

Broomfield



# PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Forbear!

### *The Steadfast Christian Part 5*

#### Understandable Anger

I know of a couple who for years tried to have a third child and yet could not. Now if you have ever ministered to a couple struggling with infertility or are yourself in this situation, you know that there is a lot of pain associated with the condition. There are failed hopes, batteries of tests with negative results. Then there is the news of other people having children. Then there is the money, time, and emotions involved. Then there is the suspicion that there is something wrong with yourself or your spouse. And then there is the anger with God for putting you into the situation. The whole series of events is quite grueling.

Well after many years of heartache for the woman, the man finally consented to a test to see if there perhaps could be a problem with him. After the test and a physical, the doctors made a shocking discovery. Finally the man confessed to his doctors and wife that he secretly had undergone a vasectomy because he didn't want any more children.

There are few who wouldn't understand the anger that this woman no doubt felt. Her supposed loving husband let her suffer for years with the false hopes of another child. How could she not live with resentment?

And yet she didn't. She forgave him. She did this for in Christ there is a better way! And that way is the way of the cross. This is the way outlined in Philippians 4:5.

The context of our passage is the struggle between two Christian women: Euodias and Syntyche. Though they were at serious and, perhaps even, understandable odds with one another, Paul nevertheless exhorted them and the whole church to cultivate the disciplines of peace outlined here! Previously we saw that the first discipline of the steadfast Christian is rejoicing. The second discipline is forbearance!

#### The Call to Forbear

Philippians 4:5 (NAS), “Let your forbearing<sup>1</sup> *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near.”

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<sup>1</sup> επιεικης epieikes

The word rendered *forbearing spirit* is actually one word in the Greek. The Greek word has a meaning richer than any single English word can convey. Hence there is quite a divergence in how this word is rendered. The King James renders it moderation. The American Standard uses the word forbearance. The Bible in Better English renders it gentle behavior. The New American Standard 95 translates it gentle spirit. The NIV and the New Kings James renders it gentleness. Philips says reasonableness. Others have suggested generosity, mildness, friendliness, magnanimity, kindness, big-heartedness, graciousness, charity toward the faults of others, and mercy toward the failures of others.

Aristotle defined this word as, "one who pardon's human failure."<sup>2</sup> And this perhaps is the best rendering. Epieikes thus speaks of a gracious-humility which enables a person to endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance.

Christ was characterized by forbearance.

2 Corinthians 10:1, "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness<sup>3</sup> of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you:"

God daily exercises it.

Psalms 86:5, "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."

Hence, Paul exhorts the Philippians, specifically Euodias and Syntyche, to have forbearance and to be known for their forbearance. In fact, as we just said, it is that for which Christ is known.

## **Forbearance and Christ**

In Isaiah 6 we read the well-know passage of Isaiah standing before God and falling down as a dead man on account of God's holiness. Now during this exchange, God commissioned Isaiah with these words:

Isaiah 6:10, "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

Now the significance of this is that in John 12, we read this:

John 12:39-41, "Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his [Christ's] glory, and spake of him."

Jesus Christ is none other than God — the infinite, eternal, and unchangeable Creator of this world who right now "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). That was He who was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. He walked on this earth 2000 years ago. He gave us the word of God. He is the One whom we call Savior and Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Cited by William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*. [Philadelphia: Westminster 1975], Page 83.

<sup>3</sup> *επιεικεια* epieikeia

## The Passion

When Christ walked on this earth, how did man receive Him?

In the parable of Matthew 21:33-39, Christ prophesied of the treatment that He as the Son of God would soon receive.

Matthew 21:33-39, "Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: 34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. 35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. 36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. 37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. 38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. 39 And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

When God condescended and in love became man, how did we receive Him? WE ABUSED HIM, BETRAYED HIM, AND KILLED HIM!

Many of you are aware of the soon to be released movie of Mel Gibson called, *The Passion*. While I am not encouraging anyone to see this movie, it has been interesting to read all the fuss that has been raised about it. One of the concerns that I have read about is that it is too violent. Listen to Mel Gibson's response to this accusation.

"From many accounts I've read, I think it was actually more violent than what you're going to see in this film. According to the psalmists, you couldn't even recognize him as being a human. That's how bad it was."<sup>4</sup>

Family of God, do you understand that never was there grief like Christ's! In order to save us from our sin, God became man and walked among us. Yet we did not receive Him. Instead we betrayed Him, mocked Him, ridiculed Him, tortured, beat, and eventually killed Him. And through it all, how did Christ respond?

1 Peter 2:21-23, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

This is the essence of forbearance! It is a gracious-humility which enables a person to endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance. If Christ could endure the torture of wicked men without reviling, then we who deserve death on account of our sin have no basis to respond with anger when someone sins against us! If Christ could walk on this earth deserving the worship of all and yet receiving none, then we who deserve the worship of none should walk on this earth expecting to receive none of the praises of men! If Christ could serve those who sought His death, then we should serve those who have sought our harm!

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<sup>4</sup> *Keeping the Faith*, and interview with Mel Gibson, *Reader's Digest*, March 2004, page 94

You and I have more in common with an ameba than we do Christ, yet Christ loves us. Christ submitted Himself to our cruel mockings. Christ died for us.

In light of Christ's example, how can we not love someone so much like us? How is it that we should not "forbear" with another sinner?

Sadly, this was not the attitude or mindset of the Euodias and Syntyche. They were divided. There disagreements were not over truth or moral failures. Their disagreement developed the attitude of my way or the highway. They were engaged in a personality conflict in which they both chose to make known each other's failings. They had started to gossip and ridicule one another behind each other's back.

In Philippians 4:4-10 Paul is addressing the disciplines that would make for peace between Euodias and Syntyche. Accordingly notice the play on words here.

Philippians 4:5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men..."

Philippians 4:6, "... let your requests be made known unto God."

Paul felt it was necessary to give this exhortation because Euodias and Syntyche were not practicing what Paul had preached. In fact they were practicing just the opposite. Rather than letting their "forbearance be known to men" and "their requests to God" they were making their requests/gripes/criticisms about one another known to man!

Paul exhorts, stop letting your requests with regard to one another be know to all man, rather allow your forbearance of one another be your trade mark, and your requests be made known to God! It's not "Right or riot," or "my way or the highway." It is "entrust your souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Peter 4:19). Forebear with one another!

## Our Encouragement

Philippians 4:5, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. **The Lord is at hand**<sup>5</sup>."

This phrase serves as a bridge between this verse and verse 6. It shows that Paul intended it to be an encouragement in both exhortations! And it is a tremendous encouragement.

The suggestion has been made by some that by this phrase Paul is referencing the immanency of (1) Christ's return or (2) our passing into His presence upon death. While the wording certainly could support this, and in fact this could be a double entendre, the more natural reading is to take this as a statement of the personal nearness of Christ to us.<sup>6</sup>

In the midst of trial and difficulty we all will feel as if we are being unjustly treated. We will have our name trashed. And we will feel abandoned and forsaken. However, Christ is near us in these trials. It was this truth that Christ used to encourage His church upon His ascension.

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<sup>5</sup> εγγυς eggus

<sup>6</sup> Bruce, Fee, Calvin, and MacArthur support this reading in their respective commentaries. When Paul calls God, Judge, he typically does this in the context of the non-believer persecuting the believer. Here the conflict is between two Christians.

Matthew 28:20, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: **and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.** Amen.”

.It was this truth that was impressed upon the David in the midst of trial.

Psalm 145:18, “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.”<sup>7</sup>

It was this truth that David gave to the brokenhearted.

Psalm 34:18, “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”

And it is this truth that serves as the timeless words of comfort to ones suffering at the hands of unfaithful believers.

Psalm 73:28 (NAS), “**But as for me, the nearness of God is my good;** I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, That I may tell of all Thy works.”

And that is the idea here! This is such an important truth for us.

Over the years I have had many opportunities to encourage brothers and sisters going through difficult situations. These situations have included trials, difficulties, hardships, the swallowing of one's pride for the sake of peace, looking past personal injury in the name of Christ, and the covering of sin with love. However, the issue is almost always raised but what about me? What about my needs? What about my security? Who's going to watch out for me?

Euodias, listen! Though the entire world — much less Syntyche — abandons you and forsakes you Christ is near! Christ is with you! Christ is walking beside you! He who never slumbers nor sleeps<sup>8</sup> holds you in His arms even while you sleep.<sup>9</sup>

Herein lays the problem. We would rather than hear the approving words of another Christian than the words of Christ. We would rather be warmed by the arms of a renegade than bereft and left only with Christ. We would rather have Syntyche's approval than Christ's!

Brothers and sisters don't forsake the eternal for the temporal. Seek the Lord. Learn to be satisfied with Him alone!

## **The Basis of Forbearance**

It is easy to know these truths, but how can we embrace them? How can Christ be our only satisfaction such that we forbear with others? How can we endure injustice, disgrace, and mistreatment without retaliation, bitterness, or vengeance?

As we look to the basis of the call here, we are brought back to the context.

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<sup>7</sup> The context is one of prayer in the Psalm and also in Philippians 4:6.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Psalm 121:4

<sup>9</sup> Compare Psalm 127:2

Philippians 4:4-5, "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand."

It is very clear from this text that the "forbearance" of verse 5 flows from the rejoicing of verse 4. The only way an individual can forbear with another is if that over which he rejoices is Christ!

Now we need to flesh this out further.

The ultimate issue resting upon any one of us this day is the basis upon which you will approach God when you enter into His presence. (Or another way of saying it is, "Why should you go to heaven?")

Those who say, "I should be allowed to go to heaven because I have been a pretty good person." "I haven't done anything really that bad." "I try not to lie, cheat, or steal." Or, "I really haven't hurt anyone other than myself when I have been bad." These responses reveal that which they rejoice over is themselves or the work of their hands! In other words, they are approaching God trusting in the fact that you have been a good enough person to enter heaven.

Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

This means that if you have sinned just one time in life, you will go to hell!

Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

This is speaking in reference to everyone of us! And it is from these two passages we conclude that if you are trusting in yourself — rejoicing (boasting) in yourself — that you are a good enough person to go to heaven, you will be sorely disappointed. Left alone, we cannot be saved no matter what we do!

There on what basis can a man enter heaven? Man can enter heaven only on the basis of Christ.

Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

After Paul and Silas were released from prison, the guard asked them how he could be saved.

Acts 16:31, "And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

As Christ died on the cross for His people's sin, if you will rely upon Christ — rejoice in Christ — as the basis upon which you will enter heaven, then you will spend eternity in glory!

How is it then that the person who "rejoices in Christ" (verse 4) is the one who "forebears" with others (verse 5)?

To rejoice in Christ is to confess that you are sinful. It is to confess that you are spiritually bankrupt. It is to confess before the Lord that your good deeds are wretched, vile, and contemptible.<sup>10</sup> Christ alone is your righteousness!

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<sup>10</sup> Compare Isaiah 64:6

If all this is sincerely believed, then to rejoice in Christ is to admit that you are a greater sinner than everyone and anyone around you. While you may know four or five of your neighbor's sins, you and I know that we are guilty of hundreds of sin. Thus to get bent out of shape over the four or five of our neighbor's sin when we have sinned far more is to play the hypocrite.

We rejoice in Christ because we know our sin. We forbear with others because we know not only our sin, but the forgiveness of Christ.

Paul is a great example of this. While he could not know the hearts of men, he did have an inkling of his own heart, and what he saw wasn't pretty. Paul never could forget the sin he perpetrated against Christ — such that we read about it on three separate occasions. He wrote this at the beginning of his ministry.

1 Corinthians 15:9, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

At the time of the Philippians letter he penned these words:

Ephesians 3:8, “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

Near the final days of his ministry he wrote this:

1 Timothy 1:15, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.”

With such a belief, how did Paul respond to those who sought to hurt him?

Through the persuasion of the false leaders in the Galatian churches, many in these bodies had participated in a defection from Christ in which Paul's calling, motive, and message were ridiculed. Yet this is how Paul responded:

Galatians 4:12, “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.”

They had just slandered Paul, yet they had done him no wrong! They had drug his name through the gutter, yet they had done him no wrong! These men had even renounced him, yet they had done him no wrong!

How is that? In comparison to the thousands of sins that Paul perpetrated against Christ, these were nothing!

Paul could forbear because Christ had forbearance with him!

Thus we see that forbearance flourishes in the context of humility where one knows "his sin and all its greatness, but also Him who sets us free!"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Christian Scheidt, 1742, Quoted from the New Trinity Hymnal, Hymn 695

Family of God, let us boldly confess our sin. Let us boldly recognize that what we have done is far more against Christ than what anyone ever could do against us. Let us boldly confess our Great Lord by capturing this paradigm of living at peace with all men!

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## **About the Preacher**

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on February 15, 2004. Greg is the preacher at Broomfield Presbyterian Church.