

## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: LONGSUFFERING

Galatians 5:22-23

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 6:1-7:1

**Intro:** In our study of the fruit of the Spirit, we come today to the fourth characteristic: longsuffering. We have had the first three: love, joy, and peace. Remember as I have reminded you each time we are dealing with “the fruit of the Spirit,” not *the fruits (plural) of the Spirit*. All nine of these characteristics make up a single fruit, a single work of the Spirit of God. They all are to be seen in their perfection in our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s purpose in saving us is to make us like our Savior. There may be times in our lives when the Spirit’s emphasis is upon one or another of these spiritual traits, but the Holy Spirit bears all of these in all of our lives to make us all like our Savior. This is what spiritual growth is. These words describe a true Christian. You won’t see these perfectly displayed in any of our lives, but you will see them, and see them in an increasing way if we are growing in the Lord.

Some of you might say that you are surprised that holiness is not mentioned as one of these characteristics. *These are holiness!* The fruit of the Spirit *is* holiness, and as Galatians 5 clearly indicates in two places, in verse 16, and in verse 25, this fruit is the result of the Spirit’s work as we walk in the Spirit. To be holy, to be like Christ, does not just mean that there are certain things that we do not do. It means that all right. But our emphasis needs to be on what we are becoming. There is power in the positive work of the Spirit that delivers us from the sins of our flesh. That is what Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is all about.

So we need to be continually checking our own hearts, and the way we live, to determine how we are doing spiritually, how we are doing in our relationship with the Lord. As a child of God do I manifest love toward God and toward the people of God, toward the Word of God, even toward people in the world? Do I know, or am I learning, how to rejoice in the Lord day by day? What about the condition of my heart? Do I know what the peace of God is that passes all understanding? It is not enough for us to search our own hearts. We need to do what David did, and call upon the Lord to search our hearts. See Psalm 139:23-24.

Today we come to the word “longsuffering.” It is the Greek word μακροθυμία. It appears fourteen times in the NT, and in all but two times is translated, longsuffering. Those two times are in Hebrews 6:12 and

## The Holy Spirit - #16 (2)

James 5:10. Hebrews 6 12 tells us, reading verse 11 with it,  
11 And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:  
12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience (longsuffering) inherit the promises.

James 5:10 says,

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering and patience (longsuffering).

One of the best ways to find out what a word means in Scripture, is to see how it is used in Scripture. Obviously the word is similar to patience, but they are not exactly the same. It is true that in exercising longsuffering you would have to be patient. Archbishop Trench says in his book on NT Synonyms that one difference between patience and longsuffering, is that the patient person is in a situation that he can't change, and so has to be patient, but a longsuffering person is in a situation that he can change, but chooses not to do so. I suppose there would be situations where that distinction would not hold up, but possibly in most cases that is true.

I personally like the way Adam Clarke in his commentary written back in the middle 1800's expressed what longsuffering means. Let me read to you how he described this important Biblical word. He said it means:

Longmindedness, bearing with the frailties and provocations of others, from the consideration that God has borne long with ours; and that, if He had not, we should have been speedily consumed: bearing up also through all the troubles and difficulties of life, without murmuring or repining [complaining]; submitting cheerfully to every dispensation of God's providence, and thus deriving benefit from every occurrence (VI, p.413).

In all of these words which make up the fruit of the Spirit, there are difficulties to be faced. They all require a full measure of the grace of God, and we need to remember that they make up "the fruit of the Spirit," not the product of our own efforts. We have responsibilities toward the Spirit in manifesting the fruit which He produces in our lives, but there are struggles and failures that we all encounter. We are not always loving. We are not always joyful. We are not always peaceful in our hearts. But our times of failure are not to lead to despair, but to a greater relationship with the Holy Spirit and greater dependence upon Him. As the Author of Scripture He uses the word to produce in us love, joy, peace, and longsuffering. These are not mere human traits. They are divine, and are pro-

duced in us by the Spirit of God.

Now I want us to look together at the longsuffering of God, and then at what the Scriptures say about the longsuffering of God as it is exercised in our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **I. THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD.**

The Bible makes it very clear that it is by the longsuffering of God that the world has not been destroyed by now, and it is by the longsuffering of God that those of us who are saved have been saved.

One passage that shows this is in Romans 9. Here is what Paul had to say about the way the world has benefitted by the longsuffering of God, and how we who are saved have benefitted from the longsuffering of God.

Listen to these words from Romans 9:22-24:

22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

One of the greatest examples of the longsuffering of God is to be seen in the account of the flood in the days of Noah. The Apostle Peter wrote of how “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 Pet. 3:20). Do you know how long God waited while the ark was being prepared? Genesis 6:3 says that it was one hundred and twenty years. How is that for an illustration of the longsuffering of God. It is in describing the conditions on earth at that time that Genesis 6:5 through 8 that the Holy Spirit has given us this information:

5 And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

6 And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

7 And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

## The Holy Spirit - #16 (4)

8 But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Gen. 6:5-8).

We look at the world in our day, and wonder how God can tolerate all of the sin that has really saturated the world. There are two explanations for this. The first is that God is a longsuffering God. And second, God has an elect people that are yet to be saved.

Why did God tolerate what Israel was doing to Him in those forty years in the desert between Egypt and Canaan? It was because He is a longsuffering God, and He had His own purposes to fulfil.

Even today people feel that they can do whatever they want to do, and do it as often as they want to do it, and nobody cares. The most tragic mistake people can make, and it is being made in our country on a national basis, is to rule God out of their thoughts..

Even in connection with our salvation, every single one of us has multiplied reasons for thanking God that He is longsuffering. The Apostle Paul expressed it concerning his own salvation in 1 Timothy 1:12-17:

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 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.

17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

This means that our salvation fits into the pattern of the Apostle Paul's salvation. We may not be guilty of the death of Christians like He was, but we are just as unworthy of salvation as he was. Isn't it true that the longer we are saved, the more we marvel at God's longsuffering with us, not only before we were saved, but since we have been saved when we consider how many times we have shown ourselves unworthy of our

salvation.

But now let me speak of

## II. OUR LONGSUFFERING.

How do we score on this? I have been speaking of God's longsuffering toward the world, and especially to us, His people. But let me ask, How longsuffering are we with God? When the Apostle Paul in speaking about His ministry, he said it was "by longsuffering." And he had been speaking about "afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings," and so on. Serving the Lord for Paul was not a bed of roses. I often have wondered how I would have done if the Lord had called me to a ministry like Paul had. When Paul said there in 2 Corinthians 6, "by longsuffering," he meant that he wanted to respond to the Lord the way the Lord had ministered to him. As Adam Clarke expressed it in the quotation I read to you earlier in my message, Paul was "bearing up , , , through all the troubles and difficulties of life without murmuring or repining; submitting cheerfully to every dispensation of God's providence, and thus deriving benefit from every occurrence."

None of us likes trouble, trials, suffering of any kind. But God the Holy Spirit by His work in our hearts is preparing us to be longsuffering toward God, longsuffering toward each other, and even longsuffering toward people in the world who don't know the Lord. The Lord Jesus was being longsuffering when He prayed on the Cross, looking down on the Roman soldiers who had nailed Him to the Cross, and out upon that mob who was enjoying every minute of His suffering, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

But what else did Paul do for the Lord's people? He prayed for them that they would be longsuffering. This was a part of his prayer for the saints in the church at Colosse which we find in Colossians 1:10-12:

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

## The Holy Spirit - #16 (6)

And then as Paul was writing his last letter to be included in the Word of God, he reminded Timothy of the example that he has sought to set before him in this words found in 2 Timothy 3:10-12:

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life,  
purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

And then in chapter 4 he exhorted Timothy with these words:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

To Paul's dying day he was writing, and I am sure, speaking, about long-suffering.

**Concl:** "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering." There has to be an order in which the Apostle Paul mentioned the fruit of the Spirit. Beginning with love, then moving on to joy, and arriving at peace, we are ready, by God's grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit, for longsuffering. Whatever may be our circumstances, whoever may be the people in our lives – all of the people, saved and unsaved, to show long-suffering in it all, God will be glorified and we will be blessed, and what God has done and is doing in all of our lives, may be the very circumstances that will turn others to Christ.

Closing verses: Col. 3:12-14.