
Words of Truth

Not To Doubtful Disputations

By: Brian A. Yeager

Amongst faithful brethren there will be both strong and weak members of the body of Christ. All faithful members are necessary (I Corinthians 12:14-27). There will be those strong in the flesh and those whom are weak (Acts 20:35). There will be those whom are strong and weak in matters of faith as well (I Corinthians 8:1-13). To be clear, those facts do NOT authorize anyone to sin or be sinful in ANY WAY (Matthew 5:48, Romans 6:1-2, Romans 6:15-16, I Corinthians 15:34, II Corinthians 7:1, II Timothy 2:19, I Peter 1:13-16, and II Peter 3:9-14). Another clarification needs to be made too. That is, physical weaknesses do not necessarily constitute that one will be or become spiritually weak (II Corinthians 12:10).

The Scriptures show that the strong are to be supportive to those whom are weaker. Notice: *"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me... Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men"* (Romans 15:1-3 and I Thessalonians 5:14).

For those whom are strong and capable of aiding the weak, there has to be a mindset of a servant (Galatians 5:13). Paul showed this very well when he, without compromising the truth of the Gospel (II Corinthians 13:8 and Galatians 2:1-5), became "all things to all men" (I Corinthians 9:19-27). Strong brothers and sisters in Christ are able to be mindful of weaker brothers or sisters in Christ, so far as there is liberty to do so, as not to wound those weak brothers or sisters in Christ (I Corinthians 10:23-33).

It is a great thing to be able to bring along the weak in matters of liberty, so that they can have time to grow spiritually. Having said that, there are times wherein this can become a problem. Weak brethren are not supposed to stay weak. To some extent, we all must grow spiritually (II Peter 3:18) or at least recognize the limits of those whom are only "one talent individuals" (cf. Matthew 25:14-30). I do not mean to come across as lacking affection in what I am about to write. Be mindful that I have a mentally retarded daughter and thus I don't use some of the terms I about to lightly. Some brethren are limited mentally. I have known several over the years that frankly have the inability to learn beyond a perpetual babe in Christ. It is not that they are unwilling, but that they are unable. This is not a weak brother or sister as we are going to address in this article. This is a mentally slow brother or sister. They do not need us to bear with them in their weakness. They need us to understand that, regardless of how hard we might try, they are not capable of "getting it". Now, let's get back to our subject. What I want to address is that there are some weaker in the faith that end up being problems. Let's consider some points.

Receive Them, But...

If we have someone who is capable of learning, willing to learn, honest, but yet weak in some areas of understanding we are authorized to receive them in the faith. Again, as we have addressed, we are not talking about those transgressing in ANY WAY. Now, notice the qualifier about receiving one that is "weak in the faith": *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him"* (Romans 14:1-3).

What does it mean, "not to doubtful disputations?" The word translated in the KJV as "doubtful" is defined as: "discussion, that is, (internal) consideration (by implication purpose), or (external) debate: - dispute, doubtful (-ing), imagination, reasoning, thought" (Strong's # 1261). The word translated in the KJV as "disputations" is defined as: "judicial estimation: - discern (-ing), disputation" (Strong's # 1253).

The meanings of the words show us that we can receive the weak in the faith as long as their matters of weakness do not result in discussions likened to debates wherein we are having disputes. In other words, if the weak one is going to disrupt the unity and peace of the local church, they are not to be received. As the body of Christ, we are expected to be at peace (Colossians 3:15). We are expected to be truly unified (John 17:20-23, Acts 2:42-46, Romans 12:16, I Corinthians 1:10, Philippians 2:2, Philippians 3:16, and I John 1:3-7). We cannot have those among us whom hold differing views (Revelation 2:14-16). If someone begins to teach another doctrine, they must be dealt with swiftly (I Timothy 1:3-7).

Consider that the context of Romans 14:1-23 allows for one brother to choose not to eat meats while another may eat those meats. The stronger brother is expected not to set before the weaker brother that which would offend the weaker brother's conscience. However, the moment ANYONE takes the view that eating a certain meat is sinful that person is teaching a doctrine of devils (I Timothy 4:1-5). All of this is written so that we may all understand that we can forbear with a weak brother or sister in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-3), but that there are limits.

I have met more than one person who has used the subject matter of a weak conscience as a tool of manipulation. They try to force their opinions under the pretense that they are being offended. In fear of losing a soul, brethren often give in to this. We cannot ever allow this to occur. No one, weak or strong, is authorized to get his or her own way (Proverbs 3:5-7). We are the Lord's people who need to submit wholly and solely to His way (Matthew 28:18-20, Colossians 3:17, and II John 1:9). Let's be sure to check our own motives and those of others when we discuss matters of a weak conscience.

Conclusion

If you are a weak brother or sister in Christ, you are holding the local church back. Get on with growing up in the faith (Hebrews 5:8-6:2). If you are strong in the faith, don't allow a good desire to support the weak turn into supporting error! Stand strong (I Corinthians 16:13)!