

CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE, NOT WRONGFUL COMPROMISE

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's *wealth*. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, *that* eat, asking no question for conscience sake: For the earth *is* the Lord's, and the fulness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you *to a feast*, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth *is* the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another *man's* conscience?”

(1 Cor 10:23-29)

“As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that *there is* none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us *there is but* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom *are* all things, and we by him. Howbeit *there is* not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat *it* as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. 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 hast 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? But 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 Cor 8:4-13)

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

There seems to have been two basic groups in the Roman Church that Paul has in mind when he addresses them in Romans 14. Paul characterizes one such group as those “weak in faith” and the other group as those whom he classifies as “strong in faith.” The difference between these camps had nothing to do with politics or personalities, but it did have everything to do with time.

Those Paul pointed to as “weak in faith” were primarily the newer converts to the church in Rome, who had only recently left the world of paganism and its idols and, therefore, had a conscience that condemned them for buying and eating meats sold in the shambles (open meat markets) where those meats may have been available for purchase for offerings to idols. Those who were “weak in faith,” that Paul mentions, did not have “the knowledge” (the understanding) of the true essence of idols, as they were yet unlearned.

The “strong in faith,” even though they too were Romans and had come from the same pagan world that the “weak in faith” had come from, had learned through Paul’s teaching that idols were “nothing” (having no real existence as living entities). Paul had enlightened these former pagans that idols could neither curse nor bless foods simply because idols had no powers to do anything. Paul also had shown that idolatry had more to do with the darkness of the human mind than it did with stone, wood, or meats sold in the shambles.

Obviously, Paul viewed being strong in the faith as preferable, and he counts himself as part of those who were strong in faith. However, notice that Paul desires all the strong in faith (matured) of the church to “accept” those who are weak in faith (the yet unlearned).

The weak would, in time, come to learn that an idol is powerless to contaminate food. It is ordinary meat; it is neither magical nor special. Since idols are powerless and incapable of affecting anything, the meats were still regular meats.

In the mind of the mature Christian, there is nothing wrong with the meat sold in the shambles. It will not defile; it will not instill evil within those who eat it. Consuming the meat in question is not equivalent to worshipping the idol to which it may have been offered.

The Greek word “accept” (or “receive” KJV) here means “to welcome.” Apparently, Paul is calling for genuine Christian tolerance. Paul is instructing the strong in faith to be careful with the *conscience* of the weak in faith and to give them time to allow their consciences to become educated—and that would and could only come with time—and teaching—not teaching that necessarily taught it is permissible to eat the meat sold in the shambles but rather teaching that enlightened the heart and mind as to the true nature of idolatry and likewise of Jesus Christ. *“But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.”*

The strong were, therefore, to “tolerate” the weak by helping to guard the one quality that would help advance them into a more life-fulfilling walk of faith—*their conscience*. In other words, to preserve their conscience, Paul taught that the strong in faith were to “accept” or “welcome” the weak even though they, at present, possessed a skewed reality of idolatry. The conscience of the weak was not to be hardened by forcing the weak to “override” their conscience but rather to educate their conscience through Biblical truths that would develop through immersive spiritual teachings. The safeguarding of their *conscience*, Paul taught, was paramount!

The strong in faith were not to wrongly compromise with the weak in faith and simply allow a lesser knowledge and understanding to become the rule instead of the exception. No, they were rather to demonstrate Christian tolerance toward them.

The stronger Christians were to abstain from their liberties in the presence of the weak. Tolerance assumes we disagree or object to something yet are cordial toward those who may hold such beliefs, but tolerance is better understood, at least in Biblical concepts, to be a time-related “acceptance” of the weak in order to permit a change through time and teaching—a tolerance which enjoined prayer and carefulness with patience.

We tolerate, for instance, the inability of a child to read—until they have had sufficient time to learn to read. We do not demand a child to “read” after the first day of school: “You have a book—read it!” No, we understand that we must accept them as they are today so that, in time, they will develop the skill of reading through teaching developed through time.

We do not, however, tolerate WITHOUT teaching - to do so would not be true biblical tolerance - it would be a crime! To leave someone in ignorance by holding back the necessary information that would enlighten them is to "hold the truth in unrighteousness." So, where there is an absence of teaching, there is no true Christian tolerance, only unchristian compromise.

To compromise wrongly is an act of neglect which, to maintain political correctness, personal advantage, etc., leaves the ignorant in ignorance and applauds their ignorance. Unchristian compromise does not administer Biblical teaching - it only accommodates the shortcomings, errors, weakness, and ignorance that leaves the unlearned in spiritual ignorance.

The time factor... A time or space given for the student to begin to show an application of the subject taught - once the subject(s) have been thoroughly taught - it is time to take the test. To continue teaching when it becomes apparent that the student refuses or rejects the teaching denotes that it is time for other spiritual measures.

Authentic Christian tolerance is a necessary ingredient in the establishing of a church body. It is designed for "the perfecting of the saints." To truly "perfect" (to mature spiritually) a church or an individual, tolerance is a necessity, whereas spiritual criminal compromise (to withhold Truth) is never an option.

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