

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

THE
EXERCISE

OF

FORBEARANCE

Poetry

WITNESS LEE

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Anaheim, CA • www.lsm.org

THE EXERCISE OF FORBEARANCE

The Greek word for forbearance in [Philippians 4:5](#) is composed of two words. The first is the preposition *epi* which, when added to another word, can have the meaning of extensive or full. This word is a component of the Greek word for full knowledge used in [2 Timothy 2:25](#). The second Greek word has various meanings: reasonable, considerate, and suitable. Thus, the meaning of the Greek is extensively reasonable or fully reasonable.

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE VIRTUE

Based on the analysis of the Greek word, our spiritual experience, God's activities in His economy, and the Lord's living on earth, we can realize that to have adequate forbearance requires that we also have many other virtues. Forbearance is an all-inclusive virtue.

THE NEED OF FORBEARANCE IN OUR FAMILY LIFE

There is a great need of forbearance in our

family life. A good family life is the product of forbearance. If a husband and wife show forbearance toward each other and toward their children, they will have an excellent married life and family life. However, if they do not exercise forbearance, they will seriously damage their life together as a family.

In dealing with their children, parents should be neither too strict nor too tolerant. Both excessive strictness and excessive tolerance are damaging to children. Then what is the right way for parents to care for their children? The right way is the way which is full of forbearance.

Suppose a child does something wrong, and the matter is made known to his father. He should not rebuke his child in a hasty way or spank him in anger. In [Ephesians 6](#) Paul tells us not to provoke our children. Usually parents provoke their children by dealing with them in anger. If you are angry with your child, you first need to ask the Lord to take away your anger. Once your anger has been dealt with by the Lord, you need to exercise your understanding to realize why the child made that particular mistake. No doubt, the child was wrong. Nevertheless, you still must understand his situation. Perhaps he was wrong because you were careless.

If you had not been careless in that particular way, the child would not have made that mistake. Because your carelessness afforded him the opportunity to do something wrong, you should not put the full blame on him. Rather, first you must blame yourself and then discipline the child. All this is included in exercising forbearance toward our children.

Parents need to exercise wisdom in speaking to their children. A child may need correction, but the parents need to sense when is the right time to speak to him. A father should ask himself whether or not he should rebuke his child in front of other children or even in front of the mother. Sometimes it is not wise to discipline a child in the presence of others. How much wisdom we must exercise in caring for our children! If we do not have forbearance, we shall not exercise wisdom. On the other hand, if we do not have adequate wisdom, we shall not be able to exercise forbearance.

If we would show forbearance, we also need patience. Most parents find it difficult to be patient when they are disciplining their children. Suppose a brother is about to rebuke one of his children. It would be much better if he waited a few hours before saying anything. However, it

is extremely difficult to wait even a few minutes, much less a few hours. The natural tendency is to deal with the children in haste. Such impatience is damaging.

Impatience is also damaging in our married life. Suppose a brother feels it is necessary to speak to his wife about a certain matter that is not pleasant. If he is truly forbearing, he will wait for the right time to speak, a time when the conversation will be constructive. In the same principle, a wife needs to be patient with her husband and wait for the proper time to express her feelings about certain matters. However, to be patient and forbearing in such a way is very difficult for us.

As an all-inclusive virtue, forbearance implies not only understanding, wisdom, and patience, but also mercy, kindness, love, and sympathy. The list of virtues is almost endless.

GOD'S FORBEARANCE

The Bible reveals that in His economy God has exercised great forbearance. Immediately after the fall of man, God began to show forbearance in His dealings with man. If you read [Genesis 3](#) from the viewpoint of forbearance, you will see how forbearing God was with fallen man. God

exercised His understanding, fully realizing man's situation and need. He also exercised His wisdom to deal with fallen man.

For the accomplishment of His eternal purpose, for the carrying out of His economy, God has always exercised forbearance. With His forbearance, He has understanding, wisdom, mercy, kindness, love, and grace. Even the rich supply of life is included in God's forbearance. God never commands us to do anything without considering our need and granting us His supply. If a parent charges his children to do a certain task but does not supply them with what they need, that parent is not forbearing. Forbearance always includes the adequate supply to meet the need.

As we read the Bible, we see that God dealt with different people in different ways. For example, He dealt with Adam in one way, with Abel in another way, and with Cain in yet another way. Some students of the Bible say that in the Scriptures there are different dispensations, different ways God deals with man. These dispensations are actually related to forbearance. For God to deal with people in a particular way during a certain age is for Him to show forbearance. Because God is forbearing, He knows how to deal with

everyone. He may come to you in a certain way because He knows that you are a certain kind of person. However, He may approach another person in a very different way.

The Bible reveals that God exercises forbearance in carrying out His economy. If God had dealt with fallen man in the way we deal with others, there would have been no way for Him to fulfill His purpose. But God has made His forbearance known to all men. Thus, God Himself set up an example, a pattern, of forbearance, making known His forbearance to men throughout all generations. God makes known His forbearance by dealing with us in a way that is reasonable, suitable, and considerate. God never disciplines anyone without proper consideration. He often waits a long period of time before chastising someone. God certainly is forbearing and full of understanding, wisdom, patience, consideration, sympathy, mercy, kindness, love, and the supply of life. Consider, for example, how forbearing He was in dealing with Israel. If you read of Israel's journey in the wilderness, you will see that God truly was forbearing toward them. God has also been forbearing with us. He has dealt with us like a wise and loving father, full of forbearance.

A BOOK OF FORBEARANCE

The entire Bible reveals the divine forbearance. We may even say that the Bible is a book of forbearance and that, as revealed in the Scriptures, God Himself is forbearance. Hence, if you ask me to define forbearance, I would say firstly that forbearance is God.

CHRIST'S FORBEARANCE

Christ Himself is our forbearance. The four Gospels reveal that the Lord Jesus lived a life of forbearance. He was forbearing with Judas and in His dealings with Peter. When He was twelve years old, He exercised forbearance toward His mother, Mary, and Joseph. In case after case, the Lord displayed understanding, wisdom, patience, mercy, kindness, and love. He was kind toward Judas, and with Peter He was full of grace.

An excellent example of Christ's forbearance toward Peter is found in [Matthew 17:24](#) and [25](#). Those who received the half-shekel for the poll tax came to Peter and asked, “Does not your teacher pay the half-shekel?” ([v. 24](#)). Immediately Peter answered, “Yes.” When he came into the house, the Lord Jesus did not rebuke him. Rather, He spoke to him in a way that was full of forbearance.

In John 11 we see the Lord's forbearance with Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Instead of acting in haste, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, the Lord deliberately delayed. Through this delay others were exposed. In dealing with this situation the Lord exercised much understanding, wisdom, consideration, mercy, and kindness. Eventually there was a great supply of life manifested in the resurrection of Lazarus.

PAUL'S FORBEARANCE

Paul's life was also a testimony of forbearance. He wrote the book of Philippians from a prison in Rome. Paul was suffering and, according to chapter four, he was short of supply and in want. Among all the churches, the church in Philippi was the best in caring for Paul's needs. But for some reason, according to the Lord's sovereignty, there was a period of time when the Philippians seemingly forgot Paul and his need. But even though Paul was suffering imprisonment, persecution, attack, negligence, and the lack of supply, he still exercised forbearance and could declare, "I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in everything and in all things I have learned the secret both to be

filled and to hunger, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in Him who empowers me” ([Phil. 4:11-13](#)). Before he charged the saints to let their forbearance be known to all men, he exercised forbearance himself. No doubt, Paul’s forbearance was made known to those around him. He was full of understanding, wisdom, considerateness, sympathy, mercy, and kindness. He was also full of the life supply.

If we read the book of Philippians carefully, we shall see that [3:17-21](#) is a separate section. This means that, spiritually speaking, [Philippians 4:1](#) is the continuation of [3:16](#). After exhorting the saints to walk by the same rule, Paul charges them to “stand firm in the Lord” ([Phil. 4:1](#)). Then he urges them to rejoice in the Lord ([v. 4](#)) and to let their forbearance be known to all men ([v. 5](#)). Later in [chapter four](#) he testifies that he can do all things in the One who empowers him. Thus, Paul could make his forbearance known to the saints because he was in the One who empowered him. Furthermore, he was content, having learned the secret both how to be abased and how to abound.

THE NEED OF GROWTH

It is not easy to make our forbearance known

to all men. This requires growth in both our human life and our spiritual life. The more a person grows and matures, the more forbearance he has. Therefore, forbearance requires the growth of life. It demands maturity.

In [Philippians 3:15](#) Paul says. “Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, have this mind.” To have this mind is to have the mind to live Christ and pursue Him. However, the very Christ whom we live and pursue should be expressed as forbearance. If we put together these verses from [chapters three and four](#), we see that forbearance requires maturity. Without growth and maturity it will be extremely difficult to make known our forbearance.

WALKING BY THE RULE OF FORBEARANCE

In [Philippians 3:16](#) Paul says, “Only this, whereunto we have attained, by the same rule let us walk.” It is true that the rule here is the rule of pursuing Christ. But since in our practical daily life Christ is to be expressed as forbearance, we may say that to walk by the same rule is to walk by the rule of forbearance.

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

After speaking of forbearance in [Philippians](#)

4:5, Paul says, “I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content” (v. 11). Paul had learned the secret of contentment. By this we see that in order to be forbearing, we must be satisfied and content. If we are not content, we shall not be able to forbear.

When a person is happy, he is not easily upset. But if he is unhappy, tired, hungry, and thirsty, he can be upset easily. A satisfied person, on the contrary, is pleasant and happy. When we are full of joy, it is difficult for us to become angry. Those who are parents know that if a child misbehaves when we are satisfied and happy, we shall deal with the child in one way, in a way full of forbearance. But if he behaves in exactly the same way when we are dissatisfied and unhappy, we shall deal with him differently, in a way that is short of forbearance. The difference is that on one occasion we are full of Christ and are happy and satisfied, whereas on the other occasion we are short of Christ and short of satisfaction in Him.

Paul could let his forbearance be known to all the saints because he was content. He did not lack anything, but was fully satisfied. No matter how he was treated by others, no matter whether the saints in Philippi cared for his need or not, Paul was satisfied. His life was full of contentment.

Now we can see that forbearance requires maturity of life and also satisfaction and contentment in Christ. Few of us are fully mature, but we can thank the Lord that we are mature at least to some extent. According to our degree of maturity, we enjoy the contentment of the Lord's life. Knowing contentment and satisfaction, we can then exercise our forbearance.

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Life-study of Philippians
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