

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

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AS  
OUR  
FORBEARANCE

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***Living Stream Ministry***  
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# CHRIST AS OUR FORBEARANCE

In [Philippians 4:5](#) Paul says, “Let your forbearance be known to all men.” Although we are familiar with the word forbearance, it is not easy for us to define it adequately. Many would say that forbearance is patience. However, this term is used at the end of a book which emphasizes the experience of Christ. Philippians is not primarily concerned with morality, behavior, character, or ethics. The subject of this Epistle is the experience of Christ. All four chapters of this book are related to the experience of Christ.

## MAKING CHRIST KNOWN

As we read the first several verses of [Philippians chapter four](#), we may not have the impression that these verses still have the experience of Christ as their subject. But [verse 13](#) says, “I can do all things in Him who empowers me.” “All things” must include the exercise of forbearance spoken of in [verse 5](#). Paul charged the saints to have forbearance. Certainly he himself lived a life of forbearance. Otherwise, he would have been hypocritical in exhorting others to make their

forbearance known when he himself did not practice forbearance. Paul's word in 4:5 must be based on his own living, experience, and practice. Thus, forbearance must be an experience of Christ. Furthermore, the fact that Paul says that he can do all things in Him who empowers him is an indication that forbearance is Christ.

In [Philippians 1:20](#) and [21](#) Paul speaks of magnifying Christ and of living Him. In [chapter two](#) he presents Christ as our unique pattern and then speaks of holding forth the word of life. Holding forth the word of life is equal to expressing Christ. In [chapter three](#) we see that Christ should be our goal and prize. We need to pursue toward the goal for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ([3:14](#)). Whether we are young or old, we all should pursue Christ. This was Paul's concept when he said in [3:16](#), "Only this, whereunto we have attained, by the same rule let us walk." We all should live Christ, magnify Christ, express Christ, and pursue Christ. Then in [chapter four](#) Paul speaks of standing firm in the Lord, rejoicing in Him, and letting our forbearance be known to all men. If we have a proper understanding of the subject of [Philippians](#), realizing that this book is focused on the experience of Christ, we shall see that to make

our forbearance known is actually to make Christ known. I believe that this was Paul's thought.

## AN EXPRESSION OF CHRIST

What word would you use to describe a life that expresses Christ? Would you describe it as loving, submissive, patient, humble, kind? None of these words is adequate. Yes, a life that expresses Christ certainly is loving, submissive, patient, humble, and kind; however, it includes much more than this. It is significant that Paul does not use any of these terms in [Philippians 4:5](#). Instead, he uses the word forbearance. He does not tell us to make our love or patience known, but to make our forbearance known.

In [4:5](#) why does Paul tell us to make our forbearance known to all men? Why does he not speak of some other virtue, such as holiness or righteousness? What word would you have used if you were writing this Epistle? Perhaps some would use faithfulness, obedience, or oneness. But none of these words seems to fit. It does not seem adequate to say, "Let your faithfulness be made known," or, "Let your oneness be made known." Try as we may, we cannot find an adequate replacement for the word forbearance. Even though we cannot fully define forbearance or

explain what it is, we sense as we read this verse that forbearance is the only word which is fitting in this verse.

When Paul says that we should make our forbearance known to all men, he indicates the fullness of our forbearance. A forbearance which can be made known to all is not a limited or partial forbearance; it is the fullness of forbearance.

If we would understand the meaning of forbearance, we should not turn to books of philosophy or ethics. Instead, we need to turn to the Bible and seek to learn from the Scriptures the significance of forbearance in [4:5](#). As we have seen, this must be an expression of Christ. First Paul charges us to make our forbearance known to all men. Realizing that we are not able to do this, he goes on to say, “I can do all things in Him who empowers me.” This indicates that forbearance is at least part of the expression of Christ. That forbearance is related to the expression of Christ becomes even more clear when we consider [4:5](#) in the context of the whole book of Philippians. In [1:20](#) and [21](#) Paul speaks of magnifying Christ and living Him. Certainly, making our forbearance known must involve living Christ and magnifying Him. This means that our forbearance must be the very Christ we live and

magnify. We should not separate [chapter four](#) from the rest of the book.

In [chapter two](#) Paul presents Christ as our unique pattern. Certainly, forbearance must be related to Christ as our pattern. This means that forbearance must involve the experience and the expression of Christ as the pattern revealed in [chapter two](#).

As we have pointed out, in [chapter three](#) we have Christ as our goal. With Paul, we must pursue toward this goal. Christ as the goal toward which we pursue must include forbearance. Since Paul speaks so much of Christ in the first three chapters of the book, what he says in [chapter four](#) must also be related to Christ. Therefore, we believe that the forbearance in [4:5](#) is Christ.

## MAKING OUR FORBEARANCE KNOWN

Forbearance is Christ as our living. The Christ whom we live becomes the forbearance we exercise and make known. If we see this, we shall realize that forbearance is a matter of great significance. It is by no means an isolated virtue in the Christian life. On the contrary, forbearance is actually a synonym for Christ in our Christian living. On the one hand, we may say that our Christian life is Christ. On the other hand, we

may say that the Christian life is a life of forbearance. To make our forbearance known, therefore, means to make our Christ known.

If we do not make known our forbearance, we shall have Christ only in doctrine or terminology, but we shall not have Christ in our experience. Young people, your parents may know that Christ is in you. However, you need to let Christ be made known to your parents by making your forbearance known to them. To all those whom we contact day by day we need to let our Christ be made known. This is to let our forbearance be known to all men.

In every chapter of Philippians Christ is revealed. However, in [chapter four](#) a particular term—forbearance—is used to denote Christ in our experience. Do not think that [chapter four of Philippians](#) is on a lower level than [chapters one, two, and three](#). No, in [chapter four](#) we have Christ experienced by us and expressed through us as forbearance. We may say that the central focus of our Christian life is Christ. I certainly agree with such a statement. But from the standpoint of our practical Christian experience, the focus of the Christian life is forbearance. Forbearance is an all-inclusive Christian virtue. It includes love, patience, kindness,

humility, compassion, considerateness, and submissiveness, a willingness to yield. If we have such an all-inclusive virtue, we shall also have righteousness and holiness.

The Christian life is a life full of forbearance but without anxiety. Only when we have forbearance can we have a life without anxiety. If our whole being is filled with forbearance, there will not be any room for anxiety.

## FITTING AND SUITABLE

The Greek word for forbearance is rendered different ways by different translations. Some versions translate the Greek word as yieldingness. Other translators point out that the Greek word means reasonable, considerate, suitable, and fitting. A forbearing person is one who always fits in, one whose behavior is always suitable.

Certain saints are good, but they do not fit in. They may move from place to place, but no matter where they may go, they are not happy. The reason these saints do not fit in is that they are not forbearing. A forbearing person is one who always fits in, whose behavior is always suitable, no matter what the circumstances or environment may be.

Forbearance also includes peacefulness, mildness, and gentleness. If you are reasonable, considerate, and able to fit in, you will no doubt be gentle, kind, mild, and peaceful. You will also be meek and moderate, full of compassion for others. The opposite of forbearance is being just in a very exacting way. A person who lacks forbearance will be exacting and demanding of others. But to be forbearing means that we are satisfied with less than our due. Alford says that the Greek word for forbearance means not to be strict with respect to legal rights. For example, a certain thing may be ours, but we do not claim it according to strict, legal right. This is forbearance.

## THE FORBEARANCE OF CHRIST

The life of the Lord Jesus is the best illustration of forbearance. Consider how He spoke to those two disciples on the way to Emmaus. Luke 24:15 says that while these disciples “were talking and discussing, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them.” The Lord Jesus said to them, “What are these words which you are exchanging with one another while you are walking?” (v. 17). With a rebuking tone, one of the disciples answered, “Are you a stranger dwelling alone

in Jerusalem and do not know the things which took place in it in these days?” (v. 18). Appearing not to know anything, the Lord asked, “What things?” (v. 19). Then they proceeded to tell Him about Jesus of Nazareth, One they described as a “Prophet, powerful in work and word before God and all the people.” They went on to say that the chief priests and the rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death and crucified Him. How forbearing the Lord was to listen to the disciples speak things which He knew much better than they did! After walking quite a distance, “they drew near to the village where they were going, and He acted as though He would go farther” (v. 28). However, “they urged Him, saying, Stay with us, because it is toward evening and the day is already nearly over. And He went in to stay with them” (v. 29). The Lord even sat down to dine with them. When He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, “their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him” (v. 31). In all this we see the Lord’s forbearance.

Besides the Lord Jesus, no human being has ever practiced a life of such forbearance. If you study the biographies of famous people, you will see that not one was truly a person of forbearance. However, if you read the four Gospels, you

will see that the human living of the Lord Jesus was full of forbearance. The Lord Jesus exercised forbearance with His disciples. Can you find a case where the Lord Jesus “fired” one of them? The Lord was forbearing even with Judas.

## CHRIST AS OUR FORBEARANCE

We need forbearance in the church life, especially in our serving together. Suppose a particular sister is serving in a way that is not adequate. The sister serving with her faces at least four options: walk away, join her in serving in her poor way, correct her, or try to improve her. None of these options involves forbearance. If the one sister exercises forbearance, she certainly will not walk away from the other sister. At least for a while, she will join the sister in her serving. Then she will exercise wisdom to see the sister’s situation and to determine whether or not she can speak a word of correction or improvement in love. If the sister is not able to receive such a word, the other one needs to wait before saying anything. Eventually, she may have an opportunity to speak not according to her own intention, but according to the leading of the Spirit. This is to exercise forbearance. If we all exercise forbearance, the church will be built up in a wonderful way.

When Paul exhorts us to let our forbearance be made known to all men, he is saying something of great significance. No human being is able by the natural life to fulfill such a requirement. Confucius may have been very good, but he was still sinful and fallen. Only the Lord Jesus lived a life full of forbearance, and only Christ can be our perfect forbearance today. The best word to sum up the totality of Christ's human virtues is forbearance. To make known our forbearance is to live a life which expresses Christ; it is to express the Christ by whom we live. Such a life is Christ Himself as the totality of all human virtues. This is Christ as our forbearance.

**This booklet is compiled from**  
*Life-study of Philippians*  
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