgin, and raises to the kingdom of heaven one who of his own free will embraces a life of celibacy.

That which derives from the power of the soul finds its fulfillment in the flesh. In persecutions the endurance of the flesh engages in battle. If flight besets one, the flesh surmounts the hardships of flight. If imprisonment precludes flight, it is the flesh which submits to the chains, the block of wood, and the bare ground. It is the flesh which endures both the scanty light (of the dungeon) and the deprivation of worldly comforts.

But, when one is led forth to the ordeal that will prove his happiness, to the opportunity to renew one's baptism, to the very ascent to the throne of divinity, there is nothing (which avails) more in that situation than endurance on the part of the body. If the spirit is willing but the flesh--without patience--weak, where is there salvation for the spirit as well as for the flesh itself?

On the other hand, when the Lord speaks thus of the flesh and declares it weak, He points out what is needed for strengthening it, namely, patience in the face of everything that is ready to overthrow our faith and impose a penalty for it, that one may bear with constancy stripes, and fire, the cross, wild beasts, or the sword as the Prophets and Apostles bore them and won the victory.

CHAPTER 14

In virtue of his power of endurance, Isaias, though cut in pieces, does not refrain from speaking of the Lord. Stephen, as he is stoned, prays for pardon for his enemies.

Happy, too, was that man who displayed every manner of patience against every vicious attack of the Devil! His flocks were driven away, his wealth in cattle destroyed by lightning, his children killed at a single stroke when his house collapsed, his own body, finally, was tortured by painful sores --yet, by none of these was he lured from his patience and the trust he owed the Lord. Though the Devil struck him with all his strength, he struck in vain!

Far from being turned away by so many misfortunes from the reverence which he owed to God, he set for us

an example and proof of how we must practice patience in the spirit as well as in the flesh, in soul as well as in body, that we may not succumb under the loss of worldly goods, the death of our dear ones, or any bodily afflictions.

What a trophy over the Devil God erected in the case of that man! What a banner of His glory He raised above His enemy when that man let fall from his lips no other word than 'Thanks be to God!' as each bitter message reached him; when he severely rebuked his wife who, weary by now of misfortunes, was urging him to improper remedies.

How God laughed, and how the Evil One was split asunder, when Job, with perfect calm, would wipe away the discharge oozing from his ulcer and, with a jesting remark, would call back to the cavity and sustenance of his open flesh the tiny creatures that were trying to make their way out!

Thus did that hero who brought about a victory for his God beat back all the darts of temptation and with the breastplate and shield of patience soon after recover from God complete health of body and the possession of twice as much as he had lost.

Had he wanted his sons to be restored, too, he would once again have heard himself called 'father.' But he preferred that they be restored to him on the last day; placing all his trust in the Lord, he deferred that great joy; for the present, he was willing to endure the loss of his children that he might not live without something to suffer!

CHAPTER 15

God is fully capable of being the trustee of our patience: if you place in His hands an injustice you have suffered, He will see that justice is done; if a loss, He will see that you receive compensation; if a pain, He acts as healer; if death, He restores life. How much is granted to patience that it should have God for a debtor!

And not without reason. For it pays attention to all His prescriptions, it becomes surety for all His commands: it strengthens faith, governs peace, sustains love, instructs humility, awaits repentance, places its seal upon the discipline of penance, controls the flesh, preserves the spirit, puts restraint upon the tongue, holds back the (violent) hand, treads under foot temptations, pushes scandal aside, consummates martyrdom.

In poverty it supplies consolation; upon wealth it imposes moderation; the sick it does not destroy, nor does it, for the man in health, prolong his life; for the man of faith it is a source of delight. It attracts the heathen, recommends the slave to his master, the master to God. It adorns a woman, perfects a man. It is loved in a child, praised in a youth, esteemed in the aged. In both man and woman, at every age of life, it is exceedingly attractive.

Now, then! If you will, let us try to grasp the features and appearance of patience. Its countenance is peaceful and untroubled. Its brow is clear, unruffled by any lines of melancholy or anger. The eyebrows are relaxed, giving an impression of joyousness. The eyes are lowered, in an attitude rather of humility than moroseness.

The mouth is closed in becoming silence. Its complexion is that of the serene and blameless. It shakes its head frequently in the direction of the Devil, and its laughter conveys a threat to him. The upper part of its garment is white and close-fitting so that it is not blown about or disturbed (by the wind).

It sits on the throne of its spirit which is extremely mild and gentle and is not whipped into a knot by the whirlwind, is not made livid by a cloud, but is a breeze of soft light, clear and simple, such as Elias saw the third time. For where God is, there, too, is the child of His nurturing, namely, patience.

When the Spirit of God descends, patience is His inseparable companion. If we fail to welcome it along with the Spirit, will the latter remain within us at all times? As a matter of fact, I rather think the Spirit would not remain at all. Without its companion and assistant it would feel very uncomfortable anywhere and at any time. It could not endure, all by itself, the blows which its enemy inflicts, if stripped of the means which helps it to endure.

CHAPTER 16

This is the theory, this the practice, this the operation of the patience which is divine and true, namely, Christian; a patience not like the patience practiced by the peoples of the earth, which is false and disgraceful.

For, that the Devil might rival the Lord in this respect, also, and be really on an equal footing with Him as it were (except that good and evil are extremes of equal magnitude) the Devil also taught his own a special brand of patience.

It is a patience, I say, which renders subject to the power of their wives husbands who are purchased by a dowry or who negotiate with panderers; a patience in virtue of which (a wife) bears, with feigned affection, all the irritation resulting from a forced association so that, as a childless widow, she may lay hands upon her husband's estate; a patience which sentences gormandizers to sacrifice their freedom and become disgraceful slaves to their gluttony.

Such are the goals of patience as the heathens know it and by such despicable efforts they appropriate the name of so noble a virtue; they live in patient endurance of their rivals, the wealthy, and their hosts; it is only God alone whom they cannot endure. But let their patience and the patience of their chief take care: there is fire beneath the earth awaiting this kind of patience.

Let us, then, love the patience that is of God, the patience of Christ; let us return to Him that which He expended for us; let us who believe in the resurrection of the flesh and of the spirit offer Him both the patience of the spirit and the patience of the flesh.