

The Fruit of Longsuffering: Is Your Fuse Long Or Short?

Galatians 5:22; James 5:10

August 31, 2014

Rev. Greg L. Price

A natural and sinful tendency that we all possess is to let our anger boil over against the one who attacks us, provokes us, ridicules us, insults us, or persecutes us for doing what is right before God. In blasting that kind of a person with vengeful words or angry deeds, you may even feel justified (“He deserved it. Look how he mistreated me”). There is nothing more common than for us to react (or at least to want to react) in such a way to those who so unjustly provoke us (whether in our family, or within the church, or outside the church). And therefore there is nothing more needful than the fruit of longsuffering.

How did the faithful witnesses and martyrs of Christ (past and present) who were cast into prison, had their properties confiscated, their bodies tortured, and their loved ones murdered, subdue the passions within to explode in personal vengeance and bitterness? We may not be presently enduring the same degree of provocation and hostility as many of our faithful brethren from the past (and at the present) have experienced, but the insults, the mockery, the verbal attacks, or the loss of promotions may nevertheless come against us for our love of Christ, His gospel, and His commandments. For you see, our commitment to Christ, His truth, and His righteousness threatens the unbelieving world. For unbelievers know (in their heart) that if our commitment to Christ and to Scripture is right and true, it means their unbelief and their sinful life stand under the condemnation of the Lord. And so they lash out against us (and against Christ in us) because in their heart they realize the light within us reveals the darkness within them (John 3:19-20—“lest his deeds be *exposed* as evil”). It is at such times that the fruit of longsuffering is tested, matured, and grown in our lives as God’s adopted children.

As we continue our pursuit, not only to understand but to practice the fruit of the Spirit listed by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22, we now consider that good and necessary fruit of longsuffering. The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) The Meaning of Longsuffering (James 5:10); and (2) The Application of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

I. The Meaning of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

A. If we don't understand the meaning of longsuffering, we will not make the proper application of it in our lives (without knowledge, there is nothing to apply).

1. In James 5:10 we find the same Greek word that is used in Galatians 5:22 for the fruit of longsuffering (*macrothumia*—*macro*=long and *thumia*=anger; thus rather than having a short anger fuse when wronged, this is a fruit of the Spirit that has a long anger fuse when wronged). In fact, the context of James 5 is set within those trying circumstances in which Christians are mistreated and wronged (the rich and powerful unbelievers of this world who take advantage of poor Christians, James 5:1-6; and even our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who wrong us, James 5:9).

2. The fruit of longsuffering works in our heart to subdue the vengeful anger of retaliation against those who have wronged us, so that rather than vengeful anger spewing forth from our lips and in our behavior, rather the grace of mercy is shown in not giving those who have wronged us what we believe they may deserve. Dear ones, the fruit of longsuffering flows from a heart that is filled with the fruit of peace. Where the fruit of peace is having its work in our lives, there the fruit of longsuffering will not be hidden.

B. In order to better understand the word "longsuffering" (*macrothumia*) as used in James 5:10, let me briefly contrast it with the

word “patience” that is used in James 5:11 (*hupomone*), which we will be considering in the next sermon. Although these two words are similar (and at times even used together in the same verse or context— Colossians 1:11; 2 Timothy 3:10), yet these two words have different nuances.

1. Whereas *longsuffering* **does not retaliate** in anger under trial, *patience* **does not give up** under trial.

2. Thus, *longsuffering* is a **restraining fruit** (vengeful anger is restrained), whereas *patience* is a **persevering fruit** (it endures and will not surrender under the pressure of extreme trial).

3. Therefore, *longsuffering* has in view a holding back the floodgates of bitterness and the passion to get even and rather looks to the mercy of God (James 1:19). Rather than excusing ourselves by saying, “That is just my personality to respond in anger”, let us acknowledge our sin and seek God’s grace to grow in the fruit of longsuffering.

4. By way of illustration, *longsuffering* is the fruit that is manifested when you are wronged by that guy that races around you in his car and cuts in front of you on the highway. Rather than doing the same thing to him with a short fuse, you suffer long and pray for mercy that he would see his foolishness and that it would not lead to his own injury or the injury of others.

C. Longsuffering is not only a fruit of the Spirit which the Lord implants in the heart of every Christian at the moment of regeneration and which grows to varying degrees in the life of every Christian, but it is also an attribute of God Himself, who delays or withholds His just wrath and punishment against those who transgress His holy Law as an act of His goodness (Romans 2:4 [God’s goodness should be a motive and incentive to lead you to repentance rather than indulging and continuing in your sin]; 1 Timothy 1:15-16).

1. God is longsuffering in delaying His full anger against the

wicked at the present time, and manifests His goodness in granting to them the common blessings of this world. Think of the moment by moment curses and hatred directed to God by the wicked in this world, the continual profaning of His holy name, His worship, and His commandments, and the spitting of the wicked upon the mercy of God offered to sinners in the gospel of salvation. And yet God suffers long in this world with the wicked who deny Him, neglect Him, ignore Him, and blaspheme Him (but that longsuffering will come to an end).

2. Likewise, the Lord Jesus did not revile when He was reviled. He suffered long with those who rejected Him, whipped Him, spat upon Him, punched Him in the face, mocked Him, and crucified Him (the most painful death devised by the wicked heart of man in the ancient world). Remember how longsuffering the Lord was even with His own proud self-serving disciples (who contradicted Him, who denied Him, and who only thought of themselves as His death was approaching)? If ever anyone had the right to immediately judge His enemies with fire from heaven, it was the Lord Jesus. And yet when James and John desired to call down fire from heaven (in vindictive anger) upon a Samaritan village for their refusal to show hospitality to them, Jesus rebuked them with these words, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55-56). It was then a time for longsuffering, not for vengeance. The time for God’s righteous punishment might be delayed at that time, but it would be fully realized on the Day of Judgment.

D. Before moving on to the next main point, I want to make clear what “longsuffering” does not imply.

1. First, “longsuffering” does not imply that we do not have a right or duty to be righteously indignant when we (or our loved ones) are clearly, intentionally, and grievously attacked, mocked, or persecuted. We are commanded, “Be ye angry, and sin not” (Ephesians 4:26; Mark

3:5; John 2:13-17). The question is not whether we should be righteously indignant (we should), but whether we should be vindictively angry and only concerned about ourselves and getting even, rather than grieved that God's honor and His righteous commandments have been trashed. Is vindictive smoke pouring forth from our nostrils, or are sorrowful tears pouring down our cheeks over the transgressions of those who hate Christ within us?

2. Second, "longsuffering" does not imply that we cannot nor ought not to defend ourselves or others against verbal or violent attacks. We always have a duty to lovingly obey the Sixth Commandment to protect our own life and the life of our neighbor (whether that be by fleeing the encounter if possible [Matthew 10:23], or by vindicating our good name or the good name of a brother or sister in Christ whether past or present [2 Corinthians 3:1], or by using force if necessary to protect our own life or the life of our neighbor [Exodus 22:2-3; Esther 8:11-12; Luke 22:35-39]).

3. Third, "longsuffering" does not imply that we are to tolerate and accept that which is evil and is contrary to God's doctrine, worship, or commandments. Suffering long with those who transgress God's commandments or who persecute us for embracing and practicing God's commandments is not at all the same thing as tolerating such evil and wrongs. Toleration means we make allowance for that which is contrary to God's Word, and do not discriminate against that which is contrary to God's Word), however, "longsuffering" means we restrain our vindictive anger against those who perpetrate evil and wrong against us. We do not approve of it. We do not accept it. We do not grant it as an alternative view to that of God's commands. Since we cannot change the wicked heart of man who oppresses us, who speaks against us, who despises God's Word, and cannot change the wicked laws of men (at least at the present time) which violate the Law of God, we suffer long, not repaying evil for evil, but rather praying for those who curse us and

speaking falsely against us that God would show them mercy (Romans 12:14,17).

II. The Application of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

A. We now come to consider how James applies the fruit of longsuffering to the Christians living at that time who were despised and killed by unbelievers (James 5:1-6) or wronged by fellow believers (James 5:9). The application employed by James is two-fold.

1. The first application of the fruit of longsuffering employed by James is this: If the prophets of old (who were loved by God and who walked in the paths of righteousness and truth) were persecuted and tried, it may be expected that you who now seek to walk in the paths of the prophets of old will likewise face opposition from Satan, unbelievers, and even at times from believers. In other words, our persecution for the righteousness and truth of Christ is not a sign of God's disapproval, but to the contrary, it is a sign of God's approval, for so likewise they treated the prophets and apostles of old, and especially treated the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

a. **Think of righteous Job**, who suffered from Satan the loss of his possessions, his children, and his health, but would not curse the Lord. **Think of Shiphrah and Puah**, the brave Israelite midwives, who risked their own lives, but would not bow the knee to Pharaoh in murdering the newborn sons of the Israelites. **Think of godly Joseph**, who was sold into slavery by his brethren for the truth he spoke to them, and then was cast into prison when his master's wife sought to seduce him and lied concerning him. **Think of David**, a man after God's own heart, who fled for his life for several years as envious Saul sought to slay him. **Think of John the Baptist**, who was cast into prison and was beheaded, because he uncompromisingly proclaimed that King Herod was guilty of incest. **Think of the women**, who did not cower in fear of the Romans or

the Jews in standing near Christ at His crucifixion and going to anoint the body of Christ. **Think of the Apostle Paul**, who leaves this testimony: 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). **Think of the Apostle John**, who was exiled to the remote island of Patmos by Caesar for his faithful testimony that Jesus was Lord, not Caesar. **Especially, think of the Lord Jesus Christ**—God in flesh, who suffered as no man has suffered the contradiction of sinners, the reproach of the wicked, the scourging, mocking, punching, the crown of thorns, and the cursed, cruel, excruciating death of the cross.

b. Note how the prophets, upon whom God put the greatest honor, were most afflicted; and, when we think that the best men have faced the most severe opposition, hardships, and persecution, we should hereby be reconciled to take up our ranks with them, willingly coming along side of them in the grand parade of God's faithful witnesses (rather than being merely spectators in the grandstands). Who do we think we are to expect a path to glory strewn with rose petals, comfort, and ease, when the path to glory for Christ's faithful witnesses was strewn with threats for their lives, bruises, imprisonment, confiscation of property, poverty, being chased like wild animals, viewed as the scum of the earth, and suffering cruel deaths? We will more likely view our trials and tribulations to be exceptional (no one is suffering like me) when we are unfamiliar with biblical history and church history, which is a testimony of the fruit of longsuffering growing and ever growing in the lives of these faithful forefathers. If we do not walk in their steps, dear ones, we will walk in the steps of those who opposed them.

c. Thus, when you suffer the attacks of those who despise Christ within you, or the mistreatment of those who profess the name of Christ, look back to the biblical hall of fame of faithful witnesses and walk in their steps in order that you might never be numbered among those who are in the hall of shame (Hebrews 12:36-40—the promise of a our full inheritance). Rather than being overcome by evil, God calls you to grow in the fruit of longsuffering by remembering the

prophets, the apostles, your fellow-believers (past and present), and the Lord Jesus Himself. When you suffer for Christ, dear ones, you are in very good company!

d. In light of the suffering of these our faithful forefathers, the right question should not be, "Why should I suffer for being a faithful witness of Jesus Christ?" But rather the right question should be, "Why should I not suffer? Seeing what my forefathers in the faith have had to endure, why should I be spared?"

2. The second application of the fruit of longsuffering employed by James is this: If the prophets of old so manifested the fruit of longsuffering in their much greater trials than most of us have ever faced, we are encouraged to look to them as an example that the same fruit of longsuffering may be growing in us as it did in them. For they were men and women who were subject to like passions as we are (James 5:17). Not only their words (their doctrine) are an example to us to follow, but their behavior under severe trial, hardship, pressure to conform to the world, and persecution are an example for us to follow. Note, dear ones, that those who were the greatest examples of suffering were also the best and greatest examples of longsuffering. All such exhortations and commands to look back to the faithful witnesses of the past also provide us with the reason we look back to walk in the steps of the faithful Covenanted Church of Scotland, and our covenanted forefathers.

B. What is it that caused these suffering forefathers in the faith to grow in the fruit of longsuffering, and especially to grow in the fruit of longsuffering as they themselves were suffering so intensely?

1. They looked in faith to an all-loving God who loved them with an everlasting love and had saved them by His amazing grace (Romans 8:35-39). They were humbled and astonished at such love.

2. They looked in faith to an almighty God who is absolutely

sovereign and who controlled the very suffering they were enduring (Daniel 4:34-35; Proverbs 21:1). It was not Satan or man that was in absolute control of their trials and tribulations, but the God who loved them with an everlasting love.

3. They looked in faith to an all-wise God who could make no mistakes, but would use even their suffering for His glory and for the good of the church (Genesis 50:20), just as did with Christ (Acts 2:22-23).

4. They looked in faith to an all-just God who will in His time bring His righteous judgment upon their wicked persecutors (Revelation 19:1-2).

C. As God has been longsuffering with us in removing altogether the wrath and punishment we deserved and in delaying the severe (yet loving) discipline we might have received, so we are to be longsuffering with others even when we believe they deserve our vindictive anger and harsh words (Matthew 18:23-35). Dear ones, the greatest motive for you to grow in being longsuffering toward others is God's longsuffering toward you—His restraining His righteous anger toward you, pouring out that undiluted righteous anger that belonged to you upon His beloved Son, so that He might have mercy upon you. Though we may not be able to forgive all those who wrong us (because they do not repent or seek forgiveness), we can like God stand ready to forgive all who wrong us (Psalm 86:5). "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13). God's wrath has been delayed, let not another hour pass. Lay hold of His mercy now.

Copyright 2014 Greg L. Price. Distributed by Still Waters Revival Books (<http://www.puritandownloads.com>) by permission of the author, Greg L. Price. More free online written Reformation resources by Greg Price (John Calvin, John Knox, Samuel Rutherford, et al.) are at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/newslett.htm> and more free audio (MP3) Reformation resources by Greg Price (and many other Puritans, Covenanters, and Reformers) are at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/go/699> or at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/swrb>.