

Nuggets and Gems from the Bible

A LIFE

FULL OF

FORBEARANCE

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In our reading of the book of Philippians it may seem that Paul's thought in [Philippians 4:1-7](#) is not nearly as high as that expressed in the first three chapters. In [chapter one](#) he speaks of living Christ and magnifying Him; in [chapter two](#), of taking Christ as our pattern, of shining as lights in the world, and of holding forth the word of life; and in [chapter three](#), of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and of pursuing toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Then in [chapter four](#) Paul uses expressions that apparently are quite ordinary: "Rejoice in the Lord"; "Let your forbearance be known to all men"; and "In nothing be anxious." Suppose as you were pursuing toward the goal for the prize someone suddenly encouraged you not to be anxious. Would you not consider this an interruption and say, "I am pursuing Christ. I want to arrive at the goal of the out-resurrection. Why do you talk to me about anxiety?" Many readers of Philippians treasure the first three chapters, but, perhaps unconsciously, they may

consider chapter four to be on a lower level than chapters one through three.

STANDING FIRM IN THE LORD

Philippians 4:1-7 is part of Paul's concluding word to chapters one, two, and three. What he says in 4:1-7 is based on what he has previously written about living Christ, magnifying Christ, taking Christ as our pattern, knowing the excellency of Christ, pursuing toward the goal, and living in the out-resurrection.

In 4:1 he says, "So then, my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, beloved." We know from chapter three that Paul aspired to be found in Christ. In 4:1 he tells us to stand firm in the Lord. Standing firm in the Lord is the key to letting our forbearance be known to all men. If we do not stand firm in the Lord, there is no way to make our forbearance known. In order to do anything we must have a proper standing. This is true of making known our forbearance. For this, we must stand firm in the Lord; that is, we must remain in Him. Hence, Paul's word about standing firm in the Lord is equal to the Lord's word about abiding in Him (John 15:4).

In Philippians 4:2 Paul goes on to say, "I

beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche, to think the same thing in the Lord.” As those who stand firm in the Lord, we should also “think the same thing in the Lord.” Apart from the Lord, we cannot think the same thing. If we would think the same thing in the Lord, we must first stand firm in Him.

Verse 3 continues, “Yes, I ask you also, genuine yokefellow, assist them, who contended with me in the gospel, with both Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” Here Paul is asking those who were genuine yokefellows to help Euodias and Syntyche to think the same thing. Paul seems to be saying, “These two sisters are my co-workers, but at least temporarily they are not in the Lord. I encourage you, genuine yokefellow, to do your best to bring them back to the Lord and help them to think the same thing in the Lord.” These sisters were co-workers who had labored with Paul and contended with him in the gospel and whose names were in the book of life. Nevertheless, for the time being they were not in the Lord.

In verse 4 Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” When in our experience we are not in the Lord, we do not have

any joy and we cannot rejoice. Formerly Euodias and Syntyche could rejoice, but now, because they are not in the Lord, they cannot rejoice in Him.

There is a practical way by which we can know whether or not we are in the Lord. As long as you are not one with a certain brother or sister in the church, you are not in the Lord. Of course, as far as position is concerned, you are in Christ eternally. Nothing can affect our position in Christ. But practically and experientially we may not remain in Him. The fact that we are not one with a particular saint proves that we are not in the Lord.

It is very serious not to be one with even one brother or sister. Most of the saints have at least one other saint with whom they are not one. For example, suppose some sisters are serving together at a love feast. One sister may not like the way another sister is serving and she may refuse to serve with her. She may even walk away from this sister. By walking away from the sister, she actually walks out of the Lord. Instead of refusing to serve with the sister, she should make her forbearance known in that situation.

It is not easy to serve with the saints in the church. If an employee in a factory does not do

a good job, the boss can fire him. But in the church life no one is hired and no one can be fired. Just as we have been born into a family and cannot be fired from being a member of the family, so we have been born into the church and cannot be fired from being a member of the church. When difficulties arise, we should not walk away from the saints or refuse to serve with them. Instead, we should exercise our forbearance.

NO ANXIETY

If we exercise forbearance, we shall not be anxious. Whenever we make our forbearance known, our anxiety is crossed out. When we exercise forbearance, we can rejoice in the Lord, and when we rejoice in the Lord, our anxiety disappears. Thus, forbearance maintains our rejoicing, and rejoicing drives away our anxiety. But whenever we do not exercise forbearance, we are not able to rejoice. Then the way is open for anxiety to enter in. This is not a mere doctrine; it is a word which touches the actual situation of our Christian life.

SATISFIED WITH LESS THAN OUR DUE

At this point we need to consider in a fuller

way the meaning of forbearance. Forbearance means that we are easily satisfied, even with less than our due. This is the meaning of the Greek word rendered forbearance. To be satisfied with less than our due is in contrast to being just in an exacting way. To forbear is to make no demands on others; it is to be satisfied with whatever another party does to us or for us. Suppose a brother's wife serves him a cold drink when he preferred a hot one, and, very dissatisfied, he rebukes her for what she has done. This is not forbearance; it is being just in a very exacting manner. If the brother had shown forbearance toward his wife, he would have been satisfied with whatever she served him, even if he had not been able to drink it. He would have been satisfied with less than his due.

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE VIRTUE

In his *Word Studies* Wuest points out that the Greek word rendered forbearance not only means satisfied with less than our due, but also means sweet reasonableness. The word includes self-control, patience, moderation, kindness, and gentleness. Furthermore, according to Christian experience, forbearance is all-inclusive,

for it includes all Christian virtues. This means that if we fail to exercise forbearance, we fail to exercise any Christian virtue. If a brother's wife serves him a cold drink contrary to his preference and he complains about it, then at that time he does not exhibit any Christian virtue. But if by the grace of Christ he is satisfied with less than his due and exercises forbearance toward his wife, not criticizing her or condemning her, he will show in his forbearance an all-inclusive Christian virtue. His forbearance will include patience, humility, self-control, looking to the Lord, and even the virtue of admitting that the Lord is sovereign in all things.

The reason we sometimes behave in an unseemly manner is that we lack forbearance. Negative attitudes and unkind words also come from a shortage of forbearance. When we fail to love, it is because we have no forbearance. Likewise, we may be intolerant because we lack forbearance. Even talkativeness may result from having no forbearance. If we do not have forbearance, we shall not have peace. If we do not show forbearance toward the members of our family, there will be no peace in our family life. Peace comes out of forbearance.

MAGNIFYING CHRIST BY MAKING KNOWN OUR FORBEARANCE

Paul realized that forbearance is an all-inclusive virtue. This is the reason he says, “Let your forbearance be known to all men.” This forbearance is actually Christ Himself. In [Philippians 1:21](#) Paul says, “To me to live is Christ.” Since Christ is forbearance, for Paul to live was forbearance. Paul’s earnest expectation was that Christ would be magnified in him, whether through life or through death. For Paul to magnify Christ was for him to make known his forbearance. Thus, for Christ to be magnified in us is equal to making our forbearance known to all men. The reason for this is that forbearance is Christ experienced by us in a practical way. We may speak of living Christ and testify that for us to live is Christ. However, day by day in our life at home what we need is forbearance. If we have forbearance, then in our experience we truly have Christ. If a brother’s wife offends him, what he needs to make known to her is Christ as his forbearance.

It is very difficult to be a good husband or wife. The key to being a good husband or wife

is forbearance. To repeat, forbearance includes much more than gentleness or humility. As an all-inclusive Christian virtue, forbearance is Christ Himself. In both the family life and in the church life, we need to live Christ by living a life of forbearance.

The more we consider the significance of forbearance, the more we can appreciate why Paul spoke of it in [Philippians 4:5](#). Our failures and defeats in the Christian life come because we are short of forbearance. All the saints, young and old alike, have a tendency to neglect forbearance. If we would live Christ, we must be satisfied with less than our due. We should not make exacting demands on others.

The Lord Jesus lived a life of forbearance when He was on earth. In one sense, He was very strict, but in another sense He was very tolerant. For example, although He prayed a great deal, He did not make demands of His disciples concerning prayer or condemn them because they did not pray enough.

THE NEARNESS OF THE LORD

Immediately after speaking about forbearance, Paul goes on to say, “The Lord is near.” I do not oppose the understanding that this refers

to the nearness of the Lord's coming. Nevertheless, according to experience, not according to doctrine, I would say that this word refers to the Lord's presence with us today. It also strengthens Paul's exhortation that we make our forbearance known to all men. Because the Lord is near, we have no excuse for not making known our forbearance. Often we fail to exercise forbearance because we forget that the Lord is near. We do not even remember that He is actually within us. When a brother's wife serves him a cold drink instead of a hot one, will he care for the drink or for the Lord? If he cares about the drink instead of the Lord, then in his experience only the drink will be at hand, for the Lord will be far away. Because we do not realize that the Lord is near, we do not exercise forbearance. Instead, we are strict in dealing with others and make exacting demands of them without considering their situation. The more we realize the nearness of the Lord, the more satisfied we shall be and the more we shall be considerate of others and sweetly reasonable regarding their situation. If we realize that the Lord is near, we shall turn from the old creation to the new creation, to the out-resurrection, which is expressed as forbearance.

THE EXPRESSION OF THE OUT-RESURRECTION

For Jesus, the Nazarene, to live a life full of forbearance required that He live a life in resurrection. Only a life in the out-resurrection can be a life of forbearance. Forbearance is actually the expression of a living which is in the out-resurrection, in the new creation instead of the old creation. To let our forbearance be known to all men is not simply to be kind or patient. Rather, it is to let others see a proper Christian living. This living is Christ as the out-resurrection expressed through forbearance.

LIVING IN THE OUT-RESURRECTION

I wish to emphasize the fact that forbearance is not a matter of ethics. Forbearance is Christ. In chapters one, two, and three of Philippians, Paul has much to say concerning Christ. Then in Philippians 4:5 he speaks of forbearance, not of Christ. Actually, when he says, “Let your forbearance be known to all men,” he is saying, “Let Christ be manifested and magnified before all men.” After speaking about living Christ, magnifying Christ, taking Christ as the pattern, and pursuing Christ as the goal, Paul indicates that

we need to live this Christ as our forbearance. We all need the Lord to be our forbearance. To live Him as forbearance is truly to live in the out-resurrection.

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