

Longsuffering Promotes Peace and Unity

James 5:10; 1 Corinthians 13:4

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Love for Christ and for each other promotes peace and unity in our families and church. The lack of it destroys peace and unity. One necessary quality of love (Christ's love implanted in every true Christian) is that of longsuffering—suffering long with a husband or wife, parent or child, brother or sister in Christ.

Our natural and sinful tendency is to have a very short fuse toward those who attack us, provoke us, ridicule us, or insult us rather than pausing, praying, reflecting, and quieting ourselves before the Lord. We may even feel justified in doing so (“He deserved it. Look how he mistreated me”). But such reactions will destroy the peace and unity we are commanded to pursue in our families and in our church. Vengeful anger and insulting speech hurled against us is sin, but how we respond in retaliation is our sin. We cannot blame our husband and wife—the sinful provocation may be theirs, but the sinful reaction is ours. There is nothing more needful than longsuffering to preserve love, peace and unity.

The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) The Meaning of Longsuffering (James 5:10); and (2) The Application of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

I. The Meaning of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

A. This is a practical letter of living out the holiness that God has worked within (“faith without works is dead” James 2:26). It is a general letter sent out to Jewish Christians that were scattered and dispersed throughout the world. Our writer was likely either James the half-brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19) or James the son of Alphaeus (one of the 12), perhaps a cousin of Jesus. Both of these men had a brother by the name of Judas (Jude 1). One of these men was the leader in Jerusalem, the Lord's brother (or relative), and the inspired author of this letter.

B. As we consider our text, the English word translated “patience” in James 5:10 is actually the word for “longsuffering” (*macrothūmia*—*macro*=a long or far distance from; and *thūmia*=anger); thus rather than being in sinful anger, longsuffering is far from it when wronged.

1. James 5 is contextually set within those trying times in which Christians are mistreated and wronged (the rich and powerful unbelievers of this world who take advantage of poor Christians, James 5:4-6; and even wronged by fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, James 5:9—murmur not against one another for wrong suffered from one another). It is love (Christ's sacrificial love—*agápē*) to suffer long with one another rather than striking back and returning evil for evil, which destroys peace and unity.

2. Longsuffering works in our heart to subdue the vengeful anger of retaliation against those who have offended us, so that the grace of mercy is shown in not giving those who have wronged us what we believe they may deserve.

C. There is a difference between the Greek words “longsuffering” (*macrothūmia*) in James 5:10 and “patience” (*hupomoné*) in James 5:11.

1. Whereas longsuffering does not retaliate in anger when scorned, insulted, ridiculed, patience does not give up under the pressure of a great trial. We are longsuffering with people, but patient under trying circumstances that are beyond our control.

2. Whereas longsuffering restrains vengeful anger, patience endures and will not surrender under the pressure of extreme trial.

3. By way of illustration, longsuffering is manifested when you are wronged by that guy

that races around you in his car and cuts in front of you on the highway. Rather than doing the same thing to him, you suffer long and pray for mercy that he would see his foolishness (or does not send that nasty email to one who has offended you, or respond to the anger of a husband/wife, parent/child, co-worker.

D. Longsuffering is also an attribute of God Himself, who delays so often His just wrath and punishment against those who transgress His holy Law in His goodness (Romans 2:4; 1 Timothy 1:15-16).

1. How longsuffering has God been with us in all of the many ways we have offended Him daily (before and even since our conversion). He has so often restrained and delayed His full anger against the wicked (as in the days of Noah and with Israel in the wilderness), and has rather manifested His goodness in granting to them the common blessings of this world (Noah preached unto them and provided them all that they needed). Think of the moment by moment curses and hatred directed to God by the wicked in this world, the continual profaning of His holy name, His worship, and His commandments, and the spitting of the wicked upon the mercy of God offered to sinners in the gospel of salvation. And yet God suffers long with the wicked; but that longsuffering will come to an end and His justice will be meted out.

2. Likewise, the Lord Jesus did not revile when He was reviled. He suffered long with those who rejected Him, whipped Him, spat upon Him, punched Him in the face, mocked Him, and crucified Him (one of the most painful deaths devised by the wicked heart of man in the ancient world). Remember how longsuffering the Lord was even with His own proud self-serving disciples (who contradicted Him, who denied Him, and who argued among themselves who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God as His death was approaching)? If ever anyone had the right to immediately judge His enemies with fire from heaven, and to lash out against His disciples, it was the Lord Jesus. And yet He suffered long with those who offended Him.

E. Let us be clear what longsuffering does not imply.

1. First, longsuffering does not imply that we should not be righteously indignant when God and His holy commandments are hated and despised—we should be righteously angry—(“Be ye angry and sin not” Ephesians 4:26). However, righteous anger is more concerned with God’s honor than with the offense committed against us. Longsuffering is not vindictive, holding grudges, rehearsing over and over how someone has mistreated you, and wanting to get even with them (Romans 12:17).

2. Second, longsuffering does not imply that we cannot nor ought not to defend ourselves or others against verbal or violent attacks. We always have a duty to lovingly obey the Sixth Commandment to protect our own life and the life of our neighbor (whether that be by fleeing the encounter if possible—Matthew 10:23, or by vindicating our good name or the good name of a brother or sister in Christ whether past or present—2 Corinthians 3:1, or by using deadly force if necessary to protect our own life or the life of our neighbor—Exodus 22:2-3; Esther 8:11-12; Luke 22:39).

3. Third, longsuffering does not imply that we are to tolerate and accept that which is evil and is contrary to God’s doctrine, worship, or commandments. Toleration means we sinfully allow and accept that which is contrary to God’s Word to be practiced (that we should not do). Longsuffering means we restrain our vindictive anger against those who perpetrate evil and wrong against us (2 Timothy 4:2—longsuffering does not mean one is silent or does not correct, but does so in love and humility). We do not approve of evil. We do not accept it. We do not consider it as an option to the truth for peace sake. But we do not repay evil for evil, but rather pray for those who curse us and speak falsely against us that God would show them mercy (Romans 12:14).

II. The Application of Longsuffering (James 5:10).

A. James now applies longsuffering to Christians who were despised, persecuted, or wronged.

1. If the prophets of old (who were loved by God and who walked in the paths of truth and righteousness) were persecuted and tried, we should likewise expect that we who now seek to walk in the

paths of the prophets of old will likewise face opposition from Satan, unbelievers, and even from professing Christians. In other words, our persecution for Christ's truth and righteousness is not a sign of God's disapproval, but to the contrary, it is a sign of God's approval; for so likewise they treated the prophets and apostles of old, and especially treated the Lord Jesus Himself. Which of the prophets of Israel was not mistreated, abused, persecuted, and insulted? Why should we expect anything different in this life? And most of the insults they received came from those who professed to be the people of God. The same was true of the apostles and the Lord Jesus as well. Their suffering the reproach and hatred of others for Christ and His truth was the rule—not the exception.

2. It was God's prophets, upon whom He put the greatest honor, that were persecuted. And when the most faithful have faced the most severe opposition, hardships, and persecution, why should we expect that we would escape their mistreatment, bitterness, and anger. James encourages us to walk in their footsteps, willingly coming along side of them in the grand parade of God's faithful witnesses (rather than being mere spectators in the grandstands). Who do we think we are to expect a path to glory strewn with rose petals, comfort, and ease, when the path to glory for Christ's faithful witnesses was strewn with threats, bruises, imprisonment, confiscation of property, poverty, being chased like wild animals, viewed as the scum of the earth, and suffering cruel deaths? If we do not walk in their steps we will walk in the steps of those who opposed them.

3. Thus, when you suffer the attacks of those who despise Christ within you, or the mistreatment of those who profess the name of Christ, look back to the biblical hall of fame of faithful witnesses and walk in their steps in order that you might never be numbered among those who are in the hall of shame. Rather than being overcome by evil, and rendering evil for evil, remember the prophets, the apostles, your fellow-believers (past and present), and the Lord Jesus Himself. When you suffer for Christ and restrain your vengeful anger you are in good company!

4. The question to ask is not, "Why should I suffer for being a faithful witness of Jesus Christ?" But rather the right question to ask is, "Why should I not suffer? Seeing what my forefathers in the faith had to endure, why do I think I should be spared?"

B. What is it that caused our forefathers in the faith to grow in longsuffering as they themselves suffered so intensely?

1. They looked in faith to an **all-loving God** who had saved them by His amazing grace (Romans 8:35-39). They were humbled, astonished, and overwhelmed at such love.

2. They looked in faith to an **almighty God** who is absolutely sovereign and who controlled the very suffering they were enduring (Proverbs 21:1). It was not Satan or man that was in absolute control of their trials and tribulations, but the God who loved them.

3. They looked in faith to an **all-wise God** who could make no mistakes, but would use even their suffering for His glory and for the good of the church (Genesis 50:20).

4. They looked in faith to an **all-just God** who will in His time bring His righteous judgment upon their wicked persecutors (Revelation 19:1-2).

C. As God has been longsuffering with us in not repaying us as our sins deserve, so we are to be longsuffering with others even when we believe they deserve our vindictive anger and harsh words.

1. The greatest motive for you to grow in being longsuffering toward others is God's longsuffering toward you—His restraining His righteous anger toward you, pouring out His righteous anger upon His beloved Son, so that He might have mercy upon you.

2. We are so quick to claim the "right" to retaliate against those who have offended us, and to think we will become a doormat if we don't retaliate. Retaliation is not a right. It is a sin. And we never have the right to sin. We may blame others for having disrupted the peace and unity within the family and

church by their insults, anger, bitterness, and biting remarks. But we become an accessory to the disruption in destroying peace and unity by repaying evil for evil in our heart, with our tongue, and with our fingers on the keyboard of our computer.

3. We suffer long in order that we might listen carefully (not react in anger), that we might speak the truth in love (rather than in anger), that we might bring healing and restoration (rather than disruption and heartache), that we might follow in the footsteps of Jesus and all who had far more to suffer than we from others, and yet were long suffering by God's grace (not filled with anger, bitterness, hate, and cruelty). Peace and unity in our families and in the church is not only built upon the truth of Christ, but also upon the longsuffering of Christ.

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