

Consider The Weaker Brother

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When we think about the early Church and her members in regard to religious activities, be it worship, service, or fellowship, we can conceive of practices which fall into one of two categories: matters of doctrine, and matters of judgment.

In matters of doctrine, the Scriptures are clear that compromise or equivocation must not be tolerated. *“It was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3). Jude saw it as imperative that we engage any struggle necessary to preserve the system of faith which had been once and for all revealed through the inspired writers of the New Testament. There must be no price too high to keep the Church pure and to keep the saved saved!

Along the same lines Paul encouraged Timothy to *“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 1:13). We are to hold tightly to the pattern of sound, or healthy teaching revealed in the New Testament.

To do otherwise is unhealthy, and that which is unhealthy for the eternal soul holds grave consequences!

On the other hand, there are those matters of judgment, matters which are neither a part of, nor contrary to that system of faith and pattern of healthy teaching. We meet on Sunday once for Bible class and twice for worship because we choose to. We are commanded to meet on the first day of the week, just as the saints did in the beginning. *“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...”* (Acts 20:7). However, we are given no command or prohibition in regard to when, where, or how many times to meet. This, then falls into a matter of judgment. In such matters we, as Christians, or elders, as the shepherds of the congregation, are free to choose to do as seems best. Could we come together just once, and still fulfill this command? Absolutely! What if we decided to come together for the entire day, rather than just a few hours? There would be no problem, as far as scripture is concerned.

However, let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the majority of a congregation would prefer to come together twice on Sunday rather than three times, as has been tradition for

many years. Now, let us also suppose that there was one brother in the congregation who did not understand this to be a matter of judgment, but believed that to fail to come together twice for worship and once for Bible class as he had always done would be sin. What is a congregation to do? Do the wishes of the many overrule those of the one? Should the many sacrifice hundreds of hours and a great deal of trouble for the sake of the one?

In 1 Corinthians 8 Paul is addressing just such a problem. In the first century Roman empire there existed a situation which is foreign to many today. Much of the Church had been raised in a culture that worshipped idols. In their false religion, they would offer meat to those idols, and then feast on that same meat as a part of worship. When those precious souls renounced those foolish practices and embraced the salvation that is offered by the one true and living God through Christ, they ceased all of their idolatrous practices. For them, to ever eat such meat again would be participating in the worship of a false god, and so they would have no part.

On the other hand, there were those Christians who understood what Paul was teaching in 1 Timothy 4:4,5. *“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received*

with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Therefore, whether it was offered to idols or not, it was meat that God had created, and they thankfully ate it as such.

What if there were an entire congregation who had this understanding, and they came together for a common meal where such meat happened to be available? Now, what if one member of this congregation believed this to be idol worship? What should they do? Paul tells us:

“But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hath knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?” (1 Corinthians 8:9-11)

The question comes down to this: What is the worth of one soul? How much should we be willing to sacrifice in order for just one to be saved? What would our savior do, or more rightly, what DID He do? When we knowingly ignore the conscience of one soul what value to we place on the blood which our Lord gave for

that soul? This is why Paul goes on to tell us that

“When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.” (1 Corinthians 8:12,13)

As Christ’s Church, we must be careful in matters of judgment. If we truly believe a thing to be a matter of judgment, let us take care not to trample rough shod over soul for which He died, and make certain that we do not divide His body for the sake of our own personal preferences!

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