

A silhouette of Jesus Christ on the cross, set against a dramatic, cloudy sky with sunlight breaking through. The figure is dark and stands out against the lighter, textured background of the clouds.

# SERVING GOD WITH LONGSUFFERING

*"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who... endured the cross, despising the shame..." (Hebrews 12:2).*

Kelvin Lim

Serving the Lord is the divine duty of every born-again Christian. The Bible exhorts the saints to serve the Lord (Romans 6:18; 1 Corinthians 7:22). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gift(s) to every child of God to equip him for his service unto the Lord. Though not everyone would be called to serve in vocational ministries (such as pastoring God's flock, teaching and preaching God's Word, being an evangelist or a full-time staff of the church, etc.), it is nonetheless required of every saint to serve his heavenly Father while here on earth! And in the process of one's service, God's saint is bound to encounter difficult people and situations. Through it all, "the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient" (2 Timothy 2:24). In other words, he is to serve "with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2b).

The word "longsuffering" in the New Testament is made up of two Greek words, "*makro*" and "*thumia*". The literal translation of "*makrothumia*" is "long-tempered" (the opposite of short-tempered). According to Vine's dictionary, "longsuffering" is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation. It does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish (cf. Luke 18:7; 1 Peter 3:20). Furthermore, "longsuffering" can also be defined as the quality that does not surrender to circumstances nor succumb to trials. It is the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope. Thus, "longsuffering" can also be translated as "patient" (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14b; James 5:7-8).

## LONGSUFFERING IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD

God's longsuffering was abundantly manifested during the days of Noah (cf. Genesis 6-7). The imaginations of

men then were so filled with "only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5b) that it grieved the LORD's heart. The wickedness of men greatly provoked the LORD to anger. Yet, the LORD was "longsuffering to (them)-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9b). The LORD could have promptly punished mankind during the days of Noah for their wickedness but He restrained Himself. He called Noah, a preacher of righteousness, to warn the ungodly for 120 years about His impending judgment of flooding the earth, but they continued in their wickedness and believed not Noah's preaching. They continued to eat, drink, make merry, marry and be given in marriage till it was too late (cf. Luke 17:27). Indeed, "the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing", just so for them to repent, but in the end only "eight souls (i.e. Noah and his family) were saved" (1 Peter 3:20).

The Bible speaks of God as "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7a). Without a doubt, God's abundant mercies and longsuffering can be seen in His dealings with His chosen nation Israel. God's forbearance with Israel as a nation over many years is well documented in Scripture. Despite great spiritual declension characterising the reigns of northern Israel's and southern Judah's kings, God's longsuffering was shown in His sending faithful prophets to warn of God's impending judgment against idolatry and apostasy unless averted by repentance (cf. Hosea 2; Amos 5; Micah 6; Jeremiah 25:1-11). Alas, when

repeated warnings fell on deaf ears, Israel fell to the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:5-6) in 722 BC, and Judah was subjugated by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:1-4) in 586 BC. What followed were 70 years of captivity and exile in Babylon. Nevertheless, the covenant-keeping God would not discard His people forever; He only meant to chasten them for a season. No wonder upon the Jews' return from captivity, Nehemiah was moved to testify of God's longsuffering: "But ... our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, ... but hardened their necks, ... but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not" (Nehemiah 9:16-17).

### LONGSUFFERING IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Christians have been made partakers of God's divine nature (cf. 2 Peter 1:4a). Upon being born into God's kingdom, we are endowed with the Holy Spirit for the service of God. And "having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4b), we are no more to walk after the flesh, expressing ourselves in "hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies" (Galatians 5:20). "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23).

As Christians serving the Lord, trials and afflictions are unavoidable in our lives (cf. 1 Peter 4:12). In such times, the Holy Spirit will enable us to go through difficulties with longsuffering, among other

God-honouring traits. The Holy Spirit will grant us the grace to bear up with those distresses, as well as to bear those injuries caused by evil mouths and wicked hearts. As we walk in the Spirit, manifesting "the fruit of the Spirit", we will be able to put up with the affronts hurled in our faces, and be ready to forgive those who offended us. Longsuffering (as one vital aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit) grows in the process of time, which can only come about through the trials providentially prepared by the Lord as a form of spiritual exercise to strengthen the patience of His children. These spiritual exercises help us to trust the Lord increasingly and thus mature in the faith according to God's purpose.

### LONGSUFFERING IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRISTIAN'S LOT

The spirit of longsuffering is most needful – especially for those spiritually more mature – when it comes to serving God among His people. The apostle Paul is very mindful that in terms of temperament, God's saints come in all shapes and sizes. Differences of opinion or in approaches to things could easily create friction, resulting in disagreements when Christians serve the Lord together. Hence, Paul pleaded with believers to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, ... with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Ephesians 4:1-2). It goes without saying that it is the spiritually strong who should take lead in doing the "forbearing", even being "kind one to another" and "forgiving one another" (Ephesians 4:32). Truly, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). Spiritually-minded Christians are to

“esteem other better than themselves” and to “look ... every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3b-4). This is the lot of every mature – and maturing – Christian.

Christians are also urged to “be patient (from the root word “*makrothumia*”) toward all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:14b). The Lord Jesus told His disciples that “men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matthew 5:11). Ungodly men will persecute Christians for their faith and oppress them in many areas of life. Yet, we are encouraged to exhibit a longsuffering spirit in dealing with them! “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Peter 3:14-16).

Moreover, Christians are to be “patient (also from “*makrothumia*”) ... unto the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7a). The apostle James exhorts the saints to “suffer with long patience” until the Lord returns to take them back to be with Him forever. Christians are to bear up well and show restraint in the face of hostility or opposition amidst their service. Notwithstanding all our trials and afflictions in serving God, it will be worth it all when Christ returns and says unto us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant”. Meanwhile, we are to “stablish (our) hearts” (James 5:8) firmly

upon God’s Word and be assured that our longsuffering in the midst of serving God will bear great testimony to others around us that can influence them for Christ. Thus, waiting patiently for the Lord’s return is also a form of serving God!

## CONCLUSION

The need for serving God with longsuffering cannot be overemphasised. It is not only a godly trait, but also an important aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which will enable the spiritually mature Christian to persevere in his service, especially in the area of ministering to people (cf. Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20).

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# Reformation Lectures 2017

in commemoration of  
the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
of the Reformation

Theme: "Historical Relevance of the Reformation"

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1<sup>st</sup> October – **Pre-Reformation** –

Ecclesiastical Corruption and Declension  
*by Pr Andrew Koh*

8<sup>th</sup> October – **Reformation from Within** –

"Morning Stars" and "Forerunners"  
*by Pr Dennis Kabingue*

15<sup>th</sup> October – **Reformation Precipitated by the Times** –

Social Developments and Intellectual Movements  
*by Pastor Prabhudas Koshy*

22<sup>nd</sup> October – **Reformation Breakthrough** –

Defining Moments and Key Figures  
*by Eld Richard Tiu*

Venue: SingPost Centre, Level 5 Auditorium (next to Paya Lebar MRT station)

Time: 1.30pm - 3.30pm