

It Is Written

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When It Was a Crime to Read the Bible

By Joe R. Price

By the start of the third decade of the 16th century, William Tyndale had already been on the run for five years. The king of England, Henry VIII, had declared him a felon. Fleeing Roman Catholic authorities in London (never to return to England), he went first to Cologne, France, and then Worms, Germany. What crime had this “evil” man committed? Of what rebellious act of treason was he guilty? He dared to translate and then print the New Testament in the English language!

In England in the 1520’s (indeed, throughout Europe during the Middle Ages), unless you were literate in Hebrew, Greek or Latin, reading the Bible for yourself was impossible. You had to rely upon what the Roman Catholic clergy said the Bible contained. You would not have been able to study the Bible for yourself to discern the truth for yourself – much less be free to practice what you learned therein. Rome ruled with an iron hand.

The Catholic Church did not want nor permit a wide transmission of the Bible and its contents. When Tyndale’s NT was published in Worms, 6,000 copies were shipped back to England. Medieval historian William Manchester reports, “To the bishop of London this was an intolerable, metastasizing heresy. He bought up all that were for sale and publicly burned them at St. Paul’s Cross. But the archbishop of Canterbury was dissatisfied; his spies told him that many remained in private hands. Protestant peers with country houses were loaning them out, like public libraries. Assembling his bishops, the archbishop declared that tracking them down was essential – each was placing souls in jeopardy – and so, on his instructions, dioceses organized posses, searching the homes of known literates, and offered rewards to informers – sending out the alarm to keep Christ’s revealed word from those who worshiped him” (A World Lit Only By Fire, 204-205).

Tyndale was eventually arrested and imprisoned for sixteen months in the castle of Vilvoorde, near Brussels. In 1536, after being tried and convicted for heresy he was publicly executed, being tied to a stake, strangled to death, and then his corpse burned.

As we consider Tyndale’s struggle and sacrifice to provide the common Englishman with readable, discernible scriptures, we are made to thank God for the daily ease and convenience with which we can open the Bible and study it for ourselves. We are made to cherish the privilege that is ours to pour over the divine text, understand it, reflect upon it, think over it so as to bring our hearts and lives into harmony with it, as well as also teach it to others (Eph. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:2).

If you have been neglecting to read, learn and live God’s word, please remember the good fortune you have: education and access – the abundant opportunity to read and know God’s word. To not drink deeply from its well is to squander a precious blessing (cf. Jas. 4:17).

The next time you pick up your Bible and read it, remember the sacrifices of countless others who have made that simple act possible. But above all, remember the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life on the cross and was then resurrected from the dead so that you know the truth, abide in His word and thus be freed from your sin (Jno. 8:31-36; 1:1-3, 14-18).

“Let Patience Have Its Perfect Work”

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4).

Patience, a fruit of the Spirit, has been described as love and endurance under pressure. Patience is a characteristic that is longsuffering and does not retaliate; a willingness to wait; to expect; to hope for.

We are not born with patience. We need only to hear a baby cry for their immediate needs or hear a child selfishly say, “No!” or “Mine!” However, it doesn’t take much insight to see that maturity and strength under pressure is much more difficult than it is to return evil for evil and be swift to strike back. It takes courage, strength, and love not to return injury and insult to others. An old Chinese proverb says: “Patience is power. With time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes a silk gown.” Patience is the ability to endure to the end.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit that is to be demonstrated in our relationships with one another. Love suffers (endures) long, and we are called upon to be patient and forbearing with one another (1 Cor. 13:4; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12). Love, with patience, hopes all things. Patience is not passive—it is consecrated active faith and strength.

The Hebrew writer tells us to run the race set before us with patience (Heb. 12:1). Truly, life is much like a race, and patience keeps doing God’s will regardless of the difficulties or the discouragements. The New Testament word for patience means “to abide under.” We are reminded of the great patience of the prophets and Job in James 5:10-11. It does not suggest giving up, compromising, or becoming complacent. Patience is keeping the course in spite of our circumstances.

Patience has a calm anticipation of hope. The New Testament speaks of the patience of hope (Rom. 5:4; 8:25). Hope produces patience. When we love and have hope in God, we are inclined to be more patient. If we believe in the promises of God, we can patiently wait for them. The hope, power, and blessings of the gospel fill us with patience.

Pessimism is often due to a lack of patience. We look around and see awful conditions and think God is too slow (read the book of Habakkuk as an example of this). Some lose their faith and hope, but true patience can wait, endure, and persevere. Let us not be like the one who prayed in this manner—“Lord, give me patience, and give it to me right now!” Therefore, LET PATIENCE HAVE ITS PERFECT WORK.

Firmly Planted

By Kyle Campbell

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (Psalm 1:1-3). It is possible to spend your whole life knowing about the truths of God and never experiencing any of them. Simply knowing about them does not mean that they have become a part of your life.

The righteous man does not find encouragement in the opinions of others but in the scripture. He is not content with a surface knowledge of scripture but meditates on it day and night until he is satisfied that what he reads reflects his own experience. He becomes like a fruit tree standing firmly on the bank of the river. The tree is well nourished and produces delicious fruit.

If you start practicing God’s word, others will draw encouragement from you. The more you grow in righteousness, the stronger you will become, and consequently, the farther the devil will flee from you (James 4:7).