

Jesus and the Fruit of the Spirit (4)

Ponder: The longsuffering of Jesus

Scripture: “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56, NKJV).

Someone smarter than I am said that a short fuse is dangerous in dynamite and in people. No doubt the Holy Spirit agrees, since He inspired Paul to use the word “macrothumia” (longsuffering) in his list of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). The first part of this compound word (macro) means “long,” and the second part means “anger.” Someone who is longsuffering, then, takes a long time to become angry. We would say he has a long temper rather than a short one.

Prior to writing about the fruit of the Spirit, Paul listed the works of the flesh, including “outbursts of wrath” (Galatians 5:20). This is the practical opposite of longsuffering.

I love W.E. Vine’s explanation of longsuffering: “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” (Expository Dictionary, p. 12).

Jesus manifested longsuffering perfectly, as He did all other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. When a Samaritan village rejected Jesus, James and John asked if He wanted them to call down fire upon it as Elijah had done in 2 Kings 1:10. Doesn’t that sound like the two disciples were provoked and would have hastily retaliated and promptly punished the Samaritans? No wonder they were called the “sons of thunder”! (Mark 3:17). But Jesus rejected their offer and reproved their attitude. Rejecting Jesus made the Samaritans liable to divine wrath, but exercised longsuffering. He was in the saving business, not the destroying business.

Even today, people benefit from God’s longsuffering. Every day that the Father waits before sending Jesus to judge the world is another day for sinners to repent and obey the gospel. As Peter wrote, “the longsuffering of our God is salvation” (2 Peter 3:15).

Since the Lord is longsuffering with us, we certainly ought to be longsuffering with each other! Part of walking worthily of our calling is to behave “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).

Watch that temper! Be longsuffering!

Song: “Amazing Grace”

Prayer: Kind Father in heaven, we praise and thank You for Your longsuffering with us, especially as demonstrated in Jesus. Help us to be longsuffering with others as He is with us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.