

# Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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## Showing Forbearance To One Another

by Dan Trygg

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, <sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Ephesians 4:1-3

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another, and forgiving ('gracing') each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave ('graced') you, so also should you."

Colossians 3:12-13

Two characteristics could provide convincing evidence to confirm both *Jesus' identity* (and the reality of His mission), and also *the identity of His true followers*. These two indicators would be so radically different that they would stand out like a flashing billboard. These were to be made visible in the interaction of Christians one to another, as well as toward all human beings. **These authenticating signs which we could (and *should*) display are (1.) *agapē-love*; and, (2.) *unity*.** Jesus said, "*By this all people will know that you are My followers, if you have love (Gk., *agapē*) for one another*" (Jn. 13:35). Also, if His followers would model a oneness that showed the reality of God living within them, ...a unity which the world could not produce on its own..., then "*the world will know that You sent Me, and loved them*" (Jn. 17:21-23). The incredible impact of the early church was due to the fact that "those who believed were of one heart and soul, and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them..." (Acts 4:32-35; cf. 2:42-46). **The love and unity of the early believers was so astonishing that everyone sat up and took notice.** True, God was bearing witness with miraculous signs, but healings and supernatural signs were not uncommon in pagan religion, nor was it unknown to the Jews. **The love and unity, however, -- this was a *new thing*. It had tremendous persuasive power that God *must* be among these people.**

The apostle Paul was no stranger to these two important markings of our spiritual pedigree. Regarding *agapē*, he wrote that the very "*goal of our instruction is love*" (I Timothy 1:3-5). In I Thess. 4:9,10, he encourages the believers to *abound more and more* at doing the love that God Himself has taught them. **Regarding *unity*, we find repeated examples in Paul's letters dealing with this theme.** In Rom. 15:5,6, he writes, "Now may God... grant you to *be of the same mind* with one another according to Christ Jesus; that *with one accord* you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In I Cor. 1:10, "Now I exhort you, brethren, ...that you all *agree*, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete (fitted-out, adapted, equipped) in the *same mind* and in the *same judgment*." **How does this work out in practice?** "*To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... But God has so composed the body, ...that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another*" (I Cor. 12:7,24,25). **By valuing one another, and caring for one another, we can transcend our differences and discover our oneness in Him. This often requires diligent work, sacrifice, and tolerance on our part** (Eph. 4:1-3; Col. 3:12-17). **There is a cost involved in cultivating and maintaining such unity.** However, the maturity of character produced by walking out the necessary process, the joy that develops out of the unity itself, and the effectiveness of the witness to others, is well worth the price.

**Ephesians 4:1-3 is a strong call to living in unity**, containing numerous practical insights:

**First, to pursue unity is to "walk worthily of our calling".** We have been *called* to unity. Paul earnestly entreats us to live in such a way that our *behavior* will correspond to our *identity* and *purpose* in Christ. To *not* pursue unity is to "walk in a manner that is *unworthy* of our calling". It would be to live in contradiction to who, and what, we have been invited by God to become. It would be to "miss the mark" in a very tragic way.

**Second, we do this by "showing forbearance to one another in love" (vs. 2).** The Greek offers a very interesting word picture here. (a.) "**Forbearance**" literally means to "**have or hold up**" something, ...either to hold up the other person, to "prop them up" when otherwise they would "fall" (and may even *deserve* to fall), ...or, to hold up *against* something else, and so to bear-with it, i.e., to endure, suffer, or *permit it to continue as it is*. The word occurs 15 times in the NT (Matt. 17:17; Mk. 9:19; Lk. 9:41; Acts 18:14; I Cor. 4:11; II Cor. 11:1(2x),4,19,20; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13; II Thess. 1:4; II Tim. 4:3; Heb. 13:22), with a related term occurring on two more occasions (Rom. 2:4; 3:25). It is clear from these passages that **the common usage for this term indicates that it means to "put up with" someone who is uncomfortable, unpleasant, irritating, or, in some fashion or another, frustrating to you.** It is to *exercise self-restraint and tolerance in the face of irritation*. Three of these references are the parallel accounts of Jesus' frustration with the disciples when He came down from the mount of transfiguration. The nine disciples who had been left behind

were having difficulty casting out a demon from a deaf boy. Jesus exclaimed, “O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me.” I believe that this account was preserved for us *in triplicate* so that we would be clearly confronted with the fact that the Lord Himself *felt these feelings* of frustration, and *chose* to “hold up against them” by bearing with, or enduring, their imperfection. It is this same character response that God the Father has towards humanity, in that He has “put up with” our sin for generations, and not acted upon the distaste, anger, and revulsion He feels in the face of evil. He has done so to give us opportunity to discover and respond to His love. **(b.) The form of this word in Greek describes ongoing, continual action.** It is not a one-time, or even occasional, event we are talking about here. We will be doing this, at least to some extent, in an ongoing fashion. People *are* going to frustrate us, or rub us wrong. *Get used to it. Expect it.* It is part of the imperfect reality of this world. **(c.) The form of the word also indicates that the ones doing the action are either intensely involved in the action, or their choice to act in this way affects or limits them.** In other words, the very word itself communicates the idea that *it will cost you something to do this*. It will certainly cost you some discomfort.

**Third, true love and unity come only from walking in the Holy Spirit. *Extraordinary results come from extraordinary measures.*** We could *try* to do the outward behavior of “putting up with someone” in our own strength, with unresolved negative inner emotions. We can “put up with” the frustrating characteristics and quirks of others, and possibly temporarily hide feelings of disdain, anger, judgment, or superiority. Inevitably, however, those attitudes *will* begin to “leak out” in our body language, voice intonations, or behavior. The more powerful the emotional state we have inside, the more likely it will build up and be expressed in some way. *This method is no different than what is employed by those who do not know Christ.* **God desires to teach us how to process our emotions, so that we are not phony on the outside** (hypocritical). He wants to *teach us to live in an entirely different manner* than we have used in the past. He has a new inner heart and spirit available to us, but we have to learn to think and operate differently to experience the new life of the Holy Spirit in us. **Paul gives us three qualifying prepositional phrases to help us understand how we are to begin to do this. Initially, he directs us to “hold up against one another” by using lowly-mindedness**, i.e., a self-examination that causes us to realize that we, too, have our share of quirks, sin, insensitivity and immaturity, ...and that what good character qualities we *do* have is because of the grace of God in our lives. Such a “reality check” removes some of “distance” we may feel toward another person. We can see we are not that much different, and *begin to feel a bit more compassion and identification with them*. Emotionally, we are able to dial down those negative feelings, and begin to experience positive ones. *We cannot maintain the behavior of bearing with one another without this emotional redirection.* **Similarly, employing meekness means relating to others with humility, teachableness, and gentleness.** If we are humble, willing to listen and learn from another, and will treat them with gentleness, we are more likely to establish connection than rejection. Keeping our voice and tone kind and soft will keep our emotions from escalating. “A *soft* answer turns away wrath” (Prov. 15:1). **Next, we are to forbear “with patience”**. The word for patience means “distant anger”. Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). The fact that Paul even thought it important to mention this indicates that there *will* be things that will be irritating about other believers in Christ that will “try” or “test” our heart attitude. We must learn to dial ourselves back so that we keep our tendency toward anger from being kindled. *An important key to walking in patience is to release control of that other person, and the situation, to God.* We cannot allow ourselves to be ruled by expectations of how things “ought to be”, or be driven by hurry. *We need the discipline to stay in the present moment with God and that other person.* It is what it is. They are where they are. Impatience won’t help. Anxiety won’t help. “Getting big” won’t help. **A third prepositional phrase follows the verbal form. We are to forbear “in love”**. We can truly only forbear one another in a healthy way when we esteem and value each other highly, and truly want God's best for each other. Again, this *agapē*-love is *not* a feeling; it is a benevolent-mindset-to-act on behalf of the other person. Only the Holy Spirit can produce this within us. **Finally, we are to “grace” one another** (Col. 4:13). It is translated as “forgive” in most translations, but it is the verbal form of “grace”. It means to “show favor, love and good-will *even when it is undeserved*”. We are to “grace” one another *as* God has “graced us”. This, too, is an ongoing, repeated, continual action requiring our intense involvement, and affecting or costing us something. God demonstrated His love and grace toward us when we were helpless, and even His enemies (Rom. 5:8,10). He has put His heart attitude into us by His Spirit, so that we can experience and express that love and grace toward each other in the Body of Christ.

**We need a higher purpose than our comfort.** Paul gives us this higher purpose in the next verse, “quickly-working/being-diligent/making-every-effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in bond of peace”. **Maintaining unity is the larger purpose for bearing with one another. In humility and gentleness, with patience, love and grace from God, we can bear-with and support one another so that the healing love and amazing unity of the Spirit could be demonstrated before a watching, weary world.** Through *this*, people will recognize Jesus was *indeed* sent from God, and that we *are* his genuine followers.