

Most of you will know we've been engaged in a short topical study on Church Life for the past several weeks. I have suggested Church Life takes three directions: we look up (in worship), we look within (in edification), and we look without (in evangelism).

Thus, having seen looking up in worship to God, we began last time to consider looking within in edification, and if you recall two weeks ago, we considered Confrontation and Forgiveness. That brings us this morning to Christian Forbearance (and I want to suggest three things about it: Its Meaning, Its Context, and Its Motive).

- I. Its Meaning
- II. Its Context
- III. Its Motive

I. Its Meaning

1. The Greek word rendered "bearing with" literally means "to hold something upright that otherwise would fall down."
2. Thus, the idea is that of enduring or continuing in something that takes ongoing work and personal effort.
3. It's for this reason, the word was eventually applied to our need "to bear with the weaknesses of others."
4. The KJV renders the term "forbearing," which brings to mind the idea of "tolerance" and/or "restraint."
5. Thus, the concept of forbearance brings with it three necessary ingredients: opposition, endurance, and affection.
6. (1) Opposition—in order for someone to "to bear with" or "forebear" there must be some form of opposition.
7. There must be something to bear, and this of necessity is from someone else—"bearing with one another."
8. This is the reason for Christian forbearance—"one another"—in other words, we have to forebear with each other.
9. Put another way—fornearance presupposes people, and it presupposes that those people are not perfect.
10. If there were no imperfect people around us, there would be no need for forbearance, patience, or tolerance.
11. 1Thess.5:14—"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all."
12. That is, be patient with all these different categories of people—the unruly, the fainthearted, and the weak.
13. And brethren, these three words, unruly, fainthearted, and weak, describe all of us in some degree or other.
14. We must exhort the unruly, comfort the fainthearted, and uphold the weak—and—"be patient with all."
15. Now, as we'll see here in a minute, patience and forbearance are closely connected (if not synonymous).
16. We must bear with those we must rebuke—we must bear with those we comfort—and we must bear with those we upfold.

17. This is why forbearance is such a necessary duty—we must be patient with—we must bear with one another.
18. (2) Endurance—but here I need to clarify—fornbearance, by very definition, is enduring this difficulty.
19. Thus, forbearance, by very definition, doesn't happen towards those we meet once or on rare occasion.
20. Fornbearance is necessary when people live together either in marriage, the same family, or same church.
21. Fornbearance is necessary when we surround ourselves with people who are unruly, fainthearted, and weak.
22. It's not easy to bear with one another, as we rub shoulders with each another day to day, week to week.
23. We must bear with those who are continually unruly, continually fainthearted, and continually weak.
24. (3) Affection—by this I mean, forbearance is not merely "putting up (enduring) with" those around us.
25. Notice how Paul puts it—"bearing with one another in love"—love is the house in which forbearance lives.
26. Thus, by very definition, forbearance is affectionate—it bears with others "in" and/or "because of" love!
27. And so, Biblical or Christian forbearance is far more than merely enduring people or putting up with them.
28. It's enduring people or putting up with them because you love them—because your heart is for them.
29. It's for this reason forbearance and forgiveness are often joined together, because love covers a multitude of sins.
30. Col.3:13—"bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another."
31. Thus, at the heart of Christian forbearance, is the continual endurance of imperfect people around us.
32. But to be more specific, Christian forbearance is bearing with each other's opinions, oddities, and sins.
33. (a) We must bear with each other's opinions—that is, each other's remaining ignorance and opinions.
34. Rom.15:1—"We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples (opinions) of the weak, and not to please ourselves."
35. Many of you will know, the context of this statement was the transition from the old to the new covenant.
36. There were things forbidden under the OC (for example eating pork), that were now lawful under the New.
37. And the facts are, not everybody made this transition as easily as others (especially Jewish believers).
38. Thus, when Paul speaks about the weak, he largely referred to Jewish Christians with weak consciences.
39. How were the Gentile Christians to treat these sensitive Jews—they were to bear with and not please themselves.
40. Simply put brethren, we all are going to have different opinions on matters that will necessitate forbearance.

41. We are all at varying levels of maturity and understanding, that again, will mean we must bear with each other.
42. Let me illustrate it this way—we are fast approaching Christmas (and what many refer to as the Holiday Season).
43. Some of you look forward to this time and others of you do not—this difference will necessitate forbearance.
44. We will need to bear with another in love—we will have to esteem one another as more important than ourselves.
45. (b) We must bear with each other's oddities—here I refer to specific things that may rub us the wrong way.
46. These are sins as much as weakness—character flaws that render each of us very far from moral perfection.
47. These are blots or spots on our personality and character—they are like acne on our moral skin or face.
48. Let me underscore, we all possess these blots or spots—none of us are free from them—none of us have clear skin.
49. And the closer we get to one another, the more evident this becomes—the bigger these spots become.
50. Brethren, I am not sure how to illustrate this point without potentially throwing one of you under the bus.
51. Simply put, we all have oddities or quirks that render us difficult to get along with—they are spots on our canvas.
52. Some of us are too rash, too loud, too quiet, too expressive, too touchy, too reserved, or too emotional.
53. Albert Barnes—"A husband and wife - such is the imperfection of human nature - can find enough in each other to embitter life, if they choose to magnify imperfections, and to become irritated at trifles; and there is no friendship that may not be marred in this way, if we will allow it. Hence, if we would have life move on smoothly, we must learn to bear and forbear."
54. John Angel James—"In many people there will unhappily be found some things, which, although they by no means affect the reality and sincerity of their religion, considerably diminish its luster, and have a tendency, without the caution of love, to disturb our communion with them. Some have a forward and obtrusive manner; others are talkative; others indulge a complaining, whining, begging disposition; others are abrupt, almost to rudeness, in their address. These, and many more, are the spots of God's children. Now here is room for the exercise of love."
55. (c) We must bear with each other's sins—not only general sins but specific sins committed against us.
56. As we learned a few weeks ago, some offenses committed against us should be covered over, whereas others should be confronted.
57. But either, we must bear with the sins and faults of others—people sin, and they sin rather frequently.
58. Gal.6:2—"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"—by "burdens" are meant trespasses (v1).
59. We must bear with each other's sins—the fact that we will regularly sin against each other and be forgiven.
60. Ian Hamilton—"The church is a fellowship of saved but not yet perfected sinners. We all battle with indwelling sin, what the Westminster Confession calls 'remnants of corruption.' We all are prone to disappoint and even fail one another, sometimes badly. We therefore greatly need the Christlike grace of patience with one another."

61. Rom.2:4—"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance (Rom.3:25—'whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed')."

## II. Its Context

1. By "context" I mean, the proper setting or atmosphere wherein true Christian forbearance is fostered.
2. Perhaps put another way, Paul describes the context in which Christian forbearance exists or thrives.
3. Thus, Paul provides a threefold attitude that enables us to bear with one another (lowliness, gentleness, and longsuffering).
4. This is found in the English phrase "with all"—"with all lowliness and gentleness" and with longsuffering."
5. In other words, it's with these three attitudes (dispositions), we are able to "bear with one another in love."
6. Now before I come to briefly consider these three separately, notice the first two (lowliness and gentleness) are closely related.
7. Paul says—"with all lowliness and gentleness" and then he says "with longsuffering" all of which enable us to bear with one another.
8. (1) Humility—this word refers to a "lowliness of mind"—taking the position of a servant beneath others.
9. Fundamentally, it refers a mindset that thinks low of oneself—that thinks others are more important!
10. This is why bearing with one another is difficult—we think too highly of ourselves and too lowly of others.
11. (2) Gentleness—this word is often translated "meekness" and refers to a "mildness" in treating others.
12. Thus, "gentleness" or "meekness" refers to the way in which humble people interact with other people.
13. In fact, "meekness" or "gentleness" is the expression of humility as it interacts with people around us.
14. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—"Meekness is essentially a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct with respect to others. It is therefore two things. It is my attitude towards myself; and it is an expression of that in my relationship to others."
15. (3) Longsuffering—perhaps the most difficult thing we must here do, is distinguish longsuffering from forbearance.
16. Let me remind you, just as lowliness and gentleness are closely related, so patience and forbearance are closely related.
17. Patience or longsuffering is the willingness to be wronged without retaliation, reprisal, or retribution.
18. Thus, just as gentleness is the practical expression of humility, forbearance is the practical expression of patience.
19. Now, before I leave this second heading, let say three things about these three words – humility, gentleness, and longsuffering.
20. (a) They are all attitudes and activities—that is, they concern how we THINK as well as how we ACT.

21. Or, put another way—the way we act towards others, is a reflection of what we think about them and ourselves.
22. If we are to act rightly toward someone (gently or patiently), we must first think rightly about them (and ourselves).
23. (b) They are all related to each other—there are five layers in v2—"lowliness of mind, gentleness, longsuffering, forbearing, and love.
24. Lowliness of mind is the foundation, upon which gentleness, longsuffering, and forbearing in love are built.
25. Thus, a person who lacks forbearance lacks patience, and a person who lacks patience lacks gentleness, and a person who lacks gentleness lacks humility.
26. Perhaps I can say, these are all necessarily dependent upon one another, and neither of them can stand alone.
27. Thus, how do we become more forbearing with one another? Well we need more humility that results in more gentleness, that results in more patience and forbearance.
28. (c) They are all perfectly seen in Christ—in other words, this is another of saying, we must imitate Christ.
29. Phil.2:5—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (who made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant)."
30. Humility, gentleness, longsuffering, and forbearance are all perfectly illustrated in our beloved Savior.
31. You know, patience and forbearance are attributes of Christ that I fear are not given their rightful place.
32. Yesterday, in our Bible Reading Group, we read Luke 9, and our Savior response to the unbelieving multitude.
33. Lk.9:41—"O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you (Matt.17:17)?"
34. But our Savior not only bore with the unbelieving multitude, He also bore with His believing people.
35. How often did He show patience toward His disciples, who were slow to understand and quick to err!
36. Why was our Savior patient toward the unbelieving masses, and the half-believing disciples (apostles)?
37. Matt.11:29—"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
38. This is what undergirded our Savior's patience—humility and gentleness—these were the foundation stones upon which patience and forbearance were built.

### III. Its Motive

1. V1—"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."
2. This is really the grand motive for all Christian obedience—"walk worthy of the calling with which you were called."
3. Now, the first thing that needs clarification is the phrase "walk worthy"—that is, live worthy of your calling.
4. We usually use the term "worthy" to mean "worth" or "value" but this is not the way Paul here uses it.
5. Paul simply means, we are walk (or live) in a way that becomes or is fitting for our privileged calling.

6. In fact, we could actually translate this word "suitable" or "appropriate"—"walk suitably or appropriately of your calling."
7. We are to walk in a way that is proper, fitting, and suitable "of the calling with which you were called."
8. This calling refers to that effectual summons, when God the Spirit, brings us out of a state of nature into a state of grace.
9. Thus, here's the primary question—what is there about this calling that should motivate us to walk worthy of that calling?
10. (1) The price of our calling—by this I mean, this saving and powerful call of Christ is the result of Christ's cross.
11. Our Savior not only paid a sufficient payment for the sins of the world, but a specific payment for His people.
12. And with regards to that specific payment, He bought a complete salvation that included their calling.
13. Canons of Dort—"It was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the NC, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Spirit, He purchased for them by His death."
14. This is why we must walk worthy of our calling, because that very calling was purchased by His blood.
15. Christ died to have a humble, gentle (meek), and patient people, who forbear with one another in love.
16. (2) The purpose of our calling—by this I mean, Christians have been called with a holy calling—they've been called to imitate Christ.
17. O brethren, think about this for a few moments—we've been called out of this world to show forbearance.
18. Matt.11:29—"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."
19. (3) The privilege of our calling—by this I simply want to remind you, that not everyone is called in this way.
20. Yes, every person who hears the gospel is called outwardly, but only certain people are called inwardly.
21. And why are these "certain people" called inwardly and not the others? It's because they were "eternally chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father."
22. O brethren, I trust we agree that bearing with one another isn't easy (in fact, it's at times very difficult).
23. But surely, we also must agree that we find in Eph.4:1 a tremendous incentive unto Christian forbearance.
24. May the Lord open our eyes to see this morning! May He impress upon us the privilege of His calling!