READING: Galatians 5:22-23

*Introduction:*

I heard a story recently about a truck driver who dropped in at an all-night service station.

The waitress had just served him when three swaggering, leather-jacketed bikers --of the Hell's Angels type entered & rushed up to him, apparently looking for a fight.

One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; & the third picked up his coffee & began to drink it.

The trucker didn't respond as one might expect.

Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his bill, walked to the front of the room, put the bill & his money at the pay point, & went out the door.

The waitress followed him to put the money in the cash register & stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night.

When she returned, one of the bikers said to her, "Well, he's not much of a man, is he?"

She replied, "I can't answer that, but he's not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorbikes out in the car park."

This man knew something of patience — although his patience was short-lived.

But as we continue to study the Fruit of the Spirit, we want to know what God means when He instructs us that we are to be patient.

For some of us, this is the hardest of the nine aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit to actually live out in our daily lives.

We live in an impatient world, & we have adapted ourselves to our culture in this respect.

We have become an impatient people — but we know that is the wrong way to be

To help us to develop Christian patience it will be helpful for us to examine three areas where we need patience & to see how God wants to help us to become patient people.

They are:

1. Patience with others

2. Patience with the Church &

3. Patience with God

1. PATIENCE WITH OTHERS

What I mean by others, is all of those people we come across in our daily experience.

These may be people at church, at work, in your home, at school, or at the local shop.

Sometimes our impatience leads us to act contrary to our profession of faith in Christ.

Little things drive us to despair — unresolved frustration, so small it seems silly, mounts up until we are blinded by the path before us.

It is in these times that we act & react out of character w/our Christian testimony.

This is what happened to a minister who was scheduled to speak at an all- day conference.

He was running late because his alarm clock never went off.

In his hurry to make up for lost time he cut himself while shaving.

Then he found his shirt was not ironed.

To make matters worse, when he got in his car, one of the tires was flat.

Disgusted, & by this time thoroughly distressed, the minister finally got underway with a sudden burst of speed.

Racing through town he failed to notice a stop sign & rushed through it.

As you would expect, there was a police officer nearby, & in just moments the scream of a siren was heard.

Jumping out of his car, the agitated minister said, "Well, go ahead & give me a ticket. Everything else has gone wrong today."

The policeman walked up & said quietly, "Sir, I used to have days like that too, before I became a Christian." — OUCH!

The writer of Proverbs has some advice for each one of us.

Prov. 14:***29 "Whoever is patient has great understanding,  but one who is quick-tempered displays folly."***

Prov. 15:18, ***"A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel."***

Prov. 19:11? ***"A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offence.."***

There are several ways that we can learn to deal patiently with others.

Firstly, we need to realise that the person we are impatient with may be dealing with some situation we are unaware of that is causing them to act in a way that is bothersome to others.

As I was preparing this sermon, my patience was put to the test:

firstly as I went to park, a man in another vehicle just pulled out in front of me with no indication as to what he was about to do.

Then when I got to the bank there were only 2 cashiers, and they were dealing with 2 quite slow people, and all the time I could feel myself getting more wound up. Then when I got home there was a van parked across my drive, which meant that I had to drive across my neighbours grass to get into the drive.

Just then the driver of the van came out of the neighbours garden, so of course I could not resist saying "good parking mate", to which he replied "I've got a parcel for you, do you want it".

We don't know what is going on in the life of our disgruntled fellow employee.

We don't know why the cashier at the shop is always grumpy.

We have no idea what is going on in the families around us.

If we can remember this, then we can begin to be patient with those around us.

The Second way to learn to be patient is to ask ourselves the question, "What would Jesus do?"

(Remember those bands & necklaces at Christian Bookshops — WWJD?)

If we would ask that question before we acted on impulse we would be a much more patient people.

Thirdly, if we would pray before losing our cool we would keep our cool.

When someone upsets us we should immediately take it to the Lord.

All 3 of these actions will help us to be more patient with others.

2. PATIENCE WITH THE CHURCH

It is fashionable to be impatient with anything institutional today, & not least of all, the church.

Impatience within the church is as old as the church.

No church is what it ought to be by a long shot.

There is a yawning gulf between the actual & the ideal.

What church is there anywhere, of any denomination, where the Gospel is consistently & radiantly preached and lived?

We sometimes overlook the fact that God builds the church out of the rough material of human nature.

It is to the church's glory, not shame, that it welcomes struggling, weak, slow, ungracious, people.

The Body of Christ consists of an unpredictable & often unattractive mix of fallible, but believing hearts.

We must be patient with the church's traditions.

An institution as old as the church has inevitably gathered around itself powerful traditions, creeds, ceremonies, & customs.

There are ways of thinking, worshiping, serving which, having been accepted as agreeable to the Word of God & having proved themselves in experience, have been passed on from one generation to another.

There is, of course, nothing consecrated about some of the traditions of the church. A new & changing generation demands new methods.

The point is that often such an adjustment is a slow & painful process.

Change must certainly come — but it only comes effectively as we patiently express the love of Christ.

We must also be patient with the church's decisions.

They are not always our personal decisions and, unfortunately, they are not always God's decisions. We can get it wrong.

It is obviously more difficult for a community to decide what is the Christian thing to do in any given situation than it is for an individual.

Again, we must learn to be patient & recognize that the church is made up of fallible people who will one day be presented pure to God Almighty.

How can we be patient with the church in these areas?

Eph. 5:25-27: ***"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.."***

In this verse we find two applications as to how we can be patient within the church.

First, recognize that Christ loved the church in all her imperfections enough to die for her — if we imitate Christ's love for the church we'll have no trouble being patient with it, warts & all.

Second, we need to realize that the church with all its imperfections will one day be presented to Christ without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.

In other words, begin to see the church as it will be rather than as it is.

I'm not trying to get you to overlook areas where we can & should improve, I'm simply saying we need to understand that one day we will see ourselves in a whole new light.

We must patiently work toward perfection knowing that it will be fully realized when Jesus comes to take us home.

3. PATIENCE WITH GOD

Many of us are wrestling with God, we are baffled by His silence, impatient with His slowness. Abram had this problem regarding God's promises to him.

We are in a hurry, & God isn't.

So we bombard heaven with our passionate prayers & complain that God is an ever-absent help in time of trouble.

So we wrestle with God — but we had better hope to lose.

The very greatness of God is His longsuffering.

The majesty of God is in His mercy.

The power of God is in His patience.

Where would any of us be if it were not for the divine love that breathes deeply & waits patiently?

2 Pet 3:9 ***"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance***.***."***

2 Pet 3:15 ***"Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, ."***

Christian patience is rooted in the conviction that God's time is always the best time, the right time, the only time.

No one who believes in Him will ever be disappointed.

You cannot force the hand of a God who chooses to make His appeal to men from a cross, who could smash us by His power, yet rather stoops to win us by His love.

So where is the practical application of how to be patient with God?

It might sound somewhat abstract, but the way that we learn to be patient with God is by growing in our knowledge of God.

The more we know of Him, the more we experience of His power, the closer we get to understanding His nature, the more patient we become.

Because all of these areas speak of growing closer to God in personal relationship & the stronger that relationship grows, the less doubt we have that God knows exactly what He is doing & when He should do it.

Conclusion:

When I worked in the Police control room taking calls from the public about what had happened to them. I could easily lose my patience with some people. After taking perhaps the 10th call from someone who had been burgled but said they had been 'robbed', I just wanted to scream at them, "You've not been robbed, you've been burgled, there's a difference"

But for them, it was a traumatic experience, they did not know the difference, and perhaps this was something that had never happened before, they were shaken, violated,.....So, I needed to take a deep breathe, put on a smile and make them feel important and deal with their needs.

We may not agree with everything that goes on in Church, or in politics, or in the village or the reason why Cranfield has been chosen to have a wind farm on its doorstep.

But as Christians, followers of Jesus, we are called to produce patience in a world that says "me" "me" "me".

Next time you're about to blow off steam at someone because you have been stuck in a queue for 30 mins, or your running late or whatever.....

Remember that God is SO SO SO patient with us....every moment of every day.

Give it to Him, and ask him for patience - NOW!!

Amen, let us pray.