

**Hallmarks of the Transformed Life
Loving our Brethren When We Differ, #2**

Intro: What do Christians do when they have conscientious disagreements? What if they hold different positions of faith about a matter they think is important to God? What would love cause them to do?

Last week we noticed that Paul urged the Roman Christians to:
*Accept each other, not resorting to doubtful disputes
Allow each person to practice his own personal convictions
Refrain from judging each other*

These exhortations in the first half of the chapter are mutual obligations; both weak and strong are being commanded. However, in the second half of this chapter Paul discusses the special responsibilities of the strong toward the weak. In such cases, it is especially important that the “strong” show love for them.

Let read together Rom. 14:13-23. Exhortations to the strong.

Paul urges the strong not to put a stumbling block before the weak.
*Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.
(Romans 14:13)
An “offense” or a stumbling block is not merely something that someone disagrees with or doesn’t like. It is something which compels another to violate his conscience; thus causing him to “fall” through surrender of the principle of faith.*

Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil (Rom. 14:16).
*The practices that Paul has in mind are things that are good. In this context, enjoying the common food and drink of the Roman world was a “good thing” because it brought enjoyment to the one who used such things and it brought glory to God through the thanksgiving being offered for the physical blessing of eating and drinking.
But a good thing like eating and drinking could be “spoken of as evil” if it resulted in the destruction of a weak brother’s soul.*

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Romans 14:19).
*Of course, differences that are aired and strongly pressed can lead to conflict. Thus, Paul urges the strong brother to pursue a course that results in peace and harmony.
The strong brother is to pursue the edification of the weak, that is, the things that build up faith rather than destroy it. (It does not preclude gently*

instructing him in keeping with his ability to receive the teaching; but it certainly makes the spiritual well-being the weak brother his ultimate goal.)

The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. (Rom. 14:22).

Here the idea is not to force another brother to accept one's views.

The strong doesn't have to surrender his faith for the sake of others; he just must practice it in such a way that it doesn't cause others to fall.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. (Rom. 15:2).

The stress is upon the words "his neighbor". Ordinarily people do what pleases them and say, if you don't like it, that's tough. But Paul urges a different spirit. Do what pleases the other person rather than what pleases you!

Some brethren may feel this is too much to ask of a strong brother. But it's not fair to ask someone give up doing what is right for the sake of someone else! What incentive is there for him to show this kind of love?

What is Paul's rationale for this exhortation?

The strong brother conducts himself in this way because the practice being surrendered is not something involving the "kingdom of God".

Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died (Rom. 14:15). for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:19).

Paul argues that the strong brother can and should give up anything not relating to the kingdom of God that might cause a brother to stumble. Thus, a brother should not be destroyed over "food", or "drinking wine" or "anything" outside of the realm of obedience to God (v. 21)

But what if the weak brother's conscience forbids a brother from practicing what God has commanded? No man can ever ask us to refrain from practicing kingdom activities—i.e. doing what God has commanded. No believer can be asked to surrender acts of obedience to God for the sake of another's conscience. Paul would forcefully say, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food"; but would he say, "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of obedience to God (teaching others, worshipping God)?"

The strong brother conducts himself in this way to protect and preserve the principle of faith.

But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23)

God wants every disciple to live consistent with the principle of faith. To fail to do so is sin and results in spiritual destruction. In the case of the person with a weak conscience, the knowledge of the strong will not clear his weak conscience. So, the brother who is forced to practice what his faith will not support is self-condemned.

By preserving the faith of the weak, there is the opportunity for continued growth in faith that might bring him to a new understanding and practice.

The strong brother conducts himself in this way to emulate the forbearing love of Christ.

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me." (Romans 15:1-3)

Christ came to save souls, not destroy them. Thus, the strong are urged to do nothing that would "destroy" a soul.

Instead of pleasing himself, Christ bore the reproaches of the wicked for God's sake.

Conclusion: When God's solution to conscientious differences is followed there can be peace and harmony among brethren even when there are conscientious differences. Instead of discord and division, God's people can "with one accord with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 15:5-6).