

God's Longsuffering: An Appeal to the Conscience

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"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." [2 Peter 3:15](#).

JESUS IS WELL CALLED "our Lord," let us at the commencement adore him. Let us each one cry to him, "My Lord, and my God." It is a long, time since our Lord went up to heaven, and he said that he would come again. Evidently, some of those who best understood him *misunderstood* him, and thought that he would surely come again even in their lifetime. He said that he would come, and faithful ones in all ages have looked for him, and it is not possible that our Lord can have deceived us. Because he is so sweetly our Lord, our brethren have made sure that he will keep his word; and he will. But certain of them have gone beyond our Lord's promise, and have felt sure that they knew *when* he would come; and they have been bitterly disappointed because the hour which they fixed passed over, and he did not appear. This does not prove that he will not come. The day is certainly nearer, and every hour is hastening his coming. "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him."

But why are his chariots so long in coming? Why does he delay? The world grows grey, not alone with age, but with iniquity; and yet the Deliverer comes not. We have waited for his footfall at the dead of night, and looked out for him through the gates of the morning, and expected him in the heat of the day, and reckoned that he might come ere yet another sun went down; but he is not here! He waits. He waits very, very long. Will he not come?

Longsuffering is that which keeps him from coming. He is bearing with men. Not yet the thunderbolt! Not yet the riven heavens and the reeling earth! Not yet the great white throne, and the day of judgment; for he is very pitiful, and beareth long with men! Even to the cries of his own elect, who cry day and night unto him—he is not in haste to answer,—for he is very patient, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

But his patience sometimes greatly puzzles us. We cannot make it out. Eighteen, nineteen centuries, and the world not converted! Nineteen centuries, and Satan still to the front, and all manner of iniquity still wounding this poor, bleeding world! What meaneth it? O Son of God, what meaneth it? Seed of the woman, when wilt thou appear with thy foot upon the serpent's head? We are puzzled at the longsuffering which causes so weary a delay.

One of the reasons is that we have not much longsuffering ourselves. We think that we do well to be angry with the rebellious, and so we prove ourselves to be more like Jonah than Jesus. A few have learned to be patient and pitiful to the ungodly, but many more are of the mind of James and John, who would have called fire from heaven upon those who rejected the Savior. We are in such a hurry. We have not the eternal leisure of God. We have but to live, like ephemera, our little day, and therefore we are in hot haste to see all things

accomplished ere the sun goes down. We are but leaves in the forest of existence; and if something is not done soon, and done quickly, we shall fade, and pass away amid unaccomplished hope; and so we are not patient. We are staggered when the Master tells us to forgive unto seventy times seven. When he forgives unto seventy times seven, and still waits, and still holds back his thunders, we are amazed, because our mind is not in harmony with the mind of the Infinitely-patient God.

We are all the more puzzled, again, because the ungodly so sadly misuse this longsuffering of God as a reason for greater sin, and as a motive for denying that there is a God at all. Because he gives them space for repentance, they make it into space for iniquity; and because he will not deal out his judgments immediately, they say, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

We have impatiently wished that he would break the silence. Have I not in my heart of hearts cried out, "O Lord, how long? Can this go on much longer? Canst thou bear it? Wilt thou not come with the iron rod, breaking thy foes before thy face, most mighty Son of God?" It is hard to have the days of blasphemy and rebuke multiplied upon us, and to hear the adversary say in every corner, "Where is now their God?" Yet, dear friends, we ought not to be affected by the hissing of these serpents. Surely we would not have our God change his purposes because of the foolish taunts of men. One said, "If there be a God, let him strike me dead"; but God did not smite him, and from this he argued that there was no God: from the same fact I argue that there is a God, and that this God is truly God; for, if he had been less than divine, he might have struck him dead; but, being infinitely patient, he bore with him still. Who was that speck that he should cause God to move hand or foot even to crush him? God is not easily moved, even by the blasphemies of the ungodly. He may be provoked one of these days, for longsuffering has its end, but for a while the Lord pauseth in pity, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Beloved brethren, Gods longsuffering with a guilty world he may never explain to us. There are many things which we must not ask to have explained. We get into deep waters, and into terrible troubles, when we must have everything explained. For my part, I like to believe great truths which are beyond my reason. A religion without mysteries seems to me to be false on the face of it. If there be an Infinite God, it is not possible that poor I, with my finite mind, shall ever be able to understand everything about him. If the Lord chooses to tarry till thousands of years have passed away, yea, till millions of years have elapsed, yet let him do as he wills. Is he not infinitely wise and good; and who are we that we should put him to the question? Let him tarry his own time; only let us watch, and wait, for he will come, and they that wait for him shall have their reward.

At this time I am going to speak a little upon this point. First, *let us admire the longsuffering of God*. And, secondly, *let us make a right account of it* by accounting it to be salvation.

I. First, I would conduct your minds hurriedly over a few points that may help you to ADMIRE THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD.

Admire the longsuffering of God as to *peculiar sins*. Look, brethren, they make images of wood or stone, and they say, "these are God," and they set up these things in the place of him that made the heavens and the earth. How does he endure to see reasonable beings bowing down before idols, before fetishes, before the basest objects? How does he bear that men should even worship emblems of impurity, and say that these are God? How does he bear it—he that sitteth in the heavens, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways?

Others, even in this country, blaspheme God. What an amount of profanity is poured out before God in this city! One can scarcely walk the streets to-day without hearing horrible language. An oath has often chilled me to the marrow—an oath which was not excused by any special circumstance, but rolled out of the man's mouth as a customary thing. We have to-day some among us that might match the devil in blasphemy, so foully do they talk. And oh, how is it that God bears it when they dare imprecate his curse upon their bodies and their souls? O Father, how dost thou bear it? How dost thou endure these profane persons, who insult thee to thy face?

Besides, there are those who use fair speech, and yet blaspheme most intolerably. Men of education and of science are often worse than the common folk because they blaspheme with fearful deliberation, and solemnly speak against God, and against his Son, and against the precious blood, and against the Holy Ghost. How is it that the Thrice-holy One bears with them? Oh, wondrous longsuffering of a Gracious God!

And then there are others who wallow in unmentionable impurity and uncleanness. No, I will not attempt any description, nor would I wish to take your thoughts to those things whereof men may blush to think, though they blush not to do them. The moon sees a world of foulness, fornication, and adultery: and yet, O God, thou bearest it! This great blot upon the face of the world, this huge city of London reeks in its filthiness, and yet thou holdest thy peace!

And then, when I turn my thoughts another way, to the oppression of the poor, to the grinding down of those who, with the hardest labor, can scarcely earn bread enough to keep body and soul together, how does the Just God permit it? When I mark the oppression of man by man—for among wild beasts there is none that equals the cruelty of man to man—how doth the All-merciful bear it? Methinks the sword of the Lord must often rattle in its scabbard, and he must force it down, and say, "Sword of the Lord, rest and be quiet!"

I will not go further, because the list is endless. The wonder is that a Gracious God should continue to bear all this! Think of the sin involved in false teaching. I stood one day at the foot of Pilate's staircase, in Rome, and saw the poor creatures go up and down, on their knees, on what they are taught was the very staircase on which the Lord Jesus Christ

stood before Pilate. I noticed sundry priests looking on, and I felt morally certain that they knew it to be an imposture. I thought that if the Lord would lend me his thunderbolts about five minutes, I would make a wonderful clearance thereabouts: but he did nothing of the kind. God is not in haste as we are. Sometimes it does suggest itself to a hot spirit to wish for speedy dealing with iniquity: but the Lord is patient and pitiful.

Especially notice, next, that this longsuffering of God is *seen in peculiar persons*. In certain persons sins are greater than the same sins would be in other people. They have been favored with a tender conscience, and with good instruction, so that when they sin they sin with a vengeance. I have known some who have stood at God's altar, and have gone forth from his temple to transgress; they have been Levites of his sanctuary, and yet first in villanies. Yet the Lord spares the traitors, and lets them live.

It is wonderful that God should have such longsuffering when we look at the *peculiar circumstances* under which some men sin. Some men sin against God wilfully, when they have no temptation to it and can plead no necessity. If the poor man steals, we half forgive him; but some do so who have all that heart could wish. When the man driven to extremity has said the thing that was not true, we have half excused him; but some are wilful liars, with no gain or profit therein. Some sin for the sheer love of sin, not for the pleasure they gain by it, nor for the profit they hope from it, but for mere wantonness. Born of godly parents, trained as you were in the very school of godliness, made to know, as you do know in your own conscience, the Lord Jesus to be the Son of God, when *you* sin against him, there is a painful emphasis in your transgressions. I speak to some who may well wonder that they are yet alive after having sinned with such gross aggravations.

Some manifest the longsuffering of God very wonderfully in the length of time in which they have been spared to sin. Many men are provoked by one offense, and think themselves miracles of patience if they forget it. But many have provoked God fifty, sixty, seventy, perhaps eighty years. *You* could not stand eighty minutes of provocation, and yet the Lord has put up with you throughout a lifetime. You tottered into this house to-night. You might have tottered more if you had remembered the weight of sin that creases to you. Yet the mercy of God spares you. Still, with outstretched arms, infinite mercy bids you come and receive at the hand of God your pardon bought with the blood of Jesus Christ. This longsuffering of God is marvellous.

Remember that it would be easy on God's part to be rid of you. There is a text where he says, "Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries." Some men bear because they cannot help it. They are obliged to submit; but God is not in that condition. One wish, and the sinner will never provoke him any more, nor refuse his mercy again. He will be gone out of the land of hope. Therefore, I say, the longsuffering of God is enhanced in its wonderfulness by the fact that he is under no necessity to exercise it except that which springs out of his own love.

I beg all of you who are unconverted to think earnestly upon God's longsuffering to you in permitting you to be here, still to hear from the cross of Christ the invitation, "look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth."

II. Secondly, let us take THE RIGHT ACCOUNT OF THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD. "Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." What does this mean?

Does it not mean, first, as *to the saving of the many*? The Lord Jesus Christ is, as I believe, to have the pre-eminence. I think that he will have the pre-eminence in the number of souls that will be saved as compared with those that will be lost; and that can scarcely be effected except by a lapse of time in which many will be brought to Christ. I am not, however, going into any speculations. I look at it this way. As long as this old hulk keeps beating up against the rocks, as long as she does not quite go down into the sea of fire, it means man's salvation. It means, "Out with the lifeboat! Man the lifeboat, and let us take off from her all that we can, and bring them to shore." God calls upon us, until the world is utterly destroyed with fire, to go on saving men with all our might and main. Every year that passes is meant to be a year of salvation. We rightly call each year "the year of our Lord"; let us make it so by more and more earnest efforts for the bringing of sinners to the cross of Christ. I cannot think that the world is spared to increase its damnation. Christ came not to destroy the world, but that the world through him might be saved; and so, as every year rolls by, let us account it salvation, and spend and be spent in the hope that by any means we may save some.

And if we can indulge a brighter hope still that the kingdom of Christ shall come, and that multitudes shall be converted, and that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea, so let it be. But ever let this be to the front—that this longsuffering of God means salvation, and at that we are to aim.

So, dear friends, in the second place, the next meaning of this is *to any of you who are unconverted*. I want you to account that the longsuffering of God in sparing you means to you salvation. Why are you here to-night? Surely it is salvation. I met years ago a soldier who had ridden in the charge of Balaclava. He was one of the few that came back when the saddles were emptied right and left of him. I could not help getting into a corner, and saying to him, "Dear sir, do you not think that God has some design of love to you in sparing you when so many fell? Have you given your heart to him?" I felt that I had a right to say *that*. Perhaps I speak to some of you who were picked off a wreck years ago. Why was that? I hope it was that you might be saved. You have had a fever lately, and have hardly been out before. You have come hither to-night, still weakly, scarcely recovered. Why were you saved from that fever when others were cut down? Surely it must mean salvation. At any rate, the God who was so pitiful as to spare you, now says to you, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." When Master Bunyan was a lad, he was so foolhardy that, when an adder rose against him, he took it in his hand, and plucked the sting out of its mouth, but he was not harmed. It was his turn to stand sentinel at the siege of

Nottingham, and as he was going forth, another man offered to take his place. That man was shot, and Master Bunyan thus escaped. We should have had no "Pilgrim's Progress" if it had not been for that. Did not God preserve him on purpose that he might be saved? There are special interpositions of divine providence, by which God spares ungodly men, whom he might have cut down long ago as cumberers of the ground: should we not look upon these as having the intention that the barren tree may be cared for yet another year, if haply it may bring forth fruit? Some of you who are here tonight are wonders to yourselves that you are still in the land of the living. I pray you account the longsuffering of God to be salvation. See salvation in it. Be encouraged to look to Christ, and, looking to him, you shall find salvation, for "there is life in a look at the Crucified One." Account God's longsuffering to be salvation to you if to no one else.

God's longsuffering is one of the great means by which he works for the salvation of his elect. He will not let them die till first they live to God. He will not suffer them to pass into eternity till first his infinite love has justified them through the righteousness of Christ.

Thus I have said what I hope may be embraced by some here present.

But I must finish. This text seems to me to have a bearing upon *the people of God*. Indeed, it is for them that it is written. "Account that the longsuffering of God is salvation."

I must turn the text to give you really what lies in it. God hears the cry going up from his own elect, and it is written, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, though he bear long with them?" That long forbearance of God brings to his own people much of trouble, pain, sorrow, much of amazement and soul distress. Brother, you must learn to look upon that as salvation. I hear you say, "What mean you?" I mean this. The very fact that you are made to groan and cry by reason of God's longsuffering to guilty men gives you sympathy with Christ, and union with Christ, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. Reckon that in being brought into harmony, sympathy, oneness with Christ, through enduring the result of the divine longsuffering, you find salvation. It is salvation to a man to be put side by side with Christ. If you have to bear the jests and gibes of the ungodly—if God spares them, and permits them to persecute you, be glad of it, and reckon it as salvation, for now you are made partaker of Christ's sufferings. What more salvation do you desire?

Remember, too, that when the ungodly persecute the righteous, they give them the mark of salvation, for of old it was so. He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit. If you were never reviled, if you were never slandered or traduced, who would know that you are a Christian? But when, through the longsuffering of God with the ungodly, you are made to suffer, account it to be a mark of your salvation. "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Once more: reckon the longsuffering of God, when it permits the ungodly to slander and injure you, as salvation, because it tends to your salvation by driving you nearer to the

Lord. It prevents your making your home in this world. It forces you to be a stranger and a foreigner. It compels you to go without the gate bearing Christ's reproach, and so, in this way, that which seemed so hard to bear brings salvation to you.

Wherefore, comfort one another, dear children of God. Be not over cast-down and troubled because of your Lord's delaying his coming, for he will yet help you, and you shall be delivered.

If the Lord has shown longsuffering to any of you, and yet you have never repented or turned to him, do so to-night. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and you are not saved." But, oh, that you might be saved ere this service ends! The leaves are falling from the trees thick and fast, and ere you fall from the tree of this mortal life, think of your God, and turn to him, and live. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." May he snatch you from the burning! Amen, and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON— [2 Peter 3](#).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—174, 529, 513.