

Spirit works this fruit of longsuffering by guiding us in faith and humility and with an eternal perspective in life.

Is this fruit of longsuffering something you have growing in the garden of your heart and life? Do you want also this fruit to be evident in your life, and not just a little bit, but abundantly so? Those who are Christians by God's grace can be known in that they not only have and do respond to God's longsuffering towards them in Christ Jesus, but by God's grace they reflect and care about having the fruit of the Spirit, also this fruit of longsuffering.

Why is it important to have this fruit of longsuffering? The answer should be obvious. Being longsuffering towards others shows so much the grace and graciousness of God, and means living so much more in faith and reliance upon God, and brings honour and attraction to God as revealed in Christ and His Word. One will not be drawn to a person who is short-tempered, and being so has too often brought discredit to the gospel cause and our Christian witness. Having this fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering, however, brings a calm resolve and response to challenges and gives such an example to others. Being longsuffering and patient in life gives a positive Christian witness and helps promote running the race with perseverance and enduring unto the end, by God's grace and through His Spirit and Word as your guide and refuge. Just think too how much good it does in the marriage bond even, when as husband and wife you are being longsuffering towards each other. Being longsuffering is a positive precious fruit of the Spirit promoting so much good all around.

In eternity the fruit of longsuffering won't be necessary anymore. For those in hell can't know or show this grace and will never do so either, and those in heaven won't need this grace, for in glory there will be no more suffering of any kind and no patience needed anymore either. There will be nothing stressful or anyone irksome or anything or anyone troublesome there, never ever again! Even thinking of that blessed prospect can help us be longsuffering now and to pray for it more and more, looking to Jesus as our only Saviour and Lord.

The fruit of the Spirit is Christian longsuffering. Is it fruit that is growing in your heart and life by God's grace? To whom might you show this fruit today, and this week, a whole lot more than you have and should have? Will you show it prayerfully and to God's praise and for the wellbeing of your neighbour? Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT -LONGSUFFERING

Continuing with our series, now we will look at the fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering, sometimes translated as patience. We should say at the start while longsuffering and patience are very closely related yet they can also be distinguished. In Colossians 1:11, Paul also speaks of being “*strengthened with all might, according to his [God's] glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.*” The distinction might best be stated this way. Longsuffering is more about being patient in reference to trying and difficult people in our lives, while patience has more to do with holding strong in adverse and difficult circumstances of life. Paul says in Galatians 5:22, “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*”, and these first three details of the fruit focus on, as someone pointed out, our relationship with God. The next three details of the fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering, gentleness, and goodness, focus more on matters in our relationship with others, and then the last three, faith [faithfulness], meekness, and temperance [self control] focus more on ourselves and our inner attitude and character of life.

In studying this detail of the fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering, let me simply consider with you four questions about it. What is this fruit? Why is it the fruit of the Spirit? How does it become by the Spirit a fruit in our lives? Is this fruit of the Spirit important for us as confessing Christians?

What is this fruit of the Spirit, longsuffering? In the original, the first part of the word longsuffering is “makro”, and the second “thumos”, and the meaning literally is, being long-tempered, having mighty, makro restraint, forbearance, and control in the face of a difficulty or trial, especially with people too. When you are longsuffering you are slow to anger, as the Bible tells us our longsuffering God is in His character. The opposite of being longsuffering is having a short fuse and being quick to react in a frustrated, impatient, angry, short-tempered manner in a stressful challenging situation. The fruit of longsuffering is exactly what the word says, the gracious powerful capacity to suffer long under adversity, looking to God in faith to bring good out of the trial. Longsuffering is that noble ability to bear with either difficult or irksome people, or troublesome and difficult circumstances, without breaking down, seeking that God be praised in and through it all still, and His gospel cause promoted. When you are longsuffering, you suffer long, and are willing to do so, in Jesus' Name and for His sake, rather than ‘fly off the

handle' as the expression goes. When you have this fruit, longsuffering, you bear with people graciously, patiently, and lovingly, and you bear with afflictions and trials gracefully without murmuring and complaining, always trying to look for the positive and highlighting that. It should be understood that the fruit of longsuffering doesn't mean ever tolerating or excusing any sin or evil, but always responding to all sin and evil in a Christ-like manner in the way of holy compassion but with clear godly direction and admonition in a spirit of gentleness.

The Bible emphasizes the importance of this fruit and gives different examples of godly people showing longsuffering in their life. Because of lack of time, let me just quote these words of Paul in Ephesians 4:1-2, calling for being longsuffering. *"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."* Think too of how longsuffering and patient Jesus showed Himself all His earthly life, indeed, He is the ultimate example, something we will come back to later. Do you have this fruit of longsuffering? Can you tell more examples in your life of showing lack of longsuffering than of being longsuffering?

Having spoken about what longsuffering is, we now ask why is it a fruit of the Spirit, of the Holy Spirit especially? Here I have a three part answer to that question. The first part is that with the natural man, fallen in Adam and born in sin, any good and gracious, God-honouring qualities of faith are not to be found. As sinners by nature we are inclined not to be self-denying, but self-demanding, not to be sacrificial towards others, but selfish over against others. The sinful history of mankind is all about people by nature, time and again, not able to be longsuffering in the long run. Do you know yourself as a person by nature not having the grace of longsuffering and patience, forbearance and steadfastness, perseverance and endurance in the ways and will of God? If endurance in the race and a longsuffering mindset towards others was dependent on us, what would come of it? Very little, and nothing, indeed, miserable would be and are the results if it is dependent on us. Won't every honest person admit this sobering reality?

But here is the gospel again in our text, longsuffering is the fruit of the Spirit, and what we are incapable of from sinful self, God can and does work by His Spirit in His people, as many as trust and follow Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. II Peter 3 states clearly that God is longsuffering towards the world, showing He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. God is longsuffering towards sinners and to His people, as many as trust and follow Him especially. Yes, all for Jesus' sake. For the gospel is, Christ endured the just wrath of God against sin as Substitute for sinners. Jesus didn't experience longsuffering towards Himself, even as God's own Son, but all through His 33 years here on earth and at the end especially, Jesus came to face eternal judgment for sin, as Substitute, in the

place of sinners, on their behalf. And the precious gospel message is, through Jesus' perfect, almighty, and loving endurance of that punishment, and His perfectly righteous life also for sinners, now God in gracious longsuffering throughout the centuries calls sinners to come to the Saviour and be saved, yes, also still today, even with this message.

So why is this fruit, longsuffering, a fruit of the Spirit? Because it can never be something we produce of ourselves as sinners, and because it is what God is all about towards people like us, especially also as revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Added to this we can say, longsuffering is the fruit of the Spirit especially because the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity is the One Who has been sent forth to apply the salvation of God and to work with saving and sanctifying effects in our lives by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit delights to take of the things of Christ and show them to us, apply them to us, and give them to us, even for all who trust the gospel and are joined to Christ by a true and living faith. The Holy Spirit is out to draw sinners to Christ and to make God's people, saved by grace, to become also Christ-like, and this fruit of longsuffering is all a part of His precious ministry to that end.

How we should be ever thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit so desperately needed not only in order to become saved, but also to live as those who are saved, to God's praise and for our neighbor's good. Do you praise and love the Holy Spirit together with the Father and the Son? Do you pray also for the Holy Spirit to bless you with this fruit of longsuffering in life's journey?

How does the fruit of longsuffering become by the Spirit a fruit in our lives? We can answer this question by stating the Holy Spirit works this fruit in the way of working in our hearts and lives faith in the gospel, and having us learn and see in Christ Jesus, God's longsuffering towards us. When you are conscious of how undeserved is the least measure of God's longsuffering towards you, it can serve to make you tender and longsuffering towards others, and when dealing with difficult circumstances. Linked with this Spirit-worked faith in God as our refuge and strength is also the trust that the Saviour God will work out all things for good in His hands. Then you come to trust God that even difficult people or irksome troublesome situations may be intended by Him for some good purposes which, when you realize this by faith, helps you deal in a spirit of longsuffering with the challenge, whatever it be. How true what John Calvin said in this regard, "Patience is the fruit and proof of faith." Here we learn again the fruit of longsuffering is a Christian grace linked with hope and trust in the Lord and His power and good purposes in our lives. Being longsuffering as a fruit of the Spirit means again and again submitting whatever difficult, irksome, frustrating or disappointing person or situation to Him, asking that God will bless you and make you a blessing in spite of it or by means of it. The Holy