

Thoughts From Other Minds:

Forbearing one another.] ... Now he is said to *forbear* who, though attacked and wounded either by words or deeds, does not immediately rise up to inflict revenge; but endeavours to overcome his enemy with mildness and to bring him back to a proper mind. However, this forbearance under injuries is accounted mean among the proud, yet by the wise it is esteemed the best and most glorious way of conquest; and that on many accounts. For

1. He who bears injuries, overcomes and conquers himself, whilst he represses and restrains the desire for revenge always boiling forth from our corrupt nature; and binds and confines that wrath, as it were a furious monster, lurking within him. This mode of conquest Solomon celebrates in Prov. 26:32, *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.* ...

2. He who forbears, conquers the very malice of his enemy. ... so we say a Christian is overcome by a wicked man, as often as he, by the provocation of attack, is drawn into similar fury; on the contrary, we may pronounce him to have conquered when he retains his own disposition, and, by bearing with the violence of the other, changes and mollifies his ferocity. See a beautiful example 1 Sam. 24:17, &c.; where David, by forbearing, and refraining from revenge, so mollifies and changes Saul, that from breathing blood and slaughter, he melts into tears and entreaties, confesses his fault, and is compelled to acknowledge and extol David's innocence and meekness. Who does not here see the malice of Saul overcome, and the patience of David triumphing?

3. He who forbears, not only conquers, but conquers by lawful means, and those which God has commanded his soldiers to use. Now it behoves a soldier obeying the command of his general, not only to fight, but to do it with those arms, and in that manner which is assigned him. *No one receiveth the crown unless he strive lawfully*, 2 Tim 2:5. But hear the decree of our commander, Prov 24:29, *Say not I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work. Repompense to no man evil for evil*, Rom 12:17; and again, vers. 21, *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*. So much for the act of forbearing.

And forgiving one another.] ... there are some who sometimes bear injuries, because, forsooth, they cannot avenge them, or because they do not think it expedient; yet in the mean time the injury is treasured up in their memory, malice rages in their hearts, and a thirst for revenge burns. The Apostle, therefore, would have us, not only bear an injury, but remove from our hearts the very desire itself of revenge; nay, that we should cherish a love for our most bitter enemies. Here applies the precept of Christ, Matt 18:35 ... and Luke 6:27-28 ... We read that all this was religiously observed by Christians in the primitive Church. *It is the custom of all to love their friends; of Christians alone to love their enemies*, says Tertullian.

John Davenant, *Colossians*, pp. 110-112.

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

4 September 2016

Sermon: “*Life in the body #3 – forbearing and forgiving*”

Scripture: Colossians 2:13-3:17

Sermon Notes

Introduction: As we continue to follow on from our August Communion study from John 14:12 we come today to a ‘pair’ of ‘one anothers’: ‘bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other’ (Col 3:13).

We have seen that faith unites us to Christ Jesus as our head, and to each other as members of his body, and that in the body we are to love one another as Christ has loved us—and this means thinking rightly towards each other.

This means humility, and being startlingly different from the community outside; differences of rank and wealth and class and culture will mean nothing among us; by our love for each other outsiders will know we are Jesus’ disciples.

Humility also leads to serving one another; we are to have among ourselves the same mind that was also in Christ Jesus—a mind to serve; and so we are ‘through love to serve one another’; God has set us free; we are to use our freedom to serve.

Serving doesn’t come naturally; we all naturally prefer to be served rather than serve; that is why we can only serve so as to please God after he has set us free from slavery to the flesh, to sin within.

Today’s ‘one anothers’ are even more difficult; serving is responding to need; these one anothers are responding to provocation: ‘bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other’ (Col 3:18; also Eph 4:1-2).

The verb ‘bearing’ or ‘to bear’ usually means just that—to put up with or to endure; but its cognate (that is, related) noun means ‘forbearance’ - refraining from, esp. what one has the right to do (cf. Romans 2:3-4, 3:23-25).

Sometimes the verb also seems to mean ‘to forbear’ - as in this context, where it is linked to ‘forgive’, which implies wrongdoing and the right to respond accordingly; so the AV has ‘forbearing’ (which alliterates well with ‘forgiving’!)

1. The need for forbearance

‘Forbearing’ means that there will be a need for forbearance—or, if ‘bearing with’, then a need for putting up with one another. The Holy Spirit would never have told us to forbear, or bear with, one another if there would be no need for it.

Unrealistic expectations lead to discouragement and even despair; to often new Christians expect the church on earth to be like the church in heaven, and when it is not they give up on church and on the Christian Faith.

Even among people who are born of God’s Spirit, who are new creations in Christ Jesus, other people will sometimes be annoying, even hurtful, and we will feel

like retaliating; it may even be that we will be (perhaps unintentionally or even intentionally) very annoying, and provoke others to feel like retaliating against us!

Such situations test our forbearance, our patience, our ability to put up with each other and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Christians do not always agree; our differences can be stressful; we can sometimes be so out of step with the Spirit that we behave badly towards each other.

2. The foundations of forbearance

Such provocation ought not be—but it does; we must be forewarned, so as not to respond in a Christian way instead of giving up on the church and the Faith. If we have experienced provocation you may wonder how you can forbear, especially when your rights have been infringed. The answer is in Col 3:12.

We are God's chosen ones, holy and beloved (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Thess 1:4-5). God has chosen us to be his, and that choice was of pure grace, because he loved us. We are holy and beloved; God has set us apart to be his own (1 Pet 2:9); we are 'saints' (Rom 1:1; 1 Jn 3:1).

When provoked we are to remember that God has chosen us and set us apart for himself, and counts us 'beloved'; he gave his Son to die for us, and in spite of our failings we are still 'beloved' to him—and then we are to put on 'compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience,' and forbear.

3. Going further than forbearance

Our pattern in forbearances when we are provoked is our Lord (1 Pet 2:13); but we are to go further than forbearance to practise forgiveness: 'forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.'

Some forbear while still treasuring up their wrong (see Davenant overleaf); forgiveness is a serious matter for us and our church. Lack of forgiveness and resentment breaks the fellowship in the body; it creates a 'vibe' that repels outsiders; it grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30) and leaves us powerless to serve the Lord.

Lack of forgiveness leads to continued anger and resentment at injuries or wrongs, even after many years. Forgiveness is not easy, but with God's help we can and must forgive; our forgiveness of others is a test of whether we have been forgiven by God (cf. Matt 18:21-35)

With God's help we must let go of the injuries and wrongs that other had done to us or to ours; we must allow him to set us free from resentment and bitterness to forgive as he has forgiven us.

Forgiveness is not an option for us who claim to be Christians. Jesus warns us that we will be excluded from heaven if we do not forgive—not to earn forgiveness, for his forgiveness is free and gracious; but God's forgiveness and the love that makes it possible touches our hearts; by forgiving we prove ourselves forgiven.

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Reflect (perhaps with the aid of a dictionary) on the difference between 'bear with' and 'forbear'; also, gain an insight into the meaning of 'forbearance' from Romans 2:3-4 and 3:23-25. Why might 'forbearing' be a better translation than 'bearing with' or 'bear with' in Colossians 3:13?
2. How does the command 'forbearing one another' warn us against unrealistic expectations about what life is like in the church in this world, and why are such expectations dangerous?
3. It's sometimes said that the way to be holy is to 'let go and let God'; how does Colossians 3:12 show us that we are to be active in the pursuit of holiness?
4. From Col 3:12; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:7; 1 Thess 1:4; 1 Pet 2:9; Rom 1:2, 1 Jn 3:1 and 1 Pet 2:23 —how should we face provocation from wrongdoing against us?
5. Why must we push beyond mere forbearing to forgiveness? Why is lack of forgiveness a serious issue for (a) our churches and (b) for us personally? (Matt 18:21-35). How dare we not forgive? (Matt 6:12) How are we to forgive? (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13). Must we wait till the other asks to be forgiven? (cf. Lk 23:34)