

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Forbearance Philippians 4:5

There is an epidemic sweeping America that is affecting every household who has a telephone. What is that epidemic? Unwanted telephone calls from telemarketers. And the calls certainly are unwanted. CBS has reported that 97 percent of all Americans say they don't want unsolicited calls made to their homes from sales people. Americans do not merely dislike telemarketers they despise them.

A woman named Jeanette Otis, a 70 year old widow from Houston, said she gets about five unwanted calls a day. And she says for her the irritation begins “when they start out their conversations with “how are you today?”

Can you identify with her response? I must confess that I have been guilty of this same irritation. But hopefully help is on the way from federal regulators who I think are just as frustrated as we are. But until that help arrives how should we respond if we are unable to hang up during that time of initial silence before they start their sales pitch? How should we respond if we actually find ourselves talking to a real live telemarketer?

This weekend we will find some help in the passage that we have just begun to study which is **Philippians 4:4-9**. Let me read this passage for you, **“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (5) Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. (6) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (7) And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (8) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. (9) The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.”**

Paul has transitioned from his efforts to gain some help for Euodia and Synteche in resolving their conflict in **Philippians 4:2-3** to a series of final exhortations in **Philippians 4:4-9** which set the stage for Paul concluding His letter to the Philippian church. The first exhortation that we have already examined was given to us by Paul in **Philippians 4:4**. Hopefully you remember this very important and practical exhortation. What did Paul exhort the Philippian church to do? He exhorted them to **“Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice.”**

We need to be careful not to misunderstand what the Lord is calling us to do when he calls us to rejoice. He is not calling us to be happy. Happiness is an attitude of satisfaction or delight based on some present circumstance. Happiness is related to happenings. Happiness is related to “happstance.” Happiness is related to “hap” which is a word that basically communicates chance. Happiness is that which you really can't plan or program. Happiness may or may not happen. This is very different from biblical joy.

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When we are talking about biblical joy we are talking about something that is not related to circumstances or chance at all and that is why Paul commands us to rejoice. And how often are we to rejoice? **“Always.”**

Biblical joy is a deep down confidence that all is well with our soul no matter what the circumstances might be.” Today you might not feel particularly happy because of your present difficult circumstances, but you should be, at this very moment in time, experiencing biblical joy. Sometimes this joy will be rather subdued and at other times it will be wonderfully overpowering, but hopefully you will always be mindful of the joy that is ours in Christ. Hopefully you would always be able to sing along with Horatio G. Spafford the words of his hymn “It is well with my soul.” Not just giving lip service to the words of that song but rather joyfully singing those words from your heart.

What were the words to the first verse? “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll - whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

When did Horatio G. Spafford pen the words to that song? Shortly after his four daughters drowned as a result of shipwreck at sea. Was he happy about the deaths of his four daughters? No! He was grief stricken. But even though he was grief stricken what accompanied his grief? A deep down confidence that all was well with his soul. What accompanied his grief was biblical joy.

Though as Christians we may or may not experience happiness which is related to circumstances, joy should be our constant companion. Joy should be our expectation. What did Paul say in **Philippians 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always...”**

You might think that this particular command is extremely difficult but certainly it is not any more difficult than the very next command that we will examine this weekend. My hope for us in the study of this particular command is not only that it might help us in knowing how to respond to telemarketers but too anyone who may cause us irritation in our lives. I would hope that our study of this particular command will improve all your interpersonal relationships and therefore the quality of our lives.

What is the next command that Paul lists for us in **Philippians 4:4-9**. Let us now read **Philippians 4:5 “Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men, the Lord is near.”**

This exhortation is not grammatically connected with the admonition “rejoice in the Lord” in **Philippians 4:4**. Not only is it not grammatically connected there is no causal link as well. These two commands are totally independent of each other. Paul did this in order to emphasize the commands. He did this in order to make these individual commands stand out.

This brings us back to **Philippians 4:5**. What does the verse say? **“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men? The Lord is near.”** When the word, translated “forbearing spirit “ is used of a person in authority it describes a person who has chosen to exercise equity and leniency in trying to establish what is fair rather than depending solely on the letter of the law.

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But when this word translated “forbearing spirit” is used of a person who is not in authority it conveys a little different idea. The word translated “forbearing spirit” (EPIEKES) in Philippians 4:5 denotes the patient bearing of abuse at the hands of others.

If we understand the word in this way the NAS translation of the word translated “forbearing spirit” is an excellent translation. If you have another translation this morning other than the New American Standard it would be best for you to understand your particular translation in the way that I have just explained it.

For example if you have a KJV when it says **“Let your moderation be known unto all men, the Lord is near.”** should be understood something like this “let your moderated response to abuse be known unto all men. the Lord is near.” If you have a NIV bible with you this weekend, when it says **“Let your gentleness be evident to all, the Lord is near.”** this passage should be understood something like this “Let your gentle response when being abused be evident to all, the Lord is near.”

The word translated “forbearing spirit” (EPIEKES) in Philippians 4:5 denotes the patient bearing of abuse at the hands of others and this is how we should understand this term.

Certainly the Philippian church was undergoing hard times. We saw this earlier in the epistle in **Philippians 1:27-30.** What did this passage tell us? **“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) in no way alarmed by your opponents -- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”**

The Philippians were suffering at the hands of people who opposed the gospel of Christ. And in light of this suffering the Philippians had several options available to them. They could either be filled with ill will toward these individuals or they could forebear with them. Hopefully the Philippians would forebear with them. Hopefully the Philippians would patiently bear the abuse that was being heaped upon them.

This particular application would seem to be the primary application to the Philippian church but certainly it did not, and should not be the only application.

Anytime that we are suffering at the hands of another we have an opportunity to forebear or to patiently bear their abuse. But what does it mean to forebear patiently? Or in other words how might our forbearing spirit manifest itself? A forbearing spirit will manifest itself when we purpose to do good toward those abusing us rather than bad. Certainly Christ did this on the day that He was crucified.

It started out in the morning in the garden of Gethsemane. Do you remember what happened? Judas comes into the garden accompanied by a large number of men with swords and clubs and he betrays Jesus with a kiss. How did Christ respond to this betrayal ?

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He responds with the words, **“Friend, do what you have come for.”** The word “friend” (HETAIROS) should not be understood so much as a term of endearment but rather as a term of comradeship or partnership. But whether it was a term of friendship or comradeship in either case it was a manifestation of a forbearing spirit. Rather than retaliating Jesus purposed to treat Judas well.

But this was not the only time that morning in the Garden of Gethsemane that he had the opportunity to manifest a forbearing spirit. What happened immediately after this initial exchange between Jesus and Judas? Jesus was seized and in response to this action Peter immediately drew his sword and cut off the ear of high priest’s servant.

But even in the midst of all this Christ continued to manifest a forbearing spirit. How did He do this? Jesus immediately called Peter to put his sword away, repaired the ear of the high priest’s servant, made a statement that repudiated violence and reminded the disciples that if he wanted or needed help the heavenly hosts were available to protect him. He could have done a great deal of damage to those who were in the process of arresting him but He rather purposed to do them good he manifested a forbearing spirit.

All through Christ’s trial and crucifixion we continue to see this same forbearing spirit manifested but there is no more dramatic expression of Christ’s forbearing spirit than his prayer while being crucified **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”**

A forbearing spirit denotes a patient bearing of abuse at the hands of others which will manifest itself by a purposed determination to do good rather than bad toward those inflicting the abuse.

If someone cuts you off in traffic what are you going to do? Are you going to get upset with them and make some derogatory remark or are you going to bear it patiently quickly falling back to a safe distance while offering up a prayer for their safety? If someone takes your parking place what are you going to do? Are you going to make sure they see your displeasure or are you going to bear this injustice patiently trusting that God will continue to provide for you all the basic needs of your life, whatever those basic needs might be which might even be a parking spot. If your spouse does not show you the attention that you believe that you deserve what are you going to do? Are you going to withhold affection or will you be reminded to lovingly support your spouse in whatever struggle that they might be presently going through. If your teacher assigns an inordinate amount of homework, what are you going to do? Are you going to complain to your friends about the assignment or are you going to ask the Lord for the grace to give your very best effort in completing the assignment. If your boss has refused to pay you what you believe you deserve what are you going to do? Are you going to grumble and complain to your fellow employees or are you going to bear it patiently seeing this as an opportunity do your work heartily as unto the Lord rather than for men. Hopefully in all these situations you will manifest a forbearing spirit. Hopefully in all of these situations you will not allow the difficulty you are experiencing with the person to distract you from your Christian duty.

You might say to yourself that this might be okay in most situations but you just don’t know how much abuse I am suffering at the hands of so and so. Or you do not know how much abuse I have suffered at the hands of so and so in the past.

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Certainly many people have been abused severely at times but for Christians the standard is clear. No matter how much abuse we have suffered in the past or may be suffering in the present it is no excuse for not manifesting a forbearing spirit. How do we know this?

Let us go on in the verse. What does it say? **“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men except your very worst abuser.”** No, this is not what it says. What does it say, **“Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men.”** We are to manifest a forbearing spirit to all men no matter how abusive they may presently be or might have been.

In the course of my years here at Valley Bible Church there have been times that I suffered at the hands of certain individuals. Early on in my ministry at this church there were people who I knew who would have been delighted if I was crushed and my ministry destroyed. This is not a fun thing to go through especially when it lasts for over four years. But no matter how bad their attitude might have been toward me or how extreme their actions might have been against me I needed to continue to exercise a forbearing spirit.

Exercising a forbearing spirit did not mean that I needed to be silent. I was involved in many lengthy and difficult discussions with these individuals about the issues that separated us. In all those discussions my biblical responsibility was to maintain a forbearing spirit.

Exercising a forbearing spirit does not mean that I was prohibited in seeking help from others in resolving the problem that existed between myself and those who I perceived as being abusive toward me. In my case, I asked the church leaders at that time in our church history who we called the “executive board” to put me on trial and invite my accusers to bring their charges against me which they in fact did. And during this entire process no matter how painful the process became my biblical responsibility was to maintain a forbearing spirit.

Exercising a forbearing spirit does not mean that I was prohibited in altering my relationship with those individuals that I perceived as abusing me. Before the difficulties arose between myself and them I had done certain things with a few of them socially but after this conflict broke out that all stopped. It was no longer profitable for us to get together socially. But even though our relationship may have changed my biblical responsibility was to maintain a forbearing spirit.

In other words I needed to bear whatever abuse patiently purposing to do good toward these individuals rather than bad. Certainly this is what I was striving to do. I was striving to only what was best for them.

But why should we do such a thing especially when it gets so difficult? Let us continue on in the verse, **“Let your forbearing spirit be made known to all men. The Lord is near.”** The word “near” can be used either spatially or temporally. In other words it can be used to communicate the Lord is near in respect to proximity or in terms of the fact that He could return at any time. In which way does Paul use the expression here in **Philippians 4:5?**

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When Paul says that “the Lord is near” he is referring to the possibility that the Lord could return at any time. Though it is true that the Lord is near to us in proximity and is therefore always aware of our human condition this was not what was just emphasized in the immediate context. Let me read for you **Philippians 3:20-21**. Let me read these two verses for you, **“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”** Paul had just emphasized the return of Christ in these two verses and therefore this is the way that we should understand the sentence, **“The Lord is near.”**

Why should we patiently bear any abuse from others because the Lord could return at any moment. He is right at the door. And He has been right at the door for nearly 2,000 years. Considering the fact that at any moment we might be caught up into the Lord’s presence to enjoy fellowship forever it would seem like we would be able to forebear a little bit longer with those who make our lives difficult and to forebear so well that everyone that would come in contact with us will be able to see this quality.

CONCLUSION

We are now approaching the new year and I truly want to my forbearing spirit to be known to all men. I want by God’s grace to give my wife the opportunity to see my forbearing spirit. I want by God’s grace to give my children the opportunity to see my forbearing spirit. I want my forbearing spirit to be known to all men even to telemarketers.

I am still going to hang up on anyone who does not immediately respond to my initial “hello” believing that they might be a telemarketer but if perchance I end up talking to one of these individuals who are simply trying to make a living I do not want my initial response to their “How are you doing today” be one of irritation. And I am not going to sit and listen to them when I know that I am not interested. But I do want, as I am gently ending the conversation, from my heart to wish them and their family a happy new year.

If we honor this command to let our forbearing spirit be known to all men it will positively impact not only our lives but the life of everyone who comes in contact with us.