

What Must I Do To Be Saved?

- BELIEVE – ACTS 16:31
- REPENT – ACTS 17:30; LUKE 13:3
- CONFESS – ROMANS 10:10; I TIMOTHY 6:12
- BE BAPTIZED – ACTS 2:38; MARK 16:16
- BE FAITHFUL – REVELATION 2:10

PRAYER LIST:

North Ridgeville Church of Christ
36364 Chestnut Ridge Road
North Ridgeville, OH 44039

www.nrcoc.net

Times for Meeting

Lord's Day

9:30 AM Bible Study (all ages)
10:30 AM Worship

Wednesday

7:00 PM Bible Study (all ages)

Elders

Bruce Dean
Mark Ullman

Evangelist

Steven Wallace

THE NORTH RIDGEVILLE CHURCH OF CHRIST

“But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only,
deceiving your own selves.” James 1:22

May 14, 2023

“The Empowerment of Longsuffering”

Steven J. Wallace

“For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, **for all patience and longsuffering with joy**” (Col. 1:9–11, emp. SJW).¹

The religion of Christ brings power to the people who hear and obey His message. Jesus described such as a solid foundation whose house will not collapse in a flood (Lk. 6:47, 48). It is a religion that lifts up the brokenhearted and at the same time casts down the proud. Jesus spoke of an unshakable joy—a lasting joy that the world is not strong enough to snatch away (Jn. 16:20–22). That is power! Likewise, forming a disposition that is longsuffering is not weak and passive but rather *empowering*. This trait is a fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. In Colossians 1 we read that it is a trait strengthened by the Lord through the knowledge and spiritual understanding found in His will. Only Christianity demonstrates how one can fall under a trial, suffer wounds from others unjustly, and still retain a thriving measure of joy. These concepts were forcefully demonstrated by Jesus while on the very cross that was built to torture Him and take His life (Heb. 12:1–3; Lk. 23:34).

While things like hatred, bitterness, and envy make us behave foolishly and look weak, longsuffering is a demonstration of power that becomes fully revealed to others when troubles arise.

Longsuffering empowers us to be saved by God. If God were not longsuffering, none of us could be saved or be here to talk about it. He was longsuffering in the days of Noah so that Noah could build the ark in a very wicked and corrupt climate (1 Pet. 3:20). Nehemiah reflects on the longsuffering God demonstrated during the wilderness wandering:

“They refused to obey, And they were not mindful of Your wonders That You did among them. But they hardened their necks, And in their rebellion They appointed a leader To return to their bondage. But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them” (Neh. 9:17).

In seeing the sinful actions of men, we also become aware of the measured and controlled response by God. Think of God’s longsuffering nature to save Saul of Tarsus and establish him in the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12–16). This proves His willingness to save all the lost.

Longsuffering empowers us to overcome evil with God. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). The foundation for what is truly good is God (Matt. 19:17). The state or quality of what is truly good is in view since the creation of the universe. “And God saw the light, that it was good...” (Gen. 1:4; cf. 1:10, 12, etc.). It is through goodness that the foolishness of men is silenced. 1 Peter 2:15, 16, “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.” Sadly, some reward evil for good (Prov. 17:13). Others reward evil with evil (Prov. 20:22). But then there are others still who can genuinely overcome evil with good, blessing those who persecute them (Rom. 12:14). These empowered individuals will bless when being reviled (1 Cor. 4:12, 13). While you and I cannot necessarily stop someone from slapping us or reviling us, we are empowered according to the glorious power of Christ to respond in a better way (Matt. 5:39). Peter helps us by showing that our response is measured by where our hope lies. He explains in 1 Peter 3:9, “not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (emp. added). What does Peter say we are called to and what does he identify that we are looking forward to?

Longsuffering empowers us to forgive others as God does. “bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (Col. 3:13, emp. added). God’s forbearing nature is what attracts us to Him (Rom. 2:4; 1 Jn. 4:19). It is quite easy for us to practice forbearance and longsuffering

toward another’s sin against us when God’s example toward us is in a clear view. God’s goodness should lead us not only to repentance but also to develop forbearance with those who sin against us (Rom. 2:4). This doesn’t mean that we overlook sin, but that when we confront and expose sin, we are looking for reconciliation, not isolation (Matt. 18:15). Once again, looking at Nehemiah 9:17, can it be said of us that we are “ready to pardon,” or are we holding onto an offense or bearing a grudge? Can it be said of you and me that we are gracious and merciful, or are we unforgiving? Can it be said of us that we are slow to anger, or are we short-fused? Can it be said of us that we are abundant in kindness, or are we swollen with bitterness?

While longsuffering is empowering, the forgetful and unmerciful spirit is disabling. Jesus spoke a parable of a man who owed ten thousand talents (Matt. 18:24). This was an insurmountable debt to pay off. When he was ordered to be sold with his wife, children, and all that he had, he prayed for his master to have a longsuffering spirit (Matt. 18:26). Although he was pardoned, he was unwilling to extend that same grace toward another who owed him only one hundred denarii (Matt. 18:28-30).

How could this happen? He forgot and failed to apply his lord’s example! Perhaps we minimize our debt and impair the spirit of mercy when we forget how we were cleansed from our old sins. As a result, we are blinded to the opportunities before us to “walk worthy of the Lord” in bearing forth the fruit of longsuffering (2 Pet. 1:9–11; Col. 1:9–11; Gal. 5:22).

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians saying,

“And we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, support the weak, be longsuffering toward all. See that none render unto any one evil for evil; but always follow after that which is good, one toward another, and toward all” (1 Thess. 5:14, 15, ASV).

Without longsuffering, we will likely become stale to *admonish* the disorderly while being tempted to render evil for evil. When someone wrongs you is no license to wrong them. There can be trying circumstances where a higher course is to be pursued. This doesn’t make me a pacifist. It doesn’t mean that I throw myself down as a carpet for others to walk on. It doesn’t mean that I will let someone assault my wife or family. But there can be circumstances where I must not respond in kind, but rather choose to respond in kindness and forbearance. Longsuffering is empowering; it frees us from acting the way evil people want us to respond. While we cannot control others, we can control ourselves.