

February 13, 2020

Dear Brethren and Friends,

In Galatians chapter 5 we read about the works of the flesh and the fruit of God's Spirit. One such fruit is longsuffering, and it is one that I would suggest doesn't come easily to most of us.

By comparison, God is very definitely longsuffering. *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries* translates the word "*makrothumia*" as "(objectively) forbearance (or subjectively) fortitude; longsuffering, patience. Longsuffering is defined as enduring wrongs or difficulties; patiently enduring lasting offense or hardship; stoic, tolerant or uncomplaining; obliging, unconstrained and many other descriptions." Does this describe you and me?

It could be said that we complain because there is much to complain about and there may be an element of truth in that. "Longsuffering" is not a word that we generally use today and is, perhaps, seen as a somewhat old fashioned word.

I have no doubt that over the last few years we have all, to one degree or another, had our share of problems. I well remember a former colleague who designated all problems as areas of opportunity, and of course he was right. Longsuffering is the Christian's way of bearing troubles and ills and also the problems associated with being different to the rest of society. It is an opportunity to grow and overcome and demonstrate to God that we are sold on the Way of Life that He has revealed to us.

If we are to be longsuffering, it follows that we mustn't give in and that we must show perseverance or stick-to-it-iveness which is one of the seven laws of success taught by Herbert W. Armstrong (the late human leader of the *Worldwide Church of God*). By persevering, we stick with it, and enduring to the end is an absolute requirement for us all. Matthew 24:13 states that "he who endures to the end, the same shall be saved". Therefore, longsuffering must incorporate perseverance, and perseverance means that we must endure. They are inextricably linked and cannot be separated.

How are we doing in this vital part of our Christian life? Longsuffering is becoming more and more essential as the pressure increases. But we can take comfort. We are not alone. We all have, or have had, problems to one degree or another, and many of the great men of the Bible had to develop this essential quality. The patriarchs of old needed it, the apostles in the New Testament needed it, Mr. Herbert Armstrong needed it (his autobiography is replete with examples where this was necessary), and we need it today—because we're no different!

Why? If everything went our way all the time, we wouldn't develop the character that God is looking for—and is needed as a future immortal member of God's Family. We must ensure that we don't just give in. Generally, we don't like it nor do we go looking for it when we have to endure hardship and difficulties, but these help us to develop longsuffering. Our human nature encourages us to avoid such character-building exercises. But we all have our problems and trials—it's part of the Christian Way of Life—and automatically part of the refining process. Longsuffering, sticking with it and enduring are absolute requirements in our Christian lives. Anything less is failure, and we've not been called to fail.

Reliance on God for delivery is not only essential and effective, but is obviously a prime reason why we go through trials, and longsuffering is part and parcel of that process. We don't always get instantaneous answers or solutions. As mentioned above, longsuffering is inextricably involved with perseverance, sticking with it and not giving in, which in turn means endurance—AND we must endure to the end.

It is the only character trait of the Spirit where time is built into the word itself. Longsuffering—perseverance—endurance! This process helps us to see why longsuffering is a part of the fruit of the Spirit.

Longsuffering is also defined by the New Bible Commentary as "that disposition of God with which he delays the punishments of men". As things get progressively worse in society, God must be extremely longsuffering to allow things to seemingly go on and on. We need to be longsuffering but we should be astounded at the longsuffering that God has for His creation.

We only have to look at the excesses of men, how they treat their fellow man and the state of the nations and the world, to realize that longsuffering is a character trait that God shows a greater deal more of than any man could ever do. How do we know that? Well, just look at what is happening around the world today, and we will see ample evidence of how longsuffering God really is. How

many times have we heard people say words to the effect that if it were up to us, we would have taken action long ago? We simply don't have the longsuffering that God has! We understand, of course, that God has a plan for mankind. He determined that man would be allowed to rule himself, under Satan's direction, for about 6,000 years. During this time, He would let man make his own decision to ultimately learn the Truth that without God, man is doomed.

We must not try to equate God's longsuffering with an unwillingness to help, and even though God may be slow to act against and eradicate evil behaviour, His people CAN and SHOULD entreat Him to intervene on their behalf, and in His due time, God WILL do so.

The homosexual lobby, unheard of just a few decades ago, has now been accepted as mainstream and fully acceptable behaviour. The change has been orchestrated over many years and has resulted in normality being redefined. The Bible is very clear on this subject but national leaders, some of whom openly state that they are Christians, blatantly ignore biblical teachings to push this agenda. If they opened their Bible and read the account of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, and took it seriously, they would not have trodden this path. God is immensely longsuffering to allow this to go on for so long but eventually, He will take action.

Same-sex "marriage" is another abomination and is a contradiction in terms. Again, the Bible is clear on this subject; marriage can only be between a man and a woman but our leaders seem to think that they know better than God. He is longsuffering on this matter but it will only be for so long.

Blasphemy is something that is heard on the lips of the young and the old. Age seems to be no barrier to take the Name of God the Father and of Jesus Christ in vain; in fact, many neither know nor care about this insult to their Creator.

The rise of terrorism in many parts of the world is another evil that God is currently tolerating, but surely not for too much longer. Much of this is done in the name of a false religion which will be eradicated when Jesus Christ returns to this earth and will set up the true Kingdom of God. No paganism and false worship will then be tolerated.

There is much financial mismanagement of every shape and size and will bring down the world's financial system when God is ready to let it happen according to His purpose. The love of money is very definitely a root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10), and the lengths that some will go to in order to acquire it is truly amazing.

In every nook and cranny of the world's society today are the sins of fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like—much as they were nearly 2,000 years ago (see Galatians 5:20-21). Nothing really changes with the exception that in these end times, they have become much worse, but "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

Satan and his demons are alive and well and are bent on the destruction of as many people as possible. But we must stay with the Truth we've been taught over the years in the true Church of God. We have to be longsuffering as God allows us to be tested and tried in such an ungodly society. But we can be amazed at the longsuffering of God who allows all of these evils and wrongdoings to continue, at least for a little while longer until it is His time to act, and He is the master of timing.

How long did Sodom and Gomorrah live such an ungodly lifestyle before God took decisive action? We don't know because the Bible simply doesn't reveal such information. But as He took action then, He will take action again when He deems the time to be right. He is a longsuffering God, and we need to be longsuffering in our Christian lives so that we can be in the Kingdom of God when this is set up at Christ's return.

Let us all make longsuffering a part of our everyday life and take this character trait of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) very seriously. We will then be rewarded when God's longsuffering with all of the evils in this world finally comes to an end and the Kingdom of God is finally set up. What a time that will be—and, hopefully, will be set up in the not-too-distant future!

With Christian love,



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