

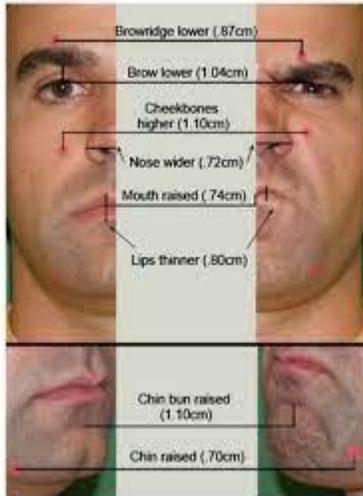
The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward 2 Peter 3:9

(Sermon to my fellow prisoners of Jesus Christ at Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, on August 1, 2021. (Philemon 1 and 9))

The longsuffering of God, the same with his forbearance and patience, arises from his mercy. His longsuffering is a display of his mercy. Wherever God is said to be longsuffering, he is represented as gracious and merciful, or as of great mercy and kindness. By his attribute of longsuffering, he is pleased to describe and make known himself, for the encouragement of faith and hope in him. Therefore the consideration of longsuffering of God properly follows that of his mercy. See for example these verses: Exodus 34:6: “*And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.*” Numbers 14:18: “*The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*” Psalm 86:15: “*But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.*”

The Hebrew word מִיָּפֶאֱרָא (pronounced “aw-rake af”) literally signifies “long of both nostrils,” is sometimes rendered “longsuffering,” as in the verses referred to above; and sometimes “slow to anger” (Nehemiah 9:17: “*And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.*” Psalm 103:8: “*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.*”). The Greek words for longsuffering are μακροθυμῶ, and μακροθυμία, (pronounced “makrothumia mak-roth-oo-mee’-ah”) in the New Testament, as found at Romans 2:4: “*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*” and 2 Peter 3:9,15: “*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*” “*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you*”. The word is an allusion to the nose (“long of both nostrils”), the seat of anger, which restrains or

shows it, as it is long or contracted. (An allusion is an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly). See the illustration below showing the face when it is calm and patient on the left side, but angry and impatient on the right side. The most prominent feature on the face is the nose, so the part is put for the whole. The Bible uses such expression in describing God's wrath. See Psalm 18:8: "There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it."



God is sometimes called, "the God of patience," Romans 15:5: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." Not only because he is the author and object of the grace of patience; but because he is patient, or longsuffering in himself, and towards his creatures, and is a pattern of patience to them. This is one of the attributes of God, in which he may in some measure be imitated. See Eph 4:1-2: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;" and Colossians 3:12: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering."

This is not to be considered as a quality, accident, passion, or affection in God, as in creatures; who bear with patience things grievous, and distressing to them, Colossians 1:11: "*Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.*" Rather, it is the very nature and essence of God, which is free from all passion and anxiety, from all suffering, grief, and pain. It springs from his goodness, and is as essential to him as longsuffering, and is joined with it. Romans 2:4: "*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and*

forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

This longsuffering is a moderation or restraint of his anger, a deferring of the effects of it, at least for a while, according to his sovereign will. It is an extension and prolongation of mercy for a season; for mercy is always in longsuffering and with it. Longsuffering differs from it in one respect: that the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting. But the longsuffering of God, as to the exercise of it, is only for a time, until some certain end is answered, or purpose accomplished. Either in the damnation and destruction of the wicked, when they are fitted for it: Romans 9:22: "*What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.*" Or in the salvation of God's elect, 2 Peter 3:15: "*And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.*" For it is exercised towards both, until each take place.

The longsuffering of God is exercised towards his chosen people; they are the "us" towards whom he is said to be "longsuffering," in 2 Peter 3:9 ("*The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*") These same elect are called beloved in 2 Peter 3:8: "*But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*" They are not only beloved of the apostle, and by one another, but by the Lord; and the "*elect according to the foreknowledge of God,*" 1 Peter 1:2: "*Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*" For to the same persons are both epistles written; and therefore being the beloved and chosen of God, it was his will that none of them should perish, but come to repentance; even all of the same character, and of the same company and society, the whole election of grace (Romans 11:5: "*Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*")

Until every one of these are called and brought to repentance, God is, and will be, longsuffering towards them; and **longsuffering to the world for their sakes**. Wherefore Christ's not coming to judgment sooner than he will, is not owing to any negligence, dilatoriness, or slackness in God, concerning the promise of it, but to the

longsuffering of God; which has been eminently displayed with respect to the people of God. Eminent not imminent. To a notable degree; not about to happen.

For example, in the saints of the Old Testament dispensation, which time is expressly called "the forbearance of God," in Romans 3:25: "*Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.*" Christ became the Surety for them in eternity, engaged to assume their nature, pay their debts, and make satisfaction for their sins. Notice of this was declared immediately after the fall of Adam: Genesis 3:15: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*" But it was four thousand years from that time to the time fixed in Daniel's prophecy, "*to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness;*" to the fulness of time when Christ should come to redeem all his people, and particularly, to obtain the redemption of transgressions that were under the first Testament. Daniel 9:24: "*Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.*" Galatians 4:4: "*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.*" Hebrews 9:15: "*And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*"

Now all this time was a time of patience, forbearance, and longsuffering with God, in respect to his people under this dispensation; he did not stir up his wrath (Psalm 78:38), and execute it on them; but reserved it for his Son, their Surety. He forbore to inflict the punishment on them their sins deserved; he did not impute sin to them (Romans 4:8), place it to their account, charge it on them, and demand of them satisfaction for it; but placed it to his Son's account, and expected satisfaction from him. He accepted of the sacrifices of slain beasts, as vicarious ones in their stead, though they had no true value, nor real efficacy in them, to atone for sin; only were typical of Christ's sacrifice; and were to continue, and did, until that truly acceptable sacrifice should be offered up. God waited till he should come and make his soul an offering for sin (Hebrews 10:8); and, upon his credit, bore with them, and bestowed

the blessings of his grace on them. They were justified by him on the foundation of Christ's righteousness to be wrought out; and their sins pardoned, through his atoning sacrifice to be offered up. They were saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, even as we are, and we as they. They were carried to heaven, and glorified, before the payment of their debts were made by their Surety, before satisfaction for their sins was given to justice, and before the actual redemption of them was obtained. All which, as it shows the trust and confidence God put in his Son, so his forbearance and longsuffering towards Old Testament saints.

For another example of his manifest longsuffering, look how he acts towards every one of his people in their state of unregeneracy, in every age and period of time, or of whatsoever nation, or under whatsoever dispensation they be; the Lord bears with them, while in a state of nature, and patiently waits all that while, to be gracious to them. Isaiah 30:18: "*And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.*" There was much grace in his heart, in his Son, and in his covenant, laid up for them. That everlasting covenant of grace is "*ordered in all things, and sure.*" (2 Samuel 23:5). This is abundantly displayed in conversion when there is an abounding and a superabounding of longsuffering displayed. But then the calling and conversion of them is according to purpose (Romans 8:28); and as there is a time for every purpose (Ecclesiastes 3:1), for the execution of it, so for this. Until that time comes, the Lord waits, forbears, suffers much and long. He does not cut them off in their sins, as they deserve; but saves them, and sometimes from very imminent dangers, to be called, 2 Timothy 1:9: "*Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.*" And with some he bears and waits a long time, who are called at the ninth and eleventh hours (Matthew 20), and, as the thief on the cross, at the last day and hour of his life (Luke 23:39-43); and he waits, as it were, in a longing manner; speaking after the manner of men, "*When shall it once be?*" Jeremiah 13:27: "*I have seen thine adulteries, and thy neighings, the lewdness of thy whoredom, and thine abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe unto thee, O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?*"

The apostle Paul is a remarkable instance of God's longsuffering; which was exercised towards him throughout all his blasphemy of Christ, his persecution of his

people, and the injuries he did unto them; he waited, through all, to be gracious to him. His eye was upon him (Deuteronomy 32:10), and his heart was towards him (Psalm 33:11); and therefore such notice is taken of him in that state, before the account is given of his calling. Acts 7:58: "*And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.*" Acts 8:1: "*And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*" Acts 8:3: "*As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*" Acts 9:1: "*And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.*" In fact, he himself says: "*For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting,*" 1 Timothy 1:16. Does he mean the pattern which is shown to the people of the Jews, in the latter day? His sense seems to be this, that as Christ bore much, and exercised great longsuffering towards him, and at last showed him mercy; so he would bear with, and show much longsuffering to the people of the Jews, of which that towards him was a pattern, and which should issue in their salvation, as it had in his. Does he prophesy of this when at Romans 11:26 he emphatically states: "*All Israel shall be saved.*" You have to admit of this reality: God's longsuffering towards the Jews is very great and very remarkable; as it was towards Paul. Though they are under the marks of his displeasure, he has not stirred up all his wrath, so as to cut them off from being a people; but has reserved them for future times, and good things for them, and waits to be gracious to them as represented in 144,000. Jeremiah 23:28: "*The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.*" There is a lot of chaff surrounding those 144,000. The chaff is discarded after it has served its purposes.

The longsuffering of God is exercised towards the ungodly, even towards "*the vessels of wrath*" whom he "*endures with much longsuffering,*" till they are "*fitted to destruction,*" Romans 9:22. And this appears by his supporting them in their beings, notwithstanding their grievous provocations of him; which are such, that it is amazing he does not at once strike them, dead, as he did Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11); or that the earth does not open and swallow them up, as it did Dathan and

Abiram (Numbers 16:12-34). This can be attributed to nothing else but, to his patience, forbearance, and longsuffering: and by the multitude of his mercies bestowed upon them which are called "*the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering.*" See Job 21:7-13: "*Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave.*" Psalm 73:4-7: "*For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.*" Romans 2:4: "*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*"

By deferring his judgments on them; which because they are not speedily executed, their hearts are set in them to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11); they are more and more hardened, and promise themselves impunity in sin. Now the ends of God's thus dealing with them, are partly for his own glory; "*to show his wrath, and make his power known*" (Romans 9:22); and to vindicate him from all cruelty and injustice, when he righteously executes his wrath, and exerts his power in their destruction. This is shown in the instance of Pharaoh. Romans 9:17: "*For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.*" Romans 9:22: "*What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.*" And partly for the sake of his own people who dwell among them, that they may not suffer with them; thus he would have spared Sodom, had there been ten righteous men in it, for their sakes (Genesis 18:16-33). And he forbears to take vengeance on those that have shed the blood of his saints, until the number of his elect, in like manner, is fulfilled. Revelation 6:11: "*And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be*

fulfilled.” He spares a wicked world from being burnt up and destroyed, until all his chosen ones are brought to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* And another end is for the wicked’s sakes, that they may be rendered inexcusable, and the execution of wrath on them at last, appears just and righteous, Romans 2:1: *“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.”* Romans 2:4-5: *“Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”*

There are many instances of the patience, forbearance, and longsuffering of God, with respect to the wicked:

* As in the men of the old world, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah. 1Peter 3:20: *“Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”* See Genesis 6:3: *“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”*

* In the instance of the inhabitants of Sodom, audacious sinners, who had first hints of God’s displeasure, yet had mercy shown them, a respite for a while, and then destroyed by fire from heaven. Genesis 13:13: *“But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.”* Genesis 14:11: *“And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.”* Genesis 14:21: *“And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.”* Genesis 18:21: *“I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know.”* Genesis 19:24: *“Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.”*

* In the instance of Pharaoh, refusing to let Israel go, whom God had spared some time, beginning with lighter judgments, then executed heavier ones; and at last drowned him, and his host, in the Red Sea. Exodus 5:2: *“And Pharaoh said, Who is*

the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.” Exodus 5:7: “Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves.” Exodus 14:17-18: “And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen.” Exodus 14:28: “And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.”

*In the instance of the people of Israel, in the wilderness, whose manners God suffered and bore with, and was grieved with them forty years. Acts 13:18: *“And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.”*

* In the example of the Amorites and Canaanites, until their sin was full, and till the land itself would bear them no longer; but spewed them out of it. Genesis 15:16: *“But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”* Leviticus 18:28: *“That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you.”*

* In the example of the Gentile world, during their times of ignorance. Acts 17:30: *“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”*

* In the example of fruitless professors of religion, signified by the barren fig tree. Luke 13:6-9 *“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”*

* In the example of antichrist, during the time of his reign, and no longer. Revelation 2:21: *“And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.”* Revelation 13:6: *“And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.”* Revelation

18:8: *“Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”*

Gill commenting on Revelation 2:21, says this about God’s forbearance: “[F]or the time for, and means leading to repentance may be given, yet if the grace of repentance itself is not given, men, either particular persons, or whole bodies of men, will never repent of their sins.”

Therefore, I say we thank God and rejoice greatly in this reality: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”* 2 Peter 3:9. *“And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation”* (2 Peter 3:15).

Jude: 24-25: *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”*

I love you. Amen.