



I press on
toward the goal to
win the prize for
which God has
called me
heavenward
in Christ
Jesus

Philippians 3:14

Following the upward call through Philippians ...

Joy and Forbearance

God's analysis is that, overall, this world is not a happy place. Jesus, said the apostle Paul, "gave Himself that He might deliver us out of this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). Even when the surface seems somewhat serene, underneath there is a lot of "twistedness," as was described by Jesus: "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Matthew 17:17). The situation down here is so far removed from what God's desire is that Jesus Himself would exclaim, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). The Almighty God's long term goal, however, has been to use the gospel to pull a special people out of this world. "You are," said Peter to the early Christians, "a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (2 Peter 2:9). Such a people, then, are to exhibit special qualities in order for that proclamation to be effective.

- **Joy** — Most of the human race operates under the delusion that something or someone will make them happy, and sometimes Christians have not yet learned that such a supposition is indeed a delusion. *Joy*, as God helps His saints to understand, is a mental state of mind that is a result of God's working within the disciple of Christ — helping him make the decision to be joyful, and helping him develop the habitual attitude of rejoicing. Thus it is that the apostle Paul writes to the Philippian brethren, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4). *Joy* is commanded; it is clear then that *joy* results from a decision. All the big things for Christians are taken care of, so long as the saint maintains his fellowship with God through Christ. He has passed out of death into life; nothing can separate him from the love of God, whether it be things of life or physical death itself. Viewed from the eternal perspective, the faithful follower of Christ can be continually joyful as he sets his mind and his affection on things above rather than on things of the earth. Each word needs to be savored: "Rejoice in the Lord always!"

- **Forbearance** — *Forbearance* is feeling like reaching out and pushing someone, but keeping your hands in your pockets instead. (Some translations render it *tolerance*, but that word is so politically charged that it really does not convey the sense that Paul wants to communicate here.) "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men," says he. "The Lord is near" (Philippians 4:5). The saint, on his part, is to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, exhibiting the character of Christ in all situations. The lost people of this world obviously are not walking in the path of Christ, and the brethren themselves often fall short. The *forbearing* Christian will keep his eye on the big picture of others' eternity rather than allowing the real or imagined slights to cause him to retaliate. A classic example of forbearance occurs in Jesus' own home in Capernaum. When a paralyzed man was brought to Jesus for healing, the crowd was too thick and the conveyors of the paralytic could not get near the Lord. Determined, they hauled the paralyzed man up on the roof of the house, tore a hole in it, and let the man down through the hole on his stretcher. Jesus, keeping the big picture of eternity in mind, *forbore* to be upset at the fact that inconvenience and expense had just been dumped on Him, and forgave the man's sin and healed him.

"The Lord is near!" The brethren need to keep constantly in mind the presence of the Lord. They need to be rejoicing continually because of the value of the spiritual blessings they already possess, and need to be forbearing in their demeanor, words, and actions toward other saints and the lost sheep of this world. Such *joy* and *forbearance* on the part of saints would really impact the world!

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