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*John Gill's*

**A BODY OF DOCTRINAL DIVINITY**

**Book 1—Chapter 15**

**OF THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD.**

The longsuffering of God, the same with his forbearance and patience, arises from his mercy, is a display of it, or is one way in which mercy shows itself; and so, by the Cabalistic Jews, it is said to belong to the predicament of "Chesed", or mercy, as they express themselves; and it may be observed, that wherever God is said to be longsuffering, he is represented as gracious and merciful, or as of great mercy and kindness; and by this attribute, as by them and with them, he is pleased to describe and make known himself, for the encouragement of faith and hope in him, (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Ps. 86:15) and therefore the consideration of it very properly follows that of mercy. The Hebrew word אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם which literally signifies "long of both nostrils", is sometimes rendered "longsuffering", as in the places referred to; and sometimes "slow to anger", (Neh. 9:17; Ps. 103:8) and to which the Greek words μακροθυμew, and μακροθυμια, in the New Testament, answer, (Rom. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9, 15) the allusion is to the nose, the seat of anger, which restrains or shows it, as it is long or contracted.

God is sometimes called, "the God of patience", (Rom. 15:5) not only because he is the author and object of the grace of patience, and that is grateful to him; but because he is patient, or longsuffering in himself, and towards his creatures, and is a pattern of patience to them; for this is one of the attributes of God, in which he may in some measure be imitated (see Eph. 4:1,2 Col. 3:12). This is not to be considered as a quality, accident, passion, or affection in God, as in creatures; who bear with patience things grievous, distressing, and torturing to them, (Col. 1:11) but it is the very nature and essence of God, which is free from all passion and perturbation, from all suffering, grief, and pain; it springs from his goodness, and is as essential to him as that, and is joined with it, (Rom. 2:4) it is no other than a moderation of his anger, a restraint of that, a deferring the effects of it, at least for a while, according

to his sovereign will; it is an extension and prolongation of mercy for a season; for mercy is always in it and with it; and in this it differs from it, that the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting; but the longsuffering of God, as to the exercise of it, is only for a time, until some certain end is answered, and in which it issues; either in the damnation and destruction of the wicked, when they are fitted for it, (Rom. 9:22) or in the salvation of God's elect, (2 Peter 3:15) for it is exercised towards both, till each take place; which will be distinctly considered.

1. The longsuffering of God is exercised towards his chosen people; they are the "us" towards whom he is said to be "longsuffering", (2 Peter 3:9) even who are called beloved, (2 Peter 3:8) not only beloved of the apostle, and by one another, but by the Lord; and the elect according to the foreknowledge of God, (1 Peter 1:2) for to the same persons are both epistles written; and therefore being the beloved and chosen of God, it was his will that none of them should perish, but come to repentance; even all of the same character, and of the same company and society, the whole election of grace; and until everyone of these are called and brought to repentance, God is, and will be, longsuffering towards them; and longsuffering to the world for their sakes; wherefore Christ's not coming to judgment sooner than he will, is not owing to any negligence, dilatoriness, or slackness in God, concerning the promise of it, but to the longsuffering of God; which has been eminently displayed with respect to the people of God.

1a. In the saints of the Old Testament dispensation, which time is expressly called "the forbearance of God" (Rom. 3:25). The case stood thus; Christ became the Surety for them in eternity, engaged to assume their nature, pay their debts, and make satisfaction for their sins: this was notified immediately after the fall of Adam, (Gen. 3:15) but it was four thousand years from thence to the time fixed in Daniel's prophecy, "to finish transgression, to make an end of sin, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness"; to the fulness of time when Christ should come to redeem all his people, and particularly, to obtain the redemption of transgressions that were under the first Testament, (Dan. 9:24; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 9:15). Now all this time was a time of patience, forbearance, and longsuffering with God, in respect to his people under this dispensation; he did not stir up his wrath, and execute it on them; but reserved it for his Son, their Surety; he forbore to inflict the punishment on them their sins deserved; he did not impute sin to them, place it to their account, charge it on them, and demand of them satisfaction for it; but placed it to his Son's account, and expected satisfaction from him: he accepted of the sacrifices of slain beasts, as vicarious ones in their stead, though they had no true value, nor real efficacy in them, to atone for sin; only were typical of Christ's sacrifice; and were to continue, and did, until that should be offered up; God waited till he should come and make his soul an offering for sin; and, upon his credit, bore with them, and bestowed the blessings of his grace on them: they were justified by him on the foundation of Christ's righteousness to be wrought out; and their sins pardoned, through his atoning sacrifice to be offered up; they were saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus, even as we are, and we as they; they were carried to heaven, and glorified, before the payment of their debts were made by their Surety, before

satisfaction for their sins was given to justice, and before the actual redemption of them was obtained. All which, as it shows the trust and confidence God put in his Son, so his forbearance and longsuffering towards Old Testament saints; which also has appeared, and does appear.

1b. In and towards everyone of his people in their state of unregeneracy, in every age and period of time, or of whatsoever nation, or under whatsoever dispensation they be; the Lord bears with them, while in a state of nature, and waits patiently all that while, to be gracious to them (Isa. 30:18). There was much grace in his heart, in his Son, and in his covenant, laid up for them. This is abundantly displayed in conversion, when there is an abounding and a superabounding of it. But then the calling and conversion of them is according to purpose; and as there is a time for every purpose, for the execution of it, so for this; and till that time comes, the Lord waits, forbears, suffers much and long; he does not cut them off in their sins, as they deserve; but saves them, and sometimes from very imminent dangers, to be called, (2 Tim. 1:9) and with some he bears and waits a long time, who are called at the ninth and eleventh hours, and, as the thief on the cross, at the last day and hour of his life; and he waits, as it were, in a longing manner; speaking after the manner of men, "When will it once be?" (Jer. 13:27).

1c. The apostle Paul is a remarkable instance of God's longsuffering; which was exercised towards him throughout all his blasphemy of Christ, his persecution of his people, and the injuries he did unto them; he waited, through all, to be gracious to him; his eye was upon him, and his heart was towards him; and hence such notice is taken of him in that state, before the account is given of his calling; (see Acts 7:58, 8:1, 3, 9:1) yea, he himself says, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting", (1 Tim. 1:16) meaning the people of the Jews, in the latter day: his sense seems to be this, that as Christ bore much, and exercised great longsuffering towards him, and at last showed him mercy; so he would bear with, and show much longsuffering to the people of the Jews, of which that towards him was a pattern, and which should issue in their salvation, as it had in his; when "all Israel shall be saved", (Rom. 11:26) God's longsuffering towards them is very great and very remarkable; as it was towards him; though they are under the marks of his displeasure, he has not stirred up all his wrath, so as to cut them off from being a people; but has reserved them for future times, and good things for them, and waits to be gracious to them.

2. The longsuffering of God is exercised towards the ungodly, even towards "the vessels of wrath" whom he "endures with much longsuffering", till they are "fitted to destruction", (Rom. 9:22) and this appears by his supporting them in their beings, notwithstanding their grievous provocations of him; which are such, that it is amazing he does not at once strike them, dead, as he did Ananias and Sapphira; or that the earth does not open and swallow them up, as it did Dathan and Abiram. This can be attributed to nothing else but, to his patience, forbearance, and longsuffering: and by the multitude of his mercies bestowed upon them, who have

many of them, more than other men; and which are called "the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering"; (see Job 21:7-13; Ps. 73:4-7; Rom. 2:4) and by granting to many of them the outward means of grace, which are despised and rejected by them; and by deferring his judgments on them; which, because they are not speedily executed, their hearts are set in them to do evil; they are more and more hardened, and promise themselves impunity in sin. Now the ends of God's thus dealing with them, are partly for his own glory; "to show his wrath, and make his power known"; to vindicate him from all cruelty and injustice, when he righteously executes his wrath, and exerts his power in their destruction: as in the instance of Pharaoh, (Rom. 9:17, 22) and partly for the sake of his own people who dwell among them, that they may not suffer with them; thus he would have spared Sodom, had there been ten righteous men in it, for their sakes: and he forbears to take vengeance on those that have shed the blood of his saints, until the number of his elect, in like manner, is fulfilled; and he spares a wicked world from being burnt up and destroyed, until all his chosen ones are brought to repentance, (Gen. 18:32; Rev. 6:11; 2 Peter 3:9) and another end is for their sakes, that they may be rendered inexcusable, and the execution of wrath on them at last, appear just and righteous (Rom. 2:1, 4, 5).

There are many instances of the patience, forbearance, and longsuffering of God, with respect to the wicked; as in the men of the old world, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, (1 Peter 3:20; see Gen. 6:3) and in the inhabitants of Sodom, daring sinners, who had first hints of God's displeasure, yet had mercy shown them, a respite for a while, and then destroyed by fire from heaven, (Gen. 13:13, 14:11, 21, 18:21, 19:24) in Pharaoh, refusing to let Israel go, whom God had spared some time, beginning with lighter judgments, then executed heavier ones; and at last drowned him, and his host, in the Red Sea, (Ex. 5:2,7 &c., Ex. 14:17, 18, 28) in the people of Israel, in the wilderness, whose manners God suffered and bore with, and was grieved with them forty years, (Acts 13:18) in the Amorites and Canaanites, until their sin was full, and till the land itself would bear them no longer; but spewed them out of it, (Gen. 15:16; Lev. 18:28) in the Gentile world, during their times of ignorance, (Acts 17:30) in fruitless professors of religion, signified by the barren fig tree, (Luke 13:6-9) and in antichrist, during the time of his reign, and no longer, (Rev. 2:21, 13:6, 18:8).