
Words of Truth

Uncompromising Forbearance

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I titled this article “Uncompromising Forbearance” because the subject matter can be just as confusing as the title. Forbearance means: “to hold oneself up against, i.e. (figuratively) put up with: — bear with, endure, forbear, suffer” (Strong’s # 430). If you are going to “put up with” someone or something that infers some level of compromise may be necessary. Thus, this subject matter is not all that black and white.

To illustrate this read Romans 14:1-15:7. In that context, regarding authorized liberties, you learn that those with mature, informed consciences are to bear with the immature who have a weaker conscience. In such a case, someone strong knows that they are permitted of God to eat all meats (I Corinthians 8:1-13 and I Timothy 4:1-5), but they compromise by not eating those meats for the sake of the weaker brother’s conscience.

With that information, how are we going to talk about having an uncompromising forbearance? Before we get into that, let’s start by seeing God’s instructions to those of us in Christ that we are to forbear with one another.

Saints Are Commanded To Be Forbearing

*“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, **forbearing one another in love**; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; **Forbearing one another**, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Ephesians 4:1-3 and Colossians 3:12-13).*

We all know that if we are instructed to do something, and we do not do it, we are sinners (Matthew 21:28-32, James 2:9-12, James 4:17, and I John 3:4). Therefore, we whom desire to be saved will certainly obey the instructions to practice forbearance with one another. Now, I’d like to come back to the point of this study. The question is how do we practice forbearance, that requires a certain level of compromise, without being compromisers? This balance has cost many their souls for many have overcompensated one way or another with this subject matter. The balance is found in the difference between law and liberty.

Compromise In Liberty, Not In Law

Words have various meanings and applications that can often cause confusion. For example, we live under the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). So, how do we separate law from liberty when the two are tied together in passages like the one I just referenced. The answer is, you cannot. God by law has given you certain areas of life wherein you have choices to make and other areas of the New Testament law wherein you do not have choices.

God says you can choose to celebrate certain days of the calendar year if you choose to do so (Romans 14:6). Therefore, He has given you a lawful liberty. On the other hand, He has said that you cannot exalt one day to make it more than a lawful liberty (Galatians 4:8-10 and Colossians 2:12-17). Therefore, this liberty is restricted by law. The Lord says you can choose to marry or you may choose not to marry (I Corinthians 7:1-40). However, He has limited by Law who may choose to marry and who may not (Matthew 19:3-9 and Romans 7:1-3). So, how does that all relate to our study?

Let's take marriage for an example to illustrate practicing forbearance without compromising. If a brother or sister in Christ chooses to marry a non-Christian, he or she has made a decision that is unwise for various reasons according to the Scriptures (Proverbs 13:20, Matthew 12:25, I Corinthians 15:33, etc.). However, it is lawful for a saint to be married to a person of the world (I Peter 3:1-7). We cannot withdraw ourselves from this person. We must practice forbearance. We must tolerate this unwise decision. You may choose in your life to separate yourself from every ungodly influence you can. That would be wise. However, you must forbear with this brother or sister in Christ in being around his or her spouse even though such is a choice you may not have made.

In continuing with marriage as our illustration, let's say we have a fellow saint that has been put away for reasons other than fornication. This brother or sister decides that his or her carnal desires are so great that marriage is necessary. Can we forbear? No! This is an unlawful choice. It is "another doctrine". This brother or sister is bound to remain unmarried or reconcile with his or her spouse (I Corinthians 7:10-11; cf. Mark 10:1-12). We cannot allow this unlawful practice to occur (Ephesians 5:6-11). Do you see the differences?

Conclusion

We may forbear wherein God has authorized us to practice forbearance. As with all things, the Scriptures are our standard to follow (Luke 4:4 and II Timothy 3:14-17). We must never allow another doctrine to be taught or practiced among us (Galatians 1:6-9, I Timothy 1:3-7, and II John 1:9-11). What we can allow is our brothers and sisters in Christ to act in ways we may not, as long as the Scriptures give them authority to make the decision that may be different than yours. We can forbear in areas of lawful liberty (i.e. I Corinthians 10:23-33).