

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE BRETHREN

And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

1 Corinthians 8:11

The LORD JESUS said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* (John 10:27-28) Yet Paul seems to be telling the Corinthians that a brother may indeed perish. We are quite certain that the LORD JESUS spoke the truth since HE is the source and sum of all truth. And we are sure that Paul spoke the truth, as well, since he wrote this epistle under the direct inspiration of the HOLY SPIRIT. The LORD was speaking concerning the fact that HE shall preserve HIS sheep unto the very end and shall lose none of them. All of those for whom HE shed HIS precious blood shall dwell with HIM in immortal glory and it is not possible that they should ever be cast off since HE gives them eternal life. That which is eternal cannot "perish" or die. Paul, however is using strong language to warn the brethren against conduct which may "destroy" another brother.

GOD has ordained and set forth that all of HIS children should be in a vital relationship not only with himself but also with one another. HE prayed for us in the garden that the FATHER might give us unity, *"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."* (John 17:23) In keeping with this thought HE described how the rest of the world would recognize them as HIS disciples as HE taught them how they should regard one another. *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:34-35)

Our religious flesh quite often tries to modify that teaching because it is much easier to adopt other means of identification than the one HE gave. Surely, HE meant that the world would know us because we were sound in doctrine, or mighty in word and deed, or faithful, or perhaps by our prosperity in the midst of want, or that we had spiritual gifts to demonstrate HIS power. The flesh says, surely we can substitute something else for having love one to the other, because there is nothing more contrary to our flesh than the simple love and esteem of our brethren above ourselves. There can be no imitation of true love. It can always be seen for what it is. *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:"* (Phil 2:2-5)

The psalmist of old said, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"* (Psalms 133:1) What the Psalmist observed has been set forth by the LORD in the establishment of HIS body in the earth. This is demonstrated as the LORD gathers men together in local churches for this purpose, *"the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by*

that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph 4:16) Just as the human body is made up of many parts, so also is the church. If one part is lacking or injured then the whole body suffers. (see I Cor.12:26) The health and nourishment of the body depends on every part of the body working for the mutual aid of the whole. " *And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*" (Col 2:19) All of our spiritual health comes from the HEAD but HE is pleased to minister it to us through the various parts (joints and bands) of the body.

So the truth of the matter is: we are our brother's keeper, not just to see that he does not fall prey to deceivers and false prophets but also that we are careful by our actions to set forth a proper example and to do nothing which may cause him to stumble. This is the exact message that Peter gave to the elders, "*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*" (1 Peter 5:2-3)

The issue which was at hand when Paul wrote the passage we are looking at in I Corinthians, was the exercise of Christian liberty. Now we are quite sure that all things are lawful unto the sons of GOD but not all things are useful for the edification of the brethren. Though I might have freedom of conscience to partake of something others consider forbidden, my love for the brethren should cause me to examine my conduct to see if it is in any way harmful to those whom the LORD loves with an everlasting love. This particular instance that Paul is addressing had to do with the eating of meat which was sacrificed to idols. Paul plainly indicates that the purpose for which the meat was used had no bearing on its suitability for consumption as food. The LORD said, "*There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.*" (Mark 7:15) But those whom Paul called the weaker brethren were still making a connection in their own mind between eating the meat sacrificed to idols and worshipping those idols. So that in their ignorance they would consider that it was acceptable to worship those idols and thus should be caused to stumble in this matter and be overcome with confusion and idolatry. It behooves those who are strong in the LORD to consider these weaker brethren as we conduct ourselves in the world. "*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 8:12-13)

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