

A Plea for Unity

On the night that he was arrested Jesus prayed that we would be one (John 17:21). He prayed that the Church, the ONE body of Christ, would experience unity. Unity is vital for the Church. But experiencing unity can be hard at times especially in situations where we have convictions that differ from one another. In today's passage Paul tells us how to think about and treat others with differing convictions. For Paul accepting fellow believers with differing convictions is really a way to live out the command to "love one another." And so, let's consider how we might love one another in the midst of differing convictions.

Opening Discussion: Paul discusses two disputed issues in today's passage that first century Christians faced. These were not issues of sin; they were simply a matter of differing convictions. What are some disputed issues over which we as 21st century Christians sometimes have differing convictions?

Read Romans 14:1-12

1. Paul introduces the categories of the "strong" and the "weak" in this passage (categories that will run through the middle of chapter 15). Though Paul doesn't say specifically, how would you characterize each?
2. What are the disputed issues that Paul addresses in this passage? And why were these things disputed?
3. What are Paul's instructions to the strong? To the weak?
4. Paul says to both the weak and the strong, "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind" (v. 5). What does this mean?

5. What should be the primary motivation for our decisions regarding matters of conscience (vv. 6-8)?

Steve said:

“Wait a minute!” you might say. “You mean to tell me that the strong shouldn’t lecture the weak about their lack of freedom and the weak shouldn’t pester the strong about the possibility of their freedom leading to sin?” I think that’s exactly what Paul is saying. I think he says this because of his great confidence that ***Jesus is a very competent Lord***. If someone really is a servant of Jesus Christ, s/he “will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” This ultimately means that genuine believers will stand before God in the full righteousness of Christ. The Lord is able and willing to make them stand (instead of letting them fall). This whole passage presupposes that for both the strong and the weak “Jesus is Lord” is more than a cliché; both the strong and the weak are humbly walking with Jesus.

6. How might truly believing and trusting that Jesus is “a very competent Lord” help release you from desires to “straighten out” another believer?
7. How would you summarize the heart of what Paul is going for in this passage?
8. What do you sense God might be saying to you through this passage?