
Words of Truth

Don't Let The "Weaker Brother" Hijack The Congregation

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As we set forth into our study in this week's article, let's make sure we start off on the same page of thought. When I am speaking of a "weaker brother", I am meaning someone who is easily offended because of having a weak conscience (i.e. Romans 14:1-15:7, I Corinthians 8:1-13, and I Corinthians 10:25-33). If you read the aforementioned Scriptures, and consider the history of the first century, you know that those with a weak conscience weren't trying to be weak. You had Jews, that had been rightly taught to abstain from certain foods under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 11:1-8), that now needed to realize that such restrictions were lifted (I Timothy 4:1-5). They struggled with that and had to grow out of it.

To illustrate what we are going to study, let's say that a new convert has previously been taught from the Old Testament that eating swine is sinful. He or she learns the truth and knows that swine is now lawful to eat. However, he or she needs time to adjust. We have this person in our homes for meals (Romans 12:13 and I Peter 4:9), but we don't feed he or she pork. From this, that person learns that his or her conscience can put things on hold. He or she then begins having "conscience issues" to prevent things we're required to do in our service to God. That so-called "weaker Christian" eventually ends up hijacking the local church and his or her weak conscience becomes the standard over the word of God. There will be HELL to pay for that for all involved.

The Wrath Of God Comes Upon Those Whom Suppress The Truth In Unrighteousness

The inspired Apostle Paul wrote this: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness"* (Romans 1:18). The word translated as "hold" means this: "to hold down (fast), in various applications (literally or figuratively):--have, hold (fast), keep (in memory), let, make toward, possess, retain, **seize on, stay, take, withhold**" (Strong's # 2722). The King James Version translates the term "hold" in other Scriptures as: "seize" (Matthew 21:38), "stayed" (Luke 4:42), "keep" (Luke 8:15), "withholdeth" (II Thessalonians 2:6), etc. In the ways in which the word translated "hold" can be understood, we see that a person who is erringly using their conscience as an excuse to hinder the truth will meet the wrath of God.

The local church is supposed to cater to those whom are "more feeble" (I Corinthians 12:14-27). This puts those that are strong in the faith in a difficult spot. How do you balance the two? How do you balance supporting the weak so he or she can grow without giving

them control of the congregation through their limited conscience? Well, the simplicity of this comes down to the difference between authorized liberties and matters pertaining to the doctrine of Christ. (Note: The doctrine of Christ is the New Testament teachings that include what the Apostles taught - John 16:1-13, I Corinthians 4:17, I Corinthians 14:37, II Corinthians 5:20, I Timothy 4:6, I Timothy 6:3, Hebrews 9:11-17, etc.).

Doctrine Or Liberty?

In all things we MUST obey God over men (Acts 5:29 and Galatians 1:10). We cannot allow those into our fellowship whom are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ or we become partakers in their evil deeds (II John 1:6-11). Therefore, we have to be capable of understanding that we may allow liberties to be set aside for the person with a weak conscience, but we cannot for even a short time, compromise on the truth.

We have a clear distinction of this in the Scriptures as a pattern to follow. Circumcision does not matter at all under the Law of Christ (I Corinthians 7:19 and Galatians 6:15). In some cases, it made sense in the first century for a preacher of the Gospel to be circumcised as not to become a hindrance to the Jews (Acts 16:1-4). This is the principle wherein an evangelist might choose to take action in matters of liberty to "become all things to all men" (I Corinthians 9:19-27). However, the moment someone makes this liberty a matter of teaching [doctrine], that cannot be allowed for even a brief period of time (Galatians 2:1-5). We must apply that principle to any and all matters of liberty today. We must always, in all things, stand for the truth WITHOUT compromise.

Never Compromise Regarding The Truth

Whether it is someone who wants to use their conscience as a tool to promote error or any other reason, we must NEVER bend the truth (Proverbs 19:27, Proverbs 23:23, Proverbs 28:4, I Corinthians 4:6, Jude 1:3-4, and Revelation 2:14-16). We must always "stand fast" (I Corinthians 16:13). Like Paul, we must be ready to defend the Gospel (Philippians 1:17).

Conclusion

We cannot allow someone to use his or her weak conscience to override the Scriptures. If a person begins causing such problems, even if that person uses his or her conscience as an excuse, we must rebuke that person (Titus 1:10-14). If he or she will not repent we must mark and avoid that person (Romans 16:17-18). We cannot allow, even a weak person, to cause problems wherein endless questions arise and the congregation gets off track (I Timothy 1:3-7). We are to be a forward moving people. We are supposed to grow (II Peter 3:18). When someone hijacks the congregation with his or her weak conscience, we become dead in that good works cease (James 2:14-26).
