

God's Longsuffering

Dr. Douglas W. Cho

[Luke 13:6-9] He also spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7 Then he said to the keeper of his vineyard, 'Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?' 8 But he answered and said to him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also until I dig around it and fertilize it. 9 And if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down.'"

Lord Jesus taught about God's longsuffering through this parable of a fig tree. We learn a few truths about how God suffers long toward people without good fruits in their lives. First, the main purpose of taking extra care of the unfruitful fig tree was to see some fruits on it. For this very purpose, the owner of the vineyard commanded the caretaker to dig deep and apply fertilizer around the tree and take good care for three years. If it fails to bear fruits after three years, then the tree must be cut down. In this manner, God's longsuffering is applied with a time limit during which His loving care is applied to an unrepenting soul together with forbearance. Some Christian teachers teach that God's mercy and longsuffering last forever without a time limit. But this erroneous doctrine comes from ignorance of God's character.

Toward the end of His earthly ministry, Lord Jesus commanded an unfruitful fig tree just outside of Jerusalem so that it dried up and died immediately before His disciples. This fig tree symbolized God's chosen people Israel for whom the Son of God labored for three years in the hope and expectation of seeing the fruit of repentance and return to God in their hearts. The death of this fig tree signified the end of God's longsuffering toward His people. And God's wrath toward them was implemented in AD 70 by the Roman army commanded by General Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem including almost all its inhabitants.

[Mark 11:12-14] Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He was hungry. 13 And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. 14 In response Jesus said to it, "Let no one eat fruit from you ever again." And His disciples heard it.

Today God is waiting to see some fruits of repentance, true honest faith, and holiness in His children in His longsuffering and loving care despite their unfruitfulness. God is also waiting with forbearance and mercy for the hard-hearted unbelievers to come to Him in repentance and humility. Remember, there is a limit to God's longsuffering toward you. In Noah's time, God allowed 120 years of longsuffering and had Noah and his grandfather Methuselah preach the gospel of salvation from the coming global flood. God allowed a time of longsuffering to Sodom and Gomorrah before their destruction with fire and brimstone. God sent numerous prophets to Judah and Israel in His enduring kindness and mercy and prompted them to bear fruits of repentance. Yet, when the time was over, God used the armies of Assyria and Babylon to punish His chosen people. We may not know God's time limit for each unfruitful soul, but it is a very risky thing to test His longsuffering by continuing to live without the good fruits God expects to see in us.

On Mt. Sinai, God declared His character to Moses as follows. God is pleased to show mercy and forgive the sins of all sinners who humble themselves and come to Him in repentance. However, God has planned His awful wrath on those who fail to bear fruits of repentance and holiness, the hypocritical pastors and believers who profess their faith outwardly but are living a duplicitous life of immorality and spiritually corruptness, and especially those unbelievers who ignore God, oppose God and His authority as the Creator of the universe.

[Exodus 34:5-7] Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Why does God suffer long toward unfruitful, unbelieving people? It is because He takes greater pleasure in showing grace and mercy to us humans than in punishing us for our wrongs. Those of you who are parents understand how you show patience and longsuffering toward unruly and disobedient children while holding onto your hope that they might turn around with awakening and repentance. The prophet Isaiah explained such a heart of God toward His people Israel.

[Isaiah 30:18] Therefore, the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore, He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the Lord is a God of justice; Blessed are all those who wait for Him.

Christians, who have been saved through our faith in Jesus Christ, ought to show forth the longsuffering and good nature of God in our lives so that others may see that we are His children.

[Galatians 5:22-23] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such, there is no law.

We are not God and do not have the authority and power to exercise the righteous judgment of God. And we must not emulate such acts of God. At best, we are only His servants and children. However, we can have agape love, longsuffering, tenderness, kindness, and true honest faith in God's truth in our lives. When these qualities are evident in our lives, we glorify God and honor His name here on earth. And God will be pleased with the good fruits in our lives.

"Our heavenly Father, You showed longsuffering toward us when we were sinners. And You led us to the truth of Jesus Christ in patience and tender kindness. Many times I have failed and sinned since then. But, through Your longsuffering and tender mercies, You helped me get up again and again and come to thus far. I am so thankful for all Your kindness and longsuffering. I want to show Your kindness and longsuffering to those around me. May the fulness of Jesus live and grow in me. In His marvelous name, I pray. Amen."

May God bless you in the coming week! Amen.

www.douglaschoministry.net

Thank you for your financial support:
Douglas Cho Ministry, PO Box 501, Cross Junction, VA 22615
Or Paypal to dwcho4771@gmail.com
Korea: Shinhan Bank 110-008-655930 [조덕운]