

Mutual Forbearance

by J.R. Miller

Mutual forbearance is the ability to endure and forgive the imperfections and wrongs of others, even when they cause us pain or offense, and it is essential for building and maintaining healthy relationships and promoting peace and happiness in our lives.

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1, Matthew 7:1-2, Luke 6:31, Romans 12:18, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13, James 1:19, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Mutual Forbearance", "Love and Patience"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the vital Christian duty of mutual forbearance, which is essential for maintaining happiness in our social interactions. He acknowledges that while human nature is imperfect and often leads to misunderstandings and grievances, the practice of love and patience can foster enduring relationships. Miller encourages believers to overlook faults, avoid a critical spirit, and respond to provocation with silence or kindness, following Christ's example of love and forgiveness. He highlights that true strength lies in self-control and the ability to rise above insults, reminding us of God's infinite forbearance towards our own shortcomings. Ultimately, he calls for a spirit of love that can transform our interactions and help us navigate the complexities of human relationships.

Transcript

Among all Christian duties, there are few that touch life at more points than the duty of mutual forbearance, and there are few that, in the observance or the breach, have more to do with the happiness or the unhappiness of life. We cannot live our lives solitarily. We are made to be social beings. It is in our communion with others that we find our sweetest pleasures and our purest earthly joys. Yet close by these springs of happiness are other fountains that do not yield sweetness. There often are briars on the branches from which we gather the most luscious fruits. Were human nature perfect, there could be nothing but most tender pleasure in the mutual minglings of life. But we are all imperfect and full of infirmities. There are qualities in each one of us that are not beautiful--many that are annoying to others. SELF rules in greater or less measure in the best of us. In our busy and excited lives, we are continually liable to jostle against each other. Our individual interests conflict, or seem to conflict. The things we do in the earnest pressing of our own business and our own plans and efforts seem at times to interfere with the interests of others. In the heat of emulation and the warmth of self-interest, we are apt to do things, which injure others.

Then, in our closer personal contact, in society and in business relations, we are constantly liable to give pain or offence. We sometimes speak quickly and give expression to thoughtless words, which fall like sparks on other inflammable tempers. Even our nearest and truest friends do things that grieve us. Close commingling of imperfect lives always has its manifold little injustices, wrongs, oppressions, slights and grievances.

Furthermore, we do not always see each other in clear and honest light. We are prone to have a bias toward self, and often misconstrue the bearing, words, or acts of others. Many of us, too, are given to little petulance's and expressions of ill-humour or bad temper, which greatly lessen the probabilities of unbroken fellowship.

Thus, it comes about that no Christian grace is likely to be called into play more frequently than that of mutual forbearance. Without it, there can really exist no close and lasting friendly relationships in a society composed of imperfect beings. Even the most tender intimacies and the holiest associations require the constant exercise of patience. If we resent every apparent injustice, demand the righting of every little wrong, and insist upon chafing and uttering our feelings at every infinitesimal grievance, and if all the other parties in the circle claim the same privilege, what miserable beings we shall all be, and how wretched life will become!

But there is a more excellent way. The spirit of love inculcated in the New Testament will, if permitted to reign in each heart and life, produce fellowship without a jar or break.

We need to guard first of all against A CRITICAL SPIRIT. It is very easy to find fault with people. It is possible, even with ordinary glasses, to see many things in one another that are not what they ought to be. Then some people carry microscopes fine enough to reveal a million animalcules in a drop of water, and with these, they can find countless blemishes in the character and conduct even of the most saintly dwellers on the earth. There are some who are always watching for slights and grievances. They are suspicious of the motives and intentions of others. They are always imagining offences, even where none were most remotely intended. This habit is directly at variance with the law of love, which thinks no evil.

We turn to the Pattern. Does Christ look upon us sharply, critically, suspiciously? He sees every infirmity in us, but it is as though He did not see it. His love overlooks it. He throws a veil over our faults. He continues to pour His own love upon us in spite of all our blemishes and our ill-treatment of Him. The law of Christian forbearance requires the same in us. We must not keep our selfish suspicions ever on the watch-tower or at the windows, looking out for neglects, discourtesies, wrongs, or grievances of any kind. We must not be hasty to think evil of others. We had better be blind, not perceiving at all the seeming rudeness or insult. It is well not to hear all that is said, or, if hear we must, to be as though we heard not.

Many bitter quarrels have grown out of an IMAGINED slights, many out of an utter misconception, or perchance from the misrepresentation of some wretched gossip-monger. Had a few moments been given to ascertain the truth, there had never been any occasion for ill-feeling.

We should seek to know the MOTIVE also which prompts the apparent grievance. In many cases, the cause of our grievance is utterly unintentional, chargeable to nothing worse than thoughtlessness--possibly meant even for kindness. It is never fair to judge men by every word they speak or everything they do in the excitement and amid the irritations of busy daily life. Many a gruff man carries a good heart and a sincere friendship under his coarse manner. The best does not always come to the surface. We should never, therefore, hastily imagine evil intention in others. Nor should we allow

ourselves to be easily persuaded that our companions or friends meant to treat us unkindly. A disposition to look favorably upon the conduct of our fellow-men is a wonderful absorber of the frictions of life.

Then there are always cases of real injustice. There are rudenesses and wrongs, which we cannot regard as merely imaginary or as misconceptions. They proceed from bad temperament or from jealousy or malice, and are very hard to bear. Kindness is repaid with unkindness. We find impatience and petulance in our best friends. There are countless things every day in our associations with others, which tend to vex or irritate us.

Here is room for the fullest exercise of that divinely-beautiful love which covers a multitude of sins in others. We seek to make every possible excuse for the neglect or rudeness or wrong. Perhaps our friend is carrying some perplexing care or some great burden today. Something may be going wrong in his business or at his home. Or it may be his unstrung nerves that make him so thoughtless and inconsiderate. Or his bad health may be the cause. A large-hearted spirit will always seek to find some palliation at least for the apparent wrong.

Another step in the school of forbearance is the lesson of keeping silent under provocation. One person alone can never make a quarrel: it takes two. A homely counsel to a newly-married couple was that they should never both be angry at the same time--that one should always remain calm and tranquil. There is a still diviner counsel, which speaks of the soft answer, which turns away wrath. If we cannot have the soft answer always ready, we can at least learn not to answer at all. Our Lord met nearly all the insults He received with patient uncomplaining silence. He was like a lamb silent before the shearer. All the keen insults of the cruel throng wrung from Him no word of resentment, no look of impatience. As the fragrant perfume but gives forth added sweetness when crushed, so cruelty, wrong, and pain only made Him the gentler and the love that always distinguished Him the sweeter.

It is a majestic power, this power of keeping silent. Great is the conqueror who leads armies to victories. Mighty is the strength that captures a city. But he is greater who can rule his own spirit. There are men who can command armies, but cannot command themselves. There are men who by their burning words can sway vast multitudes who cannot keep silence under provocation or wrong. The highest mark of nobility is self-control. It is more kingly than regal crown and purple robe.

"Not in the clamor of the crowded street,

Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,

But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat."

There are times when silence is golden, when words mean defeat, and when victory can be gained only by answering not a word. Many of the painful quarrels and much of the bitterness of what we call so often "incompatibility of temper" would never be known if we would learn to keep silence when others wrong us. We may choke back the angry word that flies to our lips. The insult unanswered will recoil upon itself and be its own destruction.

There is also a wonderful opportunity here for the play of good nature. There are some people whose gracious attitude always comes to their relief when they observe the gathering of a storm, and they will have a little story ready, or will suddenly turn the conversation entirely away from the inflammable subject, or will make some bright or playful remark that will cause the whole trouble to blow off in a hearty laugh.

It would seem possible for all to learn to bear insults or grievances in some of these ways, either in silence--not sullen, thunder-charged, but loving silence--or by returning the soft answer which will quench the flame of anger, or by that wise tact which drives out the petulant sentiment by the expulsive power of a new emotion.

There are at least two motives, which should be sufficient to lead us to cultivate this grace of forbearance. One is that no insult can do us harm unless we allow it to irritate us. If we endure even the harshest words as Jesus endured His wrongs and revilings, they will not leave one trace of injury upon us. They can harm us only when we allow ourselves to become impatient or angry. We can get the victory over them; utterly disarm them of power to do us injury, by holding ourselves superior to them. The feeling of resentment will change to pity when we remember that not he who is wronged, but he who does the wrong, is the one who suffers. Every injustice or grievance reacts and leaves a stain and a wound. All the cruelties and persecutions that human hate could inflict would not leave one trace of real harm upon us, but every feeling of resentment admitted into our hearts, every angry word uttered, will leave a stain. Forbearance thus becomes a perfect shield, which protects us from all the cruelties and wrongs of life.

The other motive is drawn from our relation to God. We sin against Him continually, and His mercy never fails. His love bears with all our neglect, forgetfulness, ingratitude and disobedience, and never grows impatient with us. We live only by His forbearance. The wrongs He endures from us are infinite in comparison with the trivial grievances we must endure from our fellow-men. When we think of this, can we grow impatient of the little irritations of daily fellowship? We are taught to pray every day, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." How can we pray this petition sincerely and continue to be exacting, resentful, revengeful, or even to be greatly pained by the unkind treatment of others?

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