



# Light from the Word

## Forbear One Another

**Editor's Note:** The Bible uses the term “one another” multiple times and it is clear God is very interested in our relationships. Jesus taught that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. In 2018, we will look at several of the “one another’s” in the Bible.

Theme verse: “Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus calls us to walk in close relationship with Him and each other as “one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”<sup>2</sup> This closeness can bring tremendous strength as our hearts are “knit together in love.”<sup>3</sup> Ironically, the more closely we walk together, the more directly we are exposed to each other’s faults and weaknesses. Even in our best efforts, we will at times be hurt or disappointed by each other, or simply feel frustrated and annoyed with one another. It is in these moments that Christ calls us to forbear one another in love.

To forbear literally means to bear up against or hold back. When we forbear one another, we hold back our natural reaction to each other’s faults. We bear up against our tendencies to seek vengeance when wronged or respond harshly when annoyed. In simple terms, to forbear one another is to put up with one another. We are called to tolerate each other’s personality weaknesses and make allowance for each other’s faults.

Forbearance by definition does not come naturally to most of us. How can we grow in our ability to forbear one another? In our theme verse, Paul encouraged the Ephesians to first put on lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering.<sup>4</sup> He wrote very similar encouragement to the Colossians, with these same virtues in exactly the same order: “Put on therefore, as the elect of God...humbleness of mind,

meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”<sup>5</sup> These attributes of the heart and mind—humility, meekness, and longsuffering—prepare us to forbear one another in love.

In the next verse, Paul adds: “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”<sup>6</sup> Our mutual love for Christ and His body binds us together, motivating us to forbear one another as we endeavor “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>7</sup> Christ entreats us as His elect to forbear one another in love, whether in our marriages, families, friendships, or church family, that he might bless our relationships with unity and peace. When we fulfill these scriptures, our relationships become a witness to the world and bring glory to our Lord. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another.”<sup>8</sup>

If we struggle to consistently forbear one another, we are not alone. We find many examples in the scripture of Christ’s followers struggling to put up with one another or make allowance for each other’s faults. We can take comfort and example from Jesus’ responses as he patiently bore with them in love, even as he forbears us in love.

In Jesus’ interaction with Mary and Martha, we see both the challenge and blessing of forbearance among family and friends. Like each of us, Mary and Martha had “gifts differing according to the grace that is given”<sup>9</sup> unto them. Both were loved equally by Jesus, yet their differences sometimes created tension between the two siblings. During one of Jesus’ visits, Mary “sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me alone to serve?”<sup>10</sup> Jesus responded to Martha’s weak moment with gentleness and truth. He helped her to recognize her own nature and esteem Mary’s gifts, and thus established

# Continued Articles

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a beautiful example of how to forbear one another in love.

As we observe Jesus' disciples, we see how our response to each other's faults can either drive us apart or bind us together. James and John came to Jesus and requested the most honorable place in His kingdom. "When the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased"<sup>11</sup> and struggled to bear up against their own impulsive reaction of indignation. On this and other occasions, rather than putting on humility and meekness, they "disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest."<sup>12</sup> Each time, Jesus showed forbearance to their weakness, gently but firmly correcting them and reminding them that "if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."<sup>13</sup>

Jesus' actions teach us to forbear one another while at the same time maintaining accountability and helping each other grow. The church at Ephesus carried out this teaching when a fervent minister named Apollos came on the scene. Apollos spoke eloquently but was missing vital elements of the full doctrine of Christ. The Ephesian believers

could have discredited his preaching and written him off as an inadequate preacher. Instead, an experienced married couple, Aquilla and Priscilla, reached out to Apollos with forbearance and love as "they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."<sup>14</sup>

As we consider Aquilla and Priscilla's loving response, it seems evident that their forbearance must have begun at home with each other. For those of us who are married, perhaps the most important relationship in which to exercise forbearance is with our spouse. We are exposed to each other's weaknesses on a daily basis, and can either feed the weeds of discord or sow seeds of loving forbearance. When we make allowance for each other's faults, we minister grace one to another and enable God to add the increase and bring His full blessing of love, unity, and peace to our marriage.

In all of our relationships, forbearance also applies when we experience more serious hurts or wrongs. Paul encourages the Colossians to exercise forbearance as a precursor to forgiveness, "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."<sup>15</sup> If someone has wronged

us, we exercise forbearance by holding back our natural impulse to seek retribution. This helps provide time and space for them to repent and for our own heart and mind to work through the process of forgiveness. In the ultimate example of forbearance and forgiveness, God not only held back and delayed the punishment of our sins, giving us and all humankind time to repent, but also provided the atonement of sin through Christ's redemptive work on Calvary, enabling our forgiveness.

May we seek daily to forbear one another in love, even as Christ forbears us, that we might bring glory to His name and peace and unity to our relationships.

### Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Eph. 4:1-2
- <sup>2</sup> Rom. 12:5
- <sup>3</sup> Col. 2:2
- <sup>4</sup> Eph. 4:2
- <sup>5</sup> Col. 3:12-13
- <sup>6</sup> Col. 3:14
- <sup>7</sup> Eph. 4:3
- <sup>8</sup> John 13:35
- <sup>9</sup> Rom. 12:6
- <sup>10</sup> Luke 10:39-40
- <sup>11</sup> Mark 10:41
- <sup>12</sup> Mark 9:34
- <sup>13</sup> Mark 9:35
- <sup>14</sup> Acts 18:26
- <sup>15</sup> Col. 3:13