

2 Peter 3:9 “Our God Is Longsuffering”

Intro. The Bible says that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) and “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20). What if God struck us dead the moment we sinned? I dare say none of us would make it out of childhood. So if God is holy and just, and if He has declared that death is a consequence for sin, how come we do not die at the young age? The answer is found in my text of Scripture, as well as other Scriptures that I will share with you today.

Today we conclude this series of messages on the attributes of God. The last one that we will consider in this series is the fact that God is long-suffering. In other words, He is slow to wrath. This is another one of the wonderful attributes of God. We should be thankful that God is long-suffering. Where would we be if He were not?

So I want to begin this morning by sharing with you:

I. THE FACT THAT GOD IS LONGSUFFERING

Peter declares right here in our text that “The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us....” The word translated “long-suffering” (*macrothumia*)¹ literally means “slow to wrath.” When I see this word, I think of a long fuse instead of a short fuse. Peter’s statement is rooted in the Old Testament. In Ex. 34:6 the Lord made the following proclamation about Himself, “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth’....” In later generations this truth was declared by the authors of Scripture. Psa. 86:15 says, “But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.”² The prophet Jonah said, “I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm” (4:2). It looks like he had read Exodus 34:6. Nehemiah 9:17 says, “You are God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness....” Nahum 1:3 says, “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power....” Though sinful man has provoked God to wrath many times, He has held back His wrath time and time again. In Rom. 2:4 Paul mentions the “forbearance and longsuffering” of God. Forbearance has to do with present provocation; longsuffering relates to that provocation repeated, and continued for a length of time. God will often put up with a sinner for many years before striking in judgment. It is a wonder of wonders that a God so sensitive to sin³ and a God so able to avenge Himself should nevertheless exhibit such great forbearance and longsuffering!

One example of the fact that God is long-suffering is seen in the story of the world in Noah’s day. Genesis 6:5 says, “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” When the earth was corrupt and crying out for judgment, nevertheless 1 Peter 3:20 says that “the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared....” In Genesis 6:3

¹ The same word is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew phrase meaning “slow to anger.”

² Psalm 103:8 says, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.” (See also Psa. 145:8).

³ Hab. 1:13 says, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness....”

the LORD said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” He held back His wrath for 120 years! Would you agree that he was indeed “slow to wrath”? It was only after they had rejected the preaching of Noah for 120 years that God unleashed the flood of His wrath upon this world.

Likewise, He was so patient and bore with both Israel and Judah for hundreds of years before allowing their enemies to destroy their nations.

Another illustration of the fact that God is long-suffering is seen in the Son of God, Jesus Christ: Jesus was longsuffering, especially as He was mocked, beaten, and crucified. He “opened not his mouth” (Isa. 53:7) when oppressed and afflicted. 1 Peter 2:23 says that when Jesus “was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” He was the supreme example of being long-suffering.

We ought to appreciate the *patience* of God. Think how He has borne with you, and still bears with you, when so much in your life is unworthy of Him, and you have so richly deserved His rejection. Learn to marvel at His patience, and try not to test His patience any more.

Yet I must give balance to the truth of this attribute of God. God is long-suffering, but His wrath eventually falls. Even though God is slow to *explode* with anger, that does not mean that He is not angry about your sin and disobedience. It does not mean that God doesn't discipline His children who sin. The consequences of sin are usually delayed. We could not be free moral agents if we were struck dead or even afflicted the moment we sinned. No, usually the consequences of sin are reaped like the harvest of agriculture. You plant a seed, it sprouts into a small plants. Weeks and months go by before it bears fruit. Even so, God's wrath is typically slow in coming. Young people are easily deceived by this reality. You can smoke and probably face no serious consequences while you are young. You can eat almost nothing but fatty and sweet foods, and feel few adverse consequences, especially when you are young. You can lie, and seem to get by with it. You can dodge the bullet of judgment for a while, but as Moses said “be sure your sin will find you out” in due time.

God is indeed longsuffering, but be sure you understand this. There is a limit to His patience. In fact, after mentioning the fact that God is longsuffering in Romans 2:4, we see in the next verse what is really happening while God is holding back His wrath. He says, “...you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” The flood of God's wrath is slowly filling up behind the dam of His patience, and the full fury of the gathering storm of judgment will burst upon you some day, perhaps when you least expect it.

This truth about delayed judgment also affects many people's view of the reality of God. It seems that God is totally unresponsive to the sin of mankind. Year after year, man grows more and more corrupt, and yet God seems to do nothing, especially immediately. Does that mean that there is no God? No! As we shall see, God's love and mercy compels Him to delay judgment. But sadly, many misinterpret God's non-action as meaning that they are getting by with something, or that God doesn't care, or even that God doesn't even exist. But don't you think that for a minute! Don't be a fool like the atheist who raises his fist toward God and says, “God, if you are real, strike me dead.” And when God does nothing in response to his unbelief, the atheist just laughs at his silly so-called proof that there is no God. Even though God is slow to wrath, that does not mean His wrath will not eventually come to sinners who fail to repent and accept God's offer of salvation. The judgment of the flood eventually came to the world in Noah's day.

Now this discussion leads to my second primary point that I wanted to make today. Let us consider:

II. THE REASONS GOD IS LONG-SUFFERING

The Bible makes much of the patience and forbearance of God in postponing merited judgments in order to extend the day of grace and give more opportunity for repentance. We see this truth expressed in our primary text for today. The apostle is addressing those who scoff at the idea that Jesus is coming again to judge this world. The delay in His coming leads some to believe He is never going to come and judge this old wicked world. But we should not misinterpret the goodness and forbearance of God. Peter explains to his first-century readers that the reasons why the promised return of Christ to judgment has not happened yet is that God “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). So Peter gives two basic reasons why God is longsuffering.

A. Because God Is Compassionate - Here Peter argues from the character of God. God is longsuffering; He is patient because of the other attributes that are associated with His “slowness to anger.” Ex. 34:6 says the Lord is also “merciful and gracious.” The word translated “merciful” (*rachuwmm*) means that God is “compassionate.” His heart is moved with compassion. That is why Peter says that God is not willing that any should perish. Likewise, God says in Ezekiel 33:11, “As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (See also Ezek. 18:23). His will is not even that even “some” should perish. He desires to pardon and forgive. That is why Paul said in 1 Tim. 2:4 that He wants *all* to be saved. Peter says that the seeming delay of God in fulfilling His promise of the Second Advent is not any tardiness on His part to keep an appointment, but is due to His compassionate patience with sinners, giving the human race an opportunity, generation after generation, to repent and accept the salvation He has wrought out on the Cross. Yet God will not violate man’s will. While God is always willing to save man, the problem is that too often man is not willing to be saved.

The Apostle Paul said something similar in Rom. 2:4, “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” The goodness of God is not intended to encourage the sinner to continue in his sin, but it is meant to woo and win him away from it. He holds back His wrath while He tirelessly calls sinners to repentance. Likewise, the good-hearted nature of God is used as a basis for a call to repentance in Joel 2:13, where the prophet says, “So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.”

After the spies came back and gave the report concerning the Promised Land that expressed unbelief rather than faith, God expressed anger and He was ready to destroy the people. Moses began to intercede for the people, and in Numbers 14:18 he repeated back much of what he heard God say to him, “The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression....” Based on that truth he said in the next verse, “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy....”

Think of John Newton, the one who wrote, *Amazing Grace*. He was a godless sailor who became a slave trader. He went from sin to sin. Many times he became very sick, but he did not die. A number of times he suffered shipwreck, but he did not drown. Why did such a wicked man not die? Well we know from history that God’s patience paid off. The day came when John

Newton came to realize that even a sinner like he could be saved and forgiven. Later he wrote the line, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound! That saved a wretch like me." He also preached the amazing grace of God.

Now the second reason God is longsuffering is this:

B. Because He Is Giving You More Time to Repent – Peter says that God "is longsuffering toward us... that all should come to repentance." God is longsuffering to give sinners at least another opportunity to repent, for once Jesus comes again, the door of salvation will be shut forever for those who had opportunity to repent. He delays His wrath to hold open the door of salvation to repentant sinners. It is as if God keeps saying, "I will give him more time. Perhaps he will yet repent." Likewise, in Rev. 2:21 the Lord Jesus said of a certain woman in the church [Jezebel], "And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality...." Because of God's love, mercy, and compassion, He holds back His wrath to give us time to repent and be saved. That is why 2 Peter 3:15 says, "consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation...."

I wonder if there is someone here today that needs to realize that God is giving you another chance to be saved? My friend, you can slap God in the face; you can turn your back on Him; you can blaspheme Him, but you cannot keep Him from wanting to save you. You cannot keep Him from loving you, for He provided a Savior, His own Son, to die in your place. He has held back His wrath from you, but He did not hold back His wrath when Jesus became your Substitute! (Rom. 8:32). The Lord Jesus will save you if you will receive the salvation He offers.

Peter says that one requirement for salvation is repentance. Repentance is a radical change of mind that leads to a change in behavior. We need to turn from our sin and turn to Christ. My friend, things are not going to continue as they are now. Jesus is coming again and in that day God will no longer hold back His wrath. Accept Christ while you still have opportunity. You never know when you will die, or when Jesus will come again, and end all opportunity for salvation.

Sir, why is it that you were spared in battle, while some of your comrades were not? Why is it that you were spared on the highway when the people in the car right in front of you or behind you were not? Some of you have done some foolish things. You could have gotten yourself killed, but you were spared. Why was that? Surely, your preservation means that God was saying to grim Death, "Spare him, for he is mine. I intend to save his soul as well as to spare his life. It grieves Me to think of him going into a devil's hell. Give him another year." Because of God's forbearance, you have been given at least one more opportunity to be saved. Will you be saved today?

The logical corollary of this verse is that Christians should use the time before the Second Coming for preaching and sharing the gospel. For the gospel concerns a Person whose first coming ushered in the last days, and whose return will seal them.

III. WE SHOULD BE LONGSUFFERING LIKE GOD

Since God is longsuffering and we are to be like God, it is no wonder that the New Testament stresses that being longsuffering is a Christian virtue and duty. In Galatians 5:22 one of the fruits of the Spirit is being longsuffering. A person who is longsuffering does not allow himself easily to be easily provoked to anger, and doesn't seek revenge. So if you are saved and indwelt by the Holy Spirit you can manifest this characteristic of God. The Holy Spirit will help

you be longsuffering toward such people. This fruit is a patient endurance under ill-treatment, without an outburst of anger or thought of revenge. In Ephesians 4:2 Paul says, “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.”⁴ Emphasis on this virtue was greatly needed when believers suffered misunderstanding, harshness, and cruelty from those who did not share their faith. In 1 Cor. 13:4 we see that the first characteristic of love is being slow to anger. When you love someone, you will not explode at them with anger or retaliation. Explosive anger is a selfish reaction. But love is slow to anger because love puts the welfare of the other person ahead of our own welfare. Furthermore, in our anger we are likely to say something or do something that will hurt the other person, not help them. So to the degree that love is in control of your heart, you will be slow to anger.

Being slow to anger is not a sign of weakness but strength. Prov. 16:32 says, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” That is why Paul prays in Colossians 1:11 that God’s people would be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering....”

So what do you do when someone provokes you, or is mean to you? Are you generally longsuffering toward people? Or are you quick-tempered and easily provoked? Do you lash out at people with your tongue, or with physical violence? Are you sweet and serene under provocation? Remember the example of Jesus Christ. Referencing His example, Peter said in 1 Peter 2:23, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” May God help us to be longsuffering like Jesus!

Conclusion: So we have seen today that God is indeed longsuffering, slow to anger. Though we have sinned against Him many times, and sinners have provoked Him many times by their unbelief in rebellion, God holds back His wrath. We have also seen why He does so. He is a God of love and compassion. It is not His will that any should perish. It is likely that someone who is listening to me needs to repent of their sins and be saved before it is too late. God has been patient with you. He has given you another opportunity to be saved. Why not repent of your sins and be saved today? I cannot promise you tomorrow. I cannot say how much longer God will be patient with you. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Most of us have already repented of our sins and been saved. I call upon us who have believed to become more and more like our wonderful God. When people mistreat you, practice one of the characteristics of love, and be slow to anger. Control your tongue and your inclination to retaliate. Will you make a commitment to the more longsuffering? Trust God, for we have seen that His Holy Spirit will help you!

Sources: Stephen F. Felker (notes from his sermons on Genesis 6:1-13, 17-18, 22, “A Saint Among Sinners”, Psalm 103:6-14, 17-18, “The Praiseworthy Attributes of God” & Romans 2:4, “Consider the Goodness of God”); Burton L. Goddard in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960); Michael Green, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Second Epistle of Peter & the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on 2 Peter 3:1-9); Warren W. Wiersbe, *“Be” Series: New Testament Volumes 1 & 2: Book* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word*

⁴ He says something similar in Colossians 3:12-13, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another....”

Studies From the Greek New Testament, Vol. 2, 2 Peter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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