

Forbearance and Forgiveness (Colossians 3:12-14)

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Introduction

1. A true believer in Christ has been raised with Christ to new life; thus, he must seek the things of Christ.
2. In order to seek things above, he must set or fix his mind on those things (vv. 1, 2).
3. In order to fix one's mind on things above, one must leave the things of earth behind. Two motives:
 - a. He is positionally dead to the old self, and the new self is hidden with Christ in God (v. 2).
 - b. He expects to appear with Christ in glory when He comes again (v. 3).
4. Paul then expands on what it takes to free the mind from earthly things (vv. 5-17).
 - a. Put to death what is earthly (vv. 5-7).
 - b. Put off fleshly habits and carnal practices (vv. 8-11).
 - c. Replace old habits with that which reflects new status in Christ (vv. 12-14).
 - d. Develop spiritual practices that glorify and honor Christ (vv. 15-17).
5. After listing five Christian virtues (v. 12), Paul uses two participles to define the areas where these virtues serve the believer in his relationship to other believers.

I. Forbearing One Another

1. Defined: "to be patient with," "to put up with," "to endure," or "to restrain oneself" (Matt. 17:17; 1 Cor. 4:12; Eph. 4:2; 2 Thess. 1:4).
 - a. *Forbearance* has the judicial connotation of withholding an immediate response to an offense. It does not mean overlooking the offense but waiting for repentance.
 - b. Believers, however, are to leave all judicial response to God (Rom. 12:19).
 - c. Paul's use of this term argues that the closeness of believers' relationships to each other opens them to difficult and abrasive circumstances.

Believers must learn to hold themselves back, not avoiding each other but holding back reaction to real or perceived offenses.
2. Forbearance is a trait belonging to God (Neh. 9:30; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9).

Believers are to emulate that trait.
3. However, there are circumstances where forbearance will not work.

Thus, Paul moves to the next level: "If anyone has a complaint [*momphe*, "blame"—used only here in the NT] against another . . ."

Here is a point at which one can no longer simply bear with another because the offense is too great.

What must he do?

II. Forgiving One Another

1. Defined: an unusual term [*charizomai*, literally, “to grace”] used in the NT (AV) 23 times: “forgive” 11 times, “give” 6 times, “freely give” twice, “deliver” twice, “grant” once, and “frankly forgive” once.
 - a. The term means one freely grants forgiveness or release of debt or obligation.
 - b. The usual word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, “to go away” or “to abandon” (Matt. 6:12-15).
2. Paul uses this term because only God can truly grant forgiveness of sins (Luke 5:21). However, Jesus used *aphiemi* in Luke 17:2, 3 for when a brother sins against a brother.
 - a. First, *rebuke* him—charge him with what he has done to offend.
 - b. The next phrase is very important: “*if he repents*, forgive him.”

You cannot forgive (*aphiemi*) if the offender has not repented. *Aphiemi* requires repentance—no repentance, no forgiveness.
3. However, Paul uses *charizomai* to show that a believer can graciously release another believer from the debt of an offense as a matter of brotherly kindness even if there is no repentance.
 - a. It does not mean that the offender is truly forgiven by God but that the offended party re-fuses, for the sake of mutual encouragement and discipleship, to allow the offense to break the relationship.
 - b. The focus is on the *believer* who is offended—how *he* is to respond to the offense.

However, notice that Paul leaves no wiggle room, just as Jesus left none: “*so you also must forgive.*”

III. How Can We Obey?

1. The natural response to biblical commands and admonitions is generally to despair and to resolve half-heartedly to try harder, which usually ends in failure and a lapse back to previous habits.
 - a. Paul made it very clear that a believer’s willingness to obey is countered with the law in his members resisting obedience (Rom. 7:21-24).
 - b. All the resolve in the world cannot enable one to rise above his limitations. He can only confess his utter helplessness in himself.
2. When one understands his limitations and when he discovers God’s remedy, only then can he see progress in his growth in grace (Rom. 8:1-4).

If he *lives by* the Spirit, he must also *walk in* the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

 - a. Walking in the Spirit means that we are enabled by the power of God to obey God.
 - b. We can slay the deeds of the flesh only “*through the Spirit* [enablement and power]” (Rom. 8:13).