

The Longsuffering Of Our Lord Is Salvation

Our Duty to be Longsuffering

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According to estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey, there were almost 700,000 nonfatal violent victimizations committed by current or former spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends of the victims in the U.S. during 2001. That is a lot. Eighty-five percent of victimizations, by intimate partners, were against women. This made up twenty percent of all nonfatal violent crime experienced by women. For intimate partner violence, as for violent crime in general, simple assault was the most common type of crime.

Two things struck me when I read these statistics:

1. There are a lot of people who have close personal relationships that have already, or are in the process of, destroying those personal relationships by their own impatience, selfishness, and intolerance.
2. Men have a greater tendency to be this way, it seems, than women—or at least they have more opportunity than women, because they have more power physically.

In our self-centered world of intolerance one quality of character has all but perished—*longsuffering*!

With the previous statistics in mind, I think it is safe to say that this sermon is directed at the men more than at the ladies. Of course, it applies to us all, because we all struggle with having longsuffering toward each other. Longsuffering is under-valued by the average Christian, whether man or woman. It is an attribute that saves us from discouragement in the face of evil. It aids us in cultivating godliness and in developing the entire Christian character. All in all we see that it is a very important attribute to produce.

The apostle Paul prayed that the Colossians would be so filled with the knowledge of God's will, that they would be enabled to live worthily of God, pleasing Him in everything. This worthy life involves fruitfulness in every good work and growth in (or by) the knowledge of God. Patience and longsuffering are included, and gratitude to God for the blessings of redemption.

Colossians 1:9-11 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not

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cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.

Paul's prayer contains two requests. The first, and the one on which the rest of the prayer is based, is that God will fill the Colossians with the knowledge of His will through all wisdom and spiritual understanding. The will of God, in its broadest and most inclusive sense, is the whole purpose of God as revealed in Christ. In verse 11, *His will* has special reference to God's intention for the conduct of the Christian life.

To be filled with the knowledge of the divine will means that such knowledge is to permeate all of our being including our thoughts, affections, purposes, and plans—all of the aspects involved in human life. The phrase containing the words, "all wisdom and spiritual understanding," is thought of as a more complete explanation of the "knowledge of His will." The knowledge of the divine will consists of all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

When their meanings are combined "*wisdom* and *understanding*" express a single thought, something like "practical wisdom" or "clear discernment" or "the right use of knowledge."

Paul's second request is that the Colossians will "walk worthy of the Lord," or, live a life worthy of the Lord. This request is built on, and grows out of, the request for knowledge of the divine will. Living a worthy life is represented as a result (or purpose) of knowing God's desire for our lives.

This suggests that knowledge of God's will is not imparted as an end in itself. It is given with a practical intent. Wisdom is the right application of knowledge and the end of all knowledge is conduct. To walk worthy of the Lord means to live life as an outward expression of righteous character. We cannot live that outward expression of righteous character unless we know what God's will is.

Colossians 1:11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.

Patience and *longsuffering* are both mentioned there, but I think the average American,

with his general English, would think of *patience* and *longsuffering* as the same thing. However, the Greek translation here uses two different words. We will be getting into the details of those and this will show what God's intent in *longsuffering* is. Verse 11 gives a couple of constituent parts of the kind of life that is pleasing to God. The major ideas expressed here in verses 10 and 11 are: bearing fruit, growing, and being strengthened. What rain and sunshine are to the nurturing of plants, the knowledge of God is to the growth and maturing of our spiritual lives.

In verse 11, "strengthened with all might" refers to the divine empowerment that enables us to stand against human nature and the powers of darkness. We, of course, know that this is related to the Holy Spirit. This empowerment is according to the might of God's glory. It is not proportioned simply to our need, but to God's abundant supply. He gives us a never ending supply.

The twofold issue of God's empowerment is *patience* and *longsuffering*. The Greek word rendered *patience* here in verse 11 is *hupomone*. It is the opposite of cowardice and hopelessness. It is "the capacity to see things through." The word rendered *longsuffering* here in verse 11 is *makrothumia*. This is the word that is going to be the most crucial and pivotal point to this sermon. It is the opposite of wrath or a spirit of revenge. It signifies even-temperedness, the attitude that, in spite of injury or insult, does not retaliate.

Proper patience and longsuffering is accompanied with joyfulness. The remedy of the gloominess that trials may produce is that we should be so filled with joy, that we are able to meet all our trials with a cheerful sense of mastery. We should feel so good that we were able to overcome the problem, or to show longsuffering in our dealings with others.

Similar to patience and forbearance, longsuffering is the quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation. It is not quick to retaliate or promptly punish someone who has insulted, offended, or harmed us. It is the opposite of anger and it is intimately associated with mercy. Longsuffering is an attribute of God and therefore a fruit of His Holy Spirit.

How does longsuffering differ from patience? There is an element of patience within longsuffering, however, there are two different factors or meanings to the words. Three words are most frequently translated either *longsuffering*, *endurance*, *perseverance*, or *patience* in modern English Bibles. That Hebrew word is *arek appayim*. The words from Greek are *makrothumia* and *hupomone*. When the time came to translate the Old Testament into Greek, the translators used *makrothumia* as the synonym of the Hebrew *arek appayim*. Both words mean essentially the same thing: "slow to anger."

I apologize for using Greek words, but it is so crucial to the understanding of the word that is translated "longsuffering" that I felt it was important that we cause our minds to grind a little bit on them.

In writing the New Testament, the apostles added *hupomone*. Both Greek words *makrothumia* and *hupomone* generally mean the same thing. However, scholars have noted that each has characteristics that set one apart from the other. It is important to understand the difference here.

1. The Greek word *makrothumia* means: forbearance and longsuffering. The opposite of *makrothumia* is wrath or revenge. *Makrothumia* usually expresses longsuffering with regard to people. This is the critical point to understand.

2. The Greek word *hupomone* means: steadfastness and patient endurance, and sometimes perseverance. The opposite of *hupomone* is cowardice or despondency. *Hupomone* usually expresses patient endurance with regard to things or circumstances.

For the remainder of this sermon, I am going to use longsuffering and patience as two different words, one to represent *makrothumia* and the other to represent *hupomone*. This is because one relates to people and the other relates to things and circumstances. And the one that I want to focus on in this sermon is the one that relates to our relationship with each other: *makrothumia*, longsuffering.

In this light, we speak of the *makrothumia*, or longsuffering of David recorded in II Samuel 16, and the *hupomone*, or patient endurance of Job in James 5.

II Samuel 16:10-13 But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?' And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day." [for his longsuffering] And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust.

This *makrothumia*, or longsuffering, of David shows itself as a calm and unruffled attitude with regard to aggravations in dealing with this person Zeruiah.

To make a comparison between longsuffering and patience let us look at James' three illustrations: the farmer, the prophets, and Job. In verses 1-6 James warns the oppressing rich of coming judgment. In verses 7-11 he encourages the oppressed poor to be "longsuffering."

In the first illustration of longsuffering patience, James mentions the farmer.

James 5:7 Therefore be patient [makrothumeesate], brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently [makrothumia] for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

The Greek word used here translated into the English *be patient* is a variation of the root *makrothumia*. It describes the attitude of self-restraint that does not try to get even for a wrong that has been done. It usually represents longsuffering towards people. So James calls for a longsuffering toward the rich oppressors that will last "until the coming of the Lord."

Since James used a variation of the word *makrothumia* (longsuffering), rather than *hupomone* (patience), he seems to indicate that the farmer who waits patiently for the rain is exhibiting longsuffering toward another living being (God), rather than patience with regard to a thing or circumstance (rain). This farmer's longsuffering is not toward the rain. He is not being patient toward the rain waiting for it to come. He is having longsuffering toward God and waiting for God to supply the rain.

James 5:8-9 You also be patient [makrothumia]. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

We are to be longsuffering toward both outsiders who oppress us, and insiders who irritate us. We are not to grumble against each other. The word grumble usually means: "to sigh" or "to groan." It speaks of inner distress more than open complaint. James is not emphasizing the loud and bitter denunciation of others, but the unexpressed feeling of bitterness or the smothered resentment that may express itself in a sigh or groan. It is the thought that you have towards someone and so it gets more into the attitude. James admonishes against this hateful reaction to others. To continue such practice results in judgment.

In the second illustration of longsuffering, James mentions the prophets.

James 5:10 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience [makrothumia].

In the prophets' position as God's representatives, they experienced affliction and responded to it with longsuffering patience. Although James refers to the prophets as a group, it is Jeremiah who stands out as one who endured mistreatment with longsuffering. He was put in the stocks, thrown in prison, and lowered into the miry dungeon. He persisted in his ministry without bitterness or retaliation.

In the third illustration, James mentions Job. This gets interesting here.

James 5:11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure [that word is a root word of hupomone or what is many times translated as patience]. You have heard of the perseverance [hupomone] of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

Those who have persevered are considered blessed. In verses 7-10 James' emphasis is for *makrothumia* (longsuffering), the self-restraint that does not retaliate; but here in verse 11 it is *hupomone*, that is endurance and perseverance in difficult circumstances. According to the Greek words there is a difference there. That patience of Job is referring to how he reacted with perseverance toward the trial of a thing or circumstance.

Job was an outstanding example of perseverance in the most trying situations. His experience also was proof that God is full of compassion and mercy. In James 5:7-11, James is urging us not to fight back, but to exercise longsuffering toward those with wealth and power whom oppress us. He is also calling for perseverance in the trying circumstances that confront us.

Both longsuffering and patience manifest themselves as a meek submission to the will of God and determination in performing the duties and persevering the conflicts of life.

In common English language today we use the word "patience" with great generality to mean several different concepts.

According to *Webster's Dictionary*, "patience" carries the meaning: "the state, quality, or

fact of being patient; specifically, the will or ability to wait or endure without complaint; steadiness, endurance, or perseverance in performing a task."

Longsuffering carries the quality of patience within its meaning. Basically, it is long and patient endurance of offense. Often we use the English word "patience" to mean perseverance or longsuffering. *Webster's Dictionary* defines longsuffering as, "bearing injuries, insults, trouble, etc., patiently for a long time." It is not wrong to use the word patience in place of longsuffering in a general sense. For the sake of this sermon, the point is the longsuffering aspect in how we react and deal with each other in our daily lives.

Selfishness is the root of poor character traits that thwart the development of longsuffering. According to the *McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia*: "selfishness is an inordinate self love, prompting one, for the sake of personal gratification or advantage, to disregard the rights or feelings of other men. It is a negative quality, that is, it does not consider what is due to one's neighbors through a deficiency of justice or benevolence. Selfishness is contrary to the Scriptures, which command us to have respect for the rights and feelings of others, and forbid us to encroach thereupon."

In contrast to God's longsuffering with them, God's own people (the children of Israel) are noticeably impatient with the very One who shows such longsuffering toward them. When they journeyed in the wilderness, after their deliverance by God's hand from Egypt, grumbling and impatience mark their character.

Numbers 21:4-9 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses: "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread." So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

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Here we see an example of the opposite of longsuffering: rather than thanking God for their food, their freedom, and His visible presence with them in the wilderness, they grumble because they are taking a long route—taking what they feel is forever—and here impatience is shown for what it is: selfish whining and demanding.

The Israelites placed "the self" above God's purposes and demands. They wanted their selfish desires to be met immediately rather than according to God's perfect plan. Impatience and intolerance are fruits of selfishness, whereas patience and longsuffering are fruits of self-sacrifice.

Paul refers to God as the God of patience in Romans 15:5. While both longsuffering and patience are held by people, only longsuffering (*makrothumia*) is an attribute of God.

People may aggravate Him, but He displays longsuffering (*makrothumia*) in regard to us. He tolerates and allows the human wills with which He created us, even when our wills are fighting against Him.

However, things cannot present resistance or burden to the Almighty God. Therefore patience (*hupomone*) of things is not attributed to Him. The God who gives patience means that God is the Author of patience in His servants.

Romans 15:4-6 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now may the God of patience [*hupomone*] and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Barnes' Notes has an interesting summary of this scripture where he summarizes the "God of patience" this way:

The God who is *himself* longsuffering, who bears patiently with the errors and faults of his children, and who can *give* patience, may He give you of His Spirit, that you may bear patiently the infirmities and errors of each other. The example of God here, who bears long with his children, and is not angry soon at their offences, is a strong argument why Christians should bear with each other.

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Longsuffering is an aspect of God's goodness leading people to repentance. If God is longsuffering with our shortcomings, we should be longsuffering with each other.

Old Testament Longsuffering Applied to God

The Old Testament words *arek appayim*, translated longsuffering, mean literally, "long of nose" or "breathing," and they refer to such things as anger which was indicated by rapid violent breathing through the nostrils. Therefore we have phrases like: "long of anger," "slow to wrath," or, "slow to anger."

The attribute of longsuffering is applied to God in Exodus 34:6.

Exodus 34:6 And the LOORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LOORD, the LOORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,

There we see God being described as longsuffering. In Numbers 14:18, Moses describes aspects of the character of God, presenting a composite quotation of His own words of loyal love for and faithful discipline of his people.

Numbers 14:18 'The LOORD is longsuffering [slow to anger] and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.'

Mainstream Christianity has rejected the true message of the Old Testament because they have been taught, through popular culture, and through deceived false teachers, that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath whereas the God of the New Testament is all mercy and grace. And of course, as Satan has intended, this distortion of God's truth is meant to pervert the understanding of such wonderful godly attributes as His longsuffering. Thus, God is falsely painted as all wrathful and no mercy; or the opposite extreme, all mercy and no wrath.

But Moses knew God intimately. He knew Him as a consuming fire; he also knew Him as a warm and tender God. Moses reminds us that while God's wrath is real, it is long delayed. The most amazing thing about the wrath of God is how much provocation He tolerates before He finally acts in righteous judgment.

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Probably there has been occasion when we all have wished that God would zap this evil, or destroy that group of people or army. But the fact that He has not thrown lightning bolts as soon as we sin is a vivid reminder that He may extend His longsuffering with us as He wills and as long as He desires.

In David's prayer for mercy in Psalm 86 he hoped and pleaded that God would save him, even though David knew himself that he was a sinner.

Psalm 86:15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.

The Hebrew words rendered "longsuffering" here means that there was, and would be, delay in His anger. That His anger was not easily or quickly agitated and He did not act from passion or sudden resentment. He endured the conduct of sinners for a long period of time without rising up to punish them. He was not quick to take vengeance, but bore with them patiently. Longsuffering is associated with God's mercy and abundant kindness by the Levites in Nehemiah 9:17.

Nehemiah 9:16-17 "But they and our fathers acted proudly, hardened their necks, and did not heed Your commandments. They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.

Even when the Israelites made a molded calf for themselves and said it was the god that brought them out of Egypt and worked great provocations, we see that though they thumbed their nose at God, going as far as overt idolatry, God still was slow to anger in dealing with them. In spite of all the Lord had taught and done for the Israelites, they (our forefathers) did not obey God's Word. In the light of such abundant generosity, their contrasting disloyalty comes as an immense shock—until we examine our own hearts and realize that we are capable of the same exact thing without God's Holy Spirit.

Had we been among the wilderness wanderers, we are not likely to have behaved much better without God's Holy Spirit. Their sin is serious, but what makes it tragic is its persistent repetition through history. The Levites listed eight things that they were guilty of, both nationally and individually:

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1. Stubborn pride (verse 16, "acted proudly and hardened their necks")
2. Heedlessness (verse 16, "did not heed Your commandments")
3. Deliberately disloyal (verse 17, "refused to obey")
4. Willfully blind (verse 17 "not mindful of Your wonders that you did among them")
5. Blatant rebellion (verse 17, "in their rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage")
6. Pathetic idolatry (verse 18, made a molded calf for themselves)
7. Unashamed profanity (verse 18, "this is your god")
8. Knowingly obstinate (verse 18, "worked great provocations")

Even though the Israelites were guilty of these eight things (and much more) God was slow to anger and was willing to give them time to repent. It is the story of wayward humanity, not just of rebellious Israel. Only a merciful and longsuffering God rescues such a people.

God is slow to anger and relents from doing harm. His longsuffering is seen in His gracious restraint of His wrath toward those who deserve His wrath. He waited patiently for 120 years while Noah built the ark and gathered the animals despite the rebellious condition of the world during that time. God's longsuffering does not overlook anything. It simply sees further than man because it has the end in view. God has true insight that knows best and is not swayed by human emotions.

In Joel's call to Judah to repent, he mentions "slow to anger" as one of God's loving characteristics.

Joel 2:12-13 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

All the words, "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness," are the

same and in the same order as in the revelation to Moses recorded in Exodus 34:5-6. On the renewal of the two tables of the law, God descended in the cloud and proclaimed the name of the Lord. Obviously these characteristics, these attributes of God are very important if it has been repeated that He is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." That is the emphasis God wanted.

The words are frequently repeated, showing how deeply that revelation to Moses sunk into the minds of the faithful of Israel. In Numbers 14:18, the words are, in part, pleaded to God by Moses himself. In Psalm 85:15, David, at one time, pleaded all the words to God. In a few other places in the Bible, David repeats the words describing God. In Nehemiah 9:17, Nehemiah praised God for His forgiving mercies. We see that God wants us to understand that He is very, very longsuffering when it comes to dealing with us.

Joel says, that God is "slow to anger" or "longsuffering," enduring long the wickedness and rebellion of man, and anticipating for a long time the eventual conversion and repentance of sinners. Joel adds, that God is "of great kindness," or "abundant in kindness," having multiple resources and means of manifesting His love, by which He may bring sinners to repentance.

At the end of Joel 2:13, we read, "He relents from doing harm." God does not will that any should perish, and, therefore, on the first signs of repentance "He relents from doing harm," and does not do harm.

In Romans 9:22, the apostle Paul referred to the case of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Paul applied Jeremiah's parable of the potter to the spiritual state of the Jews during his time.

Romans 9:22-24 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

Pharaoh and the Egyptians were "vessels of wrath"—a people deeply guilty before God. It was by their obstinate attitude toward His sovereignty, and abuse of His goodness, that they prepared themselves for destruction which the wrath, the vindictive justice of God, inflicted. But this was only after He had endured their obstinate rebellion with much longsuffering.

God's longsuffering is absolute proof that the hardening of their hearts, and their ultimate punishment, were the consequences of their own obstinate refusal of his way of life and abuse of his goodness; as the history in Exodus sufficiently shows.

The Jews of the apostle Paul's time sinned in a similar manner to the Egyptians, hardening their hearts and abusing God's goodness; and all this after a long display of His loving kindness.

They were prepared for destruction, they were ripe for punishment; and that power, which God was making known for their salvation, having been so long and so much abused and provoked, was now about to show itself in their destruction as a nation.

In contrast, verses 23 and 24 speak positively of us, the called, as the "vessels of mercy," who continue to appreciate the value of His longsuffering as His will is carried out in our lives. God is completing each one of us. In the meantime we are continuing to receive His longsuffering kindness, rather than His well-deserved wrath. It is something that we can be immensely thankful for. We should include it in our prayers, thanking Him for His longsuffering toward us, to give us time to repent of our shortcomings.

The implication in Romans 2 is that a Jewish auditor, heartily endorsing the verdict rendered concerning the Gentiles, fails to realize his own plight.

True judgment rests on the ability to discern the facts in a given case. If one is able to see himself as being in the hopelessness of the Gentile, he should logically be able to see himself as being in the same predicament. But he is so taken up with the faults of others that he does not consider his own failures. The person is looking at the faults of others and not seeing his own. Seeing the faults of others and the longsuffering of God toward that person should enable us to see the longsuffering that God has toward us.

Romans 2:1-4 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Here God is described as forbearing and longsuffering. Forbearance is a refraining from

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the enforcement of something such as a debt, right, or obligation that is due. Forbearance is literally, His holding in, or restraining his indignation, or His forbearing to manifest his displeasure against sin.

In verse 4, longsuffering indicates God's slowness to anger or His continuing to allow them to commit sins for a long time without punishing them. It does not differ essentially from forbearance. This is shown by His not coming forth at the moment that sin is committed, to punish it. He spares people from day to day, and year to year, to give them opportunity to repent, and be saved.

The way in which people despise or abuse the goodness of God is to infer that He does not intend to punish sin. They think they can do it safely and instead of turning from it, to continue in committing it more constantly, as if they were safe from judgment. Most people react exactly as Ecclesiastes 8:11 predicts, "Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

There is no more decisive proof of the wickedness of the human heart than this disposition to abuse the goodness of God. Further, because He shows kindness and forbearance, the human heart takes occasion to plunge deeper into sin, to forget His mercy, and to provoke Him to anger.

Since God is a God of justice, He cannot endure sin forever. Even though God bears long and is slow to anger He must ultimately punish all who do not repent, and who do not trust in Him for salvation. Longsuffering is proof of God's goodness, faithfulness, and His desire to grant us salvation.

Luke 18:6-8 Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said." And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

The point of verse 7 is that our longsuffering God untiringly listens to His elect as we pray in our continuing trials, while He waits for the proper time to act on our behalf.

Although God puts off avenging His people for a long time, and greatly tries our patience, nevertheless He will avenge us. He will definitely do it because He promises throughout Scripture that the judgment day will come. Many times He tries our faith, like

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gold refined in fire. Time and again He allows our persecutions and trials to continue for a long time. It almost appears as if He will not intercede. But, according to His plan and time frame He will intervene for our ultimate benefit. Although He is so longsuffering, and we are so thankful that He is, we also have to be longsuffering toward Him and toward others in God's church as well.

As with all other characteristics of God, Jesus Christ exemplifies longsuffering. Christ's forbearing and enduring of sinners demonstrates this same longsuffering. We have a promise that our Savior Jesus Christ will be long-tempered with us when we repent and dedicate ourselves to the obedience and service of the great God. As in everything else Jesus Christ is the standard by which righteousness is measured, therefore He is the standard by which longsuffering is measured.

Paul expresses to Timothy that he himself has received the result of Christ's longsuffering. Remember, "longsuffering" implies patient endurance in respect to persons, not to things or circumstances.

I Timothy 1:16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering [makrothumia], as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

We have the personal responsibility—the Christian duty—to pass on His longsuffering to others, in the same way Jesus Christ has, and is, to us.

Paul followed Christ's example by passing on the blessing of Jesus' longsuffering and forbearance to the church as he also does in his relationship with Timothy. For example, Paul exhorts Timothy in II Timothy 4:2 to "convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering."

There is no getting around the fact that God's "delay" is gracious; it is not caused by inability or indifference on God's part. The scoffers argue that God is slow to keep His promise of the new age that is to come, and evidently many Christians are influenced by this false belief.

II Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God's time frame is in perfect harmony with His longsuffering.

II Peter 3:14-15 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

Peter says, "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." In verse 15, it appears that Peter is citing Paul, as agreeing that the fact that God withholds His hand is to be regarded not as indifference on God's part, but as an opportunity for us to repent and to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior.

As we read earlier in Romans 2:4, Paul speaks of those who despise the riches of God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, forgetting that His kindness is designed to lead us to repentance and salvation.

Both Peter and Paul are in agreement that the fact that God withholds His hand is never to be used as an excuse for sinning, but always as a means of repentance and an opportunity for correction or improvement in our lives.

Though ancient Israel turned to idols and wickedness, God pleaded with them to repent and call on His name. He told Solomon, if His people would humble themselves, pray to Him, seek Him, and turn from their wicked ways He would forgive them.

II Chronicles 7:12-14 Then the LORD appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him: "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

God warned them, then He waited, sending His prophets for generations before He exiled Israel and Judah to foreign lands.

II Chronicles 7:19-20 "But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and go and serve other gods, and worship them," then I will uproot them from My land which I have given

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them; and this house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast out of My sight, and will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples.

This is exactly what we are seeing happen to this nation today. God suffers long with us so that we may have time to repent and then He will forgive our sins.

Ultimately, forgiveness is necessary in longsuffering. Paul illustrates the concept of longsuffering as self-restraint that enables us to bear injury and insult without resorting to hasty retaliation. We can see, by the example of God the Father and Jesus Christ, what we must do in our relationships. This is not only our relationships as brethren, but in our relationships between brothers and sisters and between husbands and wives. In one sense, this is also a marriage sermon, telling us how to get along as husband and wife. Marriages take longsuffering from both parties.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

The two Greek words translated, "bearing with" and "forgiving" expand the thought of longsuffering. Paul uses them to show that Christians who are truly longsuffering will manifest this attitude by two things that he mentions here in this scripture.

A willingness to bear with those whose faults or unpleasant traits are an irritant to us.

A willingness to forgive those that we have grievances against.

"Bearing with," suggests the thought of putting up with things we dislike in others. There is no qualification there other than sin. We certainly are not to like sin in someone else but we do have to suffer long with them.

"Forgiving": a word used in Colossians 2:13 of God's action toward us, has the sense of forgiving freely with humility and kindness.

Sometimes a person's desire for forgiveness is not exhibited in an apology, but may only manifest itself in repentance. The person may have offended us, but all of his future

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actions may show a change in behavior or speech toward us. We have to realize that most of the time we feel offended no apology will follow, partly because the offender does not even realize that he has offended us. So forgiveness does not require an apology first as far as our relationships with each other.

We know that there is no limit to the number of times we must forgive, that is part of the longsuffering we must exhibit as a reflection of the attributes and gifts of God.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

The principle there is that there is no limit on how many times. Forgiveness of fellow members of God's church cannot possibly be limited by frequency or quantity. As the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant shows, all of us have been forgiven more than we will have a chance to forgive others.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

Verse 31 has a negative sense about it, and verse 32 has a positive sense. Anger signifies an unjustifiable human emotion that manifests itself in noisy assertiveness and abuse. The cancerous source of all these regrettable reassertions of the old self is named as malice.

True Christians have mostly conquered these malicious traits, and as a result display kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. The word "be" in verse 32 is really "become" in the original. It says "become kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you." Paul realizes that we have not yet attained the full measure and stature of Jesus Christ.

Our forgiveness of others is to be like God's forgiveness of us. It must flow from ungrudging love.

In order to forgive, we must show evidence of longsuffering. We must imitate our heavenly Father in longsuffering, because He has been longsuffering with us and

because vengeance belongs to God alone.

Longsuffering shows evidence of godly love. It is an intricate quality of Christian character. As the called of God, we are to put on and clothe ourselves with longsuffering. By doing this, in unity as a church, we rid ourselves of, or at least dramatically reduce, friction and contention within God's church.

Beginning in chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul moves from the doctrinal to the practical application. He continues to interweave doctrine with the moral exhortations that make up most of chapters 4 through 6. The predominant element in the context of praise and worship of the early part of chapter 4 is the need for Christians to live together in love and unity.

Ephesians 4:1-3 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We have received a calling with which we were called, not one that we have acquired by self-effort. Those who share such a divine call constitute the church—the called-out ones.

In verse 2, Paul specifies four graces that evidence this essential proportion between calling and character. He mentions humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and forbearance. These are all qualities necessary for good relations with others within the church first, and then within our contacts with individuals in the world.

Longsuffering is a characteristic of God Himself. It can mean steadfastness in the endurance of suffering but here it more describes reluctance to avenge wrongs. We are to display this quality to one another and to everyone else.

We should have loving forbearance toward others. To bear with another is to put up with his or her faults and idiosyncrasies, knowing that we have our own. Love is a recurring theme in Ephesians. The four graces Paul recommends here are all aspects of love and exemplified to perfection in Christ.

I mentioned the word "idiosyncrasies." I think we could probably have a social here and sit down and each person describe their own idiosyncrasies, and we would just laugh so hard because they are quite funny. But it seems that in a one-on-one relationship with

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each other, our idiosyncrasies, differences, and preferences in the way we do things cause friction and irritation among God's people. That is what God is getting at when He is talking about longsuffering in His written Word. We are to bear long with one another's idiosyncrasies and mannerisms.

Paul tells the saints in Colosse that he prays that they will have the opposite of wrath or a spirit of revenge. He speaks of even-temperedness, the attitude that in spite of injury or insult does not retaliate. Even temperedness can be traced to the quality of love.

In I Corinthians 13, Paul says longsuffering belongs to the love, without which all else is nothing.

I Corinthians 13:4-7 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

In verse 4, "suffers long," translated from *makrothumia*, is especially related to love, in a similar way that patience *hupomone* is especially related to hope.

I Thessalonians 1:3 "remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father."

In comparison, patience is cheerful or hopeful endurance, patient waiting. Therefore, longsuffering is the quality of patiently tolerating the actions of others against us, even when we are severely tried.

True longsuffering can only be produced as a fruit of the Spirit, that is as a result of using God's Holy Spirit, and not by itself as an independent character trait. It is more a gift that is received, than a virtue that is achieved. It is not a form of ethical conduct, but it grows from the common root of love and bears fruit only along with the other fruit of the Spirit.

Love takes precedence in the list of spiritual gifts of the Spirit and carries the attribute that it suffers long. Longsuffering is long and patient endurance of offense. Since patience is an aspect of longsuffering, they are very close in their general intent.

Longsuffering is the spirit that can take revenge if it liked, but utterly refuses to do so. It is the spirit that will never retaliate.

This is the exact opposite of Greek virtue. Greek virtue was the refusal to tolerate any insult or injury. To the Greek, the great man was the man who went all out for vengeance. To the Christian, the great man is the man who, even when he can, refuses to do so.

"Forbearing one another in love," as Paul says in Ephesians 4:2, beautifully expounds the meaning that attaches to the word *makrothumia*, which is translated longsuffering.

Makrothumia is patience exhibited under ill-treatment by others, for which the English word longsuffering is used. This characteristic should be in every Christian. It is included as a fruit of the Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [*makrothumia*], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law."

I find it interesting that God did not use the word *hupomone* but *makrothumia*. He is not saying patience as much of it is translated although the aspect or the concept of patience is certainly there and indicated. You will notice that all of the fruits of the Spirit have to do with relationships. Without longsuffering we cannot walk worthily of our Christian calling. It must be exercised towards everyone. It is one of the great characteristics of love. There can be no such thing as Christian fellowship without longsuffering. If a member of God's church refuses to produce longsuffering with the help of the Holy Spirit, he is not really a part of the fellowship of God's church. He is a hypocrite!

It was God's longsuffering that delayed in the days of Noah until the ark was built. It is that very same longsuffering that is responsible for man's salvation. In His longsuffering, God bears with the sins, the foolishness, and the disobedience of humanity.

The great obligation that rests on us as Christians, is to be as longsuffering with others as God has been with us! God is longsuffering with our shortcomings. We should be longsuffering with each other. Praise be to God that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation!