

Mutual, Patient Forbearance

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:1-3; Colossians 3:12-13
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Well, brethren, tonight we're gonna take up immediately where we left off this morning. This morning we began our consideration of the grace or Christ-like virtue of forbearance and under the first heading we considered the face of forbearance, what does it look like, what are its features, its shape and contours, and having devoted the morning hour to that, we take up immediately tonight following the outline with the fundamentals of forbearance, that is, what are its constituent elements, what are the basics and essentials related to it, and these are identified for us in our two primary texts and I begin tonight in Ephesians 4 and begin to read again at verse 1, verse 1 of Ephesians 4 being the swing or the pivotal verse of the Ephesian letter. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." Now suffice it to say in brief that the calling with which you have been called can be said to be the theme or subject of the first half of the Ephesian letter, and this calling, this calling out of a state of sin and death and this calling unto Christ and the blessings accomplished for Christ by his work, this calling comes with imperatives, it comes with obligations, this calling is to be worked out and manifest in our lives, and that is indicated by Paul's entreaty, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling." Worthy of that great salvation that has been so marvelously described in the first half of this letter. The idea of walking used here as a metaphor signifies simply put, the daily course of one's living, and this walking, the daily course of living, can be said to be the theme of chapters 4 through 6, and Paul entreats us to walk in a manner worthy of this calling.

Now if you were here many years ago, only a few could have been perhaps, the late 70s when we came through the Ephesian letter, maybe you have recall of the fact that the idea of worthiness here in Ephesians 4:1 literally is the idea of one thing weighing the same as something else. It is the language of scales, weights and balances and the language here puts before our eyes the eyes of the mind, a kind of picture. There is a scale and in one balance on one side of the scale is our calling, and on the other side of the scale in the other balance is our walk, our daily conduct, and the idea is Paul is entreating us to live in such a way that there is a manifest correspondence between the salvation we profess and the way we live. There is to be a consistency between the two and now the apostle goes on to identify some of the specifics of walking in a manner worthy of this calling, walking in a manner that, as it were, correspondingly weighs the same as the salvation we

profess. Again, that is a metaphorical type of picture or description and what Paul sets before us now are primary Christ-like graces and these graces are not to be cultivated and exercised in some kind of hothouse, but rather in real relationships with people.

Follow at verse 2, "with all humility." There's a primary grace that is a part of walking in a manner worthy of what you say about the salvation you claim to possess. "With all humility and gentleness," and now our concern, "with patience, with patience showing forbearance to one another in love." Note that term "patience, makrothumia," a compound consisting of makro that simply means something is long, it has great length. Thumos is the word for one's passion with reference often to the passion of anger. Patience literally signifies one being long-passioned, long-tempered, the one who has a long fuse, not a short one. Makrothumia, patience, with patience, speaks of patiently bearing the provocations of others without losing one's temper and striking back with words and slights and retaliatory deeds; patience with other people who annoy us. It could certainly cover the realm of their oddities and their strangenesses and their peculiarities, but perhaps more directly this patience is often connected to those who offend us. The patient man holds out long, that's the point. The patient man holds out long against passion, holds out long against angry outbursts and reactions, endures long aggravation and provocation, endures long the ill-treatment incurred from others. The King James often translates the word and it's an excellent translation, long-suffering. Long-suffering as to those things we incur from others that irritate and exasperate and offend.

Now this patience is not mere theory, it is not merely something to be defined and talked about, not something that remains secluded in the mind. It takes a definite expression and that expression follows in verse 2, the phrase we work from this morning, showing forbearance to one another. The point simply is in the grammar, showing forbearance explains patience. How are you patient? How do you manifest it? Well, one primary way you manifest the honest actual possession in the soul of patience is that gracious toleration of others. That's how. Showing forbearance to one another is the fruit, is the outworking, is the manifestation of patience rather than in the language of another, the sneering remarks about the stupidity, the awkwardness, the ineptitude of others, rather than impatience with the shortcomings of others, an impatience often rooted in one's pride, in one sense, that they're superior to. Rather than writing off others, dismissing them, avoiding them, there is the extension of forbearance.

That's all to say as we follow the language of the outline, the underlying fundamental of forbearance is this Christ-like grace and we could bear out quite easily in the language of the New Testament that this is a divine attribute. In the language of Dr. Vaughn, forbearance further explains long-suffering, patience. In the language of another, forbearance clarifies the meaning of patience. Mutual forbearance is the practical expression of patience. How do you know if you are patient? Well, you can ask yourself the question: do I habitually extend to others a forbearing spirit or am I short-fused, angry, reactive, severe, ready to cut them off and wipe my hands of them?

Now again, this is evident, that is, this fundamental of patience, this underlying foundational element of forbearance, being patient, this is evident in the parallel text of Colossians 3:12-13, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience," and then this patience is explained not only by the participle "bearing" or "forbearing with one another," but there's another added, "and forgiving each other." How do we know that we possess Christ-like patience? Well, we know in terms of our extending readily to others forbearance and extending readily to others full and free forgiveness over against anger, over against retaliation, over against giving someone the cold shoulder and a slight and rudeness and all the rest.

Now a second primary fundamental of forbearance beyond patience, going back now to Ephesians 4:2, is the fundamental of love, "showing forbearance," verse 2, "to one another in love." You are patient with, showing forbearance to those you love, those you don't, you have a short fuse with. It's that simple. One of the men this morning on the way out commented on how much more ready he was to extend forbearance to his family members than his colleagues in the marketplace. What's the difference between the two? It's this fundamental, love. That's the difference. Those whom you love, you are patient with and those with whom you're patient, you feel forbearance to.

1 Corinthians 13:4, "Love is patient." Love bears all things and certainly amongst those "all things" are the provocations and the annoyances perpetuated by others toward you. Again, if you loved your wife, you'll be patient and forbearing with your wife. If you love your son or daughter, you will be patient with and forbear your child. If you love your brother in Christ, you will extend a patient forbearance to that one. If you don't love him, you won't. It's that simple.

Showing forbearance, Paul writes, to one another in love, in the sphere of self-denying love in which the Christian lives with his brethren; in the climate of sacrificial love in which the Christian lives with his brothers and sisters in the church. Again in the language of another, "in love" describes the spirit in which such forbearance was to be exercised. No acerbity of temper. What's acerbity? It's that sharp bitterness of temper that lashes out at others. No acerbity of temper. No sharp retort. No satirical reply was to be admitted. This mutual forbearance must not be affected pretended coolness or studied courtesy. No, it must have its origin and sphere in love. That's the second fundamental, that genuine heart attachment to others that is to prevail among Christ's disciples.

The fundamentals of forbearance. We need to back up to verse 1 and extend it out a bit, include calling, calling by word and spirit out of that state of sin and death unto Christ in salvation. Recall the words this morning in the introduction from J. C. Ryle where he specifically names forbearance as the mark of a sanctified man, that one who has been set apart from the bondage of sin, set apart unto Christ. The fundamentals include having genuinely been called out of sin in the world unto Christ. The fundamentals include this matter of walking worthy of that calling. A part of walking worthy of that calling are the exercises of these Christ-like graces to one another, including forbearance. And more particularly, there's the fundamental of patience and the fundamental of love. It's all to

say forbearance is not some moralistic, stoical restraint imposed upon ourselves by sheer discipline, that's not forbearance, but rather it is a Christ-like, Spirit-wrought outworking of love and patience to brethren who at times provoke us and vex us and irritate us. It is not some gritted teeth, begrudged restraint while inside we are a cauldron of anger and resentment, rather forbearance is a Christ-like dynamic arising from patience and love. They are the fundamentals of showing forbearance to one another.

Now thirdly tonight, we take up the matter of the focus of forbearance. Now a good part of this was indicated this morning under the first heading as we traced several texts beyond our primary text where this same language is used and we noted some of the realities that were to be forborne. In the case of the Lord Jesus, Matthew 17, his putting up with the littleness of faith of his 12. The focus of forbearance, the concern now is to make, I hope, clear the kinds of things, the kinds of matters to which forbearance is to be our Christ-like response. While forbearance surely applies to actual offenses, but it's only part of what applies. There's more involved, we'll come to that next week.

We read in Colossians 3:13, "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other." There's a distinction between the two. Certainly they're related, they go together, but there is a distinction between forbearance and forgiveness. In view of that and in view of other passages such as those considered under the first heading this morning, I set out tonight that forbearance more particularly, I don't mean exclusively, but more particularly or primarily focuses on other kinds of aggravations and irritations, surely other kinds that outright high-handed sin against you. I would offer that the focus of forbearance, the points upon which it converges in the way of application are points or matters or realities in others that arise not so much from their sinfulness but from their humanity and the myriad of variables that have factored into their lives and made them who they are.

And now I'll try to illustrate with some specifics the kinds of things that I believe primarily, not exclusively, but primarily forbearance focuses upon. It focuses upon such realities as some of you may face tomorrow morning going down the north way, the slow driver in your lane. What do you do with that? Get all riled up? Start muttering under your breath? Shaking your fist? Honking your horn? Well, hopefully not if you're in Christ. If you have a good opportunity to pass safely, pass him, but beyond that here's an application of patient tolerance or forbearance, that slow driver, particularly when you're in a hurry.

For me, the slow line at the post office particularly when I discern certain things making it slow that maybe ought not be, but their world doesn't revolve around me. I need to recognize that and forbear instead of sitting there sighing and shuffling my feet. We've read recently don't be that guy taken by surprise by security at the airport. Well, what if you're behind him? You can huff and puff, but that's not going to do you any good, it will probably get you in trouble maybe. You can huff and puff, manifest your aggravation, or you can forbear him. That does bring to mind Philippians 4:5, "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men," including that guy at the airport who was somehow surprised by security.

It's the situation at the gym for me and I've left one weight machine going to another station and a guy comes behind me and changes the settings. I'm gonna come right back. I've got to do that all over again. That's an opportunity to forbear, to graciously, patiently tolerate. The gym's not open just for me.

It's the unintentional mistakes of others. You have an appointment with someone, a meeting with someone, and they forget. What do you do, write them off, never talk to them again, never meet with them again, never reschedule? No, you show forbearance to one another in love.

The slowness of others to understand what seems so clear and evident. The slowness of others to make progress when you know they know but they don't use what they know.

The incompetence of others. They don't perform with the skill that somehow you expected.

What to you is a peculiar preference of others and I go to Zambia. I brought to Zambia a cereal that I've been eating for a few months, and I suppose more than one of us when we have something we kind of like, get excited about maybe and to some level we want to tell everybody about it, we think they ought to like it like we do, no matter what it is, and we can dominate conversation with whatever it is that has stirred us up and we want to talk about it no matter what the other conversations going on are. Well, time and time again our brothers Rob and Kenny had to listen to my appeals to eat this tasteless horsefeed-like cereal. More than one morning, if I remember accurately, it was offered to them. It probably annoyed them, particularly after several declines of my offer and I continued to offer.

The strange preferences of others, you come around this time of year, late last week as some of you here can testify, I want to tell you about the dominance and supremacy of SEC football. You could care less, but to me it's a big deal, at least temporarily, and somehow I'm gonna get it in the conversation. Well, we all do that kind of thing with things that have charged us up.

In the culture of cellphones, you're talking to one another and a cellphone goes off and all of a sudden they're talking to somebody else. You're visiting with them and they're texting. You're in a conversation with someone and the me-monster comes out.

The matter of peculiar mannerisms, cracking knuckles, smacking the lips in chewing gum, bad breath. Someone shows up entirely inappropriately dressed for an occasion. Again, I go to Zambia, I've been informed today that I too loudly greeted my roommates in the morning and there is a proverb related to that; that I shut the doors with too much force; that when I used the cellphone, I spoke too loudly as if no amplifier was in it and I had to supply it, and my wife has confirmed all three of those realities. Rob and Kenny, she has to live with them not just for two weeks.

Well, brethren, I set those things out because that's the realm that in my understanding forbearance is really targeted at. In the language of Albert Barnes, "Bearing patiently with the foibles, faults, and infirmities of others. The virtue here required is that which is to be manifested in our manner of receiving the provocations which we meet from our brethren. No virtue perhaps is more frequently demanded in our dealings with others. We do not go far with any fellow traveler on the journey of life before we find there is great occasion for the exercise of it. He has a temperament different from our own. He may be sanguine or choleric or melancholy while we may be just the reverse. He has peculiarities of taste and habits and disposition which differ much from ours. He has his own plans and purposes of life and his own way, and time of doing things. He may be naturally irritable or he may be so trained that his modes of speech and conduct differ much from ours. Neighbors have occasion to remark this in their neighbors, friends in their friends, kindred in their kindred, one church member in another," and that's our application. "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 the imperfections and to become irritated at trifles, and there is no friendship that may not be marred in this way if we allow it. Hence if we would have life move on smoothly, we must learn to bear and forbear, we must indulge the friend that we love in the little peculiarities of saying and doing things which may be important to him but which may be of no moment to us. Like children, we must suffer each one to build his playhouse in his own way and not quarrel with him because he does not think our way the best. All usefulness and all comfort may be prevented by unkind, a sour, a crabby temper of mind, a mind that can bear with no difference of opinion or temperament. A spirit of fault-finding, of unsatisfied temper, a constant irritability, little in equalities in the look, the temper of a manner, a brow cloudy and dissatisfied, your husband or your wife cannot tell why, will more than neutralize all the good you can do and render life anything but a blessing. It is in such gentle and quiet virtues as meekness and forbearance that the happiness and usefulness of life consists, far more than in brilliant eloquence and splendid talent or illustrious deeds. It leads me to something I've come to observe over time, one of the keys to being useful and effective in life is simply being able to get along with other people, and if you can't, you don't go far no matter what you know. You've got to get along with other people. How much truer that is in the church and without forbearance, no, we don't get along for very long with other people."

Forbearance with one another's weaknesses, eccentricities, oddities as we deem them, faults, annoying ways, I want to add this, does not preclude a timely word of instruction or even correction. It does not mean that we never inform the person of his irritating ways and vexing habits. That one who is provoking us and irritating us and annoying us may well be doing himself much harm by his offensive mannerisms or habits. You see it, others see it. It is hurting him. Forbearance does not mean that the person informed of some irritating feature can simply sit back complacently telling himself and telling others, "Well, they'll just have to put up with me. This is the way I am and I'm not changing." I remind you, Jesus at one and the same time, we saw it this morning, put up with his disciples and he also rebuked them. He put up with their littleness of faith and he rebuked them. Paul put up with the attacks of the Corinthians upon him but he also instructed them.

In that connection, I would offer some suggested homework tonight involving an honest inquiry of others, you might begin with your spouse: what is there about me that annoys and irritates you? Now I've done my homework, that is, I've asked Deborah and I've had a few answers in the last 24 hours. What is there about me that annoys and irritates and provokes? What is there about me that tries the patience of others? Granted they are to be patient but I'm not to try their patience, not deliberately. Brethren, there may be mannerisms and habits, weaknesses and peculiarities that are seriously costing you in friendships, in relationships, in opportunities, in usefulness. Consider asking others what they are. You and I may be well blinded to what they are. We're so used to them we don't see them.

Forbearance does not preclude such self-examination nor does it preclude a timely word of correction. What it does preclude is a hasty exasperated giving up on a brother; a cutting off; a writing off of another; throwing up our hands; turning our backs upon them; having nothing to do with them because we're tired and we've had enough. That's precluded.

And one last word in this connection from Matthew Henry regarding the matter of motivation to show forbearance to others. Henry writes, "We have all of us something which needs to be borne with, and this is a good reason why we should bear with others in what is disagreeable to us." The good reasons? They're having to do it with us. Do unto others as you'd have them do unto you. You don't want them to cut you off, you want them to be patient and forbearing with you. Well, do the same to them because you have things about your own life that are vexing and distracting and annoying. It's good reason why we should bear with others.

Well, finally tonight the matter of the finale, the climax of forbearance. We come to the fourth heading, to say it in another way that I can pronounce, we're talking about the aim of forbearance, where it's going. Ephesians 4:3, it's very clear where it's going, it's very clear what the issue is, the larger issue. It's very clear what's at stake, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That's what's at stake. The aim of humility and gentleness and more nearly showing forbearance to one another in love is this parallel simultaneous participle, something going on at the same time, you're showing forbearance to one another. What is it? Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That parallels in the structure showing forbearance and showing forbearance is expressive of this effort of showing all earnestness, exercising all care to preserve and guard a unified church. That's what's at stake. That's the finale of showing forbearance.

The exercise of forbearance is taking pains, being earnest about, making every effort to preserve, guard, watch over the unity of the Spirit and the peace of the church. Without forbearance, that unity is rent and true church life, the real deal, becomes impossible. The unity in Christ's church, a church composed of diverse, imperfectly renewed sinners, necessitates the gracious, patient toleration of one another. How could there possibly be open, communicative, cooperative, close, transparent, brotherly relations if impatient

anger, exasperated sighs and groans and gestures and sneering words or responses to annoying differences, irritations, weaknesses, and faults? If each member demands that every other member meet his expectations, abide by his preferences and desires, then a unified peaceful church is an illusion and an impossibility and we ought to close up now and just forget it. It's not gonna happen. But those who possess this calling of which they are to walk worthy, those who truly possess it, they have the Spirit-wrought desire and capacity to live like this, however contrary it is to their natures and, brethren, the unity of the church is of far more importance than my preferences.

I remind you in closing that Christ puts up with us. Think of how much he's put up with, he's forbore in you. Others put up with you and me and ultimately what's at issue in graciously doing the same is the unity of Christ's church. If those are not holy motivations to show forbearance to one another in love, I'm not sure any others could be offered that would have any effect.

Let's pray.

Father, again we have taken up today the front and center virtue and exercise involving demonstrated ecclesiology member to member in Christ's church involving walking worthy of the calling with which we've been called. We've taken up a matter strategic to being diligent to guard the unity of the spirit in Christ's church. We have taken up a matter that has been expressed towards us by a holy undefiled Savior who has put up with our rebellion and our unbelief, our slowness and our dullness, our little faith. We have taken up a matter that if we have friends at all, others have had to demonstrate towards us. Lord, I pray that with renewed consciousness and resolution we would mortify our small-hearted, narrow ways and demands upon others and, Father, graciously and large-heartedly and patiently show forbearance in a climate of Christian love. Lord, may this be a practiced reality among the members of this assembly and we pray in the name of our patient forbearing Savior. Amen.