

## Introduction for May 30, 2010

Can we, with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we disagree on non-essentials in such a manner that the essentials are not subverted and maligned? Can we love each other to such an extent that we make room in our hearts for each other through the various stages of sanctification? Can we walk together warring against sin, encouraging the weak in faith, calling the strong to demonstrate the cross and all standing firm in the hope of the gospel?

Everyone in this sanctuary is struggling at some point in their lives. Some are dealing with family issues, others with finances considering the wild ride of the stock market and uncertainty about economic stability in the world. Anxiety over the dramatic changes in domestic and foreign policies, the constant threats and constant belittling of conservative and moral principles is unsettling to many. The overwhelming reality of sickness that many face, whether a terminal or debilitating type of disease, is a constant struggle. Rebellion of children, the fear of failure in marriage, the constancy of conflict and turmoil in homes, churches, communities and around the world is unsettling and disturbing. This text from the pen of the Apostle Paul gives us great insight and wisdom in our understanding of how to face and wrestle with all of these issues. How we act and react as a church, welcoming and receiving one another, doing the hard work of relationships and engaging one another in the process of sanctification should be an example for all to see the beauty of Christ and His church. To glorify God with one voice is the great opportunity and challenge for us in these days.

Last week we explored the third imperative of eleven - that love displays the character of Christ in holiness - and we began looking at the fourth imperative that says that we must not despise those who do not think the same way we do when it comes to dietary laws and days. Those who are weak in faith may have a tendency toward legalism. Not a legalism that seeks to be found accepted by God on the basis of a works righteousness, but a legalistic approach to life that establishes their own standards by which others are judged.

Paul is deeply concerned about how the weak in faith, and the strong, interact and live together in the context of the church. It is the unity of the church that concerns him and informs his exhortation to the church at Rome. As Paul makes clear, we may and will disagree over various issues. That is expected and understood. However, how we disagree is the key to a healthy church, or evidences an unhealthy church. How we engage one another in matters of disagreement will either glorify God and make us strong and sweet or it will destroy our witness and leave a bitter taste in the mouths of those who know us.

Today I want us to think together about the way that we welcome the weak in faith and the manner in which we employ the principles that Paul has laid before us to determine if faith is genuine; and how to encourage the weak in faith so that together we might with one voice glorify our great and awesome God.