

God Has Spoken

Tract Series

"FORBEARING ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE"

A. L. Parr

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love...

In Ephesians 4:2, Paul spoke of "forbearing one another in love." What does God mean by these words? What does He want us to do? Let's look at the context of the verse.

In chapter 3 Paul has taught concerning [1] things that God has revealed to the world through Christ, [2] spiritual blessings available to those who live for Christ, and [3] the responsibility of the church to glorify God through preaching of Christ. Chapter 4 begins with Paul's words, "I therefore..." The intent of the first verse of chapter 4 is that because the revelation, blessings, and responsibility are God-given, all who know these facts and have obeyed Christ should live accordingly. His general idea is that it is not enough simply to say that we are Christians; we must act like it.

Then in verses 2 and 3 Paul gives some details of what it means to act like a Christian. The words "forbearing" in verse 2 and "endeavoring" in verse 3 mean, put very simply, "this is how you are to do what I wrote in verse one." How is one to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith" he is called? He walks (lives) "with all lowliness" (that is, having at all times the most humble of minds), "with all ... meekness" (that is, having at all times the most humble of demeanors, attitudes, or behaviors), "with longsuffering" (that is, not being eager to avenge wrongs), and "forbearing ... in love" his fellow Christians. Understanding the context is necessary to understanding that last phrase.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

Notice that this forbearing is to be done in love. Everything a Christian does is to be done in love, so why was it necessary to add that qualification to this admonition? Could it have been to remind us of our obligation to God when it would be easiest to forget it? Let's take a careful look at the definition of the word.

“FORBEARING”

To “forbear” is an extension of “longsuffering.” Longsuffering is great patience with others who are not behaving as accepted norms expect. Forbearance is tolerating others in the unwelcome condition that exists – to “put up with” the situation. It is to forego taking vengeance or “getting even” when a personal affront has been received. It is fulfillment of the command of Jesus to “turn to him the other (cheek) also” (Matthew 5:39).

Paul used the word “forbearance” in Romans 2:4 and 3:25 in describing how God has put off the deserved punishment of sinners, allowing them to continue until the judgment day. In that same epistle Paul has told us to “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (12:21). His admonition two verses earlier to “give place to wrath” means to back off from becoming angry enough to get even. The reason we must do this is that “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” It is God's business to punish sinners, not ours.

“IN LOVE”

Then notice again that the command in Ephesians 4:2 is to be “forbearing one another in love.” It is because we must show God's love in all things that we must avoid at all costs taking vengeance on someone who has done us some personal harm. Paul wrote again in Romans chapter 8, verses 31 through 39 that nothing should be able to separate the Christian from being and doing all that God wants. If we continually remember His love for us, His gift to us, our love for him, and our duty to him – and then if we go and act accordingly – nothing can or will separate us from Him.

“ONE ANOTHER”

Finally, look at the middle part of the phrase we are studying. Paul wrote, “forbearing **one another** in love.” This letter was written to the church in Ephesus. The commands in it are given to Christians. The “one

another” Paul is talking about here are Christians. Two things come to mind concerning this thought.

First, it is possible that one Christian will do wrong to another. This, in fact, happens occasionally, but it only happens because that Christian doing the wrong is not living by the law of God as he is supposed to do, and he is not living in the love that he is supposed to have for his fellow Christians. This may be a planned and conscious “presumptuous sin” (Psalm 19:13), or it may be that he was unintentionally and unknowingly “overtaken in a fault” (Galatians 6:1).

Secondly, this failure of an occasional Christian doesn’t mean that God has failed, or that the Bible, the church or faith has failed. A person or group of persons in the church has failed. Paul was writing to somebody. He obviously expected somebody to obey what he wrote. All Christians in that place had not done wrong; most of them were still existing as a church in full spiritual fellowship with the apostle and with Christ and God. When somebody gives up on God because he sees a Christian go sour, he is failing to remember that each individual on earth has the option to follow God or to reject Him. So does that one who sees the erring Christian; he still has the freedom to obey God and be better-off than the one he saw sinning.

When a brother or sister in Christ does wrong to you, whether by word, deed or omission, respond like a Christian, a follower of Christ. Be patient with him. Love him. Be willing and ready to forgive him and, if the error persists, forbear him in love.

(W)alk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(Ephesians 4:1-3)



Skyway Publishing
P. O. Box 662
Lincoln, IL 62656
the literature work of Confirming the Churches
www.skywaypub.org