

SHOULD YOU WEAR STEEL TOES, OR SHOULD I NOT STEP ON YOUR FEET?

We have more to unite us than to divide us. Let's make living in unity with one another a continual lifestyle.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ Ancient Rome, just like Toronto and other cities today, contained people from everywhere – with different clothing, languages and foods. And, for certain, with very different religious traditions and personal beliefs.
- ❖ And as many members of the varied population heard the gospel and came to worship together in the new Christian faith, it's no surprise that there was friction.
- ❖ In fact, Paul heard about disputes and differences from a thousand miles away, meaning that some issues were not small and the fights were not silent.
- ❖ So, in the 15th chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, he tackles the task of trying to build unity (continuing his discourse from previous chapters).
- ❖ Paul appealed to those who saw themselves as knowledgeable, senior in the faith, and strong in their understanding of the Scriptures, saying, "If you are strong, you should be able to easily carry the small burden now being carried by someone who is weak in your estimation" (v. 1, paraphrased).
- ❖ Many in that day would have experienced travel where, to keep the group moving forward, stronger group members would add a pack being carried by a child or weaker person to their load, and keep on going. The extra weight did not overwhelm the strong one, but the weaker ones got a chance to replenish their energy and go a little faster or a little further.
- ❖ What were some of the burdens being carried by the weaker members? Paul used the word "burden" to refer to beliefs or practices that were not really essential to salvation or Christian living, but which some people held onto because they felt they were important.
- ❖ Some didn't eat meat for fear that the meat might have been offered to an idol or "blessed" by a pagan priest. Some only worshipped on the Sabbath. Others favoured Sunday, as the day Jesus rose from the dead. People had many other such beliefs.
- ❖ Each of these things was tremendously important to the people who believed them. But none of those things were essential to salvation.
- ❖ In that case, Paul says, those who are able to see that it's not such a big deal should be strong and smart enough to make the adjustments needed to accommodate the brother or sister for whom it is a big deal – to be the one to *not* make a big deal of what another person believes.
- ❖ Paul is trying to do more here than protect a particular person's personal beliefs. He is trying to build and protect something much bigger and more important – something called *unity*.

KEY SCRIPTURE: Romans 15

- ❖ Paul knew something about the destructive power of disunity: it had broken up his close friendship and separated him from Barnabas, the man who had risked his life and reputation to bring Paul into the mainstream of the Christian church (Acts 9:26-28, 11:25-26, 13:2-3, 15:36-40). Paul prayed and pleaded that disunity would not destroy the church in Rome.
- ❖ In John 17, Jesus prayed for his disciples. What was His prayer? "That they all may be one", "that they love one another as I have loved them", etc. (see John 17). Jesus said if two or three of us assemble together in His name, "there I am in the midst" (Matthew 18:20).
- ❖ In unity there is the presence of God.
- ❖ There's a lot more to unite us than to divide us. We have one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:3-6). We have the same tempter. We have the same Deliverer, the same hope of His coming and the same grace to depend on.
- ❖ We want renewal in our lives. We want to see new souls being born into the Kingdom of God. What would happen if we decided to bear with each other in things that don't matter so much? What if our response to weakness was to help carry a burden rather than carry a story?
- ❖ What if we believe what God says about *unity* enough to pursue it – not just for a time but as a lifestyle of brethren dwelling together in unity.
- ❖ Then, God says, what we will experience will be so good, so pleasant, so anointed – that we will know without a doubt that only God could have commanded such a blessing...because it will be "even life forevermore" (Psalm 133).

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. How do you distinguish between what is essential for salvation and godly living versus what is a personal belief/preference? What part does scripture play?
2. If the "strong" are those who recognize that they have liberty in certain areas (e.g., foods they eat), while the weak are bothered by many things they believe they must observe (see Rom. 14:1-8; I Corinthians 8:7-13), *how* do the strong "bear the burdens of the weak"?
3. The Bible says not to judge each other (e.g., Matt. 7:1; Rom. 14:3; James 4:11); but, in love, we must hold one another to account for ungodly behaviour (e.g., Galatians 6:1; Jam. 5:19-20). How does one obey both instructions?

PRAYER TIME

Lord, help me not to step on my brother's/sister's feet, but rather, lovingly help them with their load.

WEEK OF SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2022

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

✓ (Reminds me/Confirms) 💡 (New idea) ☁️ (Think about)

! (Do this) ❤️ (Speaks to my heart) ↔️ (Must share)

PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS

Go deeper with your Life Group family.
 CONNECT-REFLECT-DISSECT THE WORD
 Your Life Group ~ Your Lifeline

Start-up: When you and a family member have a dispute, how is it usually resolved?