

The Weaker Brother (2)

Text: Romans 14:13-15:7

Introduction:

1. The Apostle Paul presents a plea for mutual acceptance of one another's positions to fulfill the greater purposes of unity and edification.
2. Both the strong and the weak are challenged in Vs. 1-13 with a particular emphasis upon the weak. Now, in this second section (Vs. 14-15:7), the Apostle Paul focuses on the strong, exhorting them not to use their liberty in such a way that they would cause their weaker brothers to suffer spiritual harm (Moo).
3. Some introductory qualifications on the scope of Christian liberty
 - Christian liberty does not mean an accommodation of sin and compromise in the believer's life (e.g. false doctrine or loose morality) – *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."* (Gal. 5:13)
 - Christian liberty does not mean the believer is never to exercise discerning judgment – *"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things..."* (1 Cor. 2:15) We are exhorted to "try the spirits" (1 John 4:1), to "prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21) and to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3).
4. There are two kinds of judgment the believer is not to exercise:
 - Hypocritical judgment (Matt. 7:1-6). This is where the person judging another brother has the same issue himself!
 - Judgment concerning matters the Bible specifically leaves open to the exercise of the individual conscience (Rom. 14)

I. Consideration of the Weaker Brother (Vs. 13-18)

A. Our Treatment of Him (Vs. 13-15)

1. Don't offend him (Vs. 13)
 - a. "not therefore judge" = on the basis of our future standing before the judgment seat of Christ detailed in the preceding verses (Vs. 10-12)
 - b. "judge this rather" = our focus is to rather be upon not causing offence to our weaker brethren
2. Don't destroy him (Vs. 14-15)
 - a. "I know, and am persuaded" = statement of firm conviction
 - b. "by the Lord Jesus" = this was not Paul's own personal opinion or conviction. He received this knowledge by Divine Revelation.
 - c. "nothing unclean of itself" = Paul clearly falls on the side of the stronger brethren in relation to their understanding of Christian liberty. 'unclean' means common and speaks of ceremonial impurity, not actual immorality (Wuest).

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- d. 'esteemeth' = to think. Refers to the conscience of the weaker brother that makes certain things which are not in and of themselves sinful, prohibited for him.
- e. 'grieved' = to cause pain, make sorrowful. Same word used to describe the grieving of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30). "The distress caused the weak when he sees the strong pursue a line of conduct which his conscience cannot approve." (Wuest)
- f. "not charitably" = a failure to exercise sensitivity to the weaker brother is linked back to a lack of love.
- g. "destroy not him with thy meat" = e.g. by offending him with your liberty or leading him to do something of which his conscience disapproves. To do so will bring spiritual damage.
- h. "for whom Christ died" = incentive to obey the command not to destroy or damage the weaker brother. If he is one for whom Christ died, then that makes him precious and valuable.

B. Our Testimony before Him (Vs. 16-18)

- a. "your good" = the exercise of Christian liberty, freedom of conscience enjoyed by the strong
- b. "be evil spoken of" = to speak reproachfully of, blaspheme, rail upon
- c. 'for' = reason given to support command
- d. "righteousness, and peace and joy" = essential, spiritual qualities of Christ's kingdom
- e. "in the Holy Ghost" = the one who supplies these virtues in the life of the believer
- f. "acceptable to God" = the things that please God
- g. "approved of men" = agreeable to our brethren in Christ

II. Edification of the Weaker Brother (Vs. 19-15:4)

A. The Pursuit of Edification (Vs. 19)

- 1. "follow after" = to persecute, hunt and pursue.
- 2. "the things which make for peace" = the "these things" mentioned in Vs. 17-18, namely, righteousness, peace and joy supplied and empowered by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. These things produce peace.
- 3. 'edify' = to build up (i.e. like a house or building), a construction term. "...Let all things be done unto edifying." (1. Cor. 14:26)

B. The Problems to Edification (Vs. 20-23)

- 1. Offending my brother (Vs. 20-21)
 - a. "destroy not" = Paul continues the building analogy. 'destroy' means to tear down, to demolish. Word was literally used to refer to the tearing down of a building. Christ used this word when He prophesied the future destruction of the temple – "thrown down" (Matt. 24:2). This is the complete opposite to

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edification. As believers, we want to be in the construction business not the demolition business as it relates to our brethren in Christ!

- b. “the work of God” = disunity of this nature not only affects individuals, it damages the church as a whole.
 - c. “nor anything” = Paul broadens the scope beyond eating and drinking to include any other thing that could potentially cause damage to the weaker brother.
 - d. See also 1 Corinthians 8 for similar exhortations (particularly Vs. 9-13)
2. Flaunting my liberty (Vs. 22a)
 - a. “hast thou faith” = liberty of conscience on a certain matter
 - b. “have it to thyself before God” = keep it a personal matter and exercise it with discretion
 3. Violating my conscience (Vs. 22b-23)
 - a. ‘happy’ = blessed
 - b. “condemneth not himself” = he has a clear conscience in what he is doing
 - c. ‘damned’ = word means condemned
 - d. “not of faith is sin” = it is sinful to engage in an activity without a clear conscience (See Acts 24:16)

C. The Patience of Edification (Vs. 15:1-4)

1. The exhortation to selflessness (Vs. 1-2)
 - a. ‘bear’ = requires the mature in Christ to have a ministry of burden bearing (Gal. 6:2). Word used to describe travelers assisting a weak companion by taking a part of his burden and carrying it for him (Haldane)
 - b. “for his good to edification” = his spiritual profit
2. The example of selflessness (Vs. 3)
 - a. “for even Christ” = the Lord Jesus is cited as our supreme example. Matt. 20:28 *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”*
 - b. Quotation from Psalm 69:9 which is a Messianic Psalm that includes references to the events of the cross.
3. The empowerment of selflessness (Vs. 4)
 - a. Paul digresses from his primary theme for a moment to justify the use of the O.T. quotation, pointing out its role in strengthening the believer’s walk of faith.
 - b. “patience and comfort of the Scriptures” = the Scriptures are the source of the inner strengthening of the soul. God himself is the source of this comfort (Vs. 5) but He ministers it to us through the pages of His Word.

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III. Unification with the Weaker Brother (Vs. 5-7)

A. The Author of Unity (Vs. 5)

1. Paul expresses this truth in the form of a prayer wish. His desire before God is that they will be unified.
2. 'God' = God is viewed as the source of this unity.
 - a. On our side, we are to work together for unity as the instruction in this section demonstrates (14:1-15:7). Eph. 4:3 exhorts us, *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
 - b. On the Divine side, God is the ultimate one who unifies His people together in the local church. So, we are to both work for unity and pray for unity.
3. 'patience and consolation' = God is the source of these blessings
4. 'likeminded' = literally “the same thing to think.” Obviously, this allows for some differences between brothers and sisters in the Lord as the context is all about mutual toleration concerning matters of personal liberty. By likeminded, Paul means that he desires that they will all adopt the same attitude and mindset towards each other. Note the words “one toward another”
5. “according to Christ Jesus” = in accordance with the will of Christ. The mind of Christ is the standard for this unity.

B. The Aim of Unity (Vs. 6)

1. 'that' = reveals the intended result of the unity contemplated in Vs. 5
2. “glorify God” = the glory of God is the aim of such unity. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35)

C. The Activity of unity (Vs. 7)

1. “receive ye one another” = Paul returns to the theme he introduced at the start of this section in 14:1. 'receive' means to take to oneself and refers to the need to extend warm fellowship to the brethren.
2. “as Christ also received us” = Christ is again held up as the supreme example which we are to follow (See also 14:3)

Conclusion:

1. What is our attitude towards others in the church? Are we self-focused or others-focused?
2. Are we allowing the love of Christ to fill us to the point where we are willing to forfeit personal freedoms for the higher objectives of church unity and the glory of God?
3. Does our conduct in the church contribute to its construction (edifying) or demolition (destroying)?