

Text: Gal. 5:22

Title: "The fruit of the Spirit in the life of Christ - Longsuffering"

Time: 8/25/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: We are focused on the fruit-inspection part of walking in the Spirit so that we will in no way fulfill the lusts of the flesh. This is the promise of Galatians 5. Christ is our example as the One who bore perfectly this fruit of love, joy, peace, and now this morning, longsuffering.

We need to begin by defining *longsuffering* in biblical terms, and that assignment can be helped by comparing it to a synonymous word that is important to our lives as Christians, the virtue of *patience*. I would like to illustrate the difference between biblical longsuffering and biblical patience by telling you about a couple of tests my sons went through on the golf course last Tuesday. For one they needed patience; for the other longsuffering.

The course included narrow fairways, thick woods, doglegs left and right, sloping greens, large bunkers, hot sun, and gusts of wind. These aspects of the game required what we mean by *patience* in a biblical sense. *Patience* is the ability to endure difficult things. On the second hole, I hit my golf ball into the woods, and as I addressed the ball to hit my second shot, I came to realize that I was standing on a hornets' nest because one of them stung me in the knee. Getting through that experience without quitting the round required what the Bible calls *patience*, the ability to endure difficult things.

Longsuffering is a bit different from this in a biblical sense. I think of a moment during the round in which my sons

needed a great deal of longsuffering. We were well into the front nine, and I was scoring my best score for nine holes so far this year. I was beating Kent again and Brandon for the very first time. Brandon, trying to offer me a kind compliment said something like, "Boy Dad, you are having a good round. You are beating both of us." Testing their possession of longsuffering, I responded, "Yeah, but you guys are easy."

You see the difference? *Patience* is what we need to endure difficult things. *Longsuffering* is what we need to endure difficult people. Scripturally, longsuffering is one of God's attributes, but patience is not. God endures difficult people, but it is impossible for Him to have to endure difficult things, because nothing is difficult for Him as an omniscient and omnipotent person.

Becoming a man, Jesus patiently endured difficult things like the cross (Heb. 12:2). He endured the shame, the pain, and the loneliness. He also endured difficult people with longsuffering, and we see that especially in His prayer from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

During my first month as the pastor of this church, I received a phone call from a former attendee who wished me well but explained that she could never return to our church because of the offense she received from the people who were here. This word from the cross came to mind, so I shared it with her. Jesus from the cross could say, "Father forgive them," because He possessed the virtue of longsuffering. He was slow to anger in a way our flesh fails to be.

Longsuffering is a fruit of the Spirit, and it is a fruit produced perfectly in the life of our Savior, who was the

Christ. I want us to see three things this morning about the longsuffering of Christ from our New Testaments.

I. Christ's longsuffering is His compassionate forgiveness of His servants' sins (Matt. 18:26).

Application: When in the face of his condemnable indebtedness and inability to pay his debts this servant begs for patience from his lord, he uses the same word translated *longsuffering* in Galatians 5. Perhaps more irritating to the lord than the irresponsibility of his servant's financial crisis was the pathetic lying promise he makes in desperation at the end of the verse, "I will pay thee all." Of course, he would not pay all. He had nothing with which to pay, and his debt was ten thousand talents, an unpayable amount for any servant.

Now does the lord possess this longsuffering to give to His pitiable servant? He does, and it is described the next verse (v. 27). His longsuffering is compassionate, because love suffers long. His longsuffering is forgiving too. This is how God's plan of salvation of sinners works, and it works for the sinner with the greatest sin debt.

Because we have sinned against our holy God, we have a debt that we cannot pay and one that condemns us justly. Our only hope is that this holy lord also possesses the longsuffering of compassionate forgiveness. And He does. Have you recognized your need for His compassionate forgiveness this morning? Has your debt been forgiven?

Illustration: The last book that John Bunyan, Puritan Baptist forefather and author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote was titled *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*. It was a sermon series

he preached on the Lord's instruction in Luke 24 that the preaching of the gospel was to begin in Jerusalem.

Bunyan thought that remarkable, and it was. He put his surprise about this instruction this way: "Yea, so hardened at this time was this Jerusalem in her sins, that she feared not to commit the biggest, and to bind herself, by which, under the guilt and damning evil of it; saying, when she had murdered the Son of God, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.'"

That is a pretty big sin-debt. Yet Jesus said, "Start in Jerusalem," when it came to the preaching of the gospel. The Jerusalem sinners were mightily saved, for Jesus countered their prayer for God's judgment with His own longsuffering prayer for their forgiveness: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

On Pentecost Day the 120 disciples became thousands in answer to our Lord's prayer. Christ's longsuffering compassionately forgives the sins of His servants. Have you been forgiven? Do you appreciate the glory of that forgiveness? Are there sinners who need your compassionate forgiveness?

II. Christ's longsuffering is His desire that sinners have more time to repent (2 Pet. 3:15).

Application: The Lord of 2 Peter 3 is Jesus Christ (vv. 2, 18). In this chapter, Peter is dealing with an attack of scoffers who disbelieved the prophecies of Christ's second coming (vv. 3-4). Peter explains that the fulfillment of these prophecies tarries because of the longsuffering of the Lord, and this longsuffering of the Lord must be seen as part of His work of salvation. If Peter's addressees needed to see that

only a few decades after Jesus's ascension, how much more do we need to trust this truth nearly two millennia hence?

Peter compares the unbelief of these scoffers to the unbelief of the world that perished in the days of Noah (vv. 5-6). Our Lord's longsuffering was on display in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20). Noah was not only a builder of a boat, but also a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). He began to herald that the flood was coming 120 years prior to the first drop of rainfall (Gen. 6:3). Tragically, only Noah and his family cared to get in the boat, and then God closed the door.

The longsuffering of Christ is the longsuffering of God who desires to give sinners more time to repent. Rom. 2:4, "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Rom. 9:22-23, "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: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory."

Illustration: I work part time in a job responsible for pricing plastic bottles. When I install a price record for billing a truckload of bottles, I have to give it an effective start-date and end-date. At the turn of the last century, systems like the one I use went to a new approach because of Y2K, and back then I was instructed to use an end-date for current pricing that was so distant into the future that we would never have to adjust it. The date is 12/31/2020, which seemed very far away in the year 2000, but now seems very soon indeed. We are going to have to change how we do pricing again.

Application: The longsuffering of Christ in each of our lives has an end-date, although we do not know what it is. For some, it seems very far away, but it may not be. For others, they see it coming soon. One hymn writer spoke of this end-date of longsuffering as "God's Final Call."

"Someday you'll hear God's final call to you
To take his offer of salvation true-
This could be it my friend if you but knew-
God's final call, God's final call.

"How can you live another day in sin,
Thinking some day with Christ you will begin?
O will you hear above the world's loud din-
God's final call, God's final call.

"If you reject God's final call of grace,
You'll have no chance your footsteps to retrace.
All hope will then be gone and doom you'll face.
O hear his call! God's final call."

Christ's longsuffering is His desire that sinners have more time to repent, but someday we will hear His final call. Now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation.

III. Christ's longsuffering is His example and expectation for us (Matt. 18:29, 2 Pet. 3:9).

Application: Clearly, Jesus spoke the parable of Matthew 18 not only to tell us that He is a longsuffering lord who forgives the sins of His servants, but also to tell us that we need to be longsuffering servants who forgive the sins of one another. Eph. 4:1-2, "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.”

And just as challenging to our hearts this morning is the truth that the longsuffering of the Lord that holds back judgment on sinners is actually a longsuffering toward us as believers. The Lord is waiting for us to herald the saving message of the gospel in word and life.

Paul put the responsibility this way in his letter to the Corinthian local church: “Awake unto righteousness and stop sinning; for some have not the knowledge of God, and I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor. 15:34). Our lack of obedient faith, our disobedient sin, keeps others from the knowledge of God, so the Lord puts up with us until we can get this right and do this better.

What will our response be? Will we treat one another with the longsuffering of compassionate forgiveness? Will we busy ourselves with a testimony of obedient faith in a world without the true knowledge of God?

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I want us to contemplate the truth that there is a dark side to the longsuffering of our Lord. The rejection of Christ’s longsuffering makes it a curse rather than a blessing.

Consider the words of Jeremy Taylor on Rom. 2:4: “For if God suffers men to go on in sins, and punishes them not, it is not a mercy nor a forbearance; it is a hardening of them, a consigning them to ruin and reprobation: and they themselves give the best argument to prove it; for they everyday multiply their iniquity, and every day grow more as an enemy of God.” Is that how we are responding to the Lord’s longsuffering toward us?

Or perhaps we should frame the question as Paul does: "Despisest thou the goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering of the Lord, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 4:2).

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching