

Forbearing One Another

Family life requires that we bear up under conditions that are not ideal. Parents do not enjoy dealing with loud, obnoxious, disobedient children. We may have to put up with disagreeable people in our neighborhood or community. And church life requires that we bear with people who are different from us and perhaps somewhat annoying, irritating, or disappointing.

In an ideal world, we would get along with everyone. No one would annoy us; no one would offend or irritate us; everything would be love, peace, and good feelings. But that's not the real world. We live in a fallen world with other sinful people. We are far from perfect ourselves, and so is everyone else. Yet we have to get along with others.

Sometimes difficult, imperfect people attend church with us—perhaps they sit in our row! Even Christian people, especially immature believers, can be self-centered and hard to get along with. Others sometimes irritate us or annoy us in various ways.

Last Sunday, we considered Paul's command to the Galatians to "bear one another's burdens." Today we'll consider another "one another" responsibility, that is, to "forebear" one another. Two main verses in the NT tell us to forbear one another.

Eph 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Col 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

How do we understand this Christian responsibility of forbearing one another?

- I. The meaning of the term "forbear"
 - A. To "forbear" (ἀνέχομαι) means "to hold up under, to sustain, to bear with, or to endure."
 - B. Typically, the word refers to bearing up under difficult or annoying circumstances or putting up with difficult people.
 - C. Let's look at Eph chapter 4 for a moment.
 1. Note the context: starting at 4:1, the command here is to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called," and then we have the *means* of doing that in 4:2: humility, patience, and "forbearing one another in love."

2. This word, “forbearing,” has the force of a command here. Forbearance is a Christian responsibility and expectation; we must forbear one another.

App: We have to bear with, tolerate, and accept other Christians even when they annoy us. We bear with them; we patiently endure their eccentricities and weaknesses; we have a forgiving, charitable spirit toward others who may disagree with us or treat us unkindly.

Peace in the church is largely based on everyone showing a degree of forbearance for everyone else. We must tolerate some differences and weaknesses within the church. Nobody here is perfect, and so we have to bear with one another in Christian love.

Trans: So that’s the meaning of the word, so now let’s consider...

II. The method of forbearance

A. Demonstrate love.

1. Note Eph 4:2end – “forbearing one another *in love*.”
2. Just like the other “one another” responsibilities, the motivation for forbearance is love. We demonstrate Christian love by forbearing one another.
3. The word here is *agape* (ἐν ἀγάπῃ). This is godly, self-sacrificial love, Christ-like love for the brethren.
Rom 5:5 ... the love of God is shed abroad (poured out) in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.
4. One of the primary marks of Christians is that they love one another. We have this love in our hearts because we are Christians.
5. Love for God and love for others motivates us to bear with one another.
6. And remember that biblical love is not primarily an emotion or feeling; it’s a desire to do what is best for the other person. We love others because we love God. We bear with others from a sense of love for God and for his people.

App: The church is a family, and at times, we must put up with people and situations that we may find very irritating and frustrating. Christian love for the brethren motivates us to forbear one another. We put up with these irritations with godly charity and love.

B. Have patience.

1. Some dictionaries define the word “forbear” as “to be patient, to have patience.” To forbear implies having patience.
2. Paul uses the words “forbear” and “patience” in the same context. The two ideas go together.

Eph 4:2 *With all lowliness and meekness, **with longsuffering, forbearing** one another in love*

3. To be patient is to be “longsuffering” (μακροθυμία). This word means exactly that – to suffer long, to endure discomfort for a long time. Christian patience allows us to bear with difficult people over time, as the irritation continues on.
4. Why do we need patient forbearance? Because of human sin and failure. Not one of us is perfect. All of us fail, particularly in human relationships. Some people are eccentric and even annoying/irritating/abrasive. We have to deal with problem people, and we need patience to bear with them.
5. Others perhaps think the same of us; they are putting up with us, forbearing us patiently. To them, we are the annoying ones that they have to bear with.
6. To “bear with one another,” then, means being patient with each other’s weaknesses. We continue to bear up under the frustrations caused by other people.

C. Tolerate minor differences.

1. Romans 14 is a key chapter in which Paul exhorts us to be tolerant of differences among fellow Christians.
2. Why are there differences among believers of like faith and practice? Mostly because of human sin, failure, and weaknesses. People have different levels of spiritual maturity. People have different levels of comprehension of biblical truth. That results in differences regarding minor aspects of life.
3. Let’s look at Rom 14 briefly. He tells us in that passage several things about accepting others who differ from us on minor issues.

a) .1 Accept those who are weak in the faith.

.2-3 Example #1: eating certain foods

.5-6 Example #2: esteeming one day above another

- b) .7-8 A key principle: we belong to the Lord; he is the authority. It does not matter so much what others think.
- c) .10 The Lord is the judge, not us. He's the master.
- d) .12 We will all give an account to God for our own behavior. This implies individual responsibility.
- e) .13 Do not judge others on these minor matters. Instead, be careful not to put a stumbling block in your brother's way. Don't be offensive; don't be annoying; don't be the cause of the problem.

This whole discussion in Rom 14 pertains to matters of indifference (adiaphora), behaviors where Christians have different standards and opinions. When people are doing something because of their commitment to the Lord, then we should be tolerant of their behavior even if we disagree with them.

Of course, there are limits here. He's not talking about tolerating sinful behavior. He's not saying that we tolerate flagrant disobedience to biblical commands. The issue in view here is minor differences over things that do not matter much.

This acceptance, tolerance, and forbearance is for fellow Christians in your church who are faithfully serving the Lord but who are a bit different from you. Perhaps they are weaker in the faith, less mature, or just odd. They have different opinions or practices.

Our responsibility toward other Christians is to accept them and not put a stumbling block in front of them, i.e., not offend them by our behavior. We don't want to be the cause of conflict. We must accept people who are a bit different from us; tolerate minor differences on minor issues.

D. Extend forgiveness.

1. Another word that Paul uses along with forbearing is forgiving.
Col 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and **forgiving one another**, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

These two words—forbearing and forgiving—are used in parallel and are almost synonymous ideas. If we are going to forbear, we must forgive.

2. Why do we need to be forgiving? Because of human sin. As James tells us, we all stumble in many ways. We all fall short of the glory of God. Christians are not perfect people.

That's not an excuse for sin; it's just reality. We need forgiveness and we need to extend forgiveness because we all lack spiritual maturity. We should not be surprised when people offend us; we should expect it and respond appropriately to it.

On most minor matters when others in the church irritate or annoy us, the proper response is to forgive. Because we want to forbear, we must forgive.

3. Forgiveness is a big part of church life. Virtually all the interpersonal problems that develop in a church would be solved or reduced if people would simply extend forgiveness and forbearance to one another.
4. And, on the other hand, virtually all the interpersonal problems that a church experiences happen because people do not forbear and forgive. People have quarrels because they do not forgive as Christ forgave.
5. Why is bitterness a problem for some people? Because they will not forbear and forgive. Instead, they hold a grudge and refuse to forgive. They become angry when others fail. When others annoy them, they refuse to patiently forbear and forgive. And they become bitter.
6. If you deal with offenses biblically, and if you forbear and forgive others, bitterness will never be a problem for you. You don't hold grudges; you hold up under the irritation with charity and Christian love for the brethren.

Offering forgiveness is not denying the sinfulness of the offender's behavior. When you forgive, you are simply letting go of the offense. You refuse to hold on to the hurt. You extend mercy to the offender like God extends mercy to you.

7. So in order to forbear, we must forgive. The two concepts go together.

E. Work at forbearance.

1. Patience, forbearance, and forgiveness are not automatic actions naturally flowing from the human heart. Forbearance is a deliberate acts of the will. We must be intentional in developing these attitudes.
2. If you are having trouble forbearing and forgiving, you need to work at developing these Christian virtues. Ask God to give you a sense of love for others so you can be forbearing and forgiving. Ask God to help you extend forbearance and forgiveness to those that offend you.
3. But whether it's natural or not, and whether you feel like it or not, we are morally obligated to forgive and forbear. This is a Christian responsibility, and it's sinful if we fail to forbear and forgive.

III. Practical steps for bearing with one another in love

- A. Remember Jesus' attitude of forbearance and patience toward us. This should motivate us to extend the same to others.

Col 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.***

The example for us to follow is Christ's forgiveness. We must strive to be Christ-like in how we extend forgiveness to others. We can forgive others because Christ forgave us.

Mt 17:17 *Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with (ἀνέχομαι) you? ...*

Jesus displayed a lot of forbearance. He had to bear with his disciples and many other sinful, irritating, annoying people. When you have to bear with annoying people, just remember how Jesus bore with his disciples and with us, and follow his example.

- B. Have reasonable expectations of others.

We all stumble in many ways; no one is perfect. We should not be surprised when others fail us in one way or another.

Ps 103:14 *For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.*

We need to remember that other people fail just like we do; we must make room for imperfect human nature. It's not an excuse for sin, but it is reality.

- C. Try to be tolerant of minor differences among the brethren. We can forbear with others who have slightly different ideas and standards.

Of course, tolerance has limits. We are not saying that we tolerate flagrant sin; we don't make excuses for sin. But we recognize that others are different from us. Others have different opinions and standards; that's OK. On matters of indifference, we must not get irritated when people do things differently than we do.

- D. Get the log out of your own eye before you complain about the speck in someone else's eye.

Perhaps you expect more from others than you do from yourself. Do you criticize others in the areas of your own weaknesses? We tend to excuse our own failures and focus on the same weaknesses in others.

- E. Consider whether you are being overly sensitive about a supposed offense. Some Christians are super-sensitive and feel deeply offended over what ought to be a slight irritation. Those who cause the so-called offense may likely not even know that they did anything hurtful.

Patient forbearance prevents us from being touchy and overly-sensitive. We extend grace and charity when people are irritating and abrasive. We strive not to take offense; we try to be patient and forgiving when others are being difficult.

Peace and tranquility within the church are largely based on loving, patient, forgiving forbearance. Peace within our own lives and families is largely based on patient, forgiving forbearance.

On the other hand, conflict is inevitable when we easily take offense when others are irritating.

We live in a fallen world with sinful people. We are sinful, and so is everyone else. The church is an assembly of sinners—saved sinners, but sinners nonetheless. So we must extend loving, patient, forgiving forbearance to one another.

That does not mean that we tolerate flagrant, unrepentant sin. But we do tolerate small annoyances and minor irritations without becoming offended.

Just like we often have to patiently bear with difficult people in our own families, so we have to extend loving, patient, forgiving forbearance to people in the church.

The next time someone at church irritates you, offends you, or annoys you, try to extend a little Christ-like, loving, patient, forgiving forbearance. Heed the command to forbear one another in love.