

A Path to Unity in the Spirit

In Galatians, Chapter 5, verses 22-23 (*Standard notations from this point on*), we read that among the elements of the fruit of the Holy Spirit is the attribute of long-suffering. We know that as we grow in our walk with the Lord that these elements will continue to increase in our lives.

Experiencing the trait of long-suffering does not mean that unless we are suffering a long time that we can't be experiencing God's Spirit in us. Indeed, translations using that odd word does everyone a disservice. Some bible versions translate the Greek into "patience," while others use "a quiet mind." While technically accurate, the terms don't convey the meaning that the underlying Greek appears to intend. That word actually goes further than merely being peaceful or having a quiet mind, but all the way to having a "disposition to endure long under offenses."

We all recognize that we have been called to become more like God each day. Moreover, we are told by God through His Word that long-suffering is an element of the nature of God. We see that in Num 14:18.

Paul also made us aware of that characteristic of God in Rom 9:22-23 where he asks whether it was longsuffering that God demonstrated in putting up with the abuses of those bound for destruction to "make known the riches of His glory" on us.

It is also written to us in Eph 4:1-3 "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the calling with which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, *forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*"

Paul's admonition goes directly to the heart of the mission of the Bible Sabbath Association! Notice what else Paul wrote to us in Col 3:12-13:

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender feelings of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, *forbearing one another and forgiving yourselves*, if anyone has a complaint against any. As Christ forgave you, so also you do."

What if God is using each of us as an example of His long-suffering toward us as a "pattern," demonstrating to all the depth of His patient endurance of our abuses toward Him so that others might see that and come to believe God? Paul indicates that this might well be so in 1 Tim 1:16 (It helps to read the context to see the offenses to which Paul refers.)

How does this insight help us with our mission? Consider this: there are among us brethren who believe that they have already been led into all truth by the Holy Spirit. They are unabashedly sure of themselves, and so much so that they display an attitude of superiority when dealing with differences of understanding. At times they will even accuse others of "not worshiping the same God as they do." This is a hurtful statement without a doubt and does not lead to harmony in the Church.

However, the example we have from God is that of enduring a continuous train of abuses for a higher purpose. We have already come to know that we are to become more like God. Therefore, we need to demonstrate long-suffering toward our younger brothers in the Spirit who do not yet understand that the Spirit leads us to truth, but not all at the same rate or even the same understanding.

We who keep the Commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus need to grow in long-suffering toward each other so that we too can be an example of walking in God's Way to those who don't yet understand the principle—thus restoring the unity of the Spirit in God's Church.