

CULTIVATE LONGSUFFERING

Jehovah God has been and is long tempered with man. He is willing to suffer grief and pain inflicted by sinners because He does not find joy in the death of the wicked but wants sinners to come to repentance. But He never condones sin. Are you not grateful for His opportunities to repent?

Believers are called to be imitators of God and Christ. If God is longsuffering, so ought disciples to be. God is longsuffering because God is love. *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God;... for God is love"* (1 John 4:7, 8). *"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up"* (1 Corinthians 13:4). Longsuffering is a characteristic of love. Thus Christians are to be cultivating a like longsuffering.

Longsuffering is more than bearing up under the weight of a burden. It is showing self-restraint when being provoked by what is wrong, so that one does not hastily retaliate or immediately punish. It is being slow to anger in our dealings with the failings of man because we recognize that all men need mercy. Justice is not discarded, but rather, justice is upheld with longsuffering.

Christians are called to live according to their calling in Christ. Now that means using freedom in Christ properly. *"...you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another"* (Galatians 5:13). Bearing the fruit of the Spirit such as longsuffering is a right use of this liberty (5:22). This merciful restraint is essential in preserving the unity of the Spirit in peace. Walk worthily *"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love"* (Ephesians 4:2). Have you ever hurt someone else with your words or actions? Be slow to react to other people's wrongs - to retaliate or to punish. The renewed mind in Christ seeks the things of Christ. Through God's truth and grace, Christians are being renewed according to the image of their Creator (Colossians 3:1, 10). That heavenly image includes demonstrating longsuffering in our interaction with and treatment of others. *"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering"* (3:12). We must learn to control our emotions so that we reflect that God and Christ are reigning in our hearts.