

18 May 2014

Let us be Longsuffering to our brethren (Pt.2 Longsuffering)

This is our second study on the word *longsuffering* as it is used in the Holy Scriptures. In our previous study we established that the word *longsuffering* as used of God refers to His salvation, forbearance, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, compassion and grace. We also covered four points; (1) the Lord God is longsuffering, and (2) the Lord shows His longsuffering by enduring the wicked and (3) the Lord shows His longsuffering nature by not wanting any to perish, and (4) the Lord shows His longsuffering in the salvation He provides. In this study we will cover three points:- (1) Christians are to be longsuffering, and (2) when a Christian shows longsuffering he forbears his brother in love, and (3) when a Christian judges another and does the same thing he despises God's longsuffering.

Let us add a little detail to our points:-

1. Christians are to be longsuffering.

Col 3:12 *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;*

There are three dynamics in the Scriptures when it comes to Christians and longsuffering.

- i) when a lost person believes the gospel of Christ crucified (as a lady Mary did on Friday in Auckland after hearing the gospel preached), then they immediately receive God's Holy Spirit. And as the believer journeys through life they bear fruit of the Spirit of God and that fruit is comprised of longsuffering (see Gal 5:22), such that longsuffering is evidence of the Holy Spirit of God residing in a believer.
- ii) Christians are also to put on longsuffering as per our verse in Col.3: 12.
- iii) As a believer grows in grace, and to approve themselves as ministers of God, they do so by longsuffering (see 2Cor.6: 4, 6 & Col.1: 11).

Why? Well, at the conclusion of our previous study we established that God is longsuffering, with a note "that is why we are to be longsuffering, refer to our next study in this series", and so in this study we establish that a believer is to be longsuffering and one of his greatest examples in the Scriptures is the Lord Jesus Christ (who is God), whom the Scriptures say showed forth all longsuffering (see 1Tim.1: 16). In addition we have other examples in the Scriptures where believers suffered long, and I expect Jeremiah was one (Jer.15: 15), and before him, there was Moses, who although the Scriptures did not record him as being longsuffering toward the fledgling nation of Israel, he would have had to have been in order to have put up with their murmuring as he did (see Num.14: 27), and when the Lord wanted to smite Israel for their rebellion, Moses stood up for them, he intervened and the Lord hearkened unto him and he did not kill them (see Ex.32: 10-14). Then you have the example of Paul who taught others in the early church of the doctrine, and it was his manner of life to be longsuffering (see 2Tim.3: 10). In other words Paul lived what he taught the church. Then we have 1Cor.13, the chapter on charity, which includes the point that longsuffering is part of charity (1Cor.13: 4), and charity is greater than faith and hope (verse 13).

I suggest to you that a person who is unsaved and of the flesh can no more show charity, can no more show longsuffering without the Holy Spirit than he can show meekness, because such attributes, such qualities are as a result of the Holy Spirit. And given that the Holy Spirit only resides in believers, then a person of the flesh, an unbeliever, is unlikely to show forth longsuffering. Whereas, a believer receives the Holy Spirit at the moment they are converted and bears fruit of the Spirit of God in the form of longsuffering, as well as being asked to put on bowels of longsuffering. Let us encourage each other to do so in obedience to the Scriptures.

2. When a Christian shows longsuffering he forbears his brother in love.

Eph 4:2 *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*

Part of the meaning we have provided for *longsuffering* is that of *forbearance*, which was confirmed in the Scriptures from Rom.2: 4, but we did not include the verse from Ephesians. And whereas Rom.2: 4 refers to God's goodness, His forbearance and His longsuffering, our verse in Eph.4: 2 refers specifically to other believers and our love for them, which is integral to our understanding of 1Cor.13 and the definition of charity, which includes longsuffering (verse 4) where a believer is patient in dealing with another brother's sin, their struggles, their tribulation, and walks the journey with them, rather than criticising them, then he shows forth longsuffering, forbearing his brother in love.

What does it mean to forbear?⁹ According to the Oxford dictionary, forbear means "abstain or refrain from, not use or mention; be patient." The various Greek words that are translated *forbear*, or *forbearing* are also translated, *bear with*, *endure*, *suffer*, *leave*, *loose*, *bear*, and *spare*. According to Jer.20: 9 there is a sense of weariness in forbearing, it is hard work.

Have you every suffered long with a brother or a family member, and found it hard work, tiresome, like you are on an endurance course, where you feel you are the one suffering?⁹ And you do all of that longsuffering in love! Is it any wonder that we are to love our brethren (1Thes.4: 9)? Now consider also that part of the meaning of charity which is *love*, and longsuffering is to be carried out in *love*. Is it any wonder that we are to show forth fervent charity to our brethren (1Pet.4: 8)?

In our first point we made the statement that a person of the flesh is unlikely to show longsuffering, but rather it is natural for our flesh, for an unsaved man, to criticise another, to get frustrated, and impatient, even with those whom they love. And for a saved man one way our flesh rises up to war against the Spirit of God within us and so reduce the effectiveness of our showing charity, of our showing them longsuffering, is to *criticise* our brother. But doesn't a believer have a mandate from the Scriptures to exhort, reprove and rebuke our brethren (2Tim.4: 2)? Yes, but;

- i) the verse in 2Tim.4 says we are to rebuke, reprove and exhort with all *longsuffering*, and
- ii) given the instruction for believers not to judge their brethren (Rom.14: 10, 13 & Jam.4: 11), it would appear that any reproving *excludes* criticism, and
- iii) when exhortation and reproof are required, may we also include some encouragement to our brethren (see the example in 2Chr.35: 2), such that we take not a rod to them but come to them in love (see Paul's rhetorical question in 1Cor.4: 21).

Given that it is natural for our flesh to criticise, it is natural for our flesh to take a rod to our brethren, how then do we show forth longsuffering?

We can *only* show biblical *longsuffering*, when we walk in the Spirit of God, when we bear fruit of the Holy Spirit of God and not of our flesh, as the fruit of the Spirit includes longsuffering (Gal.5: 22). In addition we would exhibit meekness and lowliness (see Eph.4: 2).

On that basis I suggest that Moses, who was very meek (see Num.12: 3) was endowed with wisdom from on High to rebuke the children of Israel with *all* longsuffering. And the Lord Jesus who was lowly, when He rebuked the Pharisees, would have done so with *all* longsuffering.

Let us seek to be like the Lord Jesus Christ and show longsuffering to our brethren and forbear our brothers in love.

3. When a believer judges another and does the same thing he despises God's longsuffering.

Rom 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?*

Having said what we have said in our first two points and especially in our second point regarding not judging our brother, it will not surprise you that when we do judge our brother and then do the same thing, we despise God's longsuffering to us (that we spoke about in our first study). Think about that for a

moment! Would any believer who was truly saved by God's grace, hate to think that by their actions or words they showed God that they despised Him? Because that is what the Holy Scriptures say happens when a believer judges his brother and then does the same thing, he shows his God, who sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins on the cross, that he despises the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering to him. Wow! Think on that for a few decades and tell yourself if it doesn't make you want to get on your knees before God, and repent from all the times your tongue has lashed out at a brother. Think about our words of criticism showing God that we despise His goodness, may it send each one of us to a place of weeping before the all-knowing, all-powerful God, who saved us and forbears our sin.

Do you despise the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering of your sin? Of course you do not! May that thought pop into your heart, into your mind, next time you unleash your unruly member, full of poison (Jam.3: 8), that is so small (verse 5) yet is a world of iniquity (verse 6).

Is it any wonder that the unsaved cannot tame his tongue (verse 8), and therefore unable not to criticise?

Is it any wonder that a saved man often struggles to tame his tongue?

Is it any wonder that James includes in his teaching on the tongue, that it takes a wise man endued with knowledge to show forth good conversation (verse 13)? And the only way the man can apply such wisdom is with meekness (verse 13). Which goes back to a man walking in the Spirit and bearing fruit of the Spirit, because part of the fruit of the Spirit is meekness (Gal.5: 23). And when we have a spirit of meekness, like Moses, when we have a spirit of lowliness like the Lord and Moses, we do not need to place ourselves on high, therefore we do not have to constantly criticise our brethren or put them down, to make us feel higher than they are, because our desire is lowliness.

According to the book of Proverbs:-

- i) Israel despised God's reproof (1: 30), and
- ii) we are told not to despise the chastening of the Lord (see Prov.3: 11), and
- iii) those who despise the word of God will be destroyed (see Prov.13: 13), and
- iv) those that are perverse (persistent in error) in their ways despise God (Prov.14: 2), and
- v) those who despise the ways of God shall die (Prov.19: 16).

Do you feel an abhorrence at the thought of judging your brother and then doing the same thing?

Do you hate the evil of judging your brother and doing same thing?

Because for those who love the Lord, we are required to *hate* evil (see Ps.97: 10). And if you do hate your tongue when you judge your brother and do the same thing, then what are you doing about it? How much time each year, each month, each day are you spending on your knees dying to your member that is full of deadly poison?

Let each one of us, young and old, desire with every fibre of our body to hate our evil tongue when we judge our brother and do the same thing, knowing that when we do so we despise God's longsuffering to us.

Having said what we have said, let us say it again. In this our second study on the word *longsuffering* we have covered three points:- (1) Christians are to be longsuffering, and (2) when a Christian shows longsuffering he forbears his brother in love, and (3) when a Christian judges another and does the same thing he despises God's longsuffering.