

The Lord is Longsuffering Part 2

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“But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.” Psalms 86:15

We continue speaking this week on the attribute of God's longsuffering or “The Lord is Longsuffering Part 2.” Last week we introduce you to this blessed and glorious attribute of God and we saw it more from the aspect of application, but this morning will consider it from the prospect of Theology or you wish Theology Proper. By Theology Proper we basically mean the study of God, that is, the discipline of Systematic Theology which deals specifically with the Attributes and Works of God.

We said last week that in Psalm 86 there are various attributes of God, 1. God is full of compassion. 2. God is gracious. 3. God is longsuffering 4. God is plenteous in mercy. 5. God is good and 6. God is great. This caused David to proclaim the Living and True God as the only God ALONE: Verses 8 & 10 of this Psalm, we are told, “*Among the gods **there is none like unto thee**, O Lord; neither are there **any works like unto thy works**. 10 For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: **thou art God alone.**” We also saw that this Psalm provides sweet morsels of bread for the hungry child of God, but it also provides hope to the sinner outside Christ because it sets forth the aspect of His forgiveness and compassion to sinners. Notice verse 5, “*For thou, Lord, **art good, and ready to forgive**; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*” God is ready to forgive and if you are outside Christ this morning are you ready to receive forgiveness so that you can experience the joy that David describes in verse 13, “*For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.*” Thus you can say also what David said in verse 12, “*I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.*” We also said that there is so much here in this Psalm, it's like going through a spiritual buffet line, what is your need this morning, what are you hungering for? What do you want from God this morning? Do you need mercy, grace, compassion, goodness, longsuffering, forgiveness, perseverance, lifting up of downcast soul, strength and or joy? What do you need this morning? Come, trusting and believing as in verses 6 & 7, “*Give ear, O LORD, unto my prayer; and attend to the voice of my supplications. 7 In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.*” This Psalm is a spiritual balm or ointment for anyone and everyone, both save and lost, come and fill you needs this morning, start off 2011 in the right path in the right way. Whatever you are lacking can be met in this Psalm by God.*

Far less has been written in books on Theology Proper or on Systematic Theology about this attribute than the other attributes of God's Divine character. Sad to say, but

many have passed over the attribute of the longsuffering of God without even a comment of His patience. I really do not understand this, I mean, for sure this blessed attribute of God's longsuffering is as much part of His Divine Perfections as His grace, mercy, goodness, love, wisdom, power, holiness and the rest of His attributes. Now, I understand that the actual word, 'longsuffering' is not found as frequently as other attributes, it is only used 4 times in the OT and in the NT 13 times for a total of 17 times. But we must understand that the manifestation of this glorious attribute shines forth in great grace on almost every page of Scripture. It can be that the reason that so many writers have failed to say anything on the longsuffering of God is because of the difficulty of distinguishing this attribute from His mercy, goodness and other attributes associated with it.

Stephen Charnock in his works on the attributes of God, defines the patience of God, *"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 so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch...from His mercy: "The Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger" (Ps 145:8). 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."* I think what Charnock means especially in that last phrase helps us to understand this precious and needful attribute of God, that is, mercy respects the creature as miserable and patience or longsuffering respects the creature as criminal, mercy causes God to pity us in our sinful misery, but God's longsuffering or patience bears with our sins which is the cause our misery.

I'm so thankful God is longsuffering, I'm so glad God is perfectly balance in His Godhead and that all His attributes work together harmoniously to the praise of His glory. All His attributes work together in perfect harmony; this is what makes Him the great and glorious God that He is! In Ps.145:17 it says *"The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works."*

When we look at creation it gives witness to His existence, but they have nothing to say about His character or moral perfections. His works also can tell us that He is, but do not tell what He is. God, in His character can only be found by His revelation, that is, how He has been pleased to reveal Himself to us. God has been pleased to reveal Himself to us in His Word, in the Bible. Psalm 19:1 says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork."* But creation cannot give any testimony about Him, that is, about His moral character and even as a lawgiver. It is in the study of the Word of God, the Bible that we find out who God is in the essence of His

attributes. This is why when most people speak of God, they speak of the god of their imaginations, because they do not read the Bible and therefore are not qualified or capable to describe the God of the Scriptures. They'll say, God is this and God is that, and God would not do this or God would not do that, because they don't know who the True and Living God is because, they do not read the Bible. You can only know who God is through the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the revelation of God. This is the means by which God can be known. This is how God communicates with man. Deut. 29:29 says, "*The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: **but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever**, that we may do all the words of this law.*" The Bible is the complete revealed will of God to us for all things that pertain to life and salvation. God reveals Himself in a two-fold manner, general revelation and special revelation. By general or natural revelation God reveals Himself in creation and in the conscience, but this type of revelation is insufficient to save sinners. It only teaches us that there is a God. Special or Divine revelation is the means God has chosen to reveal Himself in a salvific way. Special revelation transcends from the physical to the spiritual in the grace of saving knowledge. God will quicken His Word to our hearts at regeneration. It is by the Holy Scriptures then that we KNOW God in a personal way, not just know about Him, but to know Him in an intimate and personal way. It is by way of the Scriptures that teaches us about the longsuffering of God, we find then that the attribute of longsuffering or patience belongs to His very nature.

I guess that the best way to define the longsuffering is by saying that the longsuffering of God is God's power of self-control. It is the power of God over Himself; God's longsuffering with man is only surpassed by His patience with Himself, this is why in some places in the Bible, the longsuffering of God is defined as, "The LORD is slow to anger." Turn to the book of Nahum; this prophet has been called to speak on the attribute of the wrath of God and in chapter 1:1-3, "*The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. 2 God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. 3 **The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power**, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.*" Notice that it says, "*The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power...*" The Lord is slow to anger and then it follows that He is great in power. In other words, what the prophet is basically saying is that God longsuffering towards His creatures in His power over Himself. Octavius Winslow says, "*It is, in the strong language of inspiration, 'the hiding of His power.' But for the infinite restraint God puts upon Himself, this fallen world could not exist a moment. Mercy withholds judgment, goodness restrains justice, patience curbs power, and thus the patience of God is the salvation of man. 'He that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city.' God's slowness of anger, His patience towards man, is the ruling of himself.*" Stephen Charnock says, "*He that can*

restrain his anger is stronger than the Caesars and Alexanders of the world, that have filled the earth with their slain carcasses and ruined cities. By the same reason God's slowness to anger is a greater argument of His power than the creating a world or the power of dissolving it by a word; in this He has a dominion over creatures, in the other over Himself. This is the reason he will not return to destroy; because 'I am God, and not man.' 'I am not so weak and impotent as man, who cannot restrain his anger.' This is a strength possessed only by a God, wherein a creature is no more able to parallel Him than in any other; so that He may be said to be the Lord of Himself, as it is in the verse, that He is 'the Lord of anger.' The end why God is patient is to show His power."

Perhaps we can say that there is power in God's anger and that there is power in God's patience, but for our good and I do thank my God for this and that is this power is seen more in His patience than in His wrath. Charnock again says, *"It is no wonder that He who is above all is able to crush all; but it is a wonder that He that is provoked by all does not upon the first provocation rid His hands of all. This is the reason why He did bear such a weight of provocation from vessels of wrath, prepared for Him, that He might show what He was able to do, the lordship and royalty He had over Himself. The power of God is more manifest in His patience to a multitude of sinners than it could be in creating millions of worlds out of nothing; this was a power over Himself."* Again Winslow says, *"Neither is the equity of God impeached by the exercise of His patience. The justice of God shall never know a cloud. He must cease to be God, if he cease to be just. The exercise, therefore, of His patience in no degree lessens His righteousness. He may "pass sentence against an evil work," and yet not "execute it speedily" the infliction of punishment thus giving place to the restraint of patience, and yet remain a holy and a righteous Lord God. Would it argue the condoning of a fault on the part of a parent because, in the exercise of parental leniency, he did not immediately administer the punishment? Or, would it involve an impeachment of the justice of the sovereign if, in the exercise of the mercy of the crown, the criminal were not immediately hurried from the bar to the gibbet? And shall God be regarded as less holy or less just, if, in the exercise of His marvelous patience, he spares the guilty sinner, giving space for repentance? Oh, no! To a superficial eye He may seem to overlook wickedness because the sentence against it is not speedily executed; and the wicked man, presuming upon the arrest of judgment, may harden himself in his wickedness; nevertheless, God hates the sin though He bears long with the sinner, and sooner or later the wrath that has been thus long 'treasuring up against the day of wrath' will overtake and overwhelm the ungodly."*

God is not quick-tempered, He is not impatient, and He does not fly of the handle. He has perfect control of His anger and wrath; He is perfectly poised and balanced. His justice will come and it will be just, but He does not need to be in a hurry to judge His enemies. He waits in perfect patience to vindicate Himself, but He will at His own time satisfy His justice. A W Pink says, *"Divine patience is that power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forebear so long in punishing them."* Charnock again says, *"Men that are great in the world are quick in passion, and are not so ready to forgive an injury, or bear with an offender, as one of a meaner rank. It is a want of power over that man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon a provocation. A prince that can bridle his passions is a king over himself as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger because great in power. He has no less power over Himself than over His creatures."*

Slow to anger is the essence of His LONGSUFFERING, if God was not slow to anger, not one of us would be saved; but thanks be to our God that He is slow to anger.

Remember when Moses was up in Mt. Sinai receiving the 10 commandments? Well at the commencement of these 10 commandments the people down below were already breaking them in creating their man made IDOL, the golden calf. This happened in Exodus 32 and in Exodus 33 Moses is discouraged and seeks the grace of God and God answers Moses' prayer and it is in chapter 34 that we see God's longsuffering. As a matter of fact this is the first time the word longsuffering is used in the Scriptures. Here we really see that God is FULL OF compassion and PLENTEOUS IN mercy! Exodus 34:1-9. If God can manifest His longsuffering upon those who have been given light, how much more to those who have lesser or no light, to those who sit in darkness? Isaiah 42:7, "*To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, [and] them that **sit in darkness** out of the prison house.*" Luke 1:79, "*To give light to them that **sit in darkness and in the shadow of death**, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*" This is the purpose of God's longsuffering, to bring you to His light. Sinners sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, but God allows His longsuffering to endure in order that His goodness and longsuffering will bring them to repentance.

Did you know that in the Old Testament the concept or understanding of longsuffering basically mean long nose, a broad nose that has to do with the aspect of breathing? Anger is associated and indicated by rapid and fierce breathings through the nostrils. Ex.15:7 & 8, "*And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: **thou sentest forth thy wrath**, which consumed them as stubble. 8 And **with the blast of thy nostrils** the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.*" Job 4:9, "*By the blast of God they perish, and **by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.***" 2 Samuel 22:9, "*There went up a smoke out of his nostrils...*" Psalms 18:8, "*There **went up a smoke out of his nostrils**, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.*"

The example of a snorting and charging bull is a good picture of a ferocious and passionate anger. God is not like a bull or like a rabid animal eager to pass punishment to their foes. God is not like a cruel and wicked dictator who is in a hurry to put his enemies to death. It reminds me of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:12 – 22, no, this is not our God. God is patient, God is longsuffering, God is slow to anger and God is not in a hurry to slay sinners, this is again the essence of His great power. God is slow to anger and great in power.

Another example is seen in Numbers 14 when Israel had sinned by murmuring and complaining against God and God threatened to exterminate them and offered to Moses that He would make a greater nation through him. Moses pleaded the character of God that was revealed to him in the mount and notice how Moses responds: Turn to Numbers 14:1-2, 11 – 20. Moses pleads the power of God to be exercise in His

longsuffering in verse 17. This is the whole argument of Paul in Romans 2:4, “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and **longsuffering**; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” The Greek word for longsuffering is ‘**makrothymia**’ which comes from ‘**makrothumos**’ that is used also in the Septuagint in Nahum 1:3 and Numbers 14:18. Makrothumos is a compound word derived from makros meaning long and thumos means wrath or anger which literally means a long anger that means a slow burning which clearly pictures God’s patience and longsuffering.

In the days of Noah it was a period of longsuffering, notice the words of Peter in regards to this: 1 Peter 3:20, “Which sometime were disobedient, **when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah**, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” Those were wicked days and this is what it will be like when Christ comes back, but in the days of Noah God acted in glorious longsuffering. God waited 120 years, but look how wicked it was, Gen.6:5-7, 11-13. But in it all, God was slow to anger and He was longsuffering with them 120 years. God was also longsuffering with Pharaoh, notice what Paul says in Romans 9:17 & 22, “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth... What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, **endured** (to bear patiently) **with much longsuffering** the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” God did not need to be longsuffering with Pharaoh, for that matter God did not need to be longsuffering with any of us. Referring to Romans 9:22; Robert Haldane says, “How often do men wonder that God endures so much sin as appears in the world. Why does not God immediately cut off transgressors? Why does He not make an end of them at once? The answer is, He endures them for His own glory, and in their condemnation He will be glorified. To short-sighted mortals, it would appear preferable if God would cut off in childhood all whom He foresaw would continue in wickedness. But God endures them to an old age and to the utmost bounds of wickedness for the glory of His own name.”

Paul knew something of the longsuffering God both experientially and theologically. When we look at Paul in his unconverted life, he was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious and he wasted the church of God. If God was not slow to anger He would have judged Paul severely and would have slain him for his sins. But notice what Paul says in 1 Tim.1:12-16, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 **And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant** with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause **I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe** on him to life everlasting.” In the purpose of God Paul was a vessel of mercy afore prepared unto

glory that He might make know the riches of His glory. Peter had this mind when he speaks about the second coming of Christ and explains the long delay of the Lord's return when he said in 2 Peter 3:9, "*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; **but is longsuffering to us-ward**, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" The phrase us-ward is key to this verse as it coincides with the beloved of verse 1 that are distinguished from the scoffers in verse 3 and of course verse 15 gives understanding to this interpretation, "*And account that **the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation**...*" God's longsuffering is the impetus for our salvation.

May God be please to open your eyes and see His goodness and longsuffering in order to bring you to repentance so that you can in faith call upon God for salvation. Again in Romans 2:4, "*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*" Oh to God that you would truly believe that God is really FULL OF COMPASSION and PLENTEOUS IN MERCY, that is, His LONGSUFFERING is the only thing that keeps you out of hell. Oh dear people, God does not have to be longsuffering and none of us know when His longsuffering ends, because He is patient, He is full of compassion, He is plenteous in mercy and He is a gracious God, but again at some point, His longsuffering ends and God's justice will vindicate Him and His wrath must be poured out upon sin.

If you go hell, it will be your own fault and not's God. God has provided all the means necessary for a person to be saved.

Oh beware dear sinner that you do not take lightly the compassion, mercy and longsuffering of God, for He might open His armory against you and if He does, there is none that can stay His hand! Don't trample underfoot the mercy and compassion of a longsuffering God!

My prayer for you this morning, if you are outside Christ, is that the longsuffering of God would lead you to repentance. I plead with you this morning come to Christ in repentance and faith, in 2 Cor.6:2, "*(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, **now is the day of salvation**.)*"

Let's pray.

Sing: Psalm 145:8-11