

CONFRONTING IMPATIENCE AND IRRITABILITY

INTRODUCTION

- If we are all honest, we will admit that we give in to impatience and irritability too often
 - Irritated by our spouse's weaknesses, shortcomings, and quirks
 - Impatient with our children's immaturity or bickering or slowness to respond to our instructions
 - Irritated by others preventing us from being on time
 - Impatient with other drivers
- And all too often, such irritation overflows on others in the form of harsh and abusive words which stirs up anger in them

Proverbs 15:1 ~ A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

- While these sins can be exhibited toward anyone, unfortunately, we tend to exhibit them most freely in the context of our own families
- Our true character often comes out with those who know us best
- It is often those we are closest to – our spouse and children – who receive the brunt of our impatience and irritation
- For most of us, it is time to take this sin more seriously and lay it aside

Hebrews 12:1~ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us

- Laying these sins aside requires that we first understand the nature of these vices
- Jerry Bridges defines them in this way:
 - Impatience is “a strong sense of annoyance at the (usually) unintentional faults and failures of others. This impatience is often expressed verbally in a way that tends to humiliate the person (or persons) who is the object of the impatience.”¹
 - Irritability “describes the frequency of impatience, or the ease with which a person can become impatient over the slightest provocation. The person who easily and frequently becomes impatient is an irritable person. Most of us can become impatient at times, but the irritable person is impatient most of the time. The irritable person is one whom you feel you have to tiptoe or ‘walk on eggshells’ around.”²
- Most of us probably don't see our irritability as a big issue
- This is because we tend to blame our irritability on someone or something else
- We try to convince ourselves (and them) that they *make* us irritated
- If *they* were different, *we* wouldn't be irritated
- If *they* would just stop doing the things that bother us, *we* would respond more patiently and be less grumpy
- If *they* would fix their issues, *we* wouldn't have such a problem with them

¹ Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 116.

² *Ibid.*, 118.

- Or we blame it on being tired, sick, or stressed
- An irritable spirit tends to show up when we're under pressure: we have a lot to do...we are under time constraints...we are up against a deadline
- Under pressure, we are curt, rude, cutting, short, demanding, unappreciative, uncaring, and quick with a cutting remark that tears down rather than builds up
- We give a disdainful look, we sigh deeply, we roll our eyes, we turn away abruptly, and sometimes we lose our cool altogether

BIBLICAL ADMONITIONS TO PATIENCE

God is Patient

Exodus 34:6~ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, **slow to anger**, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

Isaiah 7:13~ Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try **the patience of my God** as well?"

Jeremiah 15:15~ You who know, O LORD, Remember me, take notice of me, And take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of **Your patience**, take me away; Know that for Your sake I endure reproach.

Romans 2:4~ Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and **patience**, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

Romans 9:22~ What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with **much patience** vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

1 Timothy 1:16~ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect **patience** as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

1 Peter 3:20~ who once were disobedient, when the **patience of God** kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.

2 Peter 3:9~ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is **patient** toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:15~ and regard the **patience of our Lord** as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

The Apostle Paul Modeled Patience

2 Corinthians 6:4, 6~ in everything commending ourselves as servants of God...in purity, in knowledge, **in patience**, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,

2 Timothy 3:10~ Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, **patience**, love, perseverance,

Patience is Commanded of Every Believer

Ecclesiastes 7:8~ The end of a matter is better than its beginning; **Patience** of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

1 Corinthians 13:4~ Love is **patient**, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,

Galatians 5:22~ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, **patience**, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Ephesians 4:2~ with all humility and gentleness, with **patience**, showing tolerance for one another in love,

Colossians 1:11 ~ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and **patience**

Colossians 3:12~ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and **patience**;

1 Thessalonians 5:14 ~ We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, **be patient** with everyone.

2 Timothy 2:24~ The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, **patient when wronged**,

2 Timothy 4:2~ preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with **great patience** and instruction.

DIAGNOSING IMPATIENCE AND IRRITABILITY

1 Corinthians 13:5

- When understanding this subtle sin, we must first realize that it is not other people or difficult circumstances that make us this way
- The events in our lives are not necessarily the things that cause impatience or irritability
- They are rather the means by which these vices in our hearts have an opportunity to express themselves
- The actual cause of our impatience lies in the sin within our own hearts, in our expectation that others around us must conform to our expectations
- In short, irritability is a heart disease...a failure to love others as we are called to

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 ~ Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, **is not provoked**, does not take into account a wrong suffered,

- “provoked” (*paroxuno*) = to sharpen; to urge, prick or spur on, stimulate
- It can be used in the positive sense of urging or spurring things forward
- But in the negative sense it means to irritate, exasperate, or even to scorn or despise something;
- In the passive it means to be provoked, roused to anger, exasperated, irritated
- We get our English word “paroxysm” from this word (“a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity”)
- NIV = it is not easily angered
- KJV = is not easily provoked
- CEV = it is not quick tempered
- RSV = it is not irritable
- Paul's point is that love is not easily provoked or kindled or incited
- Thus, irritability ultimately stems from a failure to love others the way God has called us to love as believers

Does God Get Irritated?

- The Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses the same word (*paroxuno*) in Isaiah 5:25

Isaiah 5:25 ~ On this account **the anger of the LORD has burned against His people**, And He has stretched out His hand against them and struck them down. And the mountains quaked, and their corpses lay like refuse in the middle of the streets. For all this His anger is not spent, But His hand is still stretched out.

- The dilemma: If love is not irritated (1 Cor 13:5) and God is love (1 John 4:8), then how is it okay for God to be provoked to anger?
- The answer: Paul is not condemning all kinds of being provoked to anger...there are times when righteous anger is appropriate and just
- For example:
 - Jesus' cleansing of the temple

John 2:15, 17 ~ And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables...17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME."

- Paul on Mars Hill

Acts 17:16 ~ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked (*paroxuno*) within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

- In 1 Corinthians 13:5, Paul is addressing the short fuse, the times when we become too quickly or too easily provoked to anger and irritated
- So God is provoked to anger, but He is never irritable
- He only gets angry when His glory and righteousness and justice are despised and violated
- God takes a remarkably slow time to get angry and, when He does, His response is always thoughtful, appropriate, perfectly measured, and never sinful
- Thus, like God, we are to be not easily provoked

Ephesians 4:26 ~ BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

James 1:19 ~ This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

Selfishness Lies at the Heart of Irritability

- Impatience and irritability are the response of a heart that is consumed with itself and its desires and expectations
- They occur when life does not go the way we want it to
- They occur when others have interrupted our plans for a peaceful, easy life
- They occur when we focus on the ways we have been wronged
- In short, irritability thrives in an environment of discontentment, unrealized expectations, and self-interest

Our irritability never has its roots in the soils of righteousness. It springs out of the soil of selfishness and springs up fast, like the sin-weed that it is. We get irritated or easily provoked, not when God's righteousness or justice is scorned, but when something we want is being denied, delayed, or disrupted. It works like this:

- When I'm **weary** I want **rest**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
- When I'm **sick or in pain** I want **relief**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
- When I'm **preoccupied** I want **uninterrupted focus**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
- When I'm **running late** I want **to avoid appearing negligent**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*
- When I'm **disappointed** I want **my desire fulfilled**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated.*

- When I'm **fearful** I want **escape from a threat**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated*.
- When I'm **uncertain** I want **certainty, preferably reassuring**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated*.
- When I'm **enjoying something** I want **to continue until I wish to be done**, but if it's denied/delayed/disrupted *I get irritated*.

The reason irritability is unloving, unrighteous anger is that it is a selfish response to an obstacle to our desire. What we desire may not be sinful, but a selfish response to its denial, delay, or disruption is a failure to trust God at all times ([Psalm 62:8](#)) — and often a failure to value, love, and serve another human soul.³

GUIDELINES FOR MORTIFYING IRRITABILITY

1. Call impatience and irritability what they really are – sins – and repent of them
 - It is exactly the kind of sin Jesus had to die for
 - There is never an excuse for being irritable
2. Put off irritability by putting on patience and learning to hold expectations loosely
 - Notice the pattern of sanctification described in Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 involves putting off vices and putting on the corresponding virtues
3. Remember that emotions are gauges not guides; counter sin with truth
 - We must not let irritation reign in us despite what we feel

Romans 6:12~ Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts

 - We need to act contrary to the way we feel, trusting that feelings will follow our actions
 - This occurs by thinking on what is right and true

Romans 12:1-2~ Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Corinthians 10:5 ~ We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

Philippians 4:8~ Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.
4. Trust God that the inconveniences of life are being used to sanctify and grow us
 - We must learn to see all that comes into our lives (including our spouse and children) as sanctifying influences

Psalms 119:75~ I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.

³<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lay-aside-the-weight-of-irritability>, accessed April 20, 2018.