

## Forbearance

### Putting Up with One Another

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On my way home from work, most days I turn on WBT FM here in Charlotte, and during the evening hours the station airs the *Jerry V Show*. It's a local sports talk show. "*Jerry V*,"—Jerry Vaillencourt, is a real character. If you ever have a chance to hear him when you're in Charlotte, it's worth it. Some say that he's such a character, that he's really a "nut." I won't make any judgment on that, because he's a little wacko at times, but every once in a while he comes up with a real gem of phraseology. He just has a way with words sometimes, and one of his favorite sayings these days is that in America today most of us wear our bones too tight.

He says this because in this country we have become far too sensitive. Every little thing has to have a comment made about it. Everything has to be critiqued up and down, whether the thing is good or bad. Everybody's got a way in, and when something happens it's more than likely that it's going to offend a certain percentage of the population just because they're either a certain color or from a certain ethnic group, or they happen to be a certain sex or a certain religion. Everybody is just so uptight about all sorts of things.

People are offended over the smallest matters. Things that we just used to shrug off and say, "Oh! That's just crazy" ...now are made a big stink about. Since we're all so touchy, we're constantly fighting and arguing over nothing, over little itty-bitty things that don't matter a hill of beans in the grand scheme of things. It's the same sensitivity, the same offensiveness that has made us such a litigious society. We're always going to court over something. It's not like neighbors can settle something over the back fence anymore, they've got to pull it into the courts or air it out in public.

This past summer you may have heard one of these instances. Rush Limbaugh talked about this for a few days. I want to warn you ...this is crazy. A Florida Youth Baseball League had a rule in its legal papers that each player must wear a protective athletic cup in order to participate in the league. Now this was fine as long as everybody who participated in the league was a boy. But on one team there was a girl.

I guess the parents and the coaches talked it over, and they thought that what they would do in order to comply with this rule is to have her wear a cup. So what did she do? She stuck it inside her sock and wore it on her ankle. She didn't need to wear it where it should have gone because she's a girl. You wouldn't believe what a clamor that raised all over the country. Parents of the opposing teams wanted this girl's head! They wanted her kicked off the team, out of the league. They wanted her team to forfeit every game because she didn't wear the cup where the rule didn't say it should be worn.

She complied with the rule, but they raised such a stink about this thing that there were threats of lawsuits, there were fights and arguments in the stand, and of course it got national publicity over a girl wearing an athletic cup. Isn't that dumb? Why didn't they just use their common

sense and say, "Let's exempt girls from this rule. They don't need it" But no, they had to drag it through the press. Isn't that stupid? They made a mountain out of a mole hill. They were wearing their bones way too tight on such a stupid thing as an athletic cup. Now it's a great point, but what in the world does it have to do with a girl playing baseball? Isn't life too short to argue over something so asinine? It's pretty ridiculous.

Unfortunately, the reason I bring this up is that we have our own little "tempest in a teapot" here in the Church of God. How "much ado about nothing," (to quote Shakespeare) have we endured over the past several years? Some of them get to the point where we're arguing over such stupid little things as, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?"

Now of course that one hasn't come up. That was a Dark Ages one that they argued over, but we have such things too. I'm sure everyone who has studied into the minutia of certain significant words and who has based their whole theologies upon them, feels very justified in what they've done. But does it matter in the long run just because you won an argument with the guy sitting next to you? Paul says, "*Let's not argue about words. It's not worth it.*" It's not worth it because it produces disunity and separation. How many people did that person who argues about the minutia of words, etc. offend or run off because they just couldn't put up with him after a while? In his pride did he cease fellowshiping with us lesser mortals who couldn't see it quite the way he did? Most of us probably didn't care, ...but he did.

Let's look at it from the other angle. Have we shunned anyone? Have we stopped fellowshiping with anyone? Have we shut certain people out of our lives because we disagree with them over something that may be a tempest in a teapot? Perhaps the person has a fault that we just can't deal with? It could be anything.

It could be that he likes rap music, and you just won't have anything to do with him because he likes rap music. But in the grand scheme of things is that worth breaking up fellowship with a brother? Maybe that person will grow up and listen to good music someday, but we can still fellowship with him. It's something that doesn't matter in the long run, but we shun them because we disagree. They have a fault, according to us.

Do we shun somebody because we have come to feel superior to him, because "we know what's right," and he's below us? Have we tired, or stopped putting up with, or enduring the shortcomings of our brethren, the person sitting next to you, or the person down the row? Does something about them just "bug" you? Is that a reason to push them away?

We're going to look into the subject of "Forbearance" today. "Forbear one another in love" the Bible says, and we're going to talk about "forbearance." I feel that it is a subject that we have lost in this era because "we wear our bones too tight." Our skin is stretched too thin. We don't give people any room to be human. If they're human, we shun them because we're perfect, aren't we? Please catch the sarcasm. Maybe we should be a little forbearing because maybe that will determine how forbearing God is with us.

It's always good to define our terms, but before I go into that I just want to ask the question: "Have we made forbearance a part of our character? Have we even thought about working it into our character?" I doubt that many of us really have. We just think we are forbearing, and we may not be. So let's go ahead and define our terms, because it's a good idea to do so before

we get too far into a subject. We want to understand what we're talking about.

Here's the dictionary definition of forbearance. It means, refraining from the enforcement of something. That's its basic definition. Refraining from the enforcement of something could be a debt, it could be a right that we have, it could be an obligation that we have which is due and needs to be paid, but we refrain from enforcing it for whatever reason, even though it may be due. That's like a legal definition.

Maybe we would explain it as showing patience, even though something is owed us. It is holding back or restraining the self from doing something that would be normal to do. It is controlling one's self when provoked or offended. It's synonyms, if we look at them, show us some of the nuances of the word *forbearance*. Some of these synonyms are patience, leniency. Leniency doesn't mean that you allow anything to go on. A more strict definition of leniency means that you don't give the full punishment for something, or the full amount of something. You still exact justice, but it's not as harsh as it could be.

Another one is tolerance. There are levels of tolerance. You can tolerate a person and not tolerate what he's done. You could forbear with him while he's trying to repent. Another one is self-restraint, which is holding back the self from doing something that one may regret in the long run. Another one is command of temper. Do we just lash out when something happens, rather than controlling ourselves? Endurance is another one. Longsuffering is another one.

We find the idea for forbearance coming up in the Bible under different words, and endurance and patience are some of them. Even the word clemency is another synonym of forbearance. Clemency pops up at least in the *New King James* once or twice. Another term would be mildness, ...that you're mild rather than harsh. Another synonym would be mercy, or merciful, which is another word that pops up in the Bible as well as the word pardon.

All these are synonyms of forbearance that give you a little idea, a little look into how broad the application of forbearance is. Self-restraint, patience, leniency, tolerance, command of temper, endurance, longsuffering, mildness, mercy, clemency, pardon are all synonyms for forbearance.

There are several Hebrew words that are translated "forbear" or "forbearance" or "forbearing" in the Old Testament, but they all have very similar meanings. They run from: to keep silent, or to be still, to stop or leave off doing something, to withhold from, or to spare another.

Another one means to draw, or to stretch out, or to prolong—like you prolong or draw out or stretch out somebody's period of grace, let's say, where they owe you something; but you prolong the time they have to give it back to you (like a payment of a debt). Another one means to contain, or hold in. This is the idea of self-restraint. You hold in what you feel like doing. You restrain from washing out someone.

Let's go to Nehemiah 9 just to see one of these in context. This is something that God does. I wouldn't be talking about it if God didn't have this virtue. This is part of a much longer prayer of confession to God for the sins of Israel. People there in Nehemiah's time got together. They had a big meeting, and the leaders here said this prayer before God and before the congregation.

Nehemiah 9:28-30 But after they [Israel] had rest, they again did

evil before You. Therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them; Yet when they returned and cried out to You, You heard from heaven; And many times You delivered them according to Your mercies, and testified against them, that You might bring them back to Your law. Yet they acted proudly, and did not heed Your commandments, but sinned against Your judgments, which is a man does, he shall live by them. And they shrugged their shoulders, stiffened their necks, and would not hear. Yet for many years You had *patience* [forbearance].

In the *New King James* it's translated *patience*, but the word is one of these ones that can also be translated *forbearance*.

Nehemiah 9:30-31 Yet for many years You had *forbearance* with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in Your prophets. Yet they would not listen. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless in Your great mercy You did not utterly consume them nor forsake them; For You are God, gracious and merciful.

Now we know that Israel had a yo-yo like obedience to God, didn't they? Sometimes they were up, sometimes they were down. But how long did God forbear with them? If we count from the Exodus happening in something like 1440 or so B.C until they were taken out of the land in 720 or so, how long did He forbear with Israel? That's seven hundred years of constantly breaking the covenant. Doesn't that say something about the patience of God—the forbearance—even with terrible sins—apostasy, spiritual adultery?

He punished them and gave them a chance for repentance, and they would for a while be obedient. And then they fell again, and He would forbear with them, give them a chance to repent, and then they wouldn't. So He punished them again to leave us an example of just that very thing to show us how God deals with us.

How often did God not give Israel what she deserved? Countless times I'm sure. In His mercy and patience He gave the Israelites time and space to repent. So in the end, as it says right here, He had to lower the boom. They got what they deserved. He just delayed the punishment until it could no longer be delayed anymore, because He wanted them to repent.

Let's go to the Greek words. The Greek words mean much the same as the Hebrew and English words. It's very consistent throughout language. There's this virtue of forbearance. Most languages I guess seem to have an idea of this—the holding back and enduring, patience.

The word *anehco* means to hold the self back; self-restraint; to delay punishment (in a more legal sense); a suspension of punishment until the proper time.

There's another word, *aniemi*. It means to send away or back. It means to allow to go away. The idea there is that if somebody does something wrong, you allow them to go away without

what is due to them. Understand? They seem to be getting away with it. You allow them to go away, but it's just a suspension of it. You're being lenient. You're showing clemency. You have a disposition to be merciful.

Another word is *phaidomai*. It means to refrain or to abstain; to hold yourself back again. Another one is *stego*. It sounds like stegosaurus, doesn't it? It might even be part of that word *stego*. It means to cover; to conceal, or protect. Now stegosaurus (the dinosaur) has the big long tail with the spikes coming out of it, plus it has the blades on the back that covered it. Those blades on the back of the stegosaurus covered the back of the stegosaurus when it was under attack, so it means covered lizard. Stego—cover, conceal, protect.

Another one that is often translated longsuffering is *makrothumia*. That may ring a bell for those of you who studied Greek words. *Makrothumia* means patient, enduring, bearing with another or a circumstance.

In II Corinthians 12:6 the Apostle Paul has just finished telling them that fourteen years ago he had had a vision of the third heaven. At least most people think that it was he himself who had the vision, although he says, "I know a man who had one," and it's probably his humble way of saying, "*Look. I had this vision of the third heaven fourteen years ago.*"

II Corinthians 12:6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I forbear, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.

What he is saying is, "*I'm going to restrain myself. I'm going to abstain from boasting, but I will tell the truth, that God gave me a vision of the third heaven.*" In a way he's saying "*This puts me on a rung above all the rest of you who haven't had this vision and don't see what it means*" But he says, "*I won't boast. I'm going to refrain myself and just give you the truth of it.*" Do you see the application here? "*I'm forbearing from doing something that might cause offense.*" He refrained, or abstained.

We'll see how Jesus uses this in Mark 9. This is a casting out of a demon.

Mark 9:17-18 Then one from the multitude answered and said, Teacher, I brought You my son who has a mute spirit. And wherever he seizes him, he throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid.

He was doing a lot more than making him dumb, wasn't he? He was taking over the boy's body, causing him to thrash over on the floor and gnash his teeth, and making him go absolutely rigid, like he was just stiff.

Mark 9:18 So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast him out, but they could not.

Now listen to Jesus' reply.

Mark 9:19 He answered him and said, O faithless generation...

Do you know whom He was talking to here? He was talking to His disciples, because they were the ones who had the problem. They couldn't cast the demon out.

Mark 9:19 ...how long shall I be with you? [*"Don't think that this circumstance is going to last forever... where these people can bring their child to Me because you flubbed up."*] How long shall I bear with you? [*How long shall I hold you up? How long do I have to support you before you can walk on your own?*] Bring him to Me. [*"I'll do it."*]

"How long shall I bear with you?" This is an *anecho*. It means to endure, or put up with. "*How long do I have to put up with you disciples? Where's your faith? Say the word and the demon will be cast out. How long do I have to endure your faithlessness?*" He says. "*How long do I have to support you in this?*"

In these last two scriptures we have seen restraint, self-restraint, or refraining from, or abstaining from—*pheidomai*; and bearing with, or enduring, or putting up with in the word *anecho*. These are the two main ideas in forbearance—self-restraint and endurance—two major elements of forbearance. I might want to add here that it is also intimately linked with the concepts of clemency, patience, longsuffering and mercy. As a matter of fact, like I said before, they are almost synonymous.

Let's see how God shows forbearance to His people. We're going to look particularly at His servants in the Old Testament, because in the Old Testament God has painted us a picture of people over great expanses of time. The Old Testament goes from creation, before creation, all the way up to "zero." How many years was that? In human terms that was about four thousand years worth of history, and He worked with people over long stretches of time, showing His forbearance to them all the while.

It's kind of funny to think of forbearance in a way. One commentary I read had a thought that most of us have probably had (if we've ever thought about forbearance in relation to God). This man wrote, "If God had been a man, He would long since have taken His hand, and in sheer irritation wiped the world out for all its disobedience. But God's patience waits and loves." Haven't you ever thought that? I have. Boy! How does God do it? People are so evil. Why doesn't He just go 'whoosh' and be done with it? But He's forbearing.

In Exodus 34 we'll see this is a major part of God's character. When Moses had this experience with the children of Israel and the golden calf, he was pretty upset. He had done all this, finally bringing them out of Egypt. They had heard the law, they had accepted it, and so while he's up there with God, they're down there carousing around this golden calf.

They didn't get it. They had just pledged themselves to God, and now they're worshipping this golden calf. And so he said, "*God, let me see You. I need a 'pick-me-up'.*" And so when Moses

went up the mount to get the second set of tablets, this is what happened:

Exodus 34:4-5 So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. Then the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

He was preaching him a sermon on what He is. The names of God describe God. They tell us what God is, what He does, what He will do for us.

Exodus 34:6-7 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious. [What does He start off with? These ideas of forbearance.] longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth. [They all have elements of forbearance in them.] Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity.

This is just what Moses needed to hear. God says, *"I've forgiven them. Maybe if I haven't forgiven them, I'll at least be lenient to them. They'll get theirs in the end, but I'm merciful, I'm longsuffering, I'm gracious, I'm willing to give them a chance"*

Exodus 34:7 ...and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty [Make sure you understand that. He is still a God of justice. He may be lenient, but justice will be done.] visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

But what does He lead with? He leads with forbearance. But His forbearance is not limitless. Let's get that straight.

Genesis 6:3-7 And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not [*forbear*] with man forever. [I threw one in there, didn't I? The word is "strive." He won't contend, but it's the same idea. He won't endure man's sin forever.] For he is indeed flesh [He recognizes that we're human. We make mistakes.] let his days shall be one hundred and twenty years. Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.

Genesis 6:11-13 The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

He had reached that point where forbearance was no longer a possibility. It had gotten so bad that He did what this commentator wondered about (why He hadn't done that earlier). He just went whoosh! and everything on the earth was dead except what was found in the ark.

He had a limit. He's forbearing, but He has a limit, and if we combine this with Matthew 24: 37 where it says the end is going to be like the days of Noah, then we can surmise that this world is going to soon reach that limit with God again, and it's going to be a whole lot worse because this time it's going to be not just quick death, it's going to be three and one-half years of literal hell on earth.

Let's read Genesis 20. I want everybody to see how God worked with His servants. This is the episode of Abraham lying to Abimelech. Abraham journeys to the south, and he dwells between Kadesh and Shur, and he lived for a while in Gerar. There was a king in Gerar named Abimelech. What happened here is that Abraham said that Sarah was his sister.

Now this was a half-truth. She was indeed his sister. They were half-brother, half-sister. They had the same father, but not the same mother, so he told a half-truth. He didn't tell Abimelech that she was his wife. He left out some very important information, and the reason for it was that he was trying to save his own skin. *"They'll kill me if they find out this is my wife."*

How long did God forbear with Abraham? With converted Abraham? You might think, "Oh, I read this in fifteen seconds." *No.* Verse 17 takes place after everything was all cleared up between him and Abimelech.

Genesis 20:17-18 So Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his maidservants. Then they bore children; for the LORD had closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

How long did it take them to notice that all the women in Abimelech's house were barren? I don't know. At least a couple months. And this is the "father of the faithful" that we're talking about. God didn't strike him down for his lie. He gave Abraham a chance to repent, a chance to confess both to God and Abimelech what the truth was, ...but he never did it. And so finally God stepped in and gave Abimelech a dream and told him that he was keeping His prophet's wife, and he'd better give her back.

Now notice God's forbearance. Not only did He do this over a while, whatever time it was, but He kept Abimelech from defiling Sarah. He also kept Abimelech from killing Abraham for lying to the king. And you know, He worked everything out. It could have been an awful situation. It

could have been that Isaac was never born, because Isaac isn't born until the next chapter. Also He was showing His forbearance with Sarah, because she was in on it. Call her "the mother of the faithful." She's mentioned there in Hebrews 11.

Now I'm going to throw one in here. This was the second time that it happened! Look back at Genesis 12: 10-20 and the same thing happened between Abraham and Pharaoh fifteen or twenty years before. How long was God's forbearance now? Fifteen or twenty years.

But He had given Abraham time to repent of this sin, but he never did it. Eventually I'm sure that he did, but here we have a fifteen or twenty-year period of time where God tested him on the same problem in order to help him grow in character. I thought that was kind of interesting.

Let's go to Judges 14—the story of Samson. Have you ever wondered about Samson? I have. Samson had a chronic womanizing problem, and what was worse, they weren't Israelite women. They were foreign women. He liked the Philistine women, and he liked a foreign Philistine prostitute for some reason. Let's just check something out. His story starts in chapter 14, but in chapter 15, verse 20, I want you to see how long this was that God forbore with Samson.

Judges 15:20 And he judged Israel twenty years in the days of the Philistines.

This was about the same amount of time He gave Abraham. It also says this right after he dies there in Judges 16: 31 that he judged Israel for twenty years.

Judges 16:31 And his brothers and all his father's household came down and took him, and brought him up and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He had judged Israel twenty years.

In all this time he was dallying with this Philistine girl and this prostitute Delilah. But God put up with this man's lust, his fornication, for twenty years because God was working out a purpose in Samson, and He was giving him time to repent. Now He didn't keep the penalty away from Samson. Samson paid with his eyes and with his life in the end.

He didn't get away with anything. God just forbore with him for all that time to give him a chance to build the character that we know he eventually built, because he also is mentioned in Hebrews 11 as a hero of faith. Think about it. Think about God's forbearance. Twenty years of time here, and I guess seeing Samson and what he did means there's hope for us too.

You might want to jot down II Samuel 11 through the end of chapter 12. This is the story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite. Should God have struck David down as soon as he committed adultery? It could have started even earlier when David looked at her while she was naked there in the bathtub. Or was it after he planned with Joab to kill Uriah on the frontline? Or was it after the dirty deed was done when Uriah was actually dead? God didn't step in at those times. Do you know how long He waited?

In II Samuel 12: 15 it says that Nathan departed to his house, and the LORD struck the child that

Uriah's wife bore. The whole period of gestation went by before Nathan came and said to David, "You've sinned." How far had David fallen from grace during this nine-month period in which he had committed adultery? He had conspired to kill. He had actually not done the dirty deed himself, but it was attributed to him. And then he had taken Bathsheba as his wife.

You notice in verse 27 of chapter 11 that God had already imputed the evil to him. He had judged the matter. It says here, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." I don't know who translated that, but they did an awful job. Read the margin. It says, "But the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the Lord." He called a spade a spade, but He forbore to inflict the penalty for a very important reason, and that reason is found in Psalm 51. Let's look at that and read a few of those verses. What did it produce in David?

Psalm 51:1-4 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—That You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.

Psalm 51:10-13 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.

What did this episode produce in David? Repentance for sure. Tremendous growth in character. It produced Psalm 51 itself, which I think is a major piece of writing in all the history of the world. How many countless people has it taught repentance and the building of character? God had greater purposes here. Remember that David didn't get away with this, because when Nathan came to him he said, *"From this time on your house is going to have problems, buddy. You're not getting away from this sin. It's going to follow you for the rest of your days, and your children and your children's children."* If the throne over there in England is any witness to this, it's still happening to David's house. There are problems in the family about marriage and war. Dynastic squabbles. I should say "sex and war." They just cover over it with the sanctity of marriage in many cases.

What we see here is that if God blasted everyone at the first sign of sin, we would never have the chance to build character. No one would ever make it into God's kingdom. We'd just all be oil spots on the road. We would never have the chance to repent and say, "God, I was wrong. Lead me in the right way. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me. If you allow me to live, I'll teach sinners not to do this like I have done."

We could go on to other examples of God's forbearance with people like Moses, Elijah, and Jonah, who ran away from God. Job: Mr. Self-righteous. How long did God put up with that—a long, long time. What about Jacob? Aaron—*"Oh! I threw the gold in the fire and out popped this*

*golden calf!* He put up with other things and many other people.

If God had smashed them with both fists every time they showed their humanity, they would have soon given up and that would have been the end of it. They would have never become heroes of faith, never would have become examples, never would have made it into God's kingdom. They never would have qualified. So what we see is that God's forbearance is a vital tool in fashioning sons and daughters for His family. If He doesn't forbear, we don't have time and space to grow in character.

God practices His forbearance with us just as much as He did with those people in the Old Testament. We don't live in dread of immediate punishment, do we, because we understand this. God gives us a chance to repent. In fact God is so forbearing with us that it often works the other way. He is so merciful that we think that we've gotten away with something. We find this in Ecclesiastes. Solomon remarks upon this.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Because God doesn't spank us right away we think, "Ah hah! I can do more of this because look, God's not looking." You'd better believe He is.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, [There's that word. We found it's one of the definitions of forbearance.] yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. [What do we get out of what I just read here in the last verses of chapter 12?] Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is the whole duty of man. [Now listen to what he says.] For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.

You're not getting away with nothin'. God's forbearance is there for a reason, and it should make us repent; not to turn to more evil. It's a bit of His grace upon us. We don't merit His leniency, but He gives it to us so that we can develop the character of Him.

We'll see a New Testament parallel to this written by Paul:

Romans 2:2-3 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things [all the things that he mentioned in chapter 1 that were evil and perverse]. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the

same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

We just read in Ecclesiastes that we're not going to escape the judgment of God. He's going to bring every work into account, whether it's good or whether it's evil—even the secret things.

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of his goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Then he goes on and talks about how this is the way it works out.

Romans 2:5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

The forbearance of God isn't going to work for those who are sinners because they're going to keep on sinning. Verse 6 says God will ...

Romans 2:6-7 Render to each one according to his deeds. [but He will give] eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality.

You see, God's forbearance is not based on immediate obedience. He wants obedience sure, but He's not going to demand it immediately. He wants it. He desires it badly of you, but His forbearance is not based on you snapping to it right away. His forbearance is based on something more eternal. It's called "character" and "eternal life." I'm talking of eternal life in the sense of the quality of life that God lives. He'll put up with a little disobedience now and then. Notice I said "put up with." I didn't say He would just automatically forgive it. He'll put up with it if in the end He can produce the sterling godly character that allows us entrance into His kingdom.

But know, that for every work He is going to bring you into judgment. He's just going to extend the period of grace for a while until you repent. Eternal life you see (as is shown in verse 7) goes to those who by patient continuance do good. They keep at it a long time, and they seek after glory and honor and immortality. He's patient with us. He gives us room to work within the bounds that He has set up so that we can repent and put on the godly character that will allow us to enter His kingdom. God designed that His forbearance results in our repentance, and in the end our living eternally with Him.

Let's go to Romans 3. Let's see how some of this is taken care of, because this section is talking about God's justice.

Romans 3:21 But now the righteousness of God...

If you put the word as *justice* here for "righteousness," it gives a very clear sense.

Romans 3:21-26 But now the [*justice*] of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His *justice*, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His justice, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now that may sound kind of confusing to you, but what he's saying is that God can forbear with us because Jesus Christ came to this earth and died for all of us, for all of our sins. If we repent ask God forgiveness, then Jesus Christ's blood covers all of our sins. So justice has been done. The sin has been paid for by the blood of Christ. Do you understand? God can forbear with us and allow us to "get away" with our sins for a while, because if we repent, then Jesus Christ's blood covers our sins, and justice is done. A person died for those sins—our Creator, Jesus Christ.

But if we don't repent, what happens? We die, and the penalty is paid. So this is a legal maneuver by God. His forbearance is allowed under His legal system because Jesus Christ's blood pays the penalty for our sins. So He can be merciful and lenient for a while, and whether we repent, or whether we don't repent, justice is served because a death occurs—either Jesus' or ours. So now you see the legal basis for why He can be forbearing. He's already taken care of it, one way or the other.

Let's look at the other side of this forbearance. I hope this helps those who are going through sore trials now, especially the sort where it's another person involved who is persecuting you.

Luke 18:1-5 Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart, saying, There was in a certain city a judge who did not fear God nor regard man. Now there was a widow in that city and she came to him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. [There's someone bugging me, and you have the power to get this guy off my back] And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, Though I do not fear God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubles me I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

His reasons for doing this are not very good. They are unrighteous. But in the end he went ahead and did it. He avenged her on her enemy. Now an explanation.

Luke 18:6-7 Then the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge said. And

shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him,  
though He bears long with them?

He forbears with them. Scholars have a hard time with this "though He bears long with them" section here. Just a little phrase, but after reading it all, what I think it means is, "*And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He delays His response to them?*" He restrains His response. He holds back His response to them, and He says:

Luke 18:8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily [even though He delays His response.] Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?

Very interesting. What He's saying here is that God shows forbearance on the just and the unjust. You may be having a trial of some enemy out there. Did you ever think that God may be forbearing with your enemy? That's something to think about. Maybe He's working out something in that person's life in order to call him, or at least set him up for his calling when it happens. Did you ever think of it from the other side? God may be delaying His answer to you though you're crying out to Him day and night, because He's being forbearing on this sinner that's your enemy. Turn it around. If you want forbearance for yourself, you had better be able to give this other guy a little forbearance, because he's going to be your brother in the kingdom some day. He may be your enemy now, but you may work with him in the kingdom. That trial may not be just for you. Did you ever think of it that way?

So Jesus asks here, in the age when He returns, are we going to have the faith and patience to wait for His certain intervention? He's promised it. God will avenge them speedily. It will happen, but are you going to have the faith to wait until it's done? Have you gotten caught up with God's timing on things rather than your own, which is normally pretty selfish? "I want it now, God!" But He may be working with that other person too. To Him His intervention is speedy, but to us it might be molasses. But He is just showing His character for both sides of the issue. Something to think about.

II Peter 3:8-9 But beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [This is the timing we're talking about here. God's "speedily" isn't your "speedily." Why is it like this?] The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us [He's forbearing with us.] not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

This just backs up what I said there about Luke 18. He's working with everybody. He's working mainly with us. We are His children, but He's setting up things for the repentance of all.

II Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

And we don't know all, but it says that the earth is going to burn up.

11 Peter 3:13-15 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. [Listen to Peter's conclusion here.] Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace [with your enemies too], without spot and blameless; and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.

That God is longsuffering, is forbearing with us, means that we will be able to have salvation. It won't work any other way. If He was not longsuffering with us, there would be no salvation. We could never do it. We could never please Him. We would be oil spots on the road. "The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." You'd better be glad that God is patient, that He will take this time to work with us, however long it may be, so that we will be able to be in His kingdom, to grow in His character.

I mentioned earlier that "forbearance" is part of God's character that He wants us to learn to have as part of our spiritual arsenal. In fact, if the spirit of God is working in us, we should begin to produce it as a fruit. In Galatians 5: 22 there is the fruit of the spirit—longsuffering. That's the *makrothumia* that I talked about earlier.

It is the virtue of being patient with others. It is having a disposition to be merciful or lenient while waiting for change. I think its opposites are very telling. Its opposites would be: hasty in judgment, quick to condemn, demanding one's pound of flesh. In Colossians 3: 12-14 Paul says there that as God's elect we need to be "putting on" bearing with one another.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

What he does there is he links it with forgiveness, and he says that we have to have the forgiveness of Christ. He equates our forbearance and forgiveness of each other with Christ's forgiveness of us. Remember what He said there in Matthew 18: 22, that if your brother offends you, forgive him seventy times seven. That's a tall order, but it's part of our forbearance with our brethren. In Ephesians 4: 2 we are also encouraged to be forbearing. "Bearing with one another in love," it says.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.

Forbearance is a vital part of agape love. Do you know what it says in verse 3? His immediate

change of subject is that by bearing with one another in love, it produces unity of the spirit. Very, very interesting for our time today.

Forbearance in love produces unity, and when you see disunity, when you see scattering, you can be sure that someone has thrown out forbearance and love and humility, as he says a little bit earlier. Humility, forbearance, and love—when they're gone, everyone goes to the four winds because they can't put up with each other. They find reasons to be offended, and they scatter.

I Corinthians 13 is the love chapter. We just want to pick out the words "bears all things."

I Corinthians 13:7 Love bears all things.

This is that word *stego*. Remember the stegosaurus with his covering plates? This is *stego*. Do we love the brethren enough to bear with them? What Paul means here by using the word *stego* (meaning cover, conceal, protect) is that it is an act of godly love when you keep silent about unfavorable matters, when you restrain yourself from talking about somebody else's sin, when you delay judgment and keep your brother's reputation intact, when you keep a sin or a fault "*hush, hush*" between you and the walls as it were, so the person has time to repent and to recover from it.

There are things, there are sins, there are peoples' faults you take with you to the grave, like Paul said there about the man there in Corinth. "*These things shouldn't even be talked about. Shut up. Keep it to yourself. Cover that person's sin in love.*" Love covers a multitude of sins. Do you love your brother enough to give him a chance to repent? God does. Why can't you? It's causing the church to fly apart because we don't have the forbearance to allow our brethren to repent. We want to kick them out.

We want to shun them. We say, "Go to some other group. We can't stand you anymore." Why can't we be a little bit more forbearing like God is? He'll work it out. Let's show a little bit of love. "Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13: 1). Love covers a multitude of sins. Don't let any of our sins be a way for us to be mocked because you let the cat out of the bag and gossiped.

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

I don't like how the *New King James* translated this. The word is fine. It's a literal translation, but you'll see the margin says this should say: "Let your forbearance be known to all men," or "Let your graciousness be known to all men." Let it shine. And why? What does Paul say? Why? "The Lord is at hand."

Is this book written to us, or what? This is the absolute worst time in human history, and Paul wrote us a note from two thousand years ago and told us that this time, like it was in the days of Noah, is the time for us to be showing forbearance and exhibiting it to all men. This should be right up on top of the list of virtues that we want to put in our character. Let your gentleness, let your graciousness, let your forbearance be known to all men, especially at the end.

Squabbles and fights and offenses only make things that much worse in this worst time in human history.

Among us there should be peace, there should be unity. If anyone is showing love for one another and forbearance with one another, it should be God's church, and up to this point, in the past 7, 8, 9 years, we've failed the forbearance test. It doesn't mean you put up with evil for long, it means you give somebody a chance to change. If they don't change, then matters have to be worked at in order for there to be peace. But we need to start with forbearance.

We need brotherhood, not separation. Christ is at hand. So let us, as a church and as individuals, work hard, ...as hard as we've ever worked, to apply this character trait of forbearance in our lives. As Jerry V. would say, "Let's wear our bones a little bit looser so that we all have the time and the space to repent and grow."

Everybody please have a good Sabbath.