

# “LONGSUFFERING”

## The Fourth Characteristic of “the Fruit of the Spirit”

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A fourth characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit" is longsuffering. Some have defined the term as "long on suffering." Certainly, this is an easy way to remember the basic concept. A couple of synonyms of "longsuffering" are forbearance and patience. W.E. Vine wrote, "Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy..." Further, the concept carries with it the idea of the "patient enduring of evil" and the "slowness of avenging injuries" (The Analytical Greek Lexicon).

As Vine pointed out, longsuffering is the opposite of anger. Remember in context Paul is contrasting "the fruit of the Spirit" with "the works of the flesh." This contrast is readily seen in longsuffering. Antonyms of longsuffering are "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, [and] strife" – all "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:19-21). "Hatred" is enmity, while "variance" is strife and contention. "Emulations" are indignation, and wrath is fierceness or outbursts of anger. All are in contrast to and opposite of longsuffering. In other words and in application, a person does not portray longsuffering while holding a grudge, being contentious, or exploding in anger.

Longsuffering is an attribute of God. David, the Psalmist wrote, "But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Psalm 86:15). We can all be thankful that because of God's compassion and graciousness, He is forbearing and patient with us. While we deserve death because of our sin and rebellion, He is longsuffering. Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God is not indifferent about His promise of the second coming and judgment. The reason for His apparent delay is His longsuffering. God is not willing that any should be lost. He desires "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He gives mankind opportunity and time in order for all men to come to Him in repentance. Knowing the hard-heartedness of man, it is little wonder that Peter later wrote, "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation"(2 Peter 3:15).

Noah serves as an example of the longsuffering of the Lord. Peter wrote, "Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days

of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water" (1 Peter 3:20). Just as God is longsuffering with us, He was longsuffering with Noah's contemporaries and gave them opportunity to repent. Sadly, they did not, and when judgment came, only eight souls were saved! What a sad commentary on that generation. Could this be said of our generation? One day, God will send forth His Son and "all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). God is longsuffering towards usward, but His longsuffering and patience will come to an end, and judgment day will be upon us. When that great and notable day comes, where will you spend eternity? Today is the day to prepare! So, be prepared. Judgment day is coming!

In the parable of the unjust judge, Jesus taught among other principles the longsuffering of God (Luke 18:1-8). In this parable, a wicked judge grants the petition of a widow who continually petitioned him. Like the unjust judge, God grants petitions. If the unjust judge will grant the petition of a persistent widow, how much more will God, the righteous Judge, grant to His own faithful servants who continually beseech Him? Concerning longsuffering, Jesus said, "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (Luke 18:7). The word translated "bear long" is the same original word and is usually translated longsuffering. We, like the persistent widow, continually make requests of God. Oftentimes, we make requests over and over and over again. Many times, it is not because we do not believe God will grant our prayers, but because of our own weaknesses and needs, we beseech God continually. In spite of such weaknesses, in spite of our failings, in spite of our lack of faith, God is longsuffering with us and grants our continual petitions.

In the midst of exposing the sin and hypocrisy of the Jews, Paul gives a ray of hope. He wrote, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" (Romans 2:4). Throughout their history, the Jews saw and experienced the goodness of God, but they continually rejected Him. Nonetheless, God was forbearing and longsuffering with them desiring their repentance. Like so many people, they were anxious to receive God's goodness, but they refused to be lead down the road of repentance. All men have seen the riches of God's goodness. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights..." (James 1:17). Those good and perfect gifts should lead all men to repentance, but sadly too many are like the Jews of old and reject the riches of God's goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.

Since longsuffering is an attribute of God, then we also know that Christ is longsuffering. In 1 Timothy 1:16, Paul wrote, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." When Paul was persecuting the church; when Paul was victimizing Christians; when Paul was rejecting the truth; Jesus was provoked, but He restrained Himself showing longsuffering towards Paul. The same could be said of us! "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "While we were yet sinners," while we transgressed God's law (1 John 3:4), while we knew to do good but did it not (James 4:17), while we violated our own consciences (Romans 14:23), while we lived in unrighteousness (1 John 5:17), Christ was longsuffering towards us. We deserved death, separation from God, but instead "Christ died for us." "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." (1 John 3:1).

Since God and Christ are longsuffering, it is only natural that Their servants be longsuffering. To the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2). The quality of longsuffering has its foundation in love. Paul further wrote, "Love suffereth long" (1 Corinthians 13:4). In other words, love is longsuffering. It keeps on suffering long. It keeps on being long-enduring. It keeps on exercising patience, forbearance, and perseverance. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John 4:11). Brethren, if God so loved us that He is longsuffering with us, we ought also to love one another in the same way and be longsuffering with one another. With this application, consider Colossians 3:12-13 "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

God and Jesus are our examples of longsuffering. The Holy Spirit tells us through the Word He inspired to be longsuffering. Let us, therefore, put on longsuffering. Let us be longsuffering towards one another and towards the world. Let us have this — another characteristic of "the fruit of the Spirit."