
Words of Truth

With Longsuffering, Forbearing One Another In Love

By: Brian A. Yeager

The words “longsuffering” and “forbearing” are scary to some of us. The reason for that is that we have seen many use those words incorrectly. Many have used those words to justify compromising the truth. Therefore, let me be clear, nothing in this article is to be taken to mean that we can compromise the truth. We may never compromise for any period of time (Proverbs 19:27, Proverbs 23:23, Proverbs 29:27, Romans 16:17-18, I Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 2:1-5, Jude 1:3-4, and Revelation 2:14-16). True unity must exist amongst brethren in all things at all times (Romans 15:5-6, I Corinthians 1:10, Philippians 2:2, and Philippians 3:16).

Another confusion some make concerning being longsuffering is that they think such means you go a period of time when someone sins and you say nothing. Notice carefully, it is NEVER right to allow a brother or sister in Christ to err and for you to remain silent concerning such. Even a babe in Christ needs to know when they've erred (Acts 8:13-24). It is the work of faithful Christians to restore erring Christians (Luke 17:3-4, James 5:19-20, and Jude 1:22-23).

Another confusion that people make with the terms “longsuffering” and “forbearing” is the idea that you have to tell someone “softly” that they are wrong. While there are different approaches to every error (i.e. Matthew 16:21-23, Acts 18:24-28, I Timothy 5:19-20, etc.), you must allow the Scriptures to define how you approach every situation. This will take, in principle, time in just you discerning the Scriptural approach to each situation. One thing that will not change is that you can NEVER “beat around the bush” (II Corinthians 3:12, Ephesians 6:19-20, I Thessalonians 2:2-4, and Titus 1:10-14).

There is a flipside to the coin (so to speak) to address and that is the purpose of this article. There are sometimes those individuals that are so afraid of compromising that they rarely are longsuffering with anyone. We have to understand that sometimes there will be people in error, even entire congregations, which will take time to restore to the Lord. Sometimes there will be those who are not ready or able to learn all they need to (Mark 4:33 and I Corinthians 3:1-3). Such is not always an indictment on that person either (John 16:12). Therefore, we cannot expect people to “get it” when we think they should. Each person has a different level of learning capabilities. You have to know that person to know what to expect from them.

Now, before we move on in this brief study, let me clarify one other thing. To be longsuffering with an individual you have to know he or she is willing to learn. If a person is unwilling to learn there is no room for being longsuffering (Matthew 13:53-58 and Acts 13:42-51). Trying to teach a person who is unwilling to learn is a sin (Proverbs 9:7-9, Matthew 7:6, Matthew 15:1-14, I Timothy 6:3-5, II Timothy 2:23, and Titus 3:9-11).

Thinking Through Being Longsuffering And Forbearing

Consider this text: *“Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit”* (Hebrews 5:11-6:3).

In the text above, the inspired writer of the book of Hebrews (cf. II Timothy 3:16-17) is telling people who are failing that they need to grow in Christ. They were dull of hearing. That means, in essence, they were slow [sluggish] learners. They were not where they should have been spiritually. They needed retaught things they should have already mastered. Did that mean they were unteachable? Did that mean they should be marked and withdrawn from? Obviously, based on the context, they were not beyond hope (Hebrews 6:9). Efforts, that required teachers to be longsuffering, were being made. We can see through the Scriptures that if someone is willing to learn we need to be willing to teach. That is true because we are COMMANDED to practice longsuffering and forbearance.

The Commands Are Clear

Notice: *“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... Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine”* (Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 3:12-13, and II Timothy 4:2).

The spiritual fruit that we are to produce as Christians includes being longsuffering (Galatians 5:22-23). Persuading someone to make a good choice often requires you to be forbearing (Proverbs 25:15). Love is at the root of these things (I Corinthians 13:4-7). Do you love others enough to take the time to help them IF they are willing to be helped?

Conclusion

When helping others we are to be mindful of ourselves (Galatians 6:1). I can recall times in my life wherein I am thankful God had been longsuffering with me (II Peter 3:9). Can you recall such times in your life? Can you recall times wherein others have helped you do what is acceptable to God when you were not “getting it” as quickly as you should have? I sure can. I can recall here in El Paso such times wherein this congregation needed to study authority, discipline, songs, prayer, etc. to get those things right. It took time. It worked because there are honest hearts here. If we find such people, who need time, let’s grant it!