

## Longsuffering

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by Wayne Goff

***“Longsuffering” is the fourth “fruit” (trait) of the one who walks in the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. It is notable also that Paul lists it as one of the characteristics of love, 1 Corinthians 13:4.***

The three acts listed together of “*longsuffering, kindness, goodness*” are all derived from the all-comprising grace of love (*Pulpit Commentary*). This can be seen easily from a comparison of Galatians 5:22 with 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. To the Corinthians Paul said that “*love suffers long and is kind.*” To the Galatians he said that the fruit of the Spirit includes longsuffering and kindness. The description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 could easily be summed up with the one word “*goodness*” of Galatians 5:22. So what in one epistle is called *the fruit of the Spirit*, in the other epistle is called the characteristics of love. But since God is love, the essence of love, we should not be surprised to see the parallel.

**“Longsuffering”** literally means *longness of mind*, and portrays the concept that since the mind controls anger and passion, the “long-minded” person would not easily become angry or impassioned. Furthermore, R. C. Trench explains that this disposition to *longsuffering* is applied in the New Testament in reference to **persons** while “*patience*” is the same disposition applied to **things**. This distinction is significant if we think about the two key references to “*longsuffering*” in Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians (where major problems existed among the brethren) and the letter to the Galatians (where wars with Judaizers and thus among brethren were occurring). In these places “*there were contentions and strifes among them; there were of course suspicions, and jealousies, and heart-burnings; there would be unkind judging, the imputation of improper motives, and selfishness; there were envy, and pride, and boasting, all of which were inconsistent with love*” (*Barnes’ Notes on the N.T.*, p. 770). In just such circumstances, we can see the wisdom and need for pleading for suffering long with one another. Love and the Spirit bear with the mistakes, wrongs, and injuries caused by others’ weaknesses, infirmities, and sometimes evils. If we are so wronged and can learn to control our anger and passion, then both we and our brethren will be better for it!

**WHY** should we be a people who suffer long with the injuries inflicted by others? Because God was longsuffering with us! If He had not been, then the human race long ago would have been obliterated. “*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty...*” (Ex. 34:6-7; and see also Numbers 14:18; Nahum 1:3). For several thousand years God has suffered long with the unbelief and rebellion of the whole world (Gen. 6), then of Israel (Exodus — Malachi), and now with us who are His children in Christ through the same longsuffering which led to our forgiveness (Rom. 9:22-25)! For this reason we are called upon to exhibit this attitude toward those who wrong us, or who have personalities which clash with ours, or who need our help to overcome sin (Col. 3:12-15).

We exhibit the attributes of God when we, for Jesus’ sake, are tender-hearted, humble, meek, and longsuffering. It requires these things to maintain peace and harmony within a body of believers. But we should do it because God has done it for us. As the apostle Paul said, “*even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do*” (Col. 3:13). So folks, when differences between brethren arise, and they will, let us at that time display the **longsuffering** needed to resolve the problems and glorify God when we do!

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