

CHAPTER VII

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Why is it that God does not now rightly judge America for its sins?

At times we may feel like complaining to God as did Asaph when he considered widespread injustice and ungodliness within Israel. ³ For I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴ For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. ⁵ They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind. ⁶ Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them. ⁷ Their eye bulges from fatness; the imaginations of their heart run riot. ⁸ They mock and wickedly speak of oppression; they speak from on high. ⁹ They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth." (Ps. 73:3-9). We may also be aroused to cry out as did Habakkuk. "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out to Thee, 'Violence!' Yet Thou dost not save. . . . Therefore, the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore, justice comes out perverted" (Hab. 1:2, 4).

- a. To begin with, this holding back on God's part is undoubtedly due to concern for His elect, a godly remnant, as was the case with Lot. "Hurry, escape there, for I cannot do anything until you arrive there [at Zoar]. (Gen. 19:22; cf. Matt. 24:21-22). Yet this is not to suggest that God is indifferent and unconcerned toward the non-elect, as His common grace indicates.
 - b. While Habakkuk is told that fierce judgment is certainly coming upon backslidden Israel, yet the Lord declares, "Thou it tarry, wait for it" (Hab. 2:3). Surely the additional reason for this delay is the longsuffering of God, which the true child of God, such as Habbakuk, needs to appreciate. He is impetuous before God, though he seems eventually to learn patience (Hab. 3:16-19).
2. Why did God give 120 years advance notice concerning the judgment of the earth by the Flood (Gen. 6:3)? Was it simply for the building of the ark and the gathering together of God's elect, which in this instance was comprised of Noah and his family, and none else. Again, God was undoubtedly zealous with care for His elect; but was this the only reason?
 - a. Remember, even at the time when God first announced the Flood, He assessed man's wickedness in those days as very great. "Then the Lord said, 'My Spirit

shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years. . . . Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:3, 5). When that period of 120 years commenced, that is at the beginning of the building of the Ark, Noah and his family already appear to be a sanctified unit amidst an unholy world.

- b. The further answer, according to Peter, is that “the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark” (I Pet. 3:20). Also consider that the whole created order of planet earth seems to have been divinely prepared for judgment, yet not in a hurry. Clearly, extended opportunity was given to man through “Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others” (II Pet. 2:5), while at the same time he might, like his forefather Seth, “call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26). Of course this divine forbearance yet had a limit, after which great, unmerciful wrath followed.
3. Why is it that while over 1970 years have passed since the first coming of Jesus Christ, yet his promised second coming still waits? Again, the gathering God’s elect is a major factor (Matt. 24:22, 31; II Tim. 2:10), yet of no less importance is His “kindness and tolerance and patience” that is designed to lead to repentance (Rom. 2:4). Yet the judgment of God shall finally come (Rom. 2:1-3, 5).
 - a. Certainly many have continued to treat this delay with scorn and unbelief in a manner reminiscent of Noah’s generation. “³ Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, ⁴ and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation’” (II Pet. 3:3-4; cf. Matt. 24:37-39, 48).
 - b. Further cause for the patience of God is that ingathering, over many centuries, called “the fullness of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24; Rom. 11:25), at the conclusion of which, “the Deliverer will come from Zion” (Rom. 11:26). God awaits until His gospel is preached throughout “the whole world” (Matt. 24:14), also at the conclusion of which “all Israel will be saved” “(Rom. 11:26); then will have come the end of this gospel age.
4. Why is God so patient with the *unbeliever* when he is obviously indifferent, faithless, and even militantly opposed to Him? Further, why is there this divine restraint and continuous pleading for man to repent when human hostility is relentless in the face of God’s persistent call?
 - a. The answer is, “the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience” (Rom. 2:4), which are extended so that man might be led to repentance. God’s patient,

persistent interest in rebellious sinners and saints is well documented in Scripture. "Therefore the LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him." (Is. 30:18); "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezek. 33:11; cf. Rom. 3:25).

b. By way of illustration, C. H. Spurgeon comments:

Perhaps you began your religious life with the great mistake of hoping to find salvation in your own goodness. You looked to your feelings, prayings, doings and professions for safety. You thought that your deliverance must come from yourself, and so you sought "to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," without remembering that "it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." You knew nothing of God's grace; you thought much of your own good works. So many prayers and tears, so many church-goings or chapel-goings, so much of sacraments, almsgivings, and the like; and this would make up a sweet-smelling sacrifice, acceptable to God. Blessed be the Lord who had great patience with you. . . . See how much more patience there is in God than in man. We refuse his free salvation, and go round by way of our own merits, and everywhere else, to try and find some other ground of confidence, and then at last, when everything has broken down, we come back to God and to salvation through Jesus Christ; and yet we find the Lord lovingly waiting - a God ready to pardon.¹

5. Why is God so patient and persistent with the *believer* when, in all honesty, he admits to periodic indifference, spiritual lethargy, and times of little faith, that is in the face of His unwavering perseverance? The answer is reflected in Jesus Christ's persistence with His chosen disciples. "While I was with them, I was keeping them in your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition" (John 17:12). Further the Lord Jesus declared to Peter: "31 Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32; cf. John 21:15-19). God will not allow Satan to bring a charge against Him that He was not able to complete a work of salvation which He had commenced (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). The Lord chose the disciples, warts and all, so that they might "go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain" (John 15:16). His patience in attaining this goal was great indeed. The patience of God toward His own is like that of loving parents toward their own children; their commitment is inviolate. But how much more then is God's loyal covenant commitment to His redeemed ones (Jude 24).

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, XXX, pp. 98-9.

B. THE NATURE OF GOD'S LONGSUFFERING

1. By definition, God's longsuffering is that patient, breadth of love, His forbearance that withholds judgment so that grace and mercy might be offered to sinners. Further, this endurance magnifies the grounds of condemnation and eventual abandonment of sinners as being never be more certain.
 - a. It means that God is slow to anger and restrained in temper. ¹⁷“They [Israel] refused to listen, and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; so they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them” (Neh. 9:17; cf. Isa. 30:18).
 - b. It is God's waiting love, or patience in the face of provocation to judgment. “Remember, do not forget how you [Israel] provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness; from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD.” (Deut. 9:7). Yet God's persistence will eventually bring forth Israel's circumcised hearts, restoration and prosperity (Deut. 30:1-14).
 - c. It is God's restraint and postponement of judgment that is instantly merited. Thus, for a time, He passes over sin that ought presently to be condemned (Rom. 3:25; Acts 17:30). ¹⁰“When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.” (Jonah 3:4-10; cf. Nah. 1:1, 14; Rom. 3:25).
 - d. It is God's forbearance that allows Him to persist with offered forgiveness. In Christ's parable on forgiveness, a servant pleads for patience so that he might pay his large debt. Better than forbearance, he receives a full pardon. However the same servant lacks patience when asked by a debtor for time to pay a small debt. Christ declares that this servant merits judgment because his heart did not respond with forbearance and grace. He was a phony believer (Matt. 18:21-35).
2. God's longsuffering or endurance is directed towards sinner and saint. Even now the longsuffering of God poured out upon the United States is without discrimination, except that the sinner arrogantly repudiates it while the saint both gives thanks for it and takes advantage of the opportunities it provides for service.
 - a. To the sinner, God defers judgment, even as has been the case since Adam's fall (Gen. 3:3, 15). “What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to

make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Rom. 9:22; cf. 2:4; 3:25).

- b. To the saint, God defers judgment before salvation (I Tim. 1:16) and discipline after salvation. "The Lord is not slow about His promise [3:4], as some count slowness, but is patient toward you [1:1], not wishing for any to perish [3:7] but for all to come to repentance [3:10-17]" (II Pet. 3:9).
3. By way of explanation, Charnock writes that God's longsuffering, is part of the divine goodness and mercy, yet differs from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness. Mildness is always the companion of true goodness, and the greater the goodness, the greater the mildness. Who is so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch or slip from his mercy (Ps. 145:8), "The Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger." It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the object. Mercy respects the creature as miserable; patience respects the creature as criminal; mercy pities him in his misery, and patience bears with the sin which engendered the misery, and is giving birth to more.²
 - a. Further according to Charnock,³ God's patience is manifested towards:
 - (1) Our first parents, committed to the judgment of death (Gen. 3:3), yet lived to a great age. "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died" (Gen. 5:5). Here, as even with life today, judgment was deferred (Heb. 9:27).
 - (2) The Gentiles, to whom God withheld judgment. They also are the children of Adam who have received the deferment of judgment. "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30).
 - (3) The Israelites, whom He endured for forty years in the wilderness and longer. "For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Heb. 12:3; cf. Ps. 95:10)..

² Stephen Charnock, *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, II, p. 506.

³ Ibid., pp. 512-4.

- b. Why then, according to Charnock,⁴ does God exercise patience?
- (1) To show that His anger may be appeased. It is in association with His attractive goodness and relieving mercy, they being better appreciated by means of his waiting that allows for their display before all of creation.
 - (2) To wait for men's repentance. God is "slow to anger" in spite of man's abuse of His waiting. Even light afflictions are testimonies of divine patience that prefer repentance and warn of more severe wrath to come.
 - (3) To allow for the propagation of mankind instead of its extinction. Though Adam fell, God preferred a world of mankind, rather than the first man's extinction, and thus ultimately a widespread salvation.
 - (4) To allow for the continuance of the church [people of God], enduring thorns so that roses might ultimately be gathered. This allowed for a godly remnant to arise until the promised Seed should come.
 - (5) To suffer the wicked so that the church might be properly fashioned. The tares are tolerated until harvest when the wheat is separately gathered. As at Sodom, He endures the wicked for the sake of the elect.
 - (6) To show the impeccable fairness of His future judgment. Divine waiting disallows any accusation being brought before God. For a time, justice is silenced with patience, yet finally it is loudly upheld with greater evidence.
4. God's longsuffering, or "kindness and tolerance and patience," according to Romans 2:4-5, allows for two contrasting outcomes. One is an enlarged understanding of God's grace on account of His longsuffering, the other is a sobering vision of the greater magnitude of ensuing judgment.
- a. In v. 4, such longsuffering is designed to give encouragement for repentance. "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Thomas Manton gives eight reasons why this is so:⁵
- (1) It gives time to think and call out for pardon. This is possible because God makes no angry rush to judgment; He has no impulse to act prematurely as with man; He remains open to a cry for mercy.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 524-530.

⁵ Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, XVIII, pp. 231-3.

- (2) Forfeited mercies are yet followed by more mercies. Whatever foolishness of the past we blush at, yet we are encouraged that God's kindness continues, for His mercies are new every morning.
 - (3) Continuing mercies point to God's goodness. This ongoing provision, like relentless good seasons, may be taken for granted by man, yet it is a stream witnessing to God's relentless provision of grace.
 - (4) God provides a remedy during his time of patience. In the midst of such a flow of goodness provided for unworthy man, there arises a star and a scepter from Israel, a redeeming bloom in the midst of a dry wilderness.
 - (5) There is time to turn from our doubt and disobedience. The end of God's patience is a mystery. Yet the longer His forbearance, the longer the opportunity to take advantage of His call and mercy.
 - (6) God provides means of grace during his waiting. Being resourceful, the longer His patience, the greater the range of means seems to become. However the end these means is His glory through the saving of sinners.
 - (7) God warns us of the abuse of continuing mercies. As if familiarity with His goodness breeds contempt by man, so he prefers to love a perishing world, forsakes mercy, and prefers trifles for eternal things.
 - (8) God suffers even the despisers of grace. So during His endurance of man who makes light of His grace, He even holds back at the defilement of His Son. Yet if man so persists, will he not be fit for the prison of hell?
- b. In. v. 5, such longsuffering gives time for stubborn and unrepentant hearts to store up wrath and the righteous judgment of God. "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." So, "if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?" (I Pet. 3:18).
5. Hence, God's patience must not be presumed upon. When Jonah's call to Nineveh brought forth repentance, then God's hand of judgment was stayed (Jonah 3:4-10). However, this did not mean that judgment would never fall. Approximately 150 years later, Nahum warns of judgment upon Nineveh that finds no reprieve on account of continuous bloodshed and corruption (Nah. 1:2-3).
- a. God's wrath is tempered with patience, vs. 2-3a. "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; the LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on

His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies. ^{3a} The LORD is slow to anger and great in power." So Habakkuk cried out, "O LORD, . . . in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).

- b. God's patience is restrained power, v. 3a. "The LORD is slow to anger and great in power." Here is an aspect of the humility of God whereby His omnipotence is intentionally reigned in, for a season.
- c. God's patience is temporary reprieve, v. 3b. "And the LORD will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished. In whirlwind and storm is His way, And clouds are the dust beneath His feet."

C. THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD TOWARD HIS PEOPLE

1. God's longsuffering in the Old Testament.

- a. The Hebrew, אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם, arek aphayim, "longsuffering" means to be "slow to anger," or literally to be "long of nostrils" or "long of nose" by which anger finds cooling ventilation. ¹⁶ our fathers, acted arrogantly; they became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. ¹⁷ They refused to listen, and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; so they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness; and You did not forsake them." (Neh. 9:16-17; cf. Ps. 86:15).
- b. It was experienced by the antediluvian generation through Noah. God was longsuffering in deferring judgment for 120 years while the Ark was being built and Noah preached righteousness (Gen. 6:3; I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:5).
- c. It was experienced by Israel through Moses. ⁶ Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.'" (Ex. 34:6-7). ¹⁷ "But now, I [Moses] pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.' ¹⁹ Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people

according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now." (Num. 14:18-20).

- d. It was experienced by Israel through David. "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and truth" (Ps. 86:15).
- e. It was experienced by Israel through Isaiah (Is. 48:1-11).

(1) Israel's relationship with the longsuffering God, vs. 1-8.

- (a) Religious, but not reverent or righteous, v. 1. "Hear this, O house of Jacob, who are named Israel And who came forth from the loins of Judah, Who swear by the name of the LORD And invoke the God of Israel, *But* not in truth nor in righteousness."
- (b) Formal, but not submissive, vs. 2-3. "² For they call themselves after the holy city and lean on the God of Israel; the LORD of hosts is His name. ³ I declared the former things long ago and they went forth from My mouth, and I proclaimed them. Suddenly I acted, and they came to pass."
- (c) Obstinate, unyielding, and shameless, v. 4. "Because I know that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead bronze."
- (d) Idolatrous, v. 5. "Therefore I declared *them* to you long ago, Before they took place I proclaimed *them* to you, So that you would not say, 'My idol has done them, And my graven image and my molten image have commanded them.'"
- (e) Faithless, treacherous, in spite of God's revelations, vs. 6-8a. "⁶ You have heard; look at all this. And you, will you not declare it? I proclaim to you new things from this time, even hidden things which you have not known. ⁷ They are created now and not long ago; and before today you have not heard them, so that you will not say, 'Behold, I knew them.' ^{8a} You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, because I knew that you would deal very treacherously."
- (f) Rebellious from birth, v. 8b. "And you have been called a rebel from birth."

(2) The longsuffering God's relationship with Israel, vs. 9-11.

- (a) It is longsuffering for the sake of His praise, v. 9a. "For the sake of My name I delay My wrath."
- (b) It is longsuffering for the sake of His praise, v. 9b. "And *for* My praise I restrain *it* for you, In order not to cut you off."
- (c) It is longsuffering that refines, v. 10. "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. "
- (d) It is longsuffering for His glory, v. 11. "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can *My name* be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another."

f. It was experienced by Israel through Nehemiah (Neh. 9:26-31).

Here is a description of a cyclical pattern in the history of Israel of sin, discipline, and grace. But the larger picture is that of God's covenant faithfulness that endures unfaithfulness, likened unto the father who patiently awaits his prodigal son.

- (1) Sin followed by discipline (oppressors) and grace (deliverance from oppressors), vs. 26-27. "²⁶ But they became disobedient and rebelled against You, And cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets who had admonished them So that they might return to You, And they committed great blasphemies. ²⁷ Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their oppressors who oppressed them, but when they cried to You in the time of their distress, You heard from heaven, and according to Your great compassion You gave them deliverers who delivered them from the hand of their oppressors"
- (2) Sin followed by discipline (abandonment to enemies) and grace (rescue with compassion), v. 28. "But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion."
- (3) Sin followed by patience, discipline (foreign captivity) and grace (the return of a remnant under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah), vs. 29-31. "²⁹ And admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned

against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. ³⁰ However, You bore with them for many years, And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. ³¹ Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God."

2. Longsuffering in the New Testament.

The Greek ὑπομονή, hupomonē, means "a waiting, enduring under," particularly for the believer, although it also refers to "the word of My [Christ's] patience" (Rev. 3:10). In parallel with the Hebrew for "longsuffering" is μακροθυμία, makrothumia, similarly meaning "long [rather than short] temper," with reference to God (Rom. 2:4; I Pet. 3:20) and His child (II Cor. 6:4-6; Gal. 5:22).

- a. *The longsuffering of God the Father* "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Rom. 2:4-5). "The patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah" (I Pet. 3:20).
- b. *The longsuffering of God the Son.* "¹ Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself" (Heb. 12:1-3).
- c. *The longsuffering of the Christian.* "⁴ But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love" (II Cor. 6:4-6); "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal. 5:22).

D. THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD EVIDENT IN THE BELIEVER

1. Believers are saved for the purpose of reflecting, along with other virtues, the longsuffering of God. Paul declares, "I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost [sinner], Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example

for those who would believe in Him for eternal life" (I Tim. 1:16). This communicable "perfect patience," ἅπασαν μακροθυμίαν, hapasan makrothumian, of Jesus Christ describes "length in temper" that extended to the "perfect/full measure" or degree necessary to accomplish God's saving plan in Paul's life, which the Apostle assessed as so utterly wretched. Thus the patience of Christ was not thwarted, but fruitful as divinely intended.

- a. Believers, who have encountered the longsuffering of Jesus Christ, are to exercise longsuffering in many areas. "⁵ Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6). In particular this concerns:
 - (1) Fellowship in the church. "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3); "¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you" (Col. 3:12-13).
 - (2) Christian pilgrimage. "¹¹ Realize the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹² so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb. 6:11-12; cf. 12:1-3).
 - (3) Involvement in Christian ministry. "⁴ but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, ⁵ in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, ⁶ in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love," (II Cor. 6:4-6; cf. II Tim. 2:24).
 - (4) All men. "¹⁴We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (I Thess. 5:14; cf. I Cor. 13:4).
 - (5) Christ's imminent return. "⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. ⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" (Jas. 5:7-8).
- b. However, while Jesus Christ is the model of patience, yet it is the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit that cultivates this choice fruit "²² But the fruit of the

Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23); "⁹ For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience" (Col. 1:9-11).

2. By way of illustration, in *The Pilgrim's Progress* the patient child of God is graphically portrayed in contrast with the impetuous child of this present world. At the house of the Interpreter, Christian enters a room in which two children, under a Governor, sit upon separate chairs. The eldest child called Passion appears most discontented. The other child called Patience is very quiet and unruffled. Both have the future promise of great treasure from their Governor. However, Passion would have it all now, even though it crumbles and falls between his fingers, while Patience is content to wait till next year and gain that inheritance which is eternal.⁶

- a. The temperament of Passion expounded as a child of this world.

Because of his agitation, his treasure is immediately brought to him, at which he rejoices for a time, but finds that it wastes away so that only rags are left behind. Passion is a man of this world who has no time for that which is to come beyond the grave. He wants everything in the present, this life. His proverb is, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." His philosophy is, "Let's have the goodies here and now, not pie in the sky when you die by and by!" But his pleasure is short lived (Ps. 73:3-9, 18-20; Luke 16:25; I John 2:17). Yet he mocks and scorns Patience because of his temporary poverty.

- b. The temperament of Patience expounded as a child of the world to come.

He patiently accepts his Governor's will that he wait for the best things next year, even though he temporarily lacks and is ridiculed by Passion. His benefits, though deferred, yet are wisely waited upon, for he is a child of eternity. His treasure shall be vastly superior (Rom. 8:18). This is so since that of Patience is eternal while that of Passion is temporal (II Cor. 4:16-18). His glorious enjoyment of these riches shall be when Passion has but rags. He is the spiritual man awaiting God's glorious heavenly provision, not as Passion who invests in fleeting earthly treasure (Heb. 12:1-2; Jas. 5:7-8).

⁶ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, III, p. 99.

3. The perfecting work of patience in James 1:1-4; 5:1-11.

The dispersed of the twelve tribes, Jewish Christians, suffer from two areas of opposition that may well overlap. There are “various trials” and the “testing of faith,” including anti-Christian and anti-Semitic aspects, that result in physical brutality. At the same time this persecution probably arises from those who are materially prosperous, who boast in their wealth, and who deride Christians who do not have much in terms of this world’s goods.

a. The fruit of patience or endurance in James 1:1-4.

- (1) The endurance that is of God’s bond-servant, v. 1. “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.”
- (2) The endurance that is joyful in trials, v. 2. “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”
- (3) The endurance that comes from tested faith, v. 3. “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”
- (4) The endurance that produces a perfect result, v. 4. “And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

By way of illustration, when London was on fire in 1666, the godly puritan, Thomas Goodwin, had his large library located in two parts of the city. His secular collection was distant from the fire while his sacred portion was near the blaze. Yet he later discovered that the secular collection was destroyed while the sacred portion was preserved. This led him to admit that he had loved his library too well. Nevertheless, he confessed that God had saved the better part. In reflecting on the benefits of this experience, Goodwin wrote a small discourse based upon James 1:1-5 entitled, “Patience and its Perfect Work under Sudden and Sore Trials.” Goodwin significantly points out that James is not describing patience in v. 4 individually, that is as one grace that needs to be perfected. Rather, the point is that by its very nature and requirement of time, patience allows other graces to flower and bear fruit.⁷ This perfecting work results in negative and positive effects.⁸

⁷ Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, II, pp. 432-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 446-9, 454-7.

- (a) Negatively, contrary passions are expelled, such as excessive grief, envy, passionate anger, fears, murmuring against God, worldly cares.
 - (b) Positively, quiet fruits are produced, such as contentment, the sufficiency of a pure heart, and constant joy.
- b. The fruit of patience or endurance in James 5:1-11.

The same principle is taught here as in James 1:1-4, as well as the contrast of patience and passion reminiscent of Bunyan's allegorical illustration.

- (1) The corrosive results of passion for this world, vs. 1-6.
 - (a) The weeping and misery of the materialist, v. 1. "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you."
 - (b) The wasting away of riches, vs. 2-3. "² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure."
 - (c) The wages of selfish and ill-gotten gains, vs. 4-6.
 - 1) Pay-day is coming for the harsh employer, v. 4. "Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."
 - 2) Pay-day is coming for the self-indulgent, v. 5. "You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter."
 - 3) Pay-day is coming for the unjust and conniving, v. 6. "⁶You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you."
- (2) The fruitful results of patience for the world to come, vs. 7-11.
 - (a) The waiting that produces spiritual growth and produce, v. 7. "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The

farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains."

- (b) The waiting that produces strength of heart, v. 8. "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."
- (c) The waiting that produces contentment, v. 9. "Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door."
- (d) The waiting that produced endurance in the prophets, v. 10. "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord."
- (e) The waiting that produced blessing for Job, v. 11. "We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful."

4. The glorifying work of patience in Romans 15:1-6.

The gospel having displayed the great patience of God (2:4), even with regard to the reprobate (9:22), now those Christians who are strong and mature are exhorted to be patient with the weak and immature.

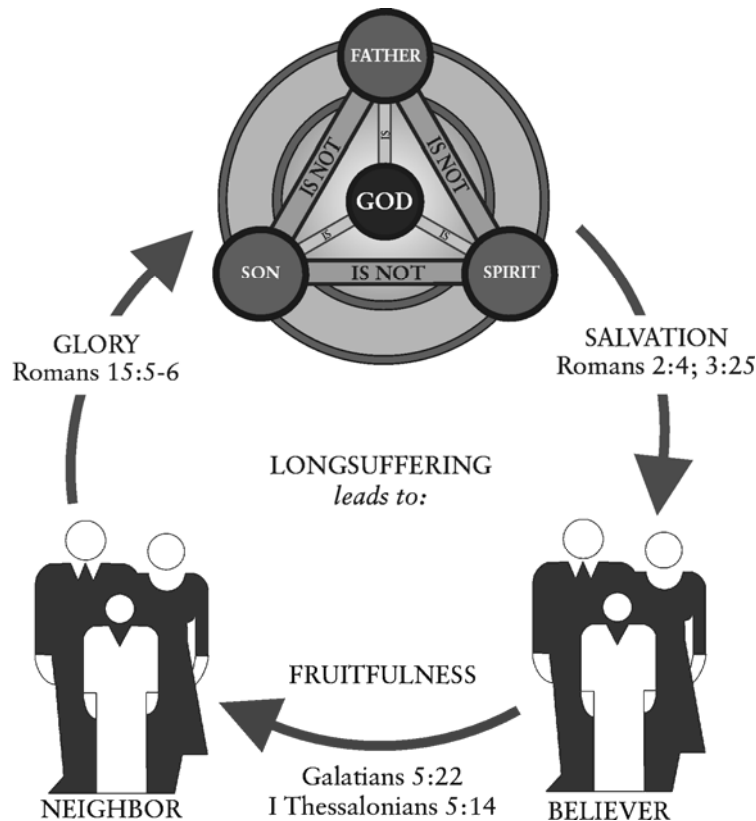
a. The example of Christ, our model, for longsuffering, vs. 1-3.

"¹ Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

- (1) The strong Christian is to patiently bear with the weaknesses of the less mature Christian, for Christ, the Strong One, has borne that which we weaklings could not carry (Matt. 11:28-30), vs. 1-2. "¹ Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. ² Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification."

- (2) The earthly ministry of Christ is a continuous testimony to his patience, v. 3. "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.'"
 - (a) He bore all the wrath that men wished to vent upon God the Father, willingly, patiently (Rev. 1:9), in fulfillment of Psalm 69:9. "For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me."
 - (b) Though he was oppressed and afflicted. "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).
- b. The dynamic of God, our Father, for longsuffering, vs. 4-6.
 - (1) The example of divine longsuffering is communicated to the believer through the Word of God, v. 4. "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."
 - (2) The impartation of divine longsuffering is a sovereign bestowal channeled through the instrumentality of prayer, v. 5. "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus." Specifically, God the Father grants patience, God the Holy Spirit implants it, and God the Son models it. But each member of the Godhead is equally longsuffering in spite of these differing functions. The NIV correctly translates the end of v. 5, "as you follow Christ Jesus."
 - (3) The purpose of the believer manifesting divine longsuffering is that of glorifying God, not man, as with all of the communicable attributes, v. 6. "So that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God is glorified when the church, the body of Christ, manifests a unity in the display of the attributes of God. "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (I Pet. 4:11).

- (4) The following diagram illustrates the cyclical influence of God's longsuffering toward mankind. His patience leads to salvation which leads to fruitfulness, all of which lead to God being glorified.



5. Charles Simeon comments on Psalm 36:1. "Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart; There is no fear of God before his eyes."

How marvelous is the forbearance of our God! He sees the state of every living man: he sees, not our actions only, but our very thoughts: for "he trieth the heart and reigns." What evils, then, does he behold in every quarter of the globe! Not a country, a town, a village, a family, no, not a single soul, exempt from the common malady! all fallen; all "enemies in their hearts to God by wicked works!" Take but a single city, our own metropolis for instance [Cambridge, England], and what a mass of iniquity does God behold in it, even in the short space of twenty-four hours! Is it not astonishing that God's wrath does not break forth against us, even as against Sodom and Gomorrah, to consume us by fire; or that another deluge does not come, to sweep us away from the face of the earth? Dear Brethren, "account this long-suffering of our God to be salvation" (II Pet. 3:15), and "let it lead every one of you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).⁹

⁹ Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae*, V, p. 270.