

# The Long-Suffering of the Lord

by William Gadsby

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*God's long-suffering is his patience and mercy towards those who sin against him, allowing them time to repent and turn to him.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 86:15, Psalm 103:10, Hosea 14:4, Luke 13:3, 2 Timothy 1:9, Hebrews 12:6, James 5:1, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 2:15

**Topics:** "Divine Mercy", "Christian Obedience"

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## Description

William Gadsby preaches about the long-suffering of God towards humanity, highlighting how despite our rebellion and insults towards Him, He continues to show mercy and patience. Gadsby discusses God's long-suffering towards all men, the elect while dead in sin, and His people after they are called by grace. He emphasizes the need for repentance, gratitude, and obedience in response to God's long-suffering and mercy, urging believers to abhor sin and live in holiness to honor and glorify God.

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## Transcript

"Long-Suffering." (Psalm 86:15)

Men and Brethren,--Through the mercy of the Lord, we have arrived at the commencement of another year. Many are the mercies we have received, and many are the insults we have offered to the great Giver of all our mercies. If we are truly led to enter into our own feelings and ways up to the present moment, we must be obliged to say that the Lord is a God "long suffering," or he would not have borne with our manners till now; for sure I am that none of us could have had patience with any of our fellow creatures who had acted towards us as we have acted towards the Lord. If they had been as dependent upon us as we are upon the Lord, and they had insulted our kindnesses as we have the Lord's, we should have spurned them from us long ago. But such is the Lord, and such is his long-suffering, that he still spares us, and deals very bountifully with us, and even loads many of us with mercies, for there are none of us who are not daily receiving mercies, more or less, from his bountiful hand.

Let me for a few moments call your attention to the long-suffering of the Lord. As far as the dear Lord shall enable me, I will,

- I. Speak a little on the long-suffering of God towards men in general.
- II. His long-suffering towards the elect while dead in sin.

III. His long-suffering towards his people after they are called by grace.

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I. The long-suffering of God towards men in general.

From the throne to the dunghill men live in awful rebellion against God. It is not possible to look rightly at any branch of society without seeing that the Lord is awfully insulted by it. On the one hand, pride, luxury, voluptuousness, and, in thousands of instances, oppression and tyranny, show themselves in the clear light of the sun. The continual actions of these men prove that there is no fear of God before their eyes. Rich men in great power may for a while bolster up themselves in their power and station, and arrogantly despise and oppress the poor, but a just God records their deeds; and though, in his long-suffering, he may for a long time forbear, yet assuredly he will eventually appear for the oppressed, James 5:1-5, is a solemn message, and it comes from a just and a holy God. The Lord enable us to be patient in sufferings, and to commit our case into his hands.

But, my fellow-mortals, do not let us stop here, and imagine that the most opulent men are the only sinners against God. "I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3) Examine every branch and gradation of society, and we shall find it in general a world enveloped in sin and rebellion against God. What awful profaneness of every kind is practiced by the greatest part of the world at large! All the members of the body and powers of the mind are engaged in sinning against and insulting the God that gave them and keeps them in existence. Swearing, lying, cheating, stealing, and base acts of uncleanness in all their detestable bearings, are pursued with impunity by tens of thousands, and numbers have to do violence to their own conscience in order to put into practice their ungodly acts. Now, Sirs, how stands the matter in your own consciences? Are you clear, or are you guilty? Are you obliged to say, Guilty? Were not the Lord a God long-suffering, where would you have been long ago? Is it not a wonder that an awfully-insulted God does not deal with us, as a nation, as he did with the old world, and sweep us off the earth in his righteous indignation?

But oppression, open and secret profaneness, and debauchery are not the only crimes of this sinful nation. No, Sirs; there are the horrid branches of hypocrisy in a profession of religion, which spread their arms like seas, as a cloak for covetousness, pride, and voluptuousness, from the mitred heads through all the channels of the professed church established by law, and the various branches of the different dissenters, all crying up holiness and their holy church, while the hearts of thousands of them are up on arms against vital godliness, in the life and power of it, as communicated to, and maintained in, the soul by the invincible energy of God the Holy Ghost. An outward show of some external forms, or what some call practical piety, on the one hand, and a stiff maintaining of the leading doctrines of the Bible without the revelation of their glory in the heart by the Holy Ghost, on the other, are the leading features of what is called the religion of this boasted Christian country. But while the various branches of professors differ very widely in point of doctrine, they can all agree to vent their spleen against the discriminating power of God's matchless grace in the heart; and thus they do all in their power to "make empty the soul of the hungry, and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail." (Isa. 32:6) True, their mouths teem forth plentifully, "Peace, peace," where God has not made peace; but the poor rooted-up soul, who has had his heart laid open by the life-giving power of God the Spirit, and who groans under the oozings up of filth discovered and felt there, and who cannot be satisfied with anything short of the divine application to his heart of the love and blood of Christ, panting for the glorious discriminating truths of God's grace to be made manifest in his conscience by the invincible energy of the Holy Spirit, unable to rest in a mere empty knowledge of

the truth, or in anything short of the gospel coming, "not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance;" such a soul, I say, may look in vain for any message of peace from the mouths of these professors, but the tongue of slander and contempt he shall have abundantly.

This is an awful branch of the sin of this nation. Antichrist is rearing up its head in a variety of ways, and bids fair to shine in all its rich attire, while the real truth of Christ, in its discriminating glory and power, is set at nought. Is it not a solemn proof that the Lord is a God long-suffering, to see his holy name, his honour, and his truth so despised and perverted, and awfully abused, under a profession of religion, to answer filthy lucre purposes? Who beside a long-suffering God would suffer himself, and the glorious revelation he has made of himself and of his matchless works and ways, to be trifled with and perverted by dying men, for the purpose of supporting themselves in their pride, arrogance, covetousness, and voluptuousness? In very deed the Lord is a long-suffering God. Dying mortals! Pause and ask yourselves how matters stand with you. If you shrink from the test now, be assured there is a day coming when you must be brought to books; as it is written, "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them, and they were judged every man according to their works." (Rev. 20:11-13) Solemn truths! Well, Sirs, where are you? Are you living in the constant practice of gratifying your body and mind, in sinning against and insulting the God that made you, and who has given you every good you possess? Can you and do you daily sin against a just, and holy, and good God with pleasure and delight, and feel in your mind a cursed boasting that you can sin so well, and thus despise the goodness and long-suffering of God? Remember, sinner, there is a day coming "when the Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;" (2 Thess. 1:9) and then, careless sinner, what will become of you? No insulting the long-suffering of God with pleasure then.

May God in mercy grant, if it be his sovereign pleasure, that the goodness of God may lead you to repentance; and may you not be suffered to go on "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

Perhaps some of you have more than the necessities of this life. Can you sport it away in drunkenness, or some branch of wanton pleasure, pride, or luxury, whilst tens of thousands of your fellow-creatures surrounding you are in a state of misery, distress, and starvation? Remember, you are but stewards of what you possess, and a reckoning day will come. And perhaps there may be some of you who are in wretchedness, and whose conscience tells you that you have been one means of bringing yourselves into your present distress, by your improvident acts when you were in better circumstances; that all good advice given to you then was thrown away, and you treated it with contempt; but now you feel your woes, and if you feel the accusations of it now, what will you feel in the great day of God's wrath, if you die without repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? But I pass on,

II. To drop a hint or two upon God's long-suffering towards his own elect while they are "dead in trespasses and sins." Let such of us as are blessed with the life and fear of God, who have been arraigned at the bar of God in the court of conscience, had our mouths stopped, felt the wrath of God, and been obliged to acknowledge that our eternal damnation would be just, and when we expected the awful but just

sentence of condemnation passed upon us, felt some sweet droppings of love and mercy in the conscience, which melted us into shame and self-abasement, and raised a solemn and deeper cry for mercy in the soul, which was heard and answered by a blessed revelation of pardon and peace to the conscience through the precious blood of the Lamb, and a sweet measure of the love of God shed abroad in the heart, being enabled in very deed to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee, because thou hast first loved me;" I say, my dear brethren, let us for a few moments call to remembrance some of the high-treasonable acts of our life, when we lived in worldly pleasure, serving divers lusts, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

O how awfully provoking have thousands of our thoughts, words, and actions been! And to what inevitable ruin we should have brought ourselves, had it not been for the long-suffering of the Lord, and his blessed determination to save us! Some of us can truly say that we should often have ran headlong into everlasting destruction, if the Lord had not, in a wonderful way, preserved us. I, for one, must say, to my own shame, and to the honour of the Lord, that such was I, and such the wonderful kindness and long-suffering of God towards me, that the Lord often prevented me, yea, and against my own inclination too, from casting myself into immediate destruction.

"Who is a God like unto our God?" Indeed, my friends, there is none like him, for in tens of thousands of instances we have sinned against him, and yet he has showed mercy; and though we have sinned in unbelief, we cannot all of us say that we did it at all times ignorantly; no, my friends, to our shame be it acknowledged, we have frequently done it against the remonstrances of our friends, against solemn checks, cautions, and rebukes from the word of God and the truth of God preached in our ears, yea, and from the accusations of our own conscience too.

We have done violence to all these admonitions, and sinned again and again. For myself, I must confess that I have awfully sinned, even with a measure of the horrors of hell in my conscience. Is it not a wonder, a matchless wonder, that God did not send such a presumptuous wretch to black despair, there to sink for ever? I have proved, to the joy of my soul, that the Lord is indeed a God long-suffering. Often some of us have been determined to take steps that would have brought us into open infamy and disgrace, and made us a pest to civil society, had not the Lord's long-suffering kindness prevented it.

No thanks to us; no, to us belongs shame; the thanks are all due to matchless grace, for we provoked the Most High in an awful degree, and rebelled against his glorious Majesty from day to day; but he, remembering that we were but flesh, and being full of compassion, forgave our iniquity, and destroyed us not; yes, he watched over our path, and preserved us from destruction, when we knew him not, nor regarded the operation of his hands, when we cared not for our own well being, but rushed madly on in sin and rebellion against God, as though we were bent upon our own eternal ruin.

But, to the honour of Jehovah's matchless, discriminating grace, be it known, he stopped us in our mad career, brought us to see and feel our lost condition, to confess our sins, and to cry for mercy, and enabled some of us feelingly to say, "Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." (2 Tim. 1:9) O my dear friends, who are brought to know and feel a measure of that unparalleled love, what a long-suffering God we have!

What wonders he has wrought for us and in us, and what blessings he has secured unto us by all that is dear to himself and safe to us! Bless his precious name, he has graciously taken the advantage of our vile

provocations, to show and prove to us how Jesus can save, and what a wonderful salvation the salvation of God is, and to bring us to show forth his praise. Cannot you recollect some instances of your life, when, if it had not been for the long-suffering, and tender mercies, and gracious preservation of the Lord, you must have sank to rise no more?

I am sure some of you, as well as myself, have been enabled in some sweet measure to enter into this blessed truth: "Sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called," (Jude 1) Whilst we have been lost in wonder at the grace of God, towards such vile and polluted wretches as we are. O my dear friends, what wonderful monuments of God's discriminating grace some of us are! Must we not, in solemn amazement, say, "What hath God wrought!" May our souls be spiritually and deeply engaged in speaking of the glory of God's kingdom, and talking of his power. (Ps. 145:11) O the matchless long-suffering of God to usward, "Not willing that any should perish," (that is, not willing that any of this "usward" should perish) "but that all of them should come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9)

"Sov'reign grace o'er sin abounding!

Ransom'd souls, the tidings swell!

'Tis a deep that knows no sounding;

Who its breadth or length can tell?

On its glories

Let my soul for ever dwell. "On such love, my soul, still ponder;

Love so great, so rich, so free;

Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,

Why, O Lord, such love to me?

Hallelujah!

Grace shall reign eternally."

Is there any presumptuous sinner here who is ready to take advantage of what has been said, in order that he may harden himself in sinning against God? Remember, poor wretch, God may not show his special mercy to you, nor bring his blessed salvation to your soul, and therefore your vile provocations may prove a preparation of your sinful soul for eternal destruction. Your taking advantage of an external knowledge of God's grace to sin the more, is "sinning that grace may abound," and may prove the awful means of deepening your eternal damnation. You may now despise, abhor, scorn, and set at nought the truth of God, but beware, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the Prophets: "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish; for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you." (Hab. 1:5; Acts 13:41) May God, in mercy, put his fear in your heart, and give you repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; for unless his gracious Majesty does this, an awful doom awaits you. But we now proceed,

III. To make a few remarks upon the long-suffering of God towards his people after they are called by divine grace. The more bountifully blessings are bestowed upon any person by an insulted friend, whilst

the receiver of those blessings, in a variety of ways, still continues to insult the giver, and the gracious giver takes advantage of those frequent insults to bestow more favours, and manifest more grace, the more it bespeaks the long-suffering and merciful kindness of the giver, and the more it exhibits the sad, detestable vileness of the receiver.

Indeed, such are we, my beloved brethren, and such is the Lord's mercy and kindness towards us, wretches that we are, that it may truly be said of us, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." If we attempt for a few moments to take a short review of the Lord's gracious dealings with us, and our dealings with and towards him, since he first began a work of grace in our souls, we shall have great cause to exclaim, "O the long-suffering of the Lord! Who can rightly describe it or fully estimate it?"

The loving-kindness and long-suffering of the Lord towards his people are beyond all comprehension. Bless his precious name, "his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting," and stands eternally sure to all his chosen family, who are loved with an everlasting love, redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, and, in God's own time, made alive to God by the invincible power of God the Holy Ghost; their life is hid with, and secured in the life of Christ, and because he lives they shall live also.

He may and does chastise, but his "loving-kindness he will not take away, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail." Love, everlasting love, to our souls, lies at the bottom of all his proceedings with and towards us: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; but if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. 12:6,8) When the Lord first quickened and enlightened our dead and dark minds, by the life-giving and light-communicating power of God the Holy Ghost, we experienced such solemn feelings in our consciences as we had never had before; and whether our distressing feelings were more or less horrible than others of whom we have heard or read, they were such as rendered our lives miserable; we could never totally remove them from our minds, but were in the end brought to tremble before God and at his word.

Whilst in this state, whatever temporary relief we might obtain, by our legal promises and vows, or our legal works, it invariably left us worse than it found us, and we were ready to conclude that there was no hope for us. Often have we thought, and sometimes said, if the Lord would be pleased to forgive our sins, and let us experience his pardoning grace in our souls; if he could, in righteousness and justice, do this, then we would unceasingly love, praise, and adore him, and truly obey him, and be satisfied with all his dealings towards us, and ever glorify him.

Well, beloved, to some of us his gracious Majesty has granted a good hope, through grace; has now and then melted our hard hearts with a sweet taste of his love and mercy, through the precious blood of the Lamb, and drawn forth deep humility, tenderness of conscience, prayer, praise, and thanksgivings to his glorious Majesty; and we have been enabled truly to say, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live."

At these moments we have felt a sweet melting down at his feet, and really expected that we were going to be all love and obedience. But alas, alas! How soon we forget all, if the Lord, for wise purposes, withholds his sweet, heart-melting, humbling power! We look within us and around us with wretched disappointment, and begin to fret, and repine, and rebel against the Lord. We feel angry at his ways and proceedings, and act more like fretful, peevish, spoiled children than grateful vessels of mercy, indebted to the free grace of God for every favour we enjoy.

Now, if the Lord had not been a God long-suffering, he would not have borne with such unholy proceedings. But his merciful kindness is such, that he has sometimes given us a gentle check, with some seasonable reproof, and then, sooner or later, he has given us another taste of his love. Some of us can say, to the honour of the Lord, that he has been graciously pleased to reveal pardon to our conscience, by a sweet and blessed application of the atonement unto our soul, and said unto us, "I am thy salvation," and he has enabled us, in the sweet spirit of adoption, to say, "My Lord and my God."

Guilt, sin, legal fear, and bondage then took their flight from the conscience, and our sins appeared to be removed from us as far as the east is from the west; nor did we ever expect their horrible company again. We could then both feel and sing, "The Lord loved me, and gave himself for me." We felt a solemn devotedness to the Lord, giving him our whole heart, and mind, and soul, and strength; and with a feeling love to the Lord, and a reverential awe of his glorious majesty, we could and did say, "But thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption," etc. (Isa. 38:17) With what vehemence did we then promise the Lord that we would constantly love, praise, and adore him, and serve and honour him with our whole hearts.

Have not some of you been here? And how have you been and acted since such solemn moments? Have not your foolish hearts wandered into forbidden paths? Must not some of us confess that we have been "unmindful of the Rock that begat us and the God that formed us," (Deut. 32:18) and have backslidden from the sweet enjoyment of the Lord, seeking ease, pleasure, and satisfaction in something short of the presence, love, and truth of the Lord? Sometimes we have been left to seek rest in the world; and that failing us, we have tried to prop up our minds with a false joy in the doctrines of the gospel, without feeling their power or deriving any real virtue from them, and for a time have gone about with clear heads but cold hearts, endeavouring to satisfy ourselves without real intercourse with the Lord, or a feeling power of divine things. And thus for a season we have been and may be suffered to go on, and endeavour to plant pleasant plants and set strange slips, and produce false confidence, presumptuous hope, and fleshly joy and stability; yea, we may sow the seed of external piety, be active in outward forms, have a tolerable share of fleshly zeal and imaginary fruitfulness spring up, both of a religious and worldly nature; rise in the morning to sow our seed and make it flourish, and be busy in the day to make our plants grow; but "the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief, and of desperate or deadly sorrow;" (Isa. 17:11) the chastening hand of God shall sweep away the whole of our imaginary fruit, and for a while leave us in felt disappointment, perplexity, confusion, and deep distress.

Brethren, have not some of us felt something of the above, and been brought to groan under the effects of our own foolishness, and expected that the Lord's mercy was clean gone for ever, and that he would be favourable no more? Yet, wonderful to tell, after all our abusings of the mercy of the Lord he has graciously appeared again, and blessed us with deep humility under a feeling sense of his matchless love and long-suffering, and has drawn forth vital faith into real exercise in a Three-One God. Thus the blessed Spirit has proved unto us that it was a loving, long-suffering God which laid his gentle rod upon us, to sweep away our false hopes, joys, and props, to bring us with weeping and supplications to his footstool, and to lead us into a more spiritual enjoyment of himself. Instead of suffering us to live, or rather starve upon the fruit of our own backslidings, he has made us abhor ourselves and vehemently cry, "O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me." Indeed, my friends, we may bring our minds into darkness, bondage, and confusion, and our hearts into hardness, and draw upon ourselves indescribable misery by our awful transgressions, but we cannot deliver our souls from bondage, guilt, and distress. Here we must lie or sink till a gracious God is pleased to deliver us. But when a long-suffering God brings us to see and feel a

measure of the fruit of our doings, and enables us to cry unto him for mercy, confessing our vileness, his gracious Majesty, in his own time, appears, and says to our souls, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." (Hos. 14:4)

O what indescribable mercy, love, and long-suffering grace are expressed in Hos. 14:4-6. And when the Lord is graciously pleased to reveal to the mind and seal upon the conscience such God-glorifying, soul-humbling, yea, and soul-exalting truths, it breaks the heart with manifested love, and melts it into gratitude, praise, and thanksgiving to the God of all the blessings we enjoy and of all the blessings promised in covenant love, and we prove, indeed and in truth, that he is unto us a God long-suffering; for instead of pouring out his wrath upon us, as we well deserve, he fills us with joy and peace in believing, and enables us in spirit and in truth to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures," etc. (Ps. 23:1,2) Yes, and this he does for his own blessed name's sake. honours crown his brow, such is his loving-kindness that he leads us beside the still waters of his everlasting love, and the waters of life, the divine river of the breakings forth of his matchless grace in the person, blood, obedience, and fullness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and causes us to feel a blessed increase of the glorious springing up of the Spirit in the soul as a well of living waters, so that, by faith and in spiritual feeling, we drink of the river of the Lord's good pleasure, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.

Under these refreshing showers of his love, and the bedewing operations of the Spirit of life and truth, the fruits of the Spirit spring up in the soul, and in heavenly tranquility we lie down in the green pastures of the glorious riches of free and sovereign grace. Thus it is that we are enabled sweetly to enter into the exceeding great and precious promises, which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and by a living faith we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord the Lamb.

Divine life and virtue flow from him, and the glorious word of his grace drops into the conscience like rain, and distils as the dew. (Deut. 32:2) At these blessed seasons, the dear Lord himself comes down upon us and in us like rain. By these divine manifestations the soul is restored to feeling, life, and activity. We have blessed intercourse with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, and the soul appears as if it were almost ready to take its flight into the realms of glorious bliss, where it could take its fill of love and glory, without any more pullbacks.

In this solemn frame of mind, under the blessed anointings, teachings, and leadings of God the Spirit, we are led into the paths of righteousness, the glorious righteousness of Christ, which is unto all and upon all them that believe. He leads us into the paths of true life and holiness; and real spiritual obedience is then no legal task, nor does it burden or gall the conscience, for of a truth the Lord's ways are ways of pleasantness, and his paths are paths of peace; yea, we feel it to be our meat and drink to do the will of the Lord.

Self is then truly abased and Christ crowned, and the glory of a Three-One God set up and maintained in the conscience, for we feel that the whole of the glory belongs to the Lord, and in holy wonder we can feelingly say, "Thou art my God, and I will praise thee," etc. As long as the dear Lord keeps us in this blessed frame of mind, matters go on very pleasantly between God and the soul, and we enjoy something of the glory of the kingdom of God being set up and maintained in us by the Lord's own power, nor do we ever dream of our feet slipping again or that our sweet intercourse and fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ will ever again be interrupted.

But, my dear friends, there is a possibility of our being tempted to abuse such infinite mercy as this, yea, and of being left, in a great measure, to fall by the power of the temptation. Pride, accursed pride, may begin to lift up its hateful head, and we then feel disposed to set up our exalted feelings as a rule by which to judge others; or if we step aside from this, it is into the most dreadful feelings of sin, guilt, and filth. We become the dupes of Satan's horrible suggestions and temptations, and we are left for a while to act as though our feelings were the only criterion by which to judge of vital godliness.

We imagine, whilst in this state of mind, that we cannot meet a child of God anywhere but in one of these two places, as though there were no spiritual experience between the most awful distress and horror of mind, and the most glorious manifestations of God's love and loveliness and the liftings up of the light of his countenance in the soul. We may rest assured that such a frame of mind is certain in the end to bring upon us barrenness of soul. But while this cursed principle of pride vamps us up, if a poor dejected sinner comes to us, who in some measure feels his lost condition, and confesses that his sins are against a just, and holy, and good God, and that he really feels wretched because of his transgressions, fearing that the Lord would not have mercy upon him, perhaps, instead of affectionately inquiring how he was brought into this state of mind; what have been his struggles under it; how he feels in secret between God and his own soul; whether he has indeed been brought to tremble at the word of God, and to feel that the Lord would be holy, just, and good if he were to cut him off and send him to hell; whether his self-strength is gone and his self-hope rooted up; whether he has felt his heart sicken under a feeling sense of hope deferred; whether he feels real shame before God, and confesses his sins unto him, and cries for mercy when no eye seeth him but the Lord; whether he can live at ease and in carelessness, or whether he is obliged to sigh and groan for mercy when he is not able to speak; whether all his attempts to help himself give him help or leave him more helpless; whether he has ever thought of giving up all concern about eternal things, and at times felt awful rebellion against God because he is so wretched, and afterwards been made to tremble at his own feelings, and to sigh for mercy; whether these attempts to give up all concern about eternal things have made him more easy or ended in deeper distress of soul; whether he ever feels any little power in addressing the Lord, or feels any gleam of hope spring up in his mind, and if so, what the ground of that hope is; whether he has ever any brokenness of spirit or melting of heart before the Lord; whether he now and then meets with a little encouragement, and if so, what that encouragement arises from; whether in very deed he believes the statement God has made in his word of his holiness and the creature's unholiness; of his goodness and the creature's baseness, of his greatness and strength and the sinner's weakness and helplessness; I say, while this principle of pride vamps us up, instead of endeavouring to draw forth the real feelings of the soul, like drawing water out of a deep well, we begin at once and say, "O!

Have you ever been in hell? Have you felt the wrath of God and the horrors of the damned in your own soul? Have Satan and you been at close quarters, and, with your mind almost driven to distraction, have you felt as if you could dethrone God, if it were in your power?" These and many other such questions we perhaps put to him, and then, with a kind of exulting spirit, say, "I have been there, and what do you think of such a state as that? You appear to know very little of any thing real yet;" and thus we at once hang a padlock upon the lips of the poor broken-down soul, and we send him away in great heaviness.

Indeed, he is so cast down by our hard questions, that he is almost afraid to speak with us again, and we are ready to exult in the depth of our own experience, and say to ourselves, "I have given him a settler." Or if we meet with one of the Lord's family who speaks a little of his distress and of the Lord's kindness towards him, how he has been brought to feel and confess his vileness, and of the little intimations of

mercy he has felt in his soul under a sweet melting faith and feeling of the love of Christ to poor sinners, having felt a little of this love shed abroad in his heart, and had just enough of faith in Christ to view a measure of his beauty, love, and loveliness, and been enabled to say, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief;" or, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee; grant me power feelingly to say, 'My Lord and my God;' let me feel the power of thy pardoning mercy, and truly believe in, and cast all my care upon thee;" instead of endeavouring to trace and draw forth the various movements of the Holy Ghost in him, and his goings-out in hope, faith, and love towards the Lord, under the teachings of the Spirit, and so encourage his faith and hope in the Lord, we begin upon high ground at once, and say, "Can you feelingly say, without any doubt, 'The Lord loved me, and gave himself for me?'"

Have you ever felt your burden of guilt removed by the powerful application of the atonement to your conscience, and, by a glorious faith in Christ, had your soul carried up into heaven, and had such soul-realizing views and feelings of the love and glory of God, and your interest therein, as to be lost in wonder, love, and praise? Or have you ever been baptized by the Spirit into the love and blood of Christ, and found yourself bathing there, as in an ocean of mercy and grace, and been brought in spirit and in truth to say, 'O Lord, thou art my God,' etc.

Thus we appear as if we had no feeling for the weak in faith, or the babes of the family of God; and while this is the case, we may rest assured that we are not in the sweet enjoyment of these blessed things in our own souls; for though we once enjoyed them, we have backslidden from that blessed freedom with the Lord. The temptations of the devil and the pride of our old nature have carried us away, to take advantage of the Lord's wonderful kindness towards us, to vamp us up with exalted views of our own experience and attainments; and thus we insult the blessed Spirit, and, in some measure, despise the poor, feeble, faint-hearted mourners in Zion.

My dear friends, there is a possibility of being left, in a great measure, to this pride and hardness of mind (for so I call it) for a length of time. While in this state, our principal talk about religion is probably about some high branches of doctrinal truth which we think we have had some deep insight into, or experience of, in bygone days, and we try to satisfy the mind with this, without present feelings of the power of divine truth; and if some poor, feeble, broken-down child of God were able to catechize us a little, and bring us to the test of our present experience, and ask us what brokenness of heart or tenderness of conscience we now feel; or what breathings-out of the soul to God in vital prayer or divine wrestlings with the Lord we now have; or what blessed comings-in from the Lord our soul now enjoys; or what sweet goings-out of faith and love to and in the Lord we now feel; and whether or not we can now truly say that "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ;" we should either be silent, or answer rather roughly, or talk of something we felt and enjoyed long ago; but if the truth were truly to come out, there is very little spiritual feeling now.

It may be that there is now and then a secret sigh or groan under a feeling of our wretchedness which may be too detestable to name, and of our loss of the blessed enjoyment of the presence of the Lord; and the Lord sometimes suffers us, as a rod for our cursed pride, to get into a state of indescribable gloom; in which state Satan's temptations, hardness of heart, darkness of mind, and a fearful sense of the displeasure of the Lord are our chief companions, and we are left to feel as if we neither can nor dare cry for mercy; till at last the soul sinks into deep horror, and in bitterness of spirit cries out, "Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me," (Ps. 55:5) and we appear to be one of the most horrible and detestable fools living.

Here we keep sinking, till the dear Lord is graciously pleased, in some way or other, to manifest a sweet measure of his loving-kindness and long-suffering, which he sometimes does by producing a little tenderness of conscience with a touch of his tender-hearted love, communicating a spirit of prayer, and drawing it forth in spiritual vehemency, till in real earnest the soul cries, "Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me; hide not thy face from me; put not thy servant away in anger.

Thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me." (Ps. 27:9) The poor soul both feels and confesses its pride, arrogance, and presumption, and earnestly cries for mercy. No spreading of their wings now, as if out of the reach of every poor, trampled-down, broken-hearted sinner. No, they feel low enough, and wonder that the Lord has not entirely spurned them from him; but such is the long-suffering of the Lord, that he is graciously pleased to hear their cry and come to their help, and graciously reveals himself unto them as "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin;" (Exod. 34:7) and though he both does and will chasten his people for sin, he will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever; and while he is slow to anger, he is also plenteous in mercy.

This he enables them to feel by the power of his blessed Spirit, and then the soul is sweetly obliged to say. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us after our iniquities." (Ps. 103:10) No, bless his gracious name! No; but instead of pouring forth his vindictive wrath, he has in the end broken our hearts with manifestive mercy, has turned for us our mourning into dancing, has put off our sackcloth, and girded us with gladness, that we might love, praise, and adore him, and show forth the wonders of his grace and long-suffering.

But some of my friends will say, "I have never been brought either into such depths of misery or heights of joy; but one thing I know and must confess, that I have often abused the little intimations of the Lord's mercy which I hope I have enjoyed, and I feel to my shame that I have acted very ungratefully to the Lord, and wonder at his long-suffering towards such a wretch as I am. His tender mercies do now and then crumble me in the dust, and I can say, 'It is of the Lord's mercy I am not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.'" (Lam. 3:22) My fellow-mortals, here we are, a company of the abusers of the mercies of the Lord. We have all, in a greater or less degree, abused his common mercies, and some of us have abused his special mercies. What coldness, hardness, and formality have we had in the worship of the Lord, what wanderings of mind and dreadful ramblings after forbidden things, what unthankfulness for blessings received, and what peevishness and fretfulness against the Lord when he has been pleased to cross our plans and has withheld from us what we thought was needful! How fleshly and worldly have we often been in our pursuits; how proud and arrogant in some of our movements! In a word, we must confess that we are vile, and yet the Lord has spared us. Here we are, all of us debtors to mercy in some way or other; but some of us are indebted to rich, discriminating grace; and, after all our unbecoming ways, still we are blest with hope in the Lord and his mercy, and we are here as witnesses that He is a God long-suffering.

Remember, my dear friends, what debtors we are to the sovereign love of God; and may the strange, the glorious, the mysterious free grace of God towards us poor polluted wretches awe our minds. And when either fleshly pleasure, fleshly appetite, or the temptations of Satan would draw us from the path of righteousness into the path of fleshly gratification, either in eating or drinking to excess, or into any other flesh-pleasing way, may we be enabled to pause and feelingly say, "How can I do that God-dishonouring, flesh-pleasing thing against God?"

Lord, make me truly abhor every thing that is contrary to thy honour." Has not the dear Lord now and then given us a proof that we are the members of his blessed body, of his flesh, and of his bones, (Eph. 5:30) and that his gracious Majesty loved us and gave himself for us, that he might sanctify and cleanse us with the washing of water by the word, and that he might present us to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that we should be holy and without blemish?

I say, my dear friends, have we not, through the riches of God's grace, now and then felt a sweet measure of this unparalleled love? And shall we pamper this poor body in pride and luxury, or indulge in any flesh-pleasing thing? God forbid! The Lord help us feelingly to remember a solemn measure of what it cost the Lord of life and glory to redeem us from all iniquity; and may the sufferings, pangs, and soul-harassing agonies, and dying sweat and groans of the God-Man Mediator, have such a place in our consciences as shall, under the divine teachings of the Holy Spirit, enable us to abhor sin in all its bearings, and abstain from all flesh-pleasing luxuries.

Thus may we be enabled to stop the mouths of gainsayers, and not be suffered to put a stumbling-block in each other's way, nor to wound the cause of Christ. May the long-suffering of the Lord lead our souls, in deep humility, to watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. May we never be suffered to trust our own hearts, nor lean to our own understanding in anything; but may we keep in view our own weakness and foolishness, and daily look unto and call upon the Lord for wisdom and strength.

May we, in spirit and in truth, flee from self-care, and truly cast all our care upon the Lord, lie at his blessed feet, lean upon his bosom, tell him all our needs, temptations, and griefs, and pour out our souls unto him. God grant that we may feel ourselves entire pensioners upon the Lord, and, as such, hang upon him, and truly derive life and virtue from him; and whatever situation in life or in the church of God we may fill, may we be truly concerned to fill up our place as it becomes the gospel of Christ.

May we hear, and feel, and act under the admonition of the Lord by John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." (1 John 2:15) May the life, love, grace, truth, tenderness, sympathy, pity, compassion, and long-suffering of the Lord draw our souls into sweet obedience, and may his honour and glory have a deep place in our hearts, and regulate our lives. And thus may we be enabled to give proof that the long-suffering of the Lord has led us into true repentance, and, by the teachings of the blessed Spirit, has enabled us to seek his honour and to glorify his blessed name. As members of the body of Christ, may we feelingly live in him, and experience that he lives in us, the hope of glory, and the glory of hope. Amen.

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