

FORBEARANCE



And as they sat at table in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

Matthew 9:10

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" they ask. Peter looks at John, John looks at Thomas, they shrug their shoulders. Before these men started hanging around with Jesus, they would not have been caught dead eating with tax collectors and sinners. Eating with tax collectors is all new to them, they don't know what to say. So Jesus comes to the rescue:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."



"Go learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

Jesus was quoting from Hosea 6:6, a passage that the Pharisees knew well. The Pharisees, being extremely religious, could not understand how Jesus, if he is a man of God, could be so lax as to fellowship with sinners. Jesus' approach was disturbing to them. There was an openness, an ease with people that made the Pharisees uncomfortable. They had been taught all their lives to stay away from "worldly people." If you were to attend a synagogue controlled by the Pharisees (and the Pharisees then controlled most synagogues the way the "Pharisees" today control most churches) you would find the atmosphere of a closed corporation. *"You don't*

come up to our standards, so what are you doing here?" On the other hand, if you went into a gathering where Jesus was teaching, you would find an open atmosphere. People feel at home; they're glad to see you; they call you by name. Scribes and Pharisees are mixed in with tax collectors and sinners---even a few priests. The difference between those Pharisee-dominated synagogues and those gatherings where Jesus was teaching, was this: The synagogues were pervaded by an atmosphere of *judgment*, In Jesus' gatherings, the atmosphere was *forbearance*. People were forbearing, patient.... toward *each other*, toward the newcomer, toward the sinner who came stumbling in from the world, looking for help.

Forbearance: the generous overlooking of insult or injury.

Let's face it: most of our churches today resemble the Pharisee-dominated synagogue much more than those gatherings where Jesus was present. "Tax collectors and sinners" don't feel too comfortable in our churches either. In fact, lots of people who attend our churches feel uncomfortable. Watch them as they approach the door. They stiffen, then they put on a spiritual smile. 'Check me off God, I'm going in there to suffer for an hour.... Oh hello, Mrs. Smith (you old gossip. I heard what you said about me behind my back.) Hi, brother Bill; Good to see ya! (I wonder how much he lost at the Casino this week.) (Uh-Oh, look who's here today! Charlie came to repent. He's been on a drunk all week; now he's coming to church so his wife will let him back in the house.) Hi Charlie, how are you?"....

Where's the forbearance?

The enemy of forbearance is self-righteousness.



When I'm full of my own righteousness, other people's sins look very sinful indeed.

When I'm full of my own righteousness, I'm short of patience with the self-righteousness I see in others. And I set out on a crusade "I'm going to bring them people to repentance", at the same time, strangely unaware of how blind I am to my own desperate need to repent. "I rise up early; I sit up late; I eat the bread of sorrows. I regard my life as one big, unappreciated sacrifice, while almost single-handedly, I hold the body of Christ together with my zeal for the "true way. I have a private line to heaven, and I know what needs to be done. I know who the troublemakers are"

.....Then one day, in his mercy, the Living God stops me in my tracks. "Call off the crusade", he says. "Come over here and sit down. Hold still, and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' Your zeal will accomplish nothing until you repent of your own, your own, lack of mercy."

And as they sat at table in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when he heard it, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.'



When the Spirit of the risen Jesus is truly welcomed into our midst, he transforms us from a Pharisee-dominated synagogue into a joyful celebration, like the one in Matthew's house. *I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*

The most meaningful offering that we can present to God, the clearest way we can show our gratitude to him, is by first showing forbearance toward each other.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

We're so grateful for the forgiveness, the healing, the new life which has come to us, that we can't help but be generous with each other.

***Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice.
Let all men know your forbearance.
Philippians 4:4***

Once upon a time there was a fellowship where they really knew how to rejoice in the Lord. Their worship was awesome. People would travel for miles to attend their meetings, where a thousand people would be lifting their hearts in praise to God.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice.

The Holy Spirit was moving. People would come broken and sick; they would walk away restored in body and mind.

Two things characterized that wonderful fellowship:

Joy in the Lord.

Forbearance toward each other.

Soon people were coming from other parts of the world to study this community with such glorious worship, such a depth of commitment to the Lord and to each other. As time passed, a

subtle change began to take place in that fellowship. The spirit of forbearance which marked their corporate life in those early days, began to give way to the spirit of those Pharisee's synagogues. The openness, the welcome, the friendship with one another, the mercy toward sinners, began to harden into a strange stiffness beneath their rigid smiles. Everybody was looking at everyone else. Everybody was on edge. Finally there was an open split. Hard words, hard feelings began to fly between brothers and sisters. And, of course, their worship lost its power.

At last a handful of believers in that dying fellowship (with the Spirit's help) discovered the missing ingredient: It was forbearance, "the generous overlooking of insult or injury." They began to see how futile it is to try to praise God, when our attitude toward each other is hard and judgmental. They began to repent. "Lord, you have commanded us to forgive as we have been forgiven. By your Spirit you command us now to show forbearance toward all. We confess that we have failed you in this, and we repent. We cry out to you for mercy and forgiveness, and for your help, as we try, once again, to open our hearts toward one another." Healing happened in that fellowship. And their praises of God once again have an authentic ring.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice.

I believe that the Spirit of the Lord wants to make his Body on earth like that joyful dinner party in Matthew's house.

He wants our private lives to be ruled by a spirit of forbearance.

He wants mercy, not sacrifice.

Mercy. Kindness. Forbearance



All the things we do in the name of the Lord will accomplish almost nothing, they won't accomplish much, they won't last long, they won't amount to anything... unless they are done in a spirit of forbearance;

Forbearance, first of all, to the people who are close to us, the people we live with, work with. How often we take them for granted! We judge them. We walk around for days with an attitude toward them. Let's ease up; let's give them a break. Let's show them some of that mercy the Lord has shown us.

Forbearance for brothers and sisters in the Body---all of them, no exceptions, the new ones, the old ones, the happy ones, the sad ones.

Mercy. Kindness. Forbearance

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Forbearance for the people who intrude on our lives. The ones who annoy us, bug us.

Forbearance toward the inconsiderate ones. Of course you don't have to dance every time they whistle but you don't have to walk around with an attitude.

Mercy. Kindness. Forbearance

Mercy toward the people we are convinced who have wronged us badly.

"Pray for those who despitely use you and persecute you."

Pray for them. Pray blessings on them.

And not just, "Dear Lord, show them how wrong they are". But "Dear Lord, pour out your grace on them! Shower them with good things, Shower them with blessings!"

When we take the forgiveness, the abundant mercy that comes to us from our Lord and turn it into forbearance toward each other---and toward all people.

Then the aroma of Christ will fill his house.

Then the joy of the Lord will rule our individual lives...

***Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I will say, rejoice.
Let all men know your forbearance.***



Lord God, we just ask that your Spirit searching our hearts would help us define exactly the step you'd have us take. Deliver us from being caught up in the changes we see needed in the other man or other woman's life. And enable us to yield to you as you speak to us. And we pray, Father, that you would shower us even this day with such a measure, such an abundant flow of your mercy, that we will almost be incapable of holding it back. And by that bursting forth of your grace and love that we may learn day after day, year after year to walk in the forbearance, which is Jesus himself. We ask it in Jesus's name. Amen.

Message and above prayer: Richard Bieber from Messiah Church's 1991 Harvest Dinner
Featured Art: Berna Lopez evangile-et-peinture.org

Prayer: Lord how we desperately need to be ruled by a spirit of forbearance. Give us hearts of mercy, kindness, forbearance. Forgive us for and rescue us from our own self-righteousness. Help us to look to you our forbearing God and offer forbearance to those around us as a sacrifice of love to you for having such mercy on us.. And yes Lord, shower us with such a flow of your abundant mercy that we are incapable of holding it back and it easily, willingly, naturally, lovingly pours out in blessings on any we need to forbear. Amen. Maranatha Mirror

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