

Makrothumia: Love is Longsuffering

[wait, I am not going to fall in love to suffer!!!]

All loves suffer. How long will your love suffer?

We have been in Col. 3:12 for some time now, but it is such a rich verse. First, we studied who we are in Christ: chosen of God, holy and beloved. How wonderful is our God to make us these three rich qualities in Christ! Now we are looking seriously at what we are to be like as Christians, what we will be like if we live by faith in the Holy Spirit: heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and now patience or Longsuffering.

The Greek word is makrothumia. Its meaning is dynamic in the Christian life. The Greek noun makrothumia and the Greek verb makrothumeo and the adverb makrothumos are primarily Christian words. They do not occur in classical Greek and rarely in later Greek. As we study these words we will discover that they describe as a Christian virtue that which to the Greek way of thinking is no virtue at all. To be longsuffering was not a virtue to the Greek philosophical way of thinking. This Greek noun is formed from two words: makros meaning long + thumos meaning heart of mind – meaning long mindset, long suffering or patience

Definition of makrothumia

1. To be long suffering.
2. Forbearance.
3. Self-restraint before proceeding to action.

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4. The quality of a person who is able to avenge himself yet refrains from doing so.
5. This word refers to being spiritually calm especially, when people say or act in ways that you wish they would not act or say.
6. The point here is that instead of losing one's faith or stop living by faith in the Holy Spirit and giving into the control of the flesh, this believer is able to maintain his/her fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
7. "it means enduring patiently in the face of wrong done to us by others and not retaliating, refraining from acting in anger" (Ralph Martin commentary on Colossians)
8. Instead of anger or revenge or lashing out with the tongue, the believer is long suffering.
9. Bearing with those who oppose us and remaining in the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us this longsuffering.
10. The ability to suffer without complaining.
11. I like the way John Callow words it in his work on Colossians, "It is exercising patience toward fellow believers who annoy us, rub us the wrong way,"
12. To be able to put up with other believers a long time without being irritated with them.

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13. Very important: This word, makrothumia, is patience in respect to persons while the Greek word hupomone is endurance or putting up with things or circumstances.
14. This is the first impact of Spiritual Love in 1 Cor. 13:4: Spiritual Love is longsuffering.

As we have noted with our other desired attributes of heart of compassion, kindness and gentleness this is first an attribute of God Himself and so it is with longsuffering. An excellent Old Testament passage to see the longsuffering of the love of God is:

Nehemiah 9:16 “But they, our fathers, (Exodus generation) acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. (Relayed by Moses)

Nehemiah 9:17 “They refused to listen, (this is not repetitious from verse 16 but refers to a second time they refused to listen and rebelled against God) And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them.”

1. Divine guidance on the way of their journey — the pillar and cloud
Nehemiah 9:12

Nehemiah 9:12 “And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day And with a pillar of fire by

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night To light for them the way In which they were to go.”

2. Good laws and just statutes to guide in all aspects of their lives
Nehemiah 9:13-14:

Nehemiah 9:14 “Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments.

Nehemiah 9:14 So You made known to them Your holy sabbath; And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through your servant Moses.”

3. Provisions for their journey — manna each day Nehemiah 9:15a:

Nehemiah 9:15a “You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, ...”

4. Renewal of the promise of the land they were going to enter and give them. Nehemiah 9:15b

Nehemiah 9:15b “...And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them.”

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Next, note what happened to them and to us when we will not listen to the Word of God and forget all that God has done for us, beginning with Eternal Life salvation. So, because they refused to listen to the Word of God and because they forgot all He had done for them they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But, introduce the aspect of the Longsuffering of God. Of course, He would have been just in taking this generation out, but instead, God is Longsuffering. We now have five unbelievable manifestations of God's love and Faithfulness.

1. You are a God of forgiveness. This will come up for us in Col. 3:13
2. Gracious and
3. Compassionate, Slow to anger (or our word longsuffering) and
4. abounding in lovingkindness; And
5. You did not forsake them. God in His longsuffering continued to provide divine guidance by the cloud and fire; He continued to provide provisions of food of manna and water and He even sent the Holy Spirit to instruct them in verse 20 (see below). And what is really remarkable about the longsuffering of God is that He sent to them His Holy Spirit to instruct them. (verse 30 see below)

Nehemiah 9:20 “You gave them Your good Spirit to instruct them, Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst”

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Nehemiah 9:30 “However, You bore with them for many years, And admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, Yet they would not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.”

But in our study of ‘longsuffering’ we learn several things from the longsuffering of God.

1. The presence of the longsuffering from God does not mean the end of wrath.

Exodus 34:6 Then the LORD passed by in front of him (Moses) and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger (longsuffering), and abounding in lovingkindness and truth;

Exodus 34:7 who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

We learn from this passage the richness of the longsuffering of God but we also learn that there is no renouncing of wrath. Many times in the

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history of Israel in the Old Testament, they tried God to the end of Longsuffering, as in the Babylonian captivity starting in 606 BC and the end of longsuffering giving way to wrath in 586 BC with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. His wrath continues until there is something inside of man to bring about the end of wrath as in the devotion of Daniel and his three friends. But if this wrath is not met with repentance then the wrath of God reaches its fulfillment as in 70 AD.

2. A thorough study of the Old Testament clearly reveals that the primary treatment of Israel was based on the Longsuffering of God. “The wrath and the grace of God are the two poles which constitute the span of His longsuffering.” Page 376 of Vol. IV of The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.
3. It must be understood that the longsuffering of God is subject only to His own Sovereignty. And secondly, His longsuffering is always directly related to final salvation of man. That is, God holds off wrath that more might be saved.

Romans 2:4 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, (this is our word makrothumia meaning His longsuffering with all mankind) **not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?** (When you wish for something to thank God for or give Him praise — thank Him for His Longsuffering for because of it you have Eternal Life).

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Think about it. God withheld His wrath from Adam and Eve's original sin to the coming of His Son, His Servant, His Messiah and the universal offer of Eternal Life Salvation. God could have upheld His own perfect Righteousness with final wrath delivered against all mankind at any time. But He was always longsuffering to the coming of Redemption. Please remember this when we come to longsuffering from the believer in the Church Age. Longsuffering is always for the manifestation of the Grace of God. One of the most troubling passages by Paul is on this very subject.

Romans 9:22 What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

What if, suppositional for sake of argument, God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience (longsuffering) vessels of wrath (all those who rejected His grace offer of the gospel) prepared for destruction? Eternity separated from God in the liquid Lake of Fire.

The Longsuffering of God for the salvation of mankind is pictured in the study of Noah.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just Jesus Christ for *the* unjust, (all members of human race) so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

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1 Peter 3:19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison,

1 Peter 3:20 who once were disobedient, (sexual interrelationships with women on earth) when the patience (longsuffering) of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, (God held off judgment in His wrath so that people might repent and come to Him) during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water. (Only eight accepted His grace call.)

4. We have well documented that longsuffering is characteristic of God but it is also characteristic of Jesus Christ Himself.

1 Timothy 1:15 It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*.

1 Timothy 1:16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, (for what reason?) so that in me as the foremost (of sinners), Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience (our word = longsuffering) as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

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5. So, this makrothumia, longsuffering, is an attribute of God and of the humanity of Jesus Christ. But God also has made it possible for this virtue to be manifested through believers in Jesus Christ in the Church Age.

But makrothumia or longsuffering is a gracious gift God and not a manifestation the virtue of self-control of the flesh.

That is, we do not make a decision to be ‘longsuffering’ or patient and then discipline ourselves to be patient. This is not what God is looking for; He is looking for a longsuffering that is from His Holy Spirit whom He has graciously supplied (Gal. 3:5) every believer in Jesus Christ. The only longsuffering that pleases God comes to us as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 But (in contrast with what comes from the flesh,) **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, (makrothumia or longsuffering) kindness** (this is the same Greek word translated gentleness in Col. 3:12), **goodness, faithfulness,**

Galatians 5:23 gentleness,... (this is the same word translated in Col. 3:12. The point is that each of these virtues listed in Col. 3:12 are given to the believer by the Holy Spirit and never from the discipline of the flesh nature) **self-control; against such things there is no law.**

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6. makrothumia is the first impact of Spiritual Love mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor. 13:4. Love (Spiritual Love) is longsuffering. Point 13 of our introduction on the definition of this word is repeated here (because it is very important). Very important: this word, makrothumia is patience in respect to persons while the Greek word hupomone is endurance or putting up with things or circumstances.

So, it stands to reason that this would be one of the impacts of Spiritual Love. In fact, it is the first impact mentioned by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 13:4). Let everyone know that we will be studying this impact of Spiritual Love in detail in our early Sunday morning service where we are studying 1 Corinthians chapter 13. But just to note some of the highlights of that study, this impact of Spiritual Love is designed to protect you. That is your Spiritual Love toward another believer, be it your husband or wife or family members or those at the local church or where you work or social or travel causes you to be longsuffering toward them. This means that you do not lash out at them, you do not seek revenge or make them pay for hurting you. This is the powerful impact of makrothumia. It keeps you from getting out of the Filling of the Holy Spirit, keeps you in fellowship with Jesus Christ. Then, when you are hurt by another, and do not react in anger or jealousy or revenge, being longsuffering allows you to treat them in the second impact of Spiritual Love — Spiritual Love is kind. And your kindness allows them the freedom to remain or get back into the Filling of the Holy Spirit, with the wonderful result that both of you are in fellowship with Holy Spirit and with Jesus Christ and with one another. And therefore, you both glorify Jesus Christ together. Most people would say they desire their husband or wife to love them. But think about it. Isn't it even more wonderful in

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your marriage that they love as Jesus Christ loves? This is always a love that you can respond to in your marriage or in any relationship with other believers. Having said this, please remember that this does not mean they will always respond in a positive way to your longsuffering. And therefore, your Spiritual Love must be even ‘longer — longsuffering’!

Spiritual Love is not whatever you want it to be and what you want it to be like. Spiritual Love is a person, Spiritual Love is the person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not whatever you want it to be. Poets, philosophers, lexicographers, theologians etc., have all tried to define this word love. Most of them fail because, the only love that really matters is a person, the person of Jesus Christ. If you want to really understand love, don't spend your time reading definitions and descriptions, study the person of Jesus Christ in the Bible. Then and only then will we begin to grasp what love is and what love should be. We have already noted that Jesus Christ is longsuffering in His love. We should each one give thanks for this impact of Christ's love. For everyone of us will need the longsuffering of the Love of Christ toward us. And therefore, we should be longsuffering in our love toward one another.

Another description of ‘longsuffering’ of Spiritual Love is found in

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility (we studied this in Col. 3:12) **and gentleness**, (also in Col. 3:12) **with patience**, (or accompanied with patience longsuffering) **showing tolerance** (this Greek word means to hold up under again,)

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I hope you can see what is being said here. Someone has hurt you or let you down in some way. Before they did this, you were in fellowship with the Holy Spirit. Now they come along and hurt you, let you down. So instead of reacting and getting out of the control of the Holy Spirit you 'hold up' your faith position in the Holy Spirit.

You restrain or hold back any sinful reaction from your flesh nature,

mental attitude sins — such as anger, jealousy, revenge or even arrogance;

sins of the tongue — lashing out at them; maligning them or cursing them or lying;

overt sins — physically attacking them (murder, harm them physically).

So, in restraint or holding back from getting out of the Filling of the Holy Spirit, you remain in your spiritual position in the Holy Spirit. This is where your free will enters the conflict. You do not make a decision to be longsuffering. No, you make a direct decision to remain in faith in the Holy Spirit. Then He, the Holy Spirit, will cause you to be longsuffering in your Spiritual Love. You see, being able to do this consistently is what Christian maturity is all about.

Oh, I know some of you thought maturity was defined by knowledge of God's word, which is certainly part of maturity. But Christian maturity involves the application of all that doctrine in your soul. So, as we grow in the knowledge of God and growing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Eph. 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, accompanied with patience (longsuffering holding back reaction for one another of the same kind, that is another believer in Jesus Christ, that is your husband or wife, family friends, those at the local church in love, that is in Spiritual Love)

7. Many who study the Bible have trouble understanding the difference between the wrath of God and Divine Discipline. Because God is Longsuffering does not mean that there will not be Divine Discipline against a believer. What we should appreciate about the relationship of long suffering and Divine Discipline is that the very existence of Divine Discipline reveals the manifestation of His longsuffering. In plain words the fact that you are suffering under Divine Discipline is proof that He simply did not take you out. And this restraint is His Longsuffering.

This is why it is always wise (revealing wisdom) to respond to Divine Discipline, learn from it and move on in a life of faith. Remember, we continue to be His even though we have sinned. Therefore, we should respond by going immediately back to faith in the Holy Spirit when we have sinned.

8. Why is it called ‘longsuffering’? Because this fruit of the Holy Spirit is required when things get really difficult in the life of a believer, when he/she is having tribulation with others — believers and unbelievers.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 6 our word is featured in verse 6, but we must understand the context.

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2 Corinthians 6:4 but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, (now we begin the circumstances that will demand our being longsuffering) in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,

2 Corinthians 6:5 in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,

2 Corinthians 6:6 in purity, in knowledge, in patience, (Here is our word longsuffering. Pay close attention to all that is going on in which we are to be longsuffering and) in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, (this can only be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit where it has any glory to Jesus Christ) in genuine love, (Spiritual Love)

2 Corinthians 6:7 in the word of truth, (the Bible) in the power of God the (Holy Spirit); by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,

2 Corinthians 6:8 by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded as deceivers and yet true;*

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9 as unknown (in and by the world) **yet well-known**, (by God and Jesus Christ) **as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death,**

10 as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich (spiritually), **as having nothing** (of worldly value) **yet possessing all things** (spiritually).

So, you can see that makrothumia, longsuffering is vital in the Angelic Conflict.

Another passage on the environment where longsuffering is needed is

James 5:9 Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.

James 5:10 As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience (longsuffering), **take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.**
(Again imitate their longsuffering)

9. Question: why should we desire longsuffering in our lives? In our relationships with one another?

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- 1) Because God commands us to be longsuffering and this should be enough said.
- 2) To help maintain peace and unity in the marriage, home, church – every area of your life.

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience (longsuffering) showing tolerance for one another in love (Spiritual Love).

- 3) Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Most husbands know that they are the head of the marriage, but few understand all that being the head involves. Here, it is first and primarily the responsibility of the husband to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That is, it is his responsibility to show forth Spiritual Love to which his wife may well respond. But, having said this, it is certainly up to the wife to be diligent even if her husband is not. And certainly, it is the responsibility of all believers to be diligent wherever they are: home, work, local church, social life.
- 4) Makrothumia is directly related to the believer receiving rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The principle for this is extracted from

Hebrews 6:12 so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience (longsuffering) inherit the promises.

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Paul is speaking to believers in the Church Age. But he exhorts us to imitate believers in the age of Israel, namely Abraham, who inherited the promises by faith and longsuffering in life. As we relate this to believers in the Church Age we have promises of rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. To receive these rewards, we must imitate Old Testament heroes who lived by faith and were longsuffering toward others in that faith (Hebrews chapter 11). Throughout our lives on earth we must develop a life of faith encouraged by longsuffering in our dealings with one another with the hope—confidence of receiving rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ.