

Consecration and Brotherhood Relationships

Lesson Scope: [Romans 14 through 16](#)

Lesson Focus

A consecrated life unites doctrine and duty. The renewed mind effects changes in our attitudes toward self, toward our brethren, toward our enemies, and toward our civil leaders.

Paul now addresses differences within the brotherhood. The Jewish believers who had been faithful to God by following the Law of Moses had to adjust to the new life of grace. Their deeply held sensitivities and sentimental attachments called for submission to the Gospel light and for patience one with another.

Differing opinions within the brotherhood may cause stressful relationships at times. In evaluating these matters, we must remember that the kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (14:17).

Although the emphasis of this lesson is on forbearance and deference one to another for the sake of peace, we need to properly understand the background of this teaching. The differing opinions being addressed here were not on issues of right and wrong. Principles of truth were not immediately at stake in these matters.

The Christian Jews in Paul's day had believed the Law of Moses to be God's will for their lives. They had faithfully followed the Law and were in favor with God. In following God into the New Covenant, they had much to learn about the Law being replaced with Christ's redeeming grace. It was difficult for some of them to disregard what they had been diligently taught from childhood.

The Gentile Christians were rejoicing in a new life of freedom from sin and could not understand the Jewish Christians' slowness to tolerate non-Jewish lifestyle and customs. Coming from two different backgrounds, Jews and Gentiles needed to exercise much patience and forbearance for the brotherhood to grow in the unity of the Spirit.

Many are blessed with a brotherhood that helps us grow in our spiritual understanding. Our brethren are concerned for the welfare of our

souls. We need to recognize the authority and responsibility of the church to make practical applications of Scriptural principles. The Word and the brotherhood are means by which our consciences can be guided in the truth.

To be in Christ is to be in His body, the church. This union with Christ and His body not only bestows rich blessings but also enjoins definite responsibilities.

Lesson Aim: To identify principles that govern the believer's relationships within the brotherhood.

Theme Verses: [John 13:34-35](#). A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you; that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Lesson Text

"We Are the Lord's"

[Romans 14:1](#) ¹ Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations.

[Romans 14:7-8](#) ⁷ For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. ⁸ For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

[Romans 14:13](#) ¹³ Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in *his* brother's way.

[Romans 14:17-19](#) ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. ¹⁸ For he that in these things serveth Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men. ¹⁹ Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

[Romans 14:22](#) ²² Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.

"Likeminded One Toward Another"

Romans 15:1-7 ¹We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ²Let every one of us please *his* neighbour for *his* good to edification. ³For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. ⁴For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. ⁵Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: ⁶That ye may with one mind *and* one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Romans 15:25-30 ²⁵But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. ²⁶For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. ²⁷It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. ²⁸When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. ²⁹And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. ³⁰Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in *your* prayers to God for me;

"Mark Them Which Cause Divisions"

Romans 16:16-20 ¹⁶Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. ¹⁷Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. ¹⁸For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. ¹⁹For your obedience is come abroad unto all *men*. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. ²⁰And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. Amen.

Questions for Study

"We Are the Lord's"

1. Why is it important that we relate properly to the "weak in the faith"?
2. What effect does an awareness of our accountability to God have on brotherhood relationships?
3. How can we encourage spiritual growth in our brethren? **"Like-minded One Toward Another"**
4. What principles must govern our relating to the varying levels of conviction and maturity in the brotherhood?
5. How is brotherly love shown by material assistance?
6. How can spiritual unity be attained in church life? What are the results?

"Mark Them Which Cause Divisions"

7. Who is responsible to "mark them which cause divisions"?
8. How can a brotherhood guard against heresy and divisive influences?

Analyzing the Passage

The "weak in the faith" (Romans 14:1) do not necessarily lack faith, but they are immature in their understanding of Scriptural principles and in their ability to distinguish between essentials and nonessentials. The strong are not to despise the weak for their lack of understanding, but they are to receive such without disruptive reasoning or disputing.

We should refrain from judging our brethren who differ in their practice within the framework of a Biblical church discipline (Romans 14:13). At the same time we are accountable to God and to our brethren for the attitudes we harbor and for the influence we wield upon the brotherhood.

Alloweth (Romans 14:22) means "testing with the purpose of approval." Careful discernment, with the help of the brotherhood, enables the believer to avoid what would eventually bring him under condemnation. The gift that Paul speaks of carrying to Jerusalem is likely the same offering he refers to in 1 Corinthians 16:3 and in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, which he brought with him to Jerusalem just prior to his arrest.

Mark (Romans 16:17) is to watch carefully or critically. We are our brother's keeper, and we must be fruit inspectors in matters of doctrine and practice. Those who cause offenses and divisions are not to be understood or treated as the weak; but avoided because of their influence.

Principles and Applications

"We Are the Lord's"

1. We need to accept the fact that members of Christ's body vary in their spiritual maturity (Romans 14:1). Because we differ in age, opportunity, and initiative, we have not all made the same progress in our spiritual lives. Each member needs to be understood, appreciated, and helped to press on to higher ground in Christian experience, regardless where he is presently. It is imperative, though, that spiritual growth be evident.

2. All aspects of Christian fellowship are governed by the awareness of our accountability to God (Romans 14:7-8). We are accountable to God not only for our own holiness of life but also for the influence we exert on our brethren. Personal liberties may need to be forfeited to avoid offending our brother. The strong brother should inspire greater commitment within us as we grow in our spiritual understanding.

3. Each member of the brotherhood is responsible to live within the bounds of conscience (Romans 14:17-19, 22). Unity that edifies is achieved by individual effort and a willingness to blend with others. To fail to heed our conscience is to weaken and destroy it. Our convictions will no doubt change as we study the Scriptures and grow in spiritual maturity. But we must always be certain that any change is in harmony with the Scriptures and a Scriptural church body. We cannot afford to allow things we are uncomfortable doing, and we must not encourage a brother, by word or action, to do something his conscience forbids.

"Likeminded One Toward Another"

4. Christian fellowship is marked by the tender care members have for each other (Romans 15:1-2). Spiritual strength includes a mindset that is willing to sacrifice personal liberties for the good of the brethren. Rather than carnally pleasing himself, the believer is called to genuine care and to practical fulfillment of his brother's spiritual and material needs. Such care also seeks to eliminate suspicion, gossip, and other non-edifying involvements and tendencies.

5. Following Christ's example results in unity (Romans 15:5-6). Christ unselfishly laid aside His glory, humbled Himself, and sacrificed Himself for our sake. As our Shepherd, He is our example of watchful, tender care for others. As His followers, we ought to willingly deny ourselves for the sake of our brother, for whom Christ died. This means

sacrificing time and resources to give aid and moral support when our brother experiences some kind of emergency. God is ready to bless such an example and such an attitude with the unity of the Spirit.

6. Sharing with our brethren on a material level is both a duty and a privilege (Romans 15:25-27). Brethren who appreciate each other desire to assist each other materially. While those who receive such assistance are greatly encouraged by the sacrifice of their brethren, the givers see this as their only reasonable service in light of what Christ has poured out for all. Thus the ties of Christian fellowship are strengthened across many miles and among many brethren who have never met. And what a privilege it is to participate in the manifold blessings of God, poured out to His children.

7. Intercessory prayer contributes to good brotherhood relationships (Romans 15:30). Striving together in prayer accomplishes much more than striving against each other over petty issues. As we are united in the Spirit around the throne of grace, our fellowship in Christ is richly enhanced. We find strength in the knowledge that our brethren are praying for us and that God will move in behalf of His people.

"Mark Them Which Cause Divisions"

8. We must separate from those who spread the deceptive influence of false doctrine (Romans 16:17-18). These influences must be identified and checked before permanent damage is done. We all have a personal responsibility to keep our hearts with all diligence so that deception and false doctrine never find a ready seedbed. If we freely listen to a wide variety of tapes and CDs by speakers outside our own circles, we are at great risk of being led astray.

Leaders are at times misunderstood in their efforts to provide this protection. What we all must understand is that, if finally no one takes issue with the false doctrine, the church will already be on the highway to apostasy and great spiritual loss.

9. God calls us to be forewarned by expanding our knowledge of good rather than our knowledge of evil (Romans 16:19). To delve into a study of the evildoings of society not only opens us to a corroding influence but also wastes our precious time. Rather, as we focus on that which edifies the brethren, we will find purpose ourselves and be part of the far-reaching, good collective influence of the brotherhood.

10. Christian fellowship is undergirded with the promise of ultimate

victory (Romans 16:20). Satan's final defeat will be Jesus' final victory. Anticipation of victory over evil inspires us to carefully guard our Christian walk today. A supportive, Scriptural fellowship is essential to keeping us on the winning side. By God's grace we can endure until the end and share in the eternal fruits of Christ's victory.

Important Teachings

1. We need to accept the fact that members of Christ's body vary in their spiritual maturity (Romans 14:1).
2. All aspects of Christian fellowship are governed by the awareness of our accountability to God (Romans 14:7-8).
3. Each member of the brotherhood is responsible to live within the bounds of conscience (Romans 14:17-19, 22).
4. Christian fellowship is marked by the tender care members have for each other (Romans 15:1-2).
5. Following Christ's example results in unity (Romans 15:5-6)
6. Sharing with our brethren on a material level is both a duty and a privilege (Romans 15:25-27).
7. Intercessory prayer contributes to good brotherhood relationships (Romans 15:30).
8. We must separate from those who spread the deceptive influence of false doctrine (Romans 16:17-18).
9. God calls us to be forewarned by expanding our knowledge of good rather than our knowledge of evil (Romans 16:19).
10. Christian fellowship is undergirded with the promise of ultimate victory (Romans 16:20).

Answers to Questions

1. *Why is it important that we relate properly to the "weak in the faith"?*
Those who are new to our church fellowship will need time to become acquainted with our practical applications of Scriptural teachings. We need to be careful not to be drawn into discussions that may be discouraging or confusing to the sincere but immature Christian. They may have some insights that will help us see our blind spots. However, we may not compromise Scriptural positions to accommodate them, or we will lose the very things that attracted them to us.
2. *What effect does an awareness of our accountability to God have on*

brotherhood relationships?

An understanding of our accountability to God causes us to live carefully, lest we fail personally or cause a weak brother to stumble and thus we become chargeable for his spiritual ruin. This kind of careful living enhances brotherhood relationships on many fronts.

3. How can we encourage spiritual growth in our brethren?

We encourage our brethren when we ourselves are solid, faithful, dependable followers of Christ. We encourage them by caring enough to kindly point out inconsistencies in their lives. We encourage them by being cheerfully open to the counsel and admonition they have for us. We encourage growth when we forgo some legitimate things that might hinder someone else.

4. What principles must govern our relating to the varying levels of conviction and maturity in the brotherhood?

True strength is measured by one's humility and willingness to sacrifice self. Our relationships must have Scriptural edification as the primary goal. We also need to remember that God-honoring unity is achievable only when it is sought according to the pattern and teaching of Christ Jesus. Finally, God must be glorified through the work and interrelationships of the brotherhood.

5. How is brotherly love shown by material assistance?

Assisting our brethren with manual labor or with finances shows them that we are aware of and truly care about their needs. It is a practical demonstration of the love we profess. Collective material assistance tests the quality of our love and humility a step further, because we submit our contributions to the discretion of the body without our name attached to the gift. Brotherly love gives out of genuine concern, but it is also willing to humbly receive in the midst of need.

6. How can spiritual unity be attained in church life? What are the results?

Unity will be a reality when love flows from heart to heart and when each member denies self and sincerely serves the Lord.

The result will be an environment in which our children learn to love the Lord and appreciate church life. Satan will not easily be able to make inroads into such a fellowship. A testimony will go out that attracts others to the church.

7. Who is responsible to "mark them which cause divisions"?

We depend very heavily on our leaders to admonish against sin and error, as well as to direct in administrating the practice and testimony of the church. But we all are finally responsible for what we tolerate and allow to grow in our lives. Pride of spirit and lust of station are often "homegrown" problems. If we ignore the responsibilities entrusted to us, or if we try to pass accountability for them on to others, we do so at our own peril and with the potential of great loss in the brotherhood.

8. How can a brotherhood guard against heresy and divisive influences?

A strong spiritual teaching program is an important bulwark against heresy. Being accountable to our brethren and open to their counsel helps us to think twice before going out on a limb of heresy or deception. Personal victory over the sins of selfishness and pride helps prevent the divisive tendencies inherent to our human nature. Scriptural church discipline is God's way of purging the errors of those who come under such discipline and also of exposing what is in the heart and experience of the rest of the brotherhood.

Summarizing the Lesson

Christ loved us while we were yet unlovely and lost in sin. He redeemed us by His own blood and accepted us as brethren. By faith we were justified in His sight, and the work of sanctification continues in our hearts. God receives each of our brethren on the same basis. When we consider the great love and patience of Christ toward us, we recognize our own shortcomings and are moved to express greater forbearance and deeper love for our brethren.

Research Guide

1. Meditate on hymns of Christian love and fellowship such as "How Sweet, How Heavenly" and "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" numbers 462 and 607 respectively in the Church Hymnal.
2. Ponder the fellowship that Paul discusses in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9.