

Bear With One Another

Put up with one another and be gracious, since we are all great sinners.

Rom 15:1; Eph 4:2; Col 3:13; Heb 13:1; James 5:9

God tells His people to bear with one another. Another way to say this is that Christians are to put up with one another.

One Bible verse says, *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.”* That’s Ephesians 4:2. Another, Colossians 3:13, says, *“Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

God bears with us many times each day as we disappoint Him, even hurt Him by indifference or not returning His love by obedience. Therefore, surely we can work at putting up with one another, knowing that we are not stooping as low as God does.

God’s kingdom is broad enough to encompass different cultures and ways of doing things, even worship styles and ways of walking with God. But, people are too often uncomfortable with those who are different from them. All of us probably have many types of people we avoid, not wanting to be around them because we are uncomfortable or because we judge them to not be “our kind of people”.

However, since any meeting of different kinds of Christians is loaded with potential for spiritual growth, we must begin to put up with and find joy in interacting with believers very different from ourselves.

There seem to be two very different things we need to put up with, or “bear with”. The first are those things in others that annoy us but are not sins. They are not wrong. The second is to put up with one another’s hurtful behaviors and sinfulness.

When bothersome behaviors and attitudes are not sinful, they are merely differences that are annoying. Obedient Christians bear with these differences by recognizing that they are allowable because they are not wrong according to the Bible. They are just the way the other people do things. Those behaviors should not be criticized. Our spirits can grow to be comfortable around these behaviors without adopting them for our own way to act. It is how the other person is, not how we are.

There is not a right way to do most things, even though each of us thinks so. Even doing some things the wrong way is not sinful. Yet, because we are comfortable with our way of doing things and our way of thinking about things, we get irritated with others who do things differently. However, God asks us to put up with one another.

We need to remember that we too have things about us that are difficult for other people to handle. Our way of life is most likely irritating to many people. With this in mind, Christians are to bear with other Christians different from themselves because of God’s desire as well as for the sake of God’s work in the world.

So, for non-sinful behaviors, it is sufficient just to accept the differences, tolerate them, and work toward not being bothered by them.

But, what about sinful behavior by Christians, especially those in our Christian Inner Circles? First, if the behavior has been hurtful to us, forgiveness is the first step in bearing with that person. If the unbiblical behavior is hurtful to others but not to us, we still put up with it but do not overlook it. That person needs help to change his or her behavior, usually from someone in his or her own Christian Inner Circle where love and trust has been strongly established. That help comes usually in the form of a few applicable Togethers. When what bothers us in other people is a sin in their lives, it is hard to help them if we cannot bear with them until they change.

God knows Christians will sometimes hurt each other because, although saved from the consequence of sin, we are still sinners. We are not yet in heaven where sin is gone. Therefore, God tells us in Scripture to just put up with one another. It is as if God is saying to us, “You are all sinners. Naturally you will sin against one another. It is to be expected. So do not make a big deal out of each other’s hurtfulness. Toughen up and let it fade away like water off a duck’s back.”

This attitude of “putting up with” allows Christians to be offended – without taking offense. It keeps them from making an issue of small things.

Furthermore, if we compare ourselves to God’s holiness, we are only a hair’s breadth better or worse than any other person. This should help us gain perspective so we will avoid judging and rejecting those who hurt us or act in sinful ways of which we do not approve.

We should do our best to react only to God. This is difficult, but a worthy pursuit. If someone hurts us, we do not need to immediately react to that person. Instead, we are to react to God and find out what He wants us to do. He will guide us on how to respond, but usually it will not be to protect ourselves or proclaim how we have been hurt, but to lovingly help the one who hurt us to grow in faith and loyalty to God and His ways.

When Jesus was mistreated, he did not consider it of much importance. By merely bearing with it, he was able to keep on course with his purpose. We, too, can put up with people’s misbehavior and stay the course God has planned for our lives.

For you to prepare for heaven by becoming more and more like Jesus in bearing with others, each month or two find someone who is difficult to be around because they really rub you the wrong way or are hurtful. Then allow the Holy Spirit to help you feel safe in Jesus and not threatened by that person. After that, realize that they are different by God’s design or behaving wrong because they, like all of us, were born innoculated by the devil’s ways. This will empower you to be comfortable around that type of person without judging them or putting unnecessary personal distance between you. Pray that you will run into a number of people with that characteristic until you find freedom in Christ and can be peaceful inside as well as loving toward that kind of person.

Not bearing with one another is one of the biggest dangers to good relationships with friends and family. Being irritated with one another, judging one another, or trying to force our way onto others inhibits much of the self-denying love of the Bible. It just doesn’t work well for relationships if we try to make everyone else conform to our ways.

Now, about heaven.

What is the use of bearing with sinful people now, especially Christians, if we won’t have to in heaven where there will be no hurtful behavior?

Bearing with others this side of death requires that our spirits change. Putting up with others rather than avoiding them makes us more like Jesus who reaches out to everyone. These changes in our spirits to be able to put up with people now have other wonderful benefits in heaven.

(1) We will have greater capacity to appreciate God and His grace. (2) We will enjoy the safety and peace of heaven more. (3) We will be better able to appreciate and enjoy different kinds of people. And, (4) We will be less hesitant about entering into new relationships with the other citizens of heaven.

We will all be thrilled to be in heaven, but some of us will experience more thrill than others. It will be worthwhile for you to change your spirit for these benefits I have just mentioned. Ever more putting up with the differences in other people and the hurts that come from people is the magic that changes your spirit and brings these wonderful benefits in heaven.

First, bearing with sinful words and behaviors before death will require you to better sense your own sinfulness, and you will enter heaven more aware of how you do not deserve to be there. You and I don't want to think of ourselves any more righteous than we really are because it will diminish our appreciation of being in heaven. For all eternity, we want to be as happy as we can be to be in heaven. We want to appreciate God and His graceful love and generosity.

It is easy to feel deserving of heaven if we compare ourselves to despicable people. But, if instead, we compare ourselves to the absolute purity of God and the complete sinlessness of Jesus, we will not feel like we deserve to live in God's home. Then, like being included in some celebrity's fancy home, we will feel so much more special at being in God's heaven.

Second, you will enjoy the safety and peace of heaven more if you have not avoided hurtful people. Bearing with them will bring you some pain. But, it will be in the service of our Lord and worth every misery when you arrive in heaven. You will immediately and forever keenly notice the absence of hurtful people and enjoy the safety immensely.

Third, you will be better able to appreciate and enjoy different kinds of people if you have grown more and more to bear with people who make you uncomfortable and learn to enjoy them. In heaven there will be different kinds of people everywhere you go, each with their different culture and mannerisms. The variety will be wonderful to those who learned to enjoy many kinds of people before death.

Fourth, you will be less hesitant about entering into new relationships with other citizens of heaven. If now you don't run from hurtful relationships, in heaven you will be less hesitant to jump into the new, wonderful, and never-hurtful relationships possible there.

These four benefits in heaven from putting up with people's irritating and horrible behaviors should make you more than ready to allow the Holy Spirit to empower you to grow your spirit to be able to bear with all kinds of people. For maximum benefit, do it now while you live among wrongdoing, wrong thinking, and wrong values in a sinful environment. You will not be able to do that in heaven.

And there is another tremendous benefit. Putting up with Christians now, both their different and annoying ways and their sinfulness will endear you to God because He asked you to do it. In heaven you will be very aware of His pleasure in you to the degree you put up with people's differences and hurtfulness. And, there will be increased empathy with God because you will know a little about His bearing with and putting up with people. Empathy develops intense closeness.

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This only minimally explains bearing with one another. To learn much more, go to our website ChristiansTogether.org and click on "Bear with One Another" on the list of the Togethers.

Prayer to Embrace this Together

Gracious God, thank You for putting up with me and all my sins. I truly appreciate that You responded so many times with grace rather than punishment. And, I especially thank You that You sent your only begotten Son to take my sins upon Himself. I can't be thankful enough!

I and those in my Christian Inner Circle will need Your help to grow our spirits to bear with others, especially those who hurt us. Help us to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit for all of us to give You more glory in the way we put up with believers very different from ourselves.

Please help us all to become more like Jesus and increasingly put up with and not react negatively to other Christians when they behave in bad ways. Help us to remember that Jesus did not reject those who disappointed Him, were infectious with leprosy, were oppressed by demons, and the like. Help those of us in our Christian Inner Circles to help one another grow in bearing with others.

May our lives worship You more because we, like You, put up with a lot of poor behavior, even quite sinful behavior. Help us to not believe that bearing with such behavior is approving of it. In fact, put courage into us to follow up bearing with another's objectionable behavior with corrective love and help to change, especially if they are in our Christian Inner Circles.

Make us strong in Your power to defeat the devil by being so secure in Your love that the bad or hurtful behavior of others has no effect on our loving response to them. Especially in our closest Christian relationships, help us not let Satan have his way and destroy our bonds of love.

Help us all to prepare for heaven by growing to get past being irritated with and judging those who hurt us, but rather enjoy them instead, in spite of their behavior. Assist us in preparation for enjoying millions of citizens in heaven who will never hurt us but will be so very different from us.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.