
Words of Truth

God's Forbearance Has Limits

By: Brian A. Yeager

When Paul was writing the Christians in Rome he had to deal with a division between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Both the Jews and the Gentiles thought they were better than one another. Paul wrote about how, in the past, they were all sinners in need of salvation (Romans 3:9-23). After establishing that they were equal in that both Jews and Gentiles that had lived under the Law of Moses were sinners needing grace, we read this: *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God"* (Romans 3:24-25). Paul's point was that there was no boasting that could be made either by the Jew or Gentile for it was not the law or their works that justified them (Romans 3:27).

The forbearance of God is supposed to lead man to repentance (Romans 2:4). It is not supposed to be boasted of or sought to gain man an advantage in some way. The Greek word that is translated "forbearance" [ἀνοχή] in both Romans 2:4 and Romans 3:25 means this: "selfrestraint, that is, tolerance: - forbearance" (Strong's # 463). God has been tolerant at times to allow people to repent of sin and be saved.

God had a certain level of tolerance in the Old Testament (Acts 14:16), that has since come to pass (Acts 17:30). Thus, as we study this subject matter we need to really focus on the New Testament as God's tolerance level has changed. That does not mean that He has no tolerance at all. We can see that there are times wherein He gives those who sin "space for repentance" (Revelation 2:1-7, Revelation 2:12-3:6, and Revelation 3:14-22). Is there a point though when God becomes intolerant? Is He tolerant in every case of sin? Let's consider such.

Is There A Point Wherein God Becomes Intolerant?

In the example I am about to use we need to understand that no Apostles exist today. To be an Apostle one had to be an eye witness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:12-26). The Apostle Paul was the last one to witness the resurrected Christ (Acts 9:1-20), as an Apostle "born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Thus, as we consider this example I am about to quote, we need to understand that such an event would not occur today.

Now to our example. Consider what happens in this context: *"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all."*

Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Josus, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 4:32-5:11).

How tolerant was God with Ananias and Sapphira? Did He give them multiple rebukes? Did He grant them time and time again to think things over and repent. The answer is, "NO"! What does that teach us? Can we say that God will always allow the "Prodigal Son" to return after time (Luke 15:11-32)? He did not with Ananias and Sapphira.

God is longsuffering (II Peter 3:9-15). However, that doesn't mean He will be tolerant in every case of sin. We have to balance the fact that we can be forgiven of sins (I John 1:9), with the fact that such forgiveness is not a "given" (Hebrews 10:26-31). God's tolerance has limits. We cannot define those limits, that is the Lord's decision. We have to be cautious in not thinking too liberally about grace (Romans 6:1-2).

Consider what Peter said to Simon, who had erred (Acts 8:13-19), and was rebuked for his errors (Acts 8:20-21). Note: "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, **if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee**" (Acts 8:22). Isn't that scary? Do we [faithful Christians] all realize how that we are barely saved (I Peter 4:17-19)? Is it possible that people count too much on the possibility of forgiveness? Do you? Do I? Think on these things!

Conclusion

Think hard about the following quote, study it, look up the word translated "peradventure" (Strong's # 3379): "*And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will*" (II Timothy 2:24-26).