

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

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FULL OF
FORBEARANCE
BUT WITHOUT
ANXIETY

WITNESS LEE

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Living Stream Ministry
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A LIFE FULL OF FORBEARANCE BUT WITHOUT ANXIETY

In this booklet we shall consider many of the details and fine points regarding a life full of forbearance but without anxiety. In particular we shall consider the way to fulfill Paul's word in [Philippians 4:6](#), "In nothing be anxious."

The subject of the book of Philippians is the experience of Christ. In the first three chapters of this Epistle, the standard of Paul's writing is very high. However, in [chapter four](#), the concluding portion of this book, Paul seems to descend to a lower level in emphasizing forbearance and anxiety.

More than fifty years ago, I was troubled by [Philippians 4](#). I appreciated Paul's words in the first three chapters. In [chapter one](#) we see that we should magnify Christ by living Him; in [chapter two](#), that we should take Christ as the pattern of the Christian life; and in [chapter three](#), that Christ is far superior to all things of religion and culture and that we must count all things loss in order to pursue Him and gain Him. Then in [chapter four](#) Paul suddenly talks about forbearance

and anxiety. I realized that forbearance was a virtue, but in my opinion Paul's word about forbearance could not compare with what he had written in the three previous chapters. Furthermore, I was troubled by the fact that Paul emphasized anxiety. But in recent years the light on the issue of forbearance versus anxiety has gradually become brighter and brighter. Now I have a deep appreciation for Paul's words, "Let your forbearance be known to all men" ([Phil. 4:5](#)) and, "In nothing be anxious" ([Phil. 4:6](#)).

TWO LIVES

Anxiety is the totality of the natural human life. Day by day and even hour by hour, the common human life is filled with anxiety. Every normal human being is anxious. The more sober you are in mind, the more anxious you will be. If you are a person who is thoughtful and careful, you will have a great deal of anxiety. Sensitive people are especially bothered by anxiety. Those who are unusually dull or insensitive may not have much anxiety, but those who are sensitive usually have many anxieties.

Just as anxiety is the totality of common human life, so forbearance is the totality of the proper Christian life. Hence, the words anxiety

and forbearance represent two kinds of lives. Among human beings there are only two kinds of lives: the human life and the Christian life. Human life is a life of anxiety, whereas the Christian life is a life of forbearance. If we see this contrast, we shall realize that it is a matter of great importance for Paul to emphasize forbearance and anxiety in [chapter four of Philippians](#). He emphasizes forbearance and anxiety because they represent two different kinds of lives. Every human being is subject to anxiety. But if we are Christians according to the divine standard, we shall have a life full of forbearance and without anxiety. The first point I would emphasize in this booklet is that forbearance and anxiety represent two kinds of lives.

TWO SOURCES

Second, forbearance comes from God, and anxiety comes from Satan. This means that forbearance and anxiety represent two different sources—God and Satan.

GOD, THE SOURCE OF FORBEARANCE

The source of forbearance is God. God gives us forbearance so that we may accomplish His

purpose. God has a purpose with us individually, with our families, and with us in the church. In order to carry out God's purpose related to us, to our families, and to the church, we need forbearance. If we lack the all-inclusive virtue of forbearance, it will be impossible for us to fulfill God's purpose. This means it will not be possible for us to allow God to fulfill His purpose with us, with our family, and with the church.

God has a threefold purpose with every one of us. He has a purpose for us individually, a purpose for us in relation to our family, and a purpose for us in the church life. It is crucial for us to realize that God has such a threefold purpose concerning us. For the fulfillment of such a divine purpose, we need forbearance. Without forbearance we shall not allow God to fulfill His purpose with us, with our family, or with the church.

Forbearance means to be utterly reasonable, considerate, and understanding in dealing with others. If we are forbearing, we shall have the wisdom and the ability to supply others with what they need. We shall also have the full knowledge of what to say to them and when to say it. For example, a parent who is forbearing will know how and when to speak to his children. If we do

not exercise forbearance in our family life, we shall not be able to build up our family for the fulfillment of God's purpose. Not only is forbearance the totality of the proper Christian life, it is also the means given by God for the fulfillment of His threefold purpose with each of us. How precious that the source of forbearance is God! The forbearance we exercise and make known to others comes from God.

SATAN, THE SOURCE OF ANXIETY

The source of anxiety is Satan. Anxiety comes from Satan to frustrate the fulfillment of God's purpose. Do not think that God assigns anxiety to us. Anxiety comes from the circumstances assigned by God. To say that anxiety comes from God's assignment is quite different from saying that anxiety is God's assignment. Because of the fall, God has assigned sufferings to us. For example, God has ordained that women experience suffering in childbearing. He also ordained that men cope with thorns and thistles. [Genesis 3:17-19](#) say, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee...in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat

bread.” Although God has assigned such sufferings, He has not assigned anxiety. After God made His assignment, Satan came in to cause anxiety through the sufferings assigned by God. Anxiety does not come from God. It comes from God’s adversary, Satan, who uses the sufferings ordained by God to cause anxiety in human life. Therefore, anxiety comes from Satan and represents Satan, whereas forbearance comes from God and represents God.

HOW GOD USES SATAN

The Bible reveals that God uses Satan. We see this especially in the book of Job. When I first read this book, I was troubled by the fact that Satan had access to God’s presence in the heavens. [Job 1:6](#) says, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.” The next verses record a conversation between God and Satan. I wondered how this conversation could take place. Why would God allow such an evil one to talk with Him? Why did He not destroy Satan, or at least drive him away? God used Satan to deal with Job. Job was righteous and perfect in himself; however, he did not truly know God. Thus, Job needed to be broken,

to be dealt with thoroughly by God. God used Satan to accomplish this work, allowing Satan, within certain prescribed limits, to do certain things to Job.

From [2 Corinthians 12](#) we see that God also permitted a messenger from Satan to afflict Paul. Paul realized that his thorn in the flesh came from Satan. He says, “Wherefore also, that I should not be exceedingly lifted up by the transcendence of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, that he might buffet me, that I should not be exceedingly lifted up” ([v. 7](#)). The principle is the same both in the case of Paul and of Job. Just as Satan was permitted by God to afflict Paul, he was allowed to afflict Job.

According to the first chapter of the book of Job, soon after Satan received permission to afflict Job, he sent calamities. First, a report came that the Sabeans had stolen the oxen and the asses and slain the servants ([Job 1:14-15](#)). Immediately the report came of another calamity: fire had fallen from heaven and had consumed Job’s sheep and other of his servants ([v. 16](#)). Then the report came about the Chaldeans who stole the camels and slew still other servants ([v. 17](#)). Then the news came of the fourth calamity: a

“great wind from the wilderness” destroyed the house where Job’s sons and daughters were feasting, and they all were killed (vv. 18-19). Here we see that Satan is able to use people, fire, and wind to bring in great destruction. When I first read Job 1, I did not understand why God allowed Satan to do such things. First Satan sends the calamities. Then he comes to cause anxiety.

God had a purpose in permitting Satan to afflict Job. God’s purpose was to break Job, who was a perfect and self-righteous person. God used Satan to do what no human being was able to do. Since Job’s friends could not deal with him, God used Satan for this task. Often the Devil accomplishes certain difficult assignments for God. Sometimes if God cannot get through by using other people, He will permit Satan to deal with you. Concerning Job, God’s purpose was to break him. Concerning Paul, God’s purpose in allowing Satan to send a messenger to afflict his body was to keep him from being proud because of the visions and revelations he received. No doubt, Satan’s purpose is always to attack God’s people. This purpose is negative. But in permitting a satanic attack to take place, God has another purpose, a very positive one. All the

sufferings we undergo are assigned to us by God for a positive purpose.

Paul speaks of this purpose in [2 Corinthians 4:16](#) and [17](#): “Wherefore we do not lose heart, but if indeed our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day. For our momentary lightness of affliction works out for us, more and more surpassingly, an eternal weight of glory.” Although the afflictions are assigned by God, they do not come from Him directly. Rather, every affliction, disaster, calamity, or catastrophe comes from Satan. But they come with God’s permission and for His purpose to perfect us. This was the reason Paul could declare that the present lightness of affliction works for us an exceeding weight of glory. God has a purpose to fulfill concerning us, and this purpose sometimes requires Satan’s help.

A few months ago I had a problem with my health. I knew this problem was caused by the Devil, Satan. But I also realized that it was permitted by God for a purpose. The Lord wanted to touch something in me, and He used this means to do it.

If we look at the cases of Job and Paul, we shall see that God permits Satan to cause affliction. As soon as the affliction comes, Satan comes

to cause anxiety. The anxiety caused by Satan is for the frustration of God's purpose. To repeat, forbearance comes from God for the fulfillment of His purpose, but anxiety comes from Satan for the frustration of God's purpose. If we see this, we shall realize that it is not an insignificant matter for Paul to speak of forbearance and anxiety together in [Philippians 4:5 and 6](#).

NO COEXISTENCE OF FORBEARANCE AND ANXIETY

If we have forbearance, we shall not have anxiety. But if we have anxiety, we shall not have forbearance. Just as God and Satan cannot stand together, so forbearance and anxiety cannot co-exist. Whenever forbearance comes, anxiety must go. But if anxiety is with us, we shall be utterly lacking in forbearance. No one who exercises forbearance can be anxious. But if you are not a forbearing person, you will be anxious and filled with worry.

From experience, not from doctrine, we have come to understand that when we exercise forbearance in full, all anxiety disappears. If by God's mercy and grace we forbear with everyone, everything, and every matter, we shall not be anxious in anything. By God's mercy and grace

we need to forbear with persons, things, and matters. If we are forbearing in this way, we shall not be subject to anxiety.

LIVING CHRIST AS OUR FORBEARANCE

Forbearance is actually Christ Himself lived out of us. The Christ in [Philippians 1, 2](#), and [3](#) is the very forbearance Paul speaks of in [4:5](#). Thus, to make our forbearance known is to make our Christ known. Forbearance is actually the magnification of Christ. In [1:20](#) Paul says that Christ will be magnified in him, but in [4:5](#) he tells us to let our forbearance be known. When we put these verses together, we see that to let our Christ be magnified is to let our forbearance be known. Therefore, in our experience forbearance is Christ Himself.

If we live Christ as our forbearance, it will not be possible for us to be anxious. Anxiety is an impossibility for those who have Christ as their forbearance. Do you know why we are anxious and why we worry? We are anxious and worried because we do not live Christ. The words “live Christ” may merely be a doctrinal term, a way of speaking, not our actual living in a practical way. But when we live Christ day by day, anxiety has no ground within us.

I repeat, to forbear is to live Christ. In such a life, a life of forbearing everything by the grace of God, there is no room for anxiety. When we magnify Christ by living Him, anxiety has no way to touch us. Then because we live Christ as our forbearance, we shall be anxious for nothing.

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