



# The Reflector

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## What about Longsuffering?

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One does not have to be very astute, to understand that longsuffering is not the present-day American's long suit. We just do not like to wait. At the restaurant, we want instant service. At the doctors office, we expect instant cures. If we have a problem, we expect an instant solution. If we go to war, we expect instant victory. Generally, we do not like to hear "it takes time."

This propensity for instant results may have spilled over into our handling of problems in the church. We tend to forget that preaching the word requires longsuffering, and that dealing with opposition also requires longsuffering:

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all **longsuffering** and doctrine." (2 Tim. 4:2).

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, **patient**, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves (are in opposition-nkj) ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;" (2 Tim. 2: 24-25).

"Longsuffering" is from "makrothumia" (noun) and "makrothumeo" (verb). On the noun, Vine says "forbearance, patience, longsuffering." Of the verb, "'to be patient, longsuffering, to bear with,' lit. 'To be long tempered.'" Then he adds this note, "Longsuffering is 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... Patience is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial, is the opposite of dependency and is associated with hope."

It is evident that while God expects us to be firm in our convictions and to be "set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1: 17), He also expects us to be longsuffering in our dealing with those who may stand in opposition to us. In this, He asks no more of us, than He has done toward us. (2 Peter 3: 9).

History tells us that every generation of Christians has been beset with controversy. Some of these controversies have had a major impact upon the church, while others have not affected it all that much. Our own generation is no different. We have some controversies that have been around for a long time and have had little or no effect upon our fellowship. Others have had a major impact. Each generation has had to wrestle with how best to handle these differences when they arise – and they will arise (1 Corinthians 11: 18). Some have chosen, no matter how grave the problem, to just ignore it and think it will go away. Others have chosen to stifle opposition, the quickest way possible, by immediately drawing lines of fellowship against any who differ with them. Still others, have a hard time finding any grounds for breaking fellowship.

Our generation is no different – even among those who consider themselves "conservative" relative to the institutional controversy of the past 50 years. There are two or three controversies that have the potential of once again dividing local churches and causing a rift in the brotherhood in general. These are not over matters of "personal conscience" or "individual application." These are matters that affect the very nature of the church and institution of marriage. I am speaking of the present ongoing discussions over what constitutes an "individually supported missionary society," what constitutes a scriptural reason for divorce, and what constitutes a scriptural marriage and/or divorce. These are serious problems and the feelings run deep among those of all sides of these questions. They go beyond the purview of Romans 14. Frankly, I am not optimistic about the outcome of these discussions. I pray that I am wrong about this assessment, but history is not encouraging about such matters.

However, I will say that I do not see the damage from these issues having quiet the devastating effect that the institutional issue had on local congregations. Nor

do I see them as having the effect comparable to the missionary societies and the instrumental music issues of 1800s. These issues affected the very structure, worship, and work of local congregations. When the institution, society, or instrument was introduced into the churches it forced a division. It gave brethren who opposed those things the choice to either directly participate in that which they believed to be wrong or withhold their contributions. Or as in the case of the instrument to sing with it or not sing at all. Neither option would have been acceptable.

In the present controversy over the right of brethren to build and maintain individually supported collectives that some believe displace the church, as serious as that is, no churches are being asked to contribute to them. If they do indeed displace the church by usurping the role that God has assigned to the local church in work that they do, they need to be vigorously opposed by brethren. But unless they call on the churches to support them, I do not see their existence to be as damaging to the fellowship in local congregations as were the benevolent institutions and sponsoring churches.

In the questions concerning cause for divorce and what constitutes a marriage or divorce, things are more complicated. If there is just one cause for divorce, then those who are teaching multiple causes are teaching a doctrine that will likely result in adultery. Likewise, if those of us who believe that both marriages and divorces must conform to the norms of the society in which one lives to be scriptural, then those who teach otherwise are encouraging adulterous arrangements. Ultimately it becomes a question as to whether or not we can continue indefinitely to fellowship one whose teaching results in adultery. We are specifically instructed as to what the congregation is to do about a fornicator (1 Corinthians 5). So, anyone influenced by that teaching and puts it into practice puts themselves in the position of forcing the congregation where they attend to take disciplinary action against them. So these are serious problems that need to be addressed.

Would I be too presumptuous if I injected a plea for the longsuffering, of which Paul wrote to Timothy, to all involved in the present discussions? Being longsuffering does not mean that you endorse, encourage or sanction in any way the position of the one with whom you are longsuffering. It simply means, as Vine said, you do not “promptly punish” the one you believe to be wrong. Yes, I know that longsuffering does not mean ever-suffering – longsuffering will at some time have to come

### *My Opportunity*

My opportunity! Dear Lord, I do not ask.  
 That thou shouldest give me some, high work  
 of Thine  
 Some noble calling, or some wondrous task –  
 Give me a little hand to hold mine.  
 I do not ask that I should ever stand  
 Among the wise, the worthy, or the great;  
 I only ask that softly, hand in hand,  
 A child and I may enter at the gate.  
 Give me a little child to point the way  
 Over the strange, sweet path that  
 leads to Thee;  
 Give me a little voice to teach to pray;  
 Give me two shining eyes Thy face to see.  
 The only crown I ask, dear Lord, to wear,  
 Is this: that I may teach a little child  
 How beautiful, oh, how divinely fair,  
 Is Thy dear face, so loving, sweet and mild!  
 I do not ask for more than this,  
 My opportunity! ‘Tis standing at my door;  
 What sorrow if this blessing I should miss!  
 A little child! What should I asked for more?

Marion C. Craig

to an end. This is true even of God’s longsuffering.

It is not easy to determine just how long our “suffering” should be toward one that we believe is either teaching or practicing that which is contrary to the gospel of Christ and a detriment to his church. This is probably one reason why we should all pray often for wisdom. (James 1: 5). For my part, I had rather err on the side of being too longsuffering than on the side of being too quick to break fellowship. If we have learned anything from the past, it is that once the lines are drawn, reconciliation is hard to come by.

Can we not, yea, even must we not be longsuffering enough to see whether our open and frank discussions can bring us together in our convictions based upon the word of God? Must we, at each juncture of these discussions, either threaten to break fellowship or try to force others to make the break? Of course, neither side can afford to participate nor encourage the error of which they believe the other is guilty. In such cases, to say the least, they would be sinning against their consciences.

Now before someone cries “you are teaching ‘unity

in diversity’,” let me deny that this is the case. The “unity in diversity” concept sees it as the permanent solution to religious division. Scriptural longsuffering is nothing close to the “unity in diversity” concept. Scriptural longsuffering buys time for brethren to work through their differences, if possible, and correct what needs correcting. The time may come, and likely will in some cases, that lines will need to be drawn to preserve both the unity and purity of the Lord’s church. But given the emphasis that the Scriptures places on longsuffering it behooves us to exercise more patience than we sometimes do – this writer included.

One sure way to hasten division is for one party to turn dialog into monologue. If one side refuses to participate then the other loses any hope of agreement and goes ahead and draws the line. Or if one party makes it clear he is not listening and that his side is the only side that deserves to be heard, then a division is sure to come.

In the present controversies I am assuming that all

parties firmly believe that their position is the scriptural one. I also assume that each party believes that the other is teaching and/or practicing error. Somebody’s mind will have to be changed for there to be permanent unity. Somebody has to teach somebody the truth. This is unlikely to happen without a free and open discussion of the issues involved. And that is unlikely to happen with the threat of an eminent break of fellowship over the dialogue. Hopefully, both sides will be open-minded enough to give a fair hearing to what the other has to say. And hopefully, neither side will be swayed from his convictions by anything other than “what saith the Scriptures.”

As with past controversies, the time may very well come that any hope for productive dialogue will have passed and the brethren will go their separate ways. But let us not let that happen without first giving the longsuffering that the Scriptures bind upon us a chance to facilitate a meeting of the minds. [edbragwell@gmail.com](mailto:edbragwell@gmail.com)

## Should We Be Envious Of The Workers Of Iniquity?

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It is hard for a poor youngster to not be envious of the community drug dealer riding the streets in his Town Car or Cadillac. It is hard for a hardworking man to not be envious of his neighbor who, although known for his questionable business practices, lives the life-style befitting the “rich and famous.” It is hard for young Christians to not be envious of their more popular peers, who may not be constrained by the moral strictness that should govern a Christian’s behavior. It is hard for evangelists, elders and other members of congregations where the attendance and facilities are paled by some of the more “progressive” churches in town, to not be envious of their religious neighbors’ inflated crowds and fantastic facilities.

David, Asaph and Solomon all address this problem. Please read Psalm 37, Psalm 73, and Proverbs 24:1, 19-20 now. David warns, “Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity” (Psalm 37:1). Asaph relates his own experience with such envy: “For I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3). Solomon gives a similar warning to that of David, “Do not be envious of evil men” (Prov. 24:1) Again, “Do not

fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the wicked” (v. 19).

All three writers reach the same basic conclusion. It is foolish to be envious of the seeming success and prosperity of those who are not obeying the Lord because such prosperity is just a mirage. It is not real. It is not lasting. David says: “For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.” (Psa. 24:2). “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass . . . For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psa. 24:7, 9-11). You see, one of the troubles with envying the prosperity(?) of the wicked is the temptation to forge ahead with creating our own prosperity without waiting on the Lord.

Asaph, after admitting his own envy (Psa. 73:3), goes ahead and points out both why he was so envious and why it was so foolish. He was envious because of the perception that he had of the prosperity of the

wicked: "They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them. And they say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?' Behold, these are the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase in riches." (Psa. 73:5-12). Then he looked at his own perceived lack of prosperity: "Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. (Psa. 73:13-14). He then says, "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me -- until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." (Psa. 73:17). Once one understands their end, those who are boastful and wicked are no longer objects of envy but of pity.

Solomon says, "For there will be no prospect for the evil man; the lamp of the wicked will be put out." (Prov. 24:20). Then he admonishes his son: "My son, fear the Lord and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?" (Prov. 24:21-22). The wicked, not content with God's way and His established order, call for change to their own ruin. There is no reason to be envious of such.

Young man, let the drug dealer have his big cars. You play it straight and obey God. You will prosper long after his cars have rusted in the junk yard.

Hard working brother, let your neighbor, with his questionable ethics, have his mansion on earth. Long after his mansion has fallen to the ground you can have a mansion in heaven.

Young Christian, let your popular peer have his or her moment in the sun with his or her compromise-gained popularity. When you mature as a Christian and then go on to the end of your earthly journey, you will see that it is you who should have been envied and not the other way around.

Brother or sister, let the First Denominational Church or the First Liberal Church have their huge crowds drawn together by carnal enticements. Let them



have their fantastic facilities designed to appeal to the secular notions of a carnally-minded public. Let them have their unscriptural practices that appeal to those who have little respect for scriptural authority. Such balloon prosperity will burst sooner or later. Plant and water, leaving it to God to give the increase. (1 Cor. 3:6). Again, "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass" (Psa. 37:7).

Let us work hard to convert every soul possible to the Lord and to build up the church. Few would argue that we are doing enough along these lines. Yet, we need to understand that the Lord's way may not produce the dynamic and spectacular visual results that men often desire and experience, but it will produce the lasting results that the Lord wants. If the Lord prospers us with great numerical growth and comfortable facilities to aid in doing His work, let us rejoice and be thankful. However, before we look at the growth and facilities of our religious neighbors either with envy or admiration and start calling for changes in the Lord's church that would compete with them, let us first ask ourselves from whence did their prosperity come -- from God or men? If from men, it will not last. It is a mirage.

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