



# Christian Life Fellowship

*Becoming fully devoted followers of Christ*



## Developing Unity In The Church

*November 9, 2008*

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### **Introduction:**

What should we do when Christians disagree? Anyone who has lived for any length of time knows that there will be disagreements between people. Even between God's people there are disagreements from time to time. It doesn't take one too long to find disagreements and records of wars and family feuds among God's people. Both the Old and New Testament refer to divisions between God's people. In the New Testament, when it came to the Corinthians, division surfaced over leaders and members who were suing each other. The Galatians were biting and devouring each other and the Saints at Ephesus and Colossae needed to be reminded of the importance of Christian unity.

Some of the problems of these divisions came because of the backgrounds of the believers prior to their giving their lives to Christ. For example, the Jewish believers came out of a very legalistic mindset that was difficult to change. Gentiles, on the other hand, had no worry about diets and days. The Roman believers had struggles over special diets and days. Some thought it was wrong to eat meat offered to idols while others ate only vegetables. Some members thought it was a sin not to observe holy days. Believers began to criticize and judge each other.

Not everything in our faith journey is as black and white as the Ten Commandments. There are grey areas of life that are not clearly right or wrong to every believer. When it comes to the grey areas, Paul gave some guidance as to how we can disagree on non-essentials and still have unity in the church.

Here are two overriding admonitions:

### **I. RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER -Romans (14:1-12)**

The directive here is made to those who were strong in the faith, those who understood their spiritual liberty in Christ and were not bound by diets or holy days. Those who were weak in faith were immature. Many people think that the strong in faith are those who follow strict rules. In the case of the Romans, the weak Christians were the ones who clung to the law and didn't enjoy the freedom they had in Christ.

Weaker believers were judging and condemning the strong believers and the strong believers were despising the weak Christians. That is not the way that Christ wants His church to operate.

Paul gives four reasons why we should welcome each another:

#### **A. God has received us. - (14:1-3)**

It is not our responsibility to decide requirements for fellowship in the church. Only God can do that. To

set up restrictions based on personal prejudices is to go beyond God's word. Because God has received us, we must receive one another. We should not argue over these matters, nor should we judge or despise one another.

When God sent Peter to the Gentiles, the church criticized him because he ate with these new believers. Yet God clearly showed Peter that He had accepted these believers by filling them with the Holy Spirit. Peter realized that fellowship is more than something based on food or religious days.

In every church there are both strong and weak believers. The strong believers have understood spiritual truth and practice it, but the weak have not yet come to the place of maturity and understanding. The weak must not condemn the strong and call them unspiritual and the strong must not despise the weak and call them immature. God has received both and they both must receive each other.

#### **B. God sustains His own, - (14:4)**

It is wrong for weaker believers to judge the strong believers because by doing so they put themselves in the place of God. God is the Master to whom we respond and answer and serve. It is wrong for anyone to interfere with this relationship. Our success in this Christian life does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians. God is the judge and He is able to make us stand.

If we think about the word "servant" here, it indicates we ought to be busy working for the Lord. Then we will not have the time or inclination to judge or condemn other Christians. People who are winning souls have more important things to do than to investigate others' lives.

I have seen conflicts in my 33 years of ministry and I can say without fail, they have always happened when people get distracted from the mission of the church and stop winning souls.

#### **C. Jesus is Lord. - (14:5-9)**

The title "LORD" is found eight times in these verses. No Christian has the right to play God in another believer's life. We can pray, admonish, advise, but we can never take the place of God or act

as anyone's Lord. The criteria here that Paul offers is that whatever day we observe, or whatever we eat or refrain from eating, we are to do it for the Lord and not because of some prejudice or whim. If we don't allow Christ to be Lord, the church is divided and weakened. Some people make the translation of the Bible an issue of division. Some people make an issue whether or not to have a Christmas tree in their home, while at the same time people are lost and headed for eternity in hell.

Let's stay focused and keep our priorities straight. Paul emphasized the union believers have with Christ. Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. As Christians, if we would simply go to the Lord in prayer instead of going to our brother in criticism, there would be stronger fellowship in the Body of Christ.

#### **D. Jesus Christ is judge. - (14:10-12)**

The judgment seat of Christ is the place where our works will be judged by the Lord. This has nothing to do with our sins, since they have been paid for by Christ already. The Greek word for judgment seat here is "bema", meaning the place where judges stood at an athletic game. At the end of the game, the judges gave out the rewards to the contestants.

How does a believer prepare for the judgment seat of Christ? It happens when we make Jesus the Lord of our lives and faithfully obey Him. Instead of judging others, we judge our own lives and make sure we are ready to meet Christ.

#### **II. EDIFY ONE ANOTHER - (14:13-23)**

The emphasis on this directive is not on the master-servant relationship, but on the brother to brother relationship. If we truly love each other, we will seek to build one another up, not tear one another down.

#### **A. We affect each other.**

Here are some ways that Paul says we impact each other. We can cause someone to stumble, we can grieve others and we can destroy others. Paul was saying that it is possible for the strong to impact the weak in these ways. Knowledge and love must work together. Knowledge puffs up but love builds

up. The strong Christian has spiritual knowledge, but if he does not practice love, his knowledge will hurt the weak believer. Knowledge must be balanced by love.

Children are often afraid of the dark. They think that something is hiding in the closet or under the bed that is going to jump out at them and go BOO! A mom or dad can have the knowledge that the child is safe, but that knowledge alone cannot comfort that child. Knowledge accompanied with love helps the weak person grow strong.

When it comes to grey areas, we should ask ourselves not only how will this impact us, but also how will this impact our brothers or sisters? Will it cause them to stumble? Will it weaken their faith? Will it destroy them or cause them to be tempted to sin?

**B. We have to have priorities. - (14:16-18)**

Like the Pharisees, we do not want to major in the minors. I have heard about churches being divided over such trivial things as the position of the piano or serving meals on Sunday. The eternal things must be at a premium in our lives. Righteousness, peace, and joy; those things come from the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If we would yield to the Holy Spirit we would not have Christians fighting with each other over minor matters. Spiritual priorities are essential to harmony in the church.

Listen friends, it's too late in the game for us to worry about who is carrying the ball and who is

**Conclusion:**

There will be disagreements between believers in the Body of Christ. We can have disagreements and still love each other. We need to be sure we receive each other and in our disagreements we need to be sure to build each other up, not judging and criticizing each other, not forcing our opinions and convictions on others.

making the touchdowns. If we are a team, if we are the body of Christ, then we need to be concerned about working together to win people to Christ.

**C. We must help each other grow. - (14:19-21)**

Both strong and weak believers need to grow. The strong believer needs to grow in love and the weak believer needs to grow in knowledge. As long as a brother is weak in faith, we must lovingly deal with him in his immaturity. It is wrong for a Christian to stay immature, having a weak conscience.

Young believers need fellowship that will protect them and encourage them to grow. Older believers must exercise love and patience and be careful not to cause them to stumble. Younger believers must grow in grace and knowledge.

**D. We must not force our convictions on others. - (14:22-23)**

There are certain truths that we must accept because they are the foundation of our faith. Areas of disagreement must not be made a test of fellowship. We cannot borrow another person's conviction and be honest in our Christian life. Even if a person's convictions are immature, one should not violate their conscience. Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. That knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise it tears down instead of building up. Believers may hold many convictions about many matters, but they must hold them in love.