

Forbearance

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[0:00] Ephesians 4, verse 1-3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Forbearance. Forbearance is something that I know I need to develop more of. It's a characteristic of Christ's likeness, isn't it?

It's really a manifestation of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit. You can see that forbearance there in the message of the Bible. And friends, the church worldwide is made up of all kinds of people. In case you hadn't noticed, they don't all look like me. That would be awful, wouldn't it? If we're all clones of one another or, you know, as much as we might like someone. We're all individuals. We're all different.

Every one of us. Different temperaments, different tastes, different hairstyles, different habits, different ways of being. And it's good. It's a good thing that the church is made up of lots of different kinds of people.

[1:31] And the differences between us aren't necessarily bad. Because a unity doesn't require that we're all the same. It's not that we're all the same, but we can all be of one accord.

We can all be of that one Spirit. Tozer said that while the church was to pursue unity, it was to do so by endeavouring to become more like Jesus Christ.

More like our Lord. Lord. Lord. And to demonstrate or kind of give an example of how this works, He talked about how when you tune a piano, there are...

Essentially, there is the tuning fork that tunes the piano. The piano, to be in tune, has to match up with the tuning fork.

And if you had a hundred pianos that were merely tuned to each other, their pitch would not be very accurate because each piano has to be tuned to the tuning fork.

[2:34] And it's like that with church, isn't it? With God's people. The object is that we're more in tune with our Lord, that we're tuned to our Lord.

And then if we are tuned to our Lord, if He's the one who sets the mark as to what we should be like, then we'll be tuned to each other as well automatically.

It follows on. As we've got that aspiration to be like our Lord and Saviour, to become like Him, then that Christ-likeness will be something that's evident amongst all of us, amongst one another.

And so sometimes when we go through life, we know it's a bit like when porcupines get together. They tend to poke each other if they get too close.

And Christians can be like that too, just like anybody can. But sometimes we can niggle each other, like those porcupines that might poke each other with their spikes, sparks, or whatever they're called.

[3:42] Whatever they're called. They poke each other. And so Christians can be like that too. We can annoy each other from time to time. So we need to learn forbearance. And Romans 5, verse 5, it says, The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us.

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts. So we can be led by the Spirit and we can get on with each other. In Romans 12, verse 10, it says, Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love in honour preferring one another.

Brotherly love. What a picture that is. Kindly affectioned one to another in brotherly love, in honour preferring one another. That's what God wants for us, for His body, for His church.

It's something that God commands of us. Forbearance. To forbear one another in love. Forbear one another in love. It's one of those Christ-like characteristics.

Forbearance. It's about being patient with others. It's about bearing patiently with other people. Forbearance. It's got the sense of intention.

[4:50] As in foreshadow, forewarn. It's got that sense of an intention. And it's also got that sense of burden. Forbear. It's got that sense of picking up the burden and bearing it.

Forbearing one another. And forbearance is not a toleration of sin as such an accommodation of sin. There's times when we know God's Word is very clear that false teachers need to be confronted.

False teaching needs to be counteracted and spoken against. But forbearance is that sense that we see brought through the scriptures of upholding the weak.

Of supporting the weak. Of that respectfulness. That plain good manners really. That is required of us. And we see that nowadays that plain old fashioned kind of courtesy is missing.

I was just talking with someone this morning about catching a bus and people not getting out of the chairs or older or frail people who, you know, it's just good manners really isn't it?

[5:56] It's courtesy to show that kind of kindness and respect. It's out the window today. Even in the world at large. But how it should be evident in the Church of God.

It's something that should be evident as one of the characteristics of those who profess to be God's people. God's people. We should have a higher mark. A higher standard. A higher bar.

For we that profess to be His. Our Lord and Saviour. And profess to know Him. And want to be like Him. And so, our society today is changing.

It's ever more changing away from that which is of God and good things and godliness. It's ever more filled with self-interest. With rudeness. With self-centeredness.

With sensitivity. People tend to be reactive and overly self-assertive or self-centered. But we as God's people we should be different. We should be having a different walk.

[6:53] A different characteristic. A different nature. The scripture verse that we read here tells of meekness. With all lowliness and meekness with long suffering for bearing one another in love.

And this word meekness it doesn't mean a weakness. It really means a strength under control. There's that sense where we are strong but our strength makes us to deal with people in a kindly way.

In a controlled way. So we're not blowing our stand. How we treat others is a powerful weakness in a way too. That there's something different. There's something changed in our nature.

In the inward man. And we see that all of these things flow together. Humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance. They don't come naturally.

It's not natural for us. It goes against the grain really. But those are the character traits that should be evident in us. The world would consider them as weaknesses. You know, nowadays people are always looking for these kind of self-confidence training, assertiveness, workshops and seminars to make people to be more powerful in their ways.

[8:13] But nobody goes to a seminar to learn how to have humility. Nobody goes to a seminar to increase their gentleness. People wouldn't stand in line to get tickets to such an event.

It's counter-cultural really, isn't it? And yet it ought to be something that we as God's people would aspire to. So have that humility, that gentleness, that patience, that forbearance.

And it's evident in the life and witness of our very Saviour Himself. It's one of these defining character traits, isn't it? Our Lord Jesus. And as we see it through His life, His suffering and in the end the cross itself.

God, and as God's people here today, I want to exhort you to consider how would you rate your level of forbearance?

Forbearance. In other words, putting up with people. You know, sometimes we can have a very low, what's the word, a very low rating. We can have a very low point where we lose it.

[9:25] And Christians can be just like the world in that we can still have that temptation when someone disagrees with us to start hurling abuse back at them or hateful words.

And Christians can be just as guilty of a lack of love. And, you know, I've seen Christians getting punching matches with each other in church foyers over sometimes petty conflicts and minor disagreements and dislikes of various things whether it's a difference of opinion or they just took a disliking to each other.

And it's a reproach. We should have forbearance. We should, if anybody should have forbearance then God's people ought to have it. And we need to forbear.

It's been written of a couple of the reformers of old. Martin Luther, that he had such a bad temper that he once called John Calvin a pig and a devil.

And Calvin, understanding the need to patiently forbear in order to preserve Christian unity replied, Luther may call me what he will but I will call, I will always call him a dear servant of Christ.

[10:38] Now, I would have differences with both Martin Luther and John Calvin but nevertheless it's the point that is being made here that we can call people names or we can actually consider well, there might be a Christian just having a bad hair day or something like that.

You know, we should have forbearance with one another. It's about unselfishness. It's about having that genuine care for other people in our lives and the other people who come across our path.

It's that consideration that we can give to other people. It's that love that ought to be the fruit of the Spirit. It says in the Word of God, love endures all things.

So let us learn to love. Learn to love as he loved us. Now that's a pretty tall order, isn't it? That's a pretty high mark, that bar set pretty high. To love as I have loved you.

So want you to love one another. And love, the Bible says, endures all things. Even those who irritate us and disturb us, who rub us up the wrong way, who embarrass us, the people that annoy us in our lives, God calls us to forbear.

[11:49] To forbear. Love will not only overlook the sin, it will overlook the offence. When someone offends you, it will overlook the offence. It will not hold the grudges that we can so naturally want to bear against someone who's offended us, who we feel has done us wrong.

It will be ready to bury the offence and not bring it up again. We live in a day where people hold grudges and they can get offended over the smallest things.

People can get too sensitive. They can have a touchy spirit. And instead they're called to be forbearing one another. In other words, being patient with other people.

Now I have reason today to develop some forbearance. I went to the shops and I experienced the joy of shopping. And I went as I bought some couple of items, I raced to the smallest queue that I could find because I was in a hurry to get home.

And there was a couple in front of me who were buying some items. And there's an elderly couple, and this is not to put older people down because I consider myself on them now.

[13:03] But they got to the checkout and the shop assistant asked would you like a bag with that? And the man said oh no that's okay I've got a bag.

And he started to put his items in the bag. But they hadn't been scammed yet. And then eventually when they were scammed to cut a long story short because it could go on, then the lady pulled out her coins on the counter to pay for the products.

And so it was a wonderful lesson today in forbearance. forbearance. A wonderful lesson. I could only smile at them because they were teaching me forbearance.

And it's been said that there was a church in Kentucky, a Baptist church, and there was two deacons in this church who were constantly arguing and bickering with each other.

And one of them decided one day to put a small wooden peg on the back wall so that the pastor could hang his hat on the peg. And when the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged.

[14:04] How dare you put up a peg without consulting me? And the people in the church took sides about the issue. And the congregation was eventually split in two.

Today people still refer to these two Baptist churches in this Mayfield County, Kentucky. I don't know if this story is true. Sounds a bit too far-fetched really.

But they still apparently refer to these two churches in Kentucky as the peg Baptist church and the anti-peg Baptist church. That's a forbearance isn't it?

That's a lesson in forbearance. We can see we can get uppity and lose our sanctification, lose our curl over the most trivial of matters. And we need to learn forbearance with one another. Some lessons in forbearance are more testing than that one. It could be people who've really done you wrong. They've really caused you great hurt. Forbear one another in love.

[15:07] Forbear one another in love. Now as we think of the lessons in the school of forbearance, we think of how we can keep silent under provocation.

One person alone can never make a quarrel. It takes two. It takes two. There was some helpful counsel to a newly married couple that they should never both be angry at the same time. That way one could remain calm and tranquil while the other does the opposite. And so the Bible says a soft answer turns away wrath. If we can't have the soft answer always ready, we can at least return not to answer at all.

We can at least learn not to answer at all. What did our Lord do when he was insulted, when he was reproached? He just calmly and patiently met it with uncomplaining silence.

He was like a lamb, silent before the shearer. All the venomous insults of the crowd, that cruel throng who ultimately would cry crucify him, crucify him, they wrung from him no word of resentment, no look of impatience.

[16:30] The cruelty that our Lord suffered did not provoke a reaction. He didn't even defend himself against the wrongful accusations.

And friends, I want to urge you today as a Christian, seek God to develop that greater fruit of forbearance in your life, in that practical side of life.

It's a part of the school of grace. The school of grace. You know, when you come across those kind of people, and I've referred to them before as those kind of sandpaper people in your life, when you come across those kind of people who can be hard to get on with, it's another lesson.

It's another lesson for you in the school of grace. It's another lesson for you, so that ultimately you might pass the whole course and earn a bachelor's degree in grace.

A bachelor's degree in grace. Having passed through the various elements of that training course, having learnt lowliness, having learnt gentleness, having learnt meekness, having learnt humility, that ultimately you'll be qualified, you'll pass with flying colours and have that acknowledgement that God is teaching you his grace, that you can grow in grace, that you can learn his grace, that grace can teach you in that school of grace, because life is like that.

[18:09] The school of hard knocks is the school of grace, because he wants us to find more and more grace. And that's why some of those people that we can't get on with that well, he puts in our lives.

The people that make us really have to dig deep for that patience and that Christ-likeness.

Some people help us to learn grace. I know I referred to it in passing this morning of people that have been quite harsh to me, that I thank them for it.

Because it actually helps me to grow. It helps me to become more like Christ. And some people are great teachers for us in this school of grace.

They're great teachers for you. These people that God puts across your path. Maybe you feel like the devil put them there, but sometimes I think God allows us such people in our lives so that they can be teachers to us of God's grace to help us learn it.

[19:14] The people who get under our skin. The Bible says bear with the failings of the weak. We can learn grace through the blessing of adversity.

And that can include such people who cause us harm and hurt. And as we forbear with one another, as we forbear with those who cross our path, as we learn to cope, as we can learn the most from those in our lives who mistreat us, God is growing grace in you.

You're growing in grace. And our verse tells us that we started with of the unity of the spirit. With all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

The unity of the spirit. It's like a holy glue, a holy glue, a binding together in the bond of peace.

And that's not to say it's a unity that is disregarding of the truth. It's a unity of the faith, the faith. It's a unity of the spirit. It's a spiritual unity, a godly unity, not an ecumenical kind of wishy-washy, let's forget all of our differences kind of unity, but a binding together in the bond of peace.

[20:43] And one of the lessons in learning grace is to endeavour to not be a respecter of persons, to try to treat people, regardless of their status or appearance and such things, to treat all with fairness and consideration, to not be a respecter of persons.

Thank God that he is not a respecter of persons. If it was about a respecter of me, I wouldn't have been saved, I would not have been worthy. And the same applies to us all here really, that God is not a respecter of persons and nor should we be.

If we were to respect people, if we were to treat people how we think they ought to be treated, then we're not acting like our Lord did to us. To return evil for evil is not being like Christ.

To return insult for insult is not being like Christ. We're called to bless instead. To not have those attitudes and that fleshliness, that selfish heart, that pridefulness, but rather the humility is what we ought to seek.

We see in the Bible we read a Joseph. What an example Joseph can be to us of that forbearance. Joseph, here he was, thrown in a pit, almost killed, sold into slavery.

[22:09] His brothers treated him very harshly. And then when the time came, when his brothers came, Joseph had been through prison. He'd been then rescued and elevated as a servant and then into a place of authority in the land.

And the brothers of Joseph came to him one day, not knowing who he was. And Joseph could have treated them very harshly.

He could have dictated the most severe of punishments and penalties for what they had done to him. He had every right to.

If it was all about rights, you know, here are rights these days, Joseph could have really dealt a harsh penalty to his brothers.

But what did Joseph do? He treated his brothers with kindness. He treated his brothers in recognising God's hand in it all.

[23:15] He did not hold to the hurt, to the bitterness, to the resentment, like he could have done. In Genesis 45, we read from verse 4, Joseph said unto his brethren, come near to me, I pray you.

And they came near, and he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom he sold into Egypt. Imagine how they would have felt at that point.

He goes on, verse 5, here, but God, and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Joseph says, it wasn't you that sent me here, it was God. God was behind all of those events of Joseph's life, all of the tragedy and testing and imprisonment and difficulty that Joseph went through.

He says, you didn't do it, God did it. Joseph saw that the unfair treatment that he received, God was teaching, God was leading, God was behind it all, behind the curtain as it were, making it all come about for God's greater glory and for our good.

[25:08] And that can be the same in our lives too. when we mistreated, when we have people that make us want to just scream, that we can learn that God is allowing these things to help us grow in grace.

You know, what a perfect opportunity Joseph had to just be very harsh and to expose their sins, to humiliate them, to just totally rub their faces in what they had done.

And they could have paid very dearly for it. But instead, Joseph chose to bury the offence. It was history. He was just glad to see his brothers again. He did not seek revenge.

He covered their sin. And love covers sin. Hatred stirs up strife. We see that in Proverbs 10 verse 12. Hatred stirreth up strifes, but love covereth all sins.

And we can be like that with the people in our lives. Love covers the offence. God used Joseph through what he went through. And God used Joseph to show that kindness, that forbearance to the people in his life.

[26:27] In Colossians 3 it says, Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies. In other words, the bowels, it talks about the inward paths.

It talks about the very inward person that we are. It's that compassion that is within the inner part of us. That mercy that he wants us to have on the inward part of us.

He talks about kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. If any have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are also called in one body, and be ye thankful.

people. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts. The bond of perfectness, forbearing one another and forgiving one another.

[27:36] There's much we could learn, there's much, much more we could say on this theme. But let this not be a theory lesson today, in this training course that is your life, in this school, the school of grace.

Let this not be some theoretical principle today. Let it be something that's practical for you, that's practical for you, that you can take this home in your kit bag, and you can practically apply it, and put it into action, with those people in your life.

You've got different people than me in your life. But there are those people in your life that call out forbearance from you. Learn not to react in the flesh.

Just as Christ, as that perfect model, shows us how to act. In 1 Peter 2, verse 21, it says, For even here unto what you called, because Christ also suffered for others.

The concept is talking about suffering as a Christian. Christ also suffered for us, leaving as an example that you should follow his steps.

[28:56] Walk in his steps. His steps, the one who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. What he said was always truth. That when he was reviled, reviled not again.

When he suffered, he threatened not, but he committed himself to him that judges righteously.

Follow his steps. Christ also suffered for us.

When he was reviled, he reviled not again. We can fight fire with fire when we have such people in our lives. We can vent our anger just like they do to us.

We can resort to the same tactics. We can drop to the same level as they do. What good does that do? Orden we to be like Christ, that perfect model.

Orden we to be as he that says to us, bear one another's burdens. Galatians 6 verse 2. The word tells us that only the forgiving can be forgiven.

[30:04] The Lord's prayer, it's really a basic principle isn't it? Forgive. When cutting marks are made to us, when people say unkind words, when we're ill treated, when we've spoken ill of, when hurtful things are done to us, how are we to respond?

When he was reviled, he reviled not again. Let us respond with patience, with long-suffering, with tenderness, with mercy.

Let's get that full qualification, as it were, in the school of grace. Let's not miss the mark. Let's not bomb out on the lessons we're learning in humility.

Let's not bomb out in that exam for temperance. Let's not fail in that assessment for our forbearance.

Every day is another lesson. Every day is another assessment in the school of grace, if you like.

And it's about how do we respond when such things come our way.

[31:18] Will our response bring glory to our Lord? Will it be worthy of that calling with which he's called us? How often do we respond as the natural man would, with anger, with frustration, with venting, with bitterness, with self-pity or something like that?

Or will we respond by the power of the Holy Spirit? When he was reviled, he reviled not again. Will we walk in a manner worthy of our calling?

Let's make it practical now. What will you do with this message?

What will you do with those people in your life? In 1 John 3 18 it says, My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in tune, in the practical. You know, as the popular saying goes, talk is cheap.

[32:29] Talk is cheap. Make it practical. Make it practical today. Don't just be a hearer, but a doer of the word. Think before God. Be honest before our Lord tonight.

and consider other people in my life that are calling out forbearance in me. Other people in my life that, yes Lord, I know I need to be more forbearing with them.

Forbearing one another in love. Forgiving one another. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.