

TRUTH

“. . . Your word is truth” (John 17:17)

May 2024

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD

Longsuffering is a character trait that is desired and demanded of the people of God, the church (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:22). In Ephesians 4:1-3 we read, “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Our worthy walk is one that is characterized by longsuffering, which is motivated by love and fulfilling our growth in becoming more like our God.

Longsuffering is often equated with patience. Longsuffering may differ from patience in that patience is enduring difficult circumstances, while longsuffering is enduring difficult people. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of NT Words* explains longsuffering as “that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is the opposite of anger and is associated with mercy, and is used of God.”

The longsuffering of God is plainly and often stated in Scripture: “And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘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, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation’” (Exodus 34:6,7). Again, we read, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:8-12).

Knowing the longsuffering of God could cause us to conclude that our sins are not going to be judged. We might be tempted to think that God is going to ignore or overlook our transgressions. This is an error

in judgment that we cannot afford to make. Remember God’s warnings: “The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked. The LORD has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3). Also, “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God” (Ecclesiastes 8:11-13).

We must be warned that the longsuffering of God is not going to be carried into eternity. By that time (judgment), we will either come to forgiveness that is through the blood of Jesus, or we will be judged for our sins. Paul reminded the Christians in Rome of this fact: “But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who ‘will render to each one according to his deeds’” (Romans 2:2-6). The biblical teaching of God’s longsuffering is never pointing to a lack or failure of judgment. God’s mercy and grace extend the offer of redemption to any who will come to Him in the obedience of faith and who will continue to trust in Him and walk with Him (1 John 1:1–2:6).

The longsuffering of God should cause us to be thankful for the goodness of God and to repent of any wrongdoing. To think that we can or should abuse God’s desire to save us from sin is the height of arrogance and will lead to certain condemnation!

-- Dave Leonard

TAKEAWAYS FROM EXODUS 14-15

In these two unforgettable chapters, we read about the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea. That took place in approximately B.C. 1447, and it is mentioned numerous times throughout the Scriptures.

As the Israelites were preparing to cross the Red Sea, at one point *“they were very afraid”* (Exodus 14:10). Why? They were afraid of dying. They were not fearful of the water itself, but afraid of the fast-approaching Egyptian army. The children of Israel asked Moses, *“... have you take us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?”* (14:11). A wavering faith causes fear, and fear leads to irrational thinking and irrational speech. That is what happened with Israel in this case.

No, Moses' purpose in bringing them out of Egypt was not to cause them to die on their journey toward Canaan. Whose idea was it to get the Israelites out of Egypt? It was God's. So, when Moses returned there to lead his Israelite brethren out of slavery and toward the land of promise, he was following God's orders. When we read the biblical record of the Israelites spending forty years in the wilderness, we often see them complaining against Jehovah and Moses. We learn from Exodus 14:10-12 that their murmuring started before they ever crossed the Red Sea!

In response to the Israelites' complaining which stemmed from their fear, Moses charged them, *“Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for your today . . . The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace”* (14:13,14). The Lord God would fight for Israel and manifest His amazing power! They would witness His salvation, and they ought to be grateful for it. In this context, the “salvation” that would come from God would not be the forgiveness of their sins, but rather physical deliverance from the Egyptians. As God's people, regardless of the evil forces and testy trials that may come our way in life, we must learn to trust in Him, always having complete confidence in His wisdom, His plan, and His might.

The dividing of the Red Sea was neither a mere natural phenomenon nor a coincidence: it was a miracle. It happened *when* and *how* God wanted it to happen (14:16,19-27). *“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided . . . and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left”* (14:21,22). According to Psalm 106:9, Jehovah *“rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up.”* By God's power, He brought the water of the sea back together, which resulted in the death of

all the pursuing, Egyptian soldiers (14:26-28).

In God's language, what transpired at the Red Sea? *“So the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea . . . the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians”* (14:27,30). How did the Israelites respond when they saw what God had done for them? The Bible record shows that they (1) feared the Lord (14:31), (2) believed the Lord and His servant Moses (14:31), and then (3) sang a song to praise the Lord (15:1-18). They sang this song of deliverance and joy only *after* they had crossed the water (15:1). It reminds us of a certain eunuch who rejoiced after he was delivered from sin when he was immersed in water (Acts 8:36-39).

Do you recall what we read about the Israelites in Hebrews 11:29? There it is written, *“By faith they passed through the Red Sea . . .”* In what way was their action a demonstration of faith? They did not *become* believers in God that day: they already were His believing children. It was the Lord's expressed will for them to “go forward” and *“go on dry ground through the midst of the sea”* (14:15,16). They complied with God's desire. It would have taken courage to trust in the Lord to hold back the walled waters so they could pass safely through.

Even the people of other nations (Gentiles) heard about God's great miracle at the Red Sea. About forty years after the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, Rahab acknowledged this to two Israelite spies about herself and other Canaanites: *“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt . . . And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted; neither did there remain any more courage in anyone because of you, for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath”* (Joshua 2:10,11). He is the universe's Almighty Ruler! *“Let all the inhabitants of the earth stand in awe of Him”* (Psalm 33:8).

After Israel crossed the Red Sea, Miriam led the women in singing praise to Jehovah. In that connection, Miriam is called “the prophetess” (Exodus 15:20,21). In that generation, God chose three siblings to play major roles in Israel: Miriam was a prophetess, Aaron served as Israel's high priest, and Moses was a prophet and mediator between the Lord and Israel.

Here are two final thoughts. Though the Israelites had escaped from Egypt, not every day of their lives would be pleasant and problem-free (15:22-24). Also, God promised them that if they would obey Him, none of the diseases which He sent on the Egyptians would be present among them (15:25,26).

-- Roger D. Campbell

Overcoming an Unhealthy Self-Image

A person's self-image is how he views himself, including the conception he has of his appearance, abilities, and worth. An *unhealthy* self-image is one that is harmful to one's mental wellbeing. How we view ourselves influences how we treat others and God.

Some people do not like themselves. Perhaps they do not like their physical appearance. They may think they are lacking intelligence, are clumsy, void of talent, or have no value. That kind of low self-image can ruin a person's sense of self-worth for a lifetime.

Such folks need encouragement. It can help offset negative thoughts and criticism they get from others. They need to have their eyes opened to some Bible truths. First, they are valuable in God's sight, as He made them in His image (Genesis 1:26,27). Second, the Lord wants us to love ourselves (Mark 12:31). Third, God loves them — not the person they have the potential to become, but the person they are right now! He showed His unconditional love by sending His Son to die for each of us (1 John 4:9,10). Fourth, if they submit to the Lamb of God, He will not hold their sins against them ever again (Hebrews 8:12). In addition, they have God-given blessings and abilities (Matthew 25:14-30). Finally, God looks on a person's heart, not his outward appearance (1 Samuel 16:7).

On the other end of the spectrum, some people think way too *highly* of themselves. That, too, is an unhealthy self-image. They look at their blessings, abilities, or earthly accomplishments and conclude, "I am amazing! I am better than other people! By my own power and brains, I am a wonderful person, so I do not need anyone or anything." God's charge to each of us is "*not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think*" (Romans 12:3). God resists the proud, but exalts the humble (1 Peter 5:5,6).

Arrogant, self-serving, self-praising folks need to learn some Bible facts about "nothing." Without *love*, we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2). Without *Jesus*, we can do/be nothing (John 15:5). We are what we are by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10), so without God's *grace*, we are nothing. Let those truths sink in.

The acceptance of two realities stands as the foundation of a healthy self-image. First, we need to recognize, "In God's sight, I am just as important as any other person in the world — I am not worth *less*, and I am not worthless." I also need to admit, "In God's sight, I am not of *more* worth than any other person — all other humans are just as valuable as I am."

Via God's revealed truth, we can be the people He wants us to be (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Believe it!

-- Roger D. Campbell

Why doesn't the church of Christ have women overseers?

In a world filled with religious division, pure New Testament Christianity stands out! As such, people often have questions about the Lord's church. While not every religious group has women in leadership roles, many of them do, so the question is often raised as to why churches of Christ do not appoint women as elders/overseers or have women in leadership roles.

All we do in spiritual matters is to be done "*in the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Colossians 3:17), meaning all we do is to be done by the authority of Jesus. And authority from Jesus comes from the New Testament. So, as with any religious question, the question of having or not having women as overseers is not to be answered based on feelings, thoughts, tradition, creeds, or what the majority of religious folk are doing. The *real* question is, "What does the New Testament have to say about this matter?"

The short answer to our question is this: faithful churches of Christ do not have women overseers because such is not authorized by the New Testament. This answer is demonstrated by two major arguments:

(1) 1 Timothy 2:11-14 forbids women from having authority over men in the church. Verses 11 and 12 say women are to "*learn in silence [literally, quietness] with all submission,*" and they are not permitted "*to teach or to have authority over a man.*" Lest one think the prohibition is merely cultural, verses 13 and 14 connect the injunction with Eve's being deceived and sinning first. The Almighty does not owe humans an explanation for any of His actions or commands, yet He plainly gives the reason for the restraint on women leadership in 1 Timothy 2, and that reason goes back to the beginning of time, **not** culture. Furthermore, this issue is neither a matter of ability nor superiority. Many women are as talented—if not more so—than men. But God has spoken! Let us abide by His will.

(2) 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 preclude women serving as elders. Paul, by inspiration, gives the qualifications for a congregation's overseers; among those, an elder is to be "*the husband of one wife*" (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). This qualification alone excludes any female from serving as an elder in the Lord's church.

Why does the church of Christ not have women overseers? In short, women have **zero authority** from God to serve as overseers in the Lord's church. Let us always respect and submit to God's will.

-- Chad Dollahite

THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS

Jesus told this masterful story during the last week of His earthly life. We can read it in Matthew 21, Mark 12, and Luke 20. According to Luke 20:9, our Lord spoke this parable to “the people,” but it was especially addressed to the Jewish leaders (Luke 20:1). Tensions were high between them and Jesus!

What was the setting for this parable? That same day, the Jewish leaders had questioned the Christ’s authority (Matthew 21:23-27). After that, He told the Parable of Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32), then the parable of our study.

In a nutshell, here is the storyline of the Parable of Wicked Vinedressers. A certain landowner plants a vineyard, makes provisions for it, leases it to vinedressers, then goes into a far country. When the time comes for the grapes to be harvested, the landowner sends multiple servants, then his son, to receive the vineyard’s fruit. Each of those men whom he sent were mistreated by the vinedressers. They killed the landowner’s son.

A brief outline of the Parable of Wicked Vinedressers, as it is recorded in Matthew 21:

- (1) 21:33-36 – The wicked vinedressers
- (2) 21:37-39 – the rejected Son
- (3) 21:40-46 – judgment on those who reject the Son.

The main point of the parable seems to be to show the awful doom for the Jewish leaders and others who would reject the Christ (Matthew 21:42-44).

The landowner in the story represents God the Father. The vineyard which He planted was the nation of Israel, His chosen people. The message of Isaiah 5:1-7 makes it plain that God counted Israel as His vineyard during Old Testament days.

Just as the landowner made great provisions for his vineyard, so Jehovah made wonderful provisions for Israel, providing all His people needed. He blessed the Israelites with the law of Moses, an expedient location in Canaan, and conditional protection and material blessings when they obeyed Him.

According to Luke 20:9, the landowner “*went into a far country for a long time.*” God had spoken directly to Israel at Mt. Sinai in the days of Moses, but then withdrew Himself, so to speak. The “long time” likely stands for the time period from the giving of the law at Sinai until the coming of the Word in the flesh. Just as the landowner was seeking fruit from his vineyard (Matthew 21:34), so God wanted the fruit of righteousness from His children (Isaiah 5:7).

What about the landowner’s servants, as well as the vinedressers (21:34)? Whom do they symbolize? It is common to read in the Old Testament that prophets of God were called His “servants” (Jeremiah 7:25), so

in our story, the servants are the prophets whom God sent to preach to His people. When Jesus spoke of the servants being persecuted, that is exactly what happened to some of God’s prophets when they preached to His people (2 Chronicles 36:15,16). God showed longsuffering by sending servants/prophets over and over (21:34-36).

The vinedressers in the story symbolize the leaders of the Jewish people. They had all they needed for a good harvest, so they had no room for excuses. In the end, they killed the vinedresser’s son, even after they admitted that he was heir to the inheritance (21:38).

The murdered Son stood for Jesus. Coming in the name of His Father, He should have been honored like the Father is honored (John 5:23). Instead, the Jewish leaders rejected His authority, His person, and His teaching. Rejecting the Son is equal to rejecting the Father Who sent Him. The doom of the envious, rebellious Jewish leaders was inevitable! This parable serves as a prediction of Jesus’ upcoming death and the consequence for the Jews who had a hand in it.

After Jesus finished the parable, the Jewish leaders pronounced their own upcoming destruction. How? When the Master asked them what the owner of the vineyard would do to those vinedressers who killed his son, the Jews replied, “*He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons*” (21:40,41). Their conclusions were correct! God *did* destroy the nation of Israel. He did so when He used the Roman army to destroy Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70. The Messiah, Who was the rejected chief cornerstone, would crush the rebellious Jews, grinding them into powder (21:42,44).

The “other vinedressers/nation” to whom the vineyard/kingdom would be given (21:41,43) are the Gentiles who would receive the gospel and become part of God’s family (Ephesians 3:5,6). Spiritual Israel is now the church (Galatians 6:15,16).

The Jews’ leaders gave off the appearance of being holy men of God. In reality, they were “wicked men” (21:41). Appearances and reality are not always the same. In this case, the Jews admitted the truth about the Son, but still rejected Him and His truth. How sad.

Our Lord masterfully told this story, causing His listeners to see and admit the truth before they saw how the teaching applied to them. Jesus was amazing!

-- Roger D. Campbell

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