



Light from the Word

Romans 14 – Biblical Remedy

Editor's note: This month begins a three-part series of teachings from Romans 14.

“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”¹

As we think about our relationships with one another, it helps to first review Romans 14:10-11. Every believer who has ever lived will appear before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of his life. The Lord will review our life carefully, without bias, but with complete knowledge of our motives and actions. Apparently, we will start by standing before Him,² but will ultimately kneel before Him.³ Might this be after He reviews our lives with us, showing what we did well and what we should have done better? Then, we will understand what forgiveness truly means as we look into the face of Him who blends the perfect combination of justice and mercy into love. In fact, looking back at Romans 13, we see that *“love is the fulfilling of the law.”⁴* Christ has shown us His love so clearly while expecting us to also share that same love with others, knowing we fall far short of His likeness.

Far too often the hardest situations in which to practice the law of love are not with strangers, but within our own families. It can be even more challenging when there are disagreements within the family of God. When that occurs, we need to ask ourselves if the disagreement is over foundational biblical doctrines such as we find in our Statement of Faith. Hymn #191 in the Zion's Harp (“Now and Then”) was said to have been written by a brother who was in prison because he would not deny his beliefs.⁵ We should have that same desire to not compromise the truths of the Bible.

Although some beliefs are foundational truth and not to be compromised, the Apostle Paul acknowledges that some convictions are personal

expressions of faith, or lack of faith. If we hold differing convictions in such instances:

We should acknowledge we are part of the Body of Christ and not live for ourselves.⁶

We should keep our focus on Christ and what He has done and is doing for us.⁷

To make certain that our focus is truly on Jesus, we must do some introspection to determine which of the following motives describes us, remembering that we will in the future, appear before the perfect judge who knows, and will remember, our motives much better than we will:

Is our attitude similar to the quarrelsome one described in 1 Tim 6:3-5?

Or are we motivated by the desire to build up each other as stated in Romans 14:19?

We have a great need for each other's perspectives as we apply the Word of God to living in our current culture. We can learn much from each other as we teach our world about the love of Christ. If our love for one another is not evident in our lives as believers, how can we expect unbelievers to embrace it?⁸

One attribute that is so hard to put into practice is submission, which is not a word our culture likes to use. However, practicing that virtue will lead to great harmony and unity. It certainly does not give anyone the authority to demand submission from someone else, but the Lord expects each of us to submit to one another, whether it be to our spouse, church leadership, or each other. As a dear, now departed, elder once said, “Submission is very important when two people do not agree on a subject.” When we don't agree, our relationship will struggle until we reach one of two conclusions. Both conclusions require us to humbly seek to understand each other, and in so doing reveals love, esteem, and grace.⁹

One conclusion is that we agree to disagree on the subject, understanding that it is an appropriate

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response to differences of conscience. When we come to this conclusion, we must be certain to esteem the other higher than ourselves,¹⁰ even though we differ on the issue. That can be called disagreeing without being disagreeable.

The second possibility is that each of us practices submission and we find a middle ground on which we can both agree. “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*”¹¹ Both of these conclusions are valid and happen continually in healthy relationships.

A middle-aged brother once gave a large sum of money toward a new church building. His son, who knew that he was not in favor of the building project, thinking it may be too extravagant, asked him why he was donating that much money. His father said that he had voiced his opinion but the church voted as a group to go ahead with

the building, so it was his duty to contribute to what the church decided upon. This is an example of the first conclusion, in that he did not second guess or criticize the church but esteemed the other brothers higher than himself. However, he also practiced the second conclusion by showing submission in such a pure way that his son later gave his heart to the Lord. What a witness from a quiet, godly man! What the brother could not know is that dozens of his descendants would be baptized and some would preach in the church which he originally felt was too extravagant.

Until the Lord returns, society will always change. Every generation of believers has had to decide what it means to be *in* the world but not *of* the world.¹² As they discuss the proper choices for their generation there will certainly be disagreements. Some will think change is happening much too quickly while others think the opposite.

The early church grew from eleven disciples to a large enough

group to have a major impact on the Roman Empire, fighting the sword with the Word. Non-believers throughout the empire were amazed at the love Christians displayed not only for each other but also for their enemies. That same attitude appeared during the early years of the Anabaptist movement. Are we striving for that same love now or are we letting differences of opinions harm both our fellowship and our witness to non-believers? Let's practice the mutual esteem taught in Romans 14 so the Kingdom can grow in numbers and in Christlikeness as it should.

(Footnotes)

¹ Rom. 14:19

² Rom. 14:10

³ Rom. 14:11

⁴ Rom. 13:10

⁵ Klopfenstein, *A Treasure of Praise*, p. 28.

⁶ Rom. 14:7

⁷ Rom. 14:8-9

⁸ John 13:35

⁹ Philemon 14

¹⁰ Phil. 2:3

¹¹ Amos 3:3

¹² John 17:15