

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 23 -

HARMONY IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

Romans 15:1-7

The ethical instructions begun in chapter 14, verse 1, are continued through chapter 15, verse 14; and as you know, they have to do with the Christian's duty to those who differ with them. It is obvious, yet it must be mentioned again, that differences are normal in the Christian Church, that it is not uncommon for Christians to disagree. As a matter of fact, diversity is of the essence of the Body of CHRIST. Of course, there are some things on which Christians must agree. Not to agree on these is not to be Christian: that JESUS CHRIST is LORD; that He is the Son of GOD; that He laid down His life upon the Cross of Calvary for the salvation of man; that the problem in history is sin, and the solution of that problem is the blood of JESUS CHRIST, GOD's Son. On these all Christians agree as well as on many other things. But there are many things in which we differ, and Paul in this particular passage is discussing our attitude when we differ.

In the first six verses of the 15th chapter, he is a little bit more specific as he addresses himself to those who are strong as to their attitude toward the weak. This is quite apparent in the physical realm. The strong who mistreats the weak is called a bully and is so recognized by everyone. But there are bullies in the spiritual and moral realm, and they are not so easily recognizable. In the physical realm it is expected that the strong have a greater responsibility than the weak, especially in a family. The strong must compensate for the weak, bear the burdens of the weak, share their weaknesses; and if that is true in a family, it is infinitely more so in the family of GOD. So Paul begins by saying we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. **"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."**

What Paul is saying is, in the household of GOD strength equals obligation. It is not a matter of pride; it is a matter of increased responsibility. The very fact that one is strong places upon him this duty to the weaker brother. If one thinks he is strong, he places upon himself an obligation to the one he thinks is weak. This simply cannot be over-emphasized, for as often happens in a domestic situation, the strong take advantage of the weak and are critical of the weak, rather than helping them. So it is in the Church; the one who thinks he is strong is critical of the one he judges as weak, and not only does he not bear his burdens and welcome him unto edification to the glory of GOD, he excludes him. It can be inferred quite fairly from this passage of Scripture that the test for authentic strength, spiritually and morally, is the attitude of the one who is strong

toward the one who is weak.

If a Christian feels he has matured in the faith, has gone more deeply than others, the evidence of his maturity will not be criticism of the weaker brother. This would indicate immaturity. The evidence of maturity will be his love, concern, sympathy and care for the weaker brother. thinking one's self strong while condemning the weak is a dead give-away to one's lack of spiritual character. What a difference in the household of GOD should those who feel they are strong take upon themselves the burdens of those they feel are weak and not consider themselves but consider the weaker brother for his good unto his edification. Thus Paul counsels us.

But he doesn't leave it there. He says that JESUS CHRIST is our example in this; He did not please Himself. As a matter of fact, Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, reminds us that JESUS CHRIST bore the reproach of the sinner. He gave Himself utterly and completely. He sacrificed Himself. He pleased not Himself. This is the hallmark of spiritual maturity, not to please one's self. Indeed, the Scriptures have been given for this very purpose. Not simply that we might be edified, but that we, as we are instructed in the Word of GOD unto the patience and encouragement of the Scriptures, might edify others in the body and that we might glorify GOD together with one mind and one mouth.

He closes this early passage of the 15th chapter, verses 5 and 6, with a wonderful prayer for the Church. Live in harmony with one another, or regard one another to be equally worthy through the example of JESUS CHRIST, a principle which he amplifies in verses 7 through 14. He begins the passage by summing up his argument from the first verse of chapter 14 through the 14th verse of chapter 15. This is the sum total of Christian duty toward those who differ.

"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." Consider how CHRIST has welcomed you. Are you worthy to come? Has your life been above reproach? Have you done nothing, said nothing, thought nothing, desired nothing that is contrary to the Son of GOD? Has your life been perfect in the last seven days, in the last twenty-four hours? Yet CHRIST welcomes you. Paul says you are to welcome others this way.

Of course they do things that displease you, they disagree with you, they fail, they sin; so much more are you obligated to welcome them for the glory of GOD! As our supreme example he uses a beautiful picture of CHRIST as the servant. He draws from the Old Testament two passages from the Psalms, one from Deuteronomy, one from Isaiah, showing JESUS CHRIST as the servant of GOD first to the Jew in order that the promises GOD has made to the patriarchs might be fulfilled and secondly to the Gentiles in order that they might glorify GOD for His mercy to them. This is the attitude of a Christian to other Christians, that of a servant, for the Son of GOD was a servant. **"And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all."** **"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."** What a phenomenon would a congregation like this be in our modern mid-twentieth century world, a congregation where each of the members was outdoing the others in serving each other, in loving each other, in caring for each other, in concern for each other; Christians who cared not for themselves but for others, who pleased not themselves but pleased others to the glory of GOD!

How desperately our world needs to see this kind of a demonstration of authentic, New Testament, apostolic Christianity. If we were more like this, men would have less excuse to talk

about doctrinal unity. GOD help us to see it. GOD help to blot out of our lives the criticism which we feel towards those that we assume are weaker than we. GOD help us to blot out of our hearts and minds our censorious spirit and put there in its place the love of CHRIST, the concern of CHRIST, the care of CHRIST for those who differ with us. Let us never forget that the more mature we feel we are, the more responsible we are to be like JESUS CHRIST at this point; and if we are not like this, let us suffer no illusions about our own spiritual maturity. Let us acknowledge our adolescence and let us seek the forgiveness of Almighty GOD and the cleansing of the blood of the SON of GOD, and let us pray that the HOLY GHOST will fill us, and the love of GOD may be shed abroad in our hearts to the glory of the SON and the healing of the Church.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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