

Learning to Love

Living like the Redeemed, 2

I. The Reality of Disputable Matters.

A. We are people gathered around truth.

We believe in absolute truths, in definite rights and wrongs

B. Not everything is a matter of right and wrong.

- The Bible doesn't speak definitively on everything

- The Bible is not flat land.

- Matthew 23:23

23"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

- Matthew 22:34-40

34Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

36"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38This is the first and greatest commandment. 39And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

- I Corinthians 13 – Love chapter

- I Corinthians 15:3ff

3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures

- Some things are of utmost importance.
- Some things are disputable.
- For many things there are many right conclusions.

C. A history of dispute.

- Cups
- Sunday School
- Eat in church buildings
- Support of missionaries
- Celebration of special days.
- Millennial thought.
- How the Holy Spirit works in lives

- **Disputes over if something is disputable.**
- Woman's role
- Instrumental worship

II. What Paul says – Romans 14, 15.

1Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. 2One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. 4Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

5One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. 7For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. 8If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

9For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. 10You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. 11It is written:

" 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord,
'every knee will bow before me;

every tongue will confess to God.' " 12So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

13Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food^[b] is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

A. Some definitions.

- What does the word "weak" mean?

-- The weak person is not a weak willed person or a person with weak character. The weakness is a weakness of "faith" or a weakness that has to do with conviction that a Christian has the freedom to do certain things.

-- When we envision a weak person we should not see someone who is vulnerable and easily overcome by temptation. Instead we should envision a sensitive Christian full of indecision and scruples. What the weak need is not the strength of self control, but the liberty of conscience.

- Where do the weak come from?

- **Ex-Idolaters?** Those freshly converted from paganism. I Corinthians 8 situation where meat sacrificed to idols is specifically mentioned. Their over-scrupulous consciences would not allow them to buy meat from the local butcher for fear that the meat had been sacrificed to idols and would contaminate them. There are many similarities between this passage and I Cor. 8 – Eating or abstinence; danger of causing the weak to stumble; the sanctity of the conscience; and the voluntary limitation of Christian freedom for the sake of a brother for whom Christ died.
- **Asceticism?** This is the belief that you become more spiritual by the refusal of things that could pollute the body. These were personal decisions based on a faulty view of God. Essenes among the Jews and Pythagoreans among the pagans. Amish or Mennonites today.

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

- **Legalists?** Maybe the weak are those who have failed to understand the fundamental principles of the faith that page after page of the book of Romans attests to. Men and women are justified and reconciled to God not by being a vegetarian, by keeping the Sabbath, or by being a teetotaler, but by faith in Jesus Christ. The legalist expanded the Gospel to include all of their settled views on the issues. They believed that their works and abstentions were good works necessary to obtain salvation. Remember Galatians and the anathema for those who perverted the Gospel? It would be hard to believe that Paul would be so gentle with the Romans if they were doing the same thing.
- **Jewish Christians?** Most probable. Their weakness consisted of their continuing commitment to the Jewish dietary laws and special days. Food had to do with both the food being Kosher or butchered correctly and that it was from among the clean foods they could eat. If this could not be assured they would abstain from meat totally. The days dealt with the Sabbath days and the various festivals of the Jews.

- Be careful! It is hard to fully describe who are the weak and the strong. In fact characteristics of both might reside in all individuals.
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- Whoever the weak were, please remember that to them these were not minor issues but were vital to their commitment to God. Food and days were central to Jewish identity. To hear from anyone that these were non-essentials would be very hard indeed.
- It is important never to elevate non-essentials to the position of essential, so that we make such things a condition of fellowship.

B. The Principle – Accept him.

- Acceptance means that the strong does not despise, browbeat, condemn or damage the weak in any way. Just like in the Jerusalem council, the strong are restrained and the conscience of the weak are safeguarded. Jews could continue with circumcision but not impose it on Gentiles. And the Gentiles should abstain from things that were abhorrent to the Jews—meat sacrificed to idols and strangled.
- The weak are not to be ignored or reproached or at this stage at least corrected. They are to be accepted! This is a deep word that means to receive into fellowship and into one's heart. Same word Paul used in urging Philemon to accept Onesimus in the same way he would accept Paul.
- Paul would allow no judgment to be passed on disputable matters. Intrinsic in diakrisis is the idea of no discussions, debates, quarrels, or the taking of a stand. The Church is not to be turned into a debating chamber over non-essentials or into a court room where the weak are interrogated and arraigned. The welcome we give to the weak extends to their opinions.

C. Truths upon which this principle is based. 14:2-13

- Welcome him because God has. Uses first the example of eating. Probably not a vegetarian issue but an issue of proper handling of food – clean and unclean issues. Neither party should in any way look down on the other or condemn the other. He is God's servant and God is able to make him stand. Then Paul talks about the keeping of special days. The only rule is that such practice not be

mindless but that each should be fully convinced in his own mind. Whatever you do in the eating or abstaining from meat or the keeping of special days or not, do it unto the Lord.

- It is Jesus who died to be Lord, so let him be! You are not the judge, God is! In fact, you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, so be careful not to judge others. Just who do we think we are?

- Some additional principles:

-- Stop passing judgment and determine not to place any obstacles in your brother's way. 13. No food is unclean in itself but if your brother regards it as unclean to him it is unclean. If you distress your brother by what you eat you are no longer acting in love. Don't destroy your brother by your eating—Christ died for him. Don't let a freedom become evil by the way you practice it. The kingdom is not about eating or drinking, but about the fruits of the Spirit.

-- Make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God over opinions! It is better to curtail your personal freedoms in Christ if it is going to cause your brother to fall.

-- Opinions about disputable matters are best kept to yourself. You do not need to nor is it wise to share all your feelings about everything. Do not cause a person to act outside his convictions, because to do so is sin.

III. The Bottom Line – Romans 15:1-13

1We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

5May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy.

A. We who are strong must bear the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. An indication of the strong is that they do not insist on their own way—they do not please themselves, they always have others in mind.

- Jesus didn't please himself.

B. A spirit of unity is essential to worship. One of the places where our differences can show up most prominently would be in worship. It is impossible to glorify God with one heart and mouth when there are divisions among us.

C. When we accept others we praise God. It frees us to concentrate on the truly important things in life.

Will the strong please stand up! It is time for those of us who are strong to start bearing with the weak and stop trying to please ourselves.