

Family Ethics II – Diligently Forbearing

INTRODUCTION / REVIEW

Last week, we began to look at the ethics of the family. Paul wants us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called. That's vs 1. Vs 2 says that we are to have right attitudes: humility, gentleness and patience.

And now Paul calls his readers to have right methods. He gives two commands:

- bearing with one another in love, and,
- being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Let's take each of these apart and examine them.

FORBEARANCE:

Bearing up: The assumption is that the calling on our lives – the calling to believe the gospel and be followers of the Lord Jesus – is sufficiently compelling, it's a good enough reason to walk *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.*

Bearing with one another or forbearance is defined as patient self-control; self-restraint and tolerance.¹ The original word has the historical meaning of "holding oneself erect and firm, sustaining, bear with evenness of temper, enduring."

Think about how Jesus bore with his disciples. Time after time they failed him, but he always was patient with them.

- They couldn't heal the epileptic because of their small faith.² But he bore with them and continued to teach them.
- They with Jesus in a boat during a storm. While he slept, they were frightened, because of their small faith.³ But he patiently endured their lack of belief and calmed the storm.
- Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and gets out to do the same thing, but starts sinking because of his small faith.⁴ But Jesus takes his hand and rescues him.

What does this look like for us?

- When we are offended, what do we do, attack in return?
- When our good intentions are ill spoken of, do we say "poor me" and sulk?
- When we're badly treated or ever persecuted for taking a righteous stance, do we immediately defend ourselves?

In love: And note that this is the *agape* love of which we have often heard, different from the "love" we commonly hear about.

¹ See Friberg's Lexicon, entry 2060 (Timothy Friberg and Barbara Friberg, Analytical Greek New Testament (GNM), 2nd ed. (n.p.: Timothy and Barbara Friberg, 1994), BibleWorks, v.8.) and New Oxford American Dictionary (Dictionary program in Apple's Mac OS X 10.6).

² Mat 17.14-20

³ Mat 8.26

⁴ Mat 14.31

Jesus says of love:

- *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*⁵
- *Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.*⁶
- *Love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*⁷

This is the love of commitment and obedience, selfless and oriented outwards toward others in service, not merely emotional and inwards toward ourselves. Paul says:

- *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.*⁸

This isn't sweetness and light kind of love, the romantic music kind of love of the movies. It's more like the Band of Brothers kind of love, the dirt and grit and combat and noise of real life. It's the love that sacrifices, not takes. It's the love that surprises the recipient, because it's unexpected – and maybe it surprises the giver too, because we don't want to give it. It's obedient love, sometimes obedience with gritted teeth and a determined look.

And again, what does this look like for us? This is not the kind of tolerance that rolls its eyes and says: "you sure are lucky I put up with your nonsense!" and mutters names under the breath.

- When we are offended, we not only refuse to attack back, but we ... what do we do, attack in return?
- When our good intentions are ill spoken of, we not only refuse to say "poor me" and sulk, but ...
- When we're badly treated or ever persecuted for taking a righteous stance, we not only refuse to immediately defend ourselves, but we ...

It sounds crazy, doesn't it? Well, Paul thought it was crazy too.

*We are fools for Christ's sake ... To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*⁹

One another: One final comment about this section: while it seems obvious, do notice that we're to love one another. Don't let this fact escape you. When we are called to walk in a worthy manner, we're called to do it together as a community. This is not forbearance in abstraction. We aren't to love all the little children of the world and ignore each other. It's the 'you' and the 'me,' each of us right under our noses with whom we are to be tolerant, patient, and enduring.

⁵ Mat 19.19

⁶ Luk 6.27

⁷ Joh 13.34-35

⁸ 1Co 13.1-3

⁹ 1Co 4.10-13

It's the same idea as Jesus' answer to the disciples' question: Who is my neighbor?¹⁰ In their case, it was an heretical Samaritan! Who is it for us?

- wives,
- husbands,
- children,
- parents,
- work-mates,
- teachers,
- fathers,
- mothers,
- pastors,
- congregants,
- people who are always positive and people who are always negative and whomever else you should be putting on the list.

If we're not bearing with one another in these realms, then we are not bearing with one another in love.

EAGERLY MAINTAINING:

Eagerness / diligence: If the calling to which we have been called has the great value that Paul gives to us, then we must also walk: *with all humility and gentleness, with patience ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Another version reads *being diligent to preserve ...*

This diligence or eagerness signifies willingness to make every effort, intentionally working toward a goal. It's sparing no effort and wasting no time to accomplish something. And these are not just the efforts that are comfortable or convenient. It means to be zealous to accomplish some task, with all speed and energy. There's a sense of urgency about it. Peter uses this word when he writes:

According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation.¹¹

The sense here is: "It's not much longer now. God is holding back His judgment just a little while longer, so be sure to be diligent in your holiness!" It's not too different from knowing that your parents will be home soon and the house is a mess! "Quick, let's get it cleaned up!"

Spirit's unity: We are eagerly and diligently maintaining something that is not ours. It is the Spirit's unity, not our unity. Paul has a very specific kind of unity in mind. In fact, he defines what he means in the very next sentences:

¹⁰ Luk 10.29 ff.

¹¹ 2Pe 3.13-15

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.¹²

On what is our unity based? It's not one political perspective. Not one socio-economic stratum. Not one neighborhood. Not one age group. Not one marital status. Not one race. Not one country of origin. Not one denominational structure. Just this: One hope, one baptism, one Lord, one faith, one God, one Spirit = one body. It's the unity crafted by God's Spirit when we are born again.

Again, what does this unity look like for us? We could examine this in all kinds of ways: marriage, child-raising, or work. Let's use just one example – the church.

- Are you annoyed with someone who thinks differently from you, say, on the political or theological spectrum?
- Do you find it difficult to understand how someone can have different preferences in clothing, music, or sports?
- Are you just as committed to those brothers and sisters in our midst who don't have your background in the Episcopal church and so don't have the same sensibilities about worship?
- How are you doing with needy people?
- Are the affluent in our midst committed to unity with the less affluent – and don't forget that affluence has a wide range of definitions!
- By the way, those who are less affluent – wherever you are on the economic scale – are you jealous of or resentful of the more affluent?
- What about the negative people in our midst? Or the people with personality quirks?

Let me suggest that if any of these categories in this congregation touch on a “pet peeve” of yours – or perhaps there's another type of person that's more difficult for you – you can begin praying today and acting today toward eagerly maintaining the Spirit's unity.

Bond of peace: Finally, the Spirit's unity is maintained diligently and eagerly in the bond of peace. Peace, like many of the words in the Scriptures, has rich meaning. In the OT, it's a word we've all heard before: shalom. It has the sense of “completeness, safety, soundness, wholeness, health, tranquility, and contentment.”¹³

On this matter, I love the way Paul ends his 2nd letter to the Corinthians:

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.¹⁴

That's what the unity of the Spirit will look like in our midst. We'll know it's the authentic item, when it looks like this. We can call it unity, we can talk about unity, we can give it any description we want. But this is the genuine article, when it looks like the description that Paul gives to the Corinthians.

¹² Eph 4.4-6

¹³ BDB Lexicon.

¹⁴ 2Co 13.11-14

If the calling to which we have been called has the great value that Paul gives to us, then we must also walk in this way: *with all humility and gentleness, with patience ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

APPLICATIONS / CONCLUSIONS:

- Preaching on holiness could lead to lack of holiness and unity. That happens when one starts looking around and saying: "I sure hope xxyyzz is here! They sure need this!" It gives us another stick to beat on each other. Don't do that.
- Preaching on holiness could lead to despair. "I can't do this, I don't measure up!" That's right – you don't! See the 1st chapter of Ephesians.

Our response to the faith is never to say: "Well, now I've found Jesus for myself. I hope everything works out alright for you!" From the little band of Jesus' disciples, to the 3,000 after Peter's sermon on Pentecost, to the house churches that spring up under Paul, to St. John's today: the body of Christ, the community of the church, the fellowship of the saints – whatever one calls it, that's how our faith is first expressed – as a community together, with each other.

Our culture pushes us to atomization. Electronics and entertainment and the rugged individualism of American history tend to push us apart. Pettiness, jealousy, anger, and all sorts of sin keeps us apart. But the culture of Scripture, the culture of the kingdom of heaven, the culture of the faith, and the culture of being Christ's disciples brings us together.

If we call ourselves Christians, if we are in Christ Jesus, if we are really following Him; then:

I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Family Ethics II – Ephesians 4.2-3

1. Forbearance:

1.1. Defined: patient _____ - _____ - see examples from Jesus'

relationship with his disciples: Mat 8.26, 14.31, 17.14-20

1.2. In Love: *agape* is selfless and _____ (Mat 19.19, Luk 6.27, Joh 13.34-35, 1Co 13.1-3)

1.3. One Another: not an abstract idea. Who is my _____? (Luk 10.29 ff.)

2. Eagerly Maintaining

2.1. Defined: _____ no effort and wasting no _____ to accomplish

something, as with Peter's exhortation to be prepared for the return of the Lord (2Pe 3.13-15).

2.2. The Spirit's Unity: Unity crafted by God's Spirit when we are _____
_____ (Eph 4.4-6).

2.3. Bond Of Peace: Unity is _____ when we are at peace (2Co 13.11-14).

3. Conclusions / Thoughts

self-control, outward oriented, neighbor, sparing, time, born again, demonstrated