

Brethren Can Differ without Breaking Fellowship
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Introduction: We should not be surprised when brethren disagree.

- A. There will always be an ongoing struggle to keep the unity of the spirit in a growing church. **(Eph 4:1-3)**
 - 1. Brethren must at times struggle to find the truth as well as struggle to keep the right attitudes towards each other.
 - 2. It is during these inevitable times of struggle that real Christian maturity is shown! **(Col 2:2-5)**
 - 3. If we are honest we should recognize the great struggle each of us will have to maintain a proper heart towards the truth and towards others.
- B. One major issue we must resolve is that of the Christian's fellowship.
 - 1. Some tolerate that what they should have cut off! **(1 Tim 5:22)**
 - 2. There are some who have "jumped the gun" in deciding that a given situation demands that they give up on other Christians. (Ex. Corinth) **(1 Cor 1:2)**
 - 3. We need a principled, Bible based approach to these matters. What has been our past practice may be rooted in emotion rather than the Lord's will.

I. We must always seek complete obedience to all that God has said

- A. Jesus expected His followers to observe all that He commanded. **(Mt 28:18-20)**
 - 1. When there is but one thing that we refuse to do of the Lord's, then we have fallen away. **(Mk 10:21-23; Lk 9:23-24; 14:33)**
 - 2. Each of us must give our whole hearts and lives to the Lord. **(Mk 12:30-31)**
- B. How can we know what God expects of us?
 - 1. His word must be studied and understood. **(Eph 3:3-5; 5:17)**
 - 2. I can conclude that a matter is taught when it is expressed in a command, an approved example or an inescapable conclusion.
 - a. If an example has God's approval, then I know I can do it. **(1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6)**
 - b. Before I determine a practice is *demanded that is not specifically named* I must show that it is necessarily concluded from the text. **(Mk 12:26-27)** (Ex. If they came out of the water, they then had to go into it! **(Acts 8:39)**)
 - c. We cannot demand that others practice that which "has a possibility" of being required. (Ex. 7th Day Adventist on Noah and life spans)
- C. I must remain true to matters of conscience. **(Rom 14:1-4, 22-23)**
 - 1. I cannot compromise in my personal life!
 - 2. I also cannot demand of others that which is not clearly taught.

II. We must take great care in our collective work together

- A. There are decisions made in a local church that involve everyone.
 - 1. When we spend the money taken on the first day of the week this is everyone's work. **(1 Cor 16:1-2; Phil 4:15-17)**
 - 2. When we worship, everyone is to take part! **(Col 3:16; 1 Cor 14:15-16)**
 - 3. When one believes a thing to be sinful in these areas, then they are left with no

- good choices if they remain. They must either participate or commit sin!
- B. There are decisions that take place that are matters of personal opinion.
1. Here there is no sinful choice just choices based on judgment. (**Rom 14:14**)
 2. If we are not careful we can see others hurt because of either their own immaturity and/or a lack of love on our part. (**Col 3:14-15**)
 3. In these matters we must always be “willing to yield” for the good of others. (**Jas 3:17**)
- C. There are decisions that one may believe are wrong but he is allowed not to become a participant.
1. Should we have the Lord’s supper on Sunday night? Our arrangement allows for others to choose or refuse to participate.
 2. There is room to disagree with what is taught from the pulpit! (**Acts 17:11**)
 - a. There will always be areas that require further study.
 - b. There are some things that we cannot yield to. (**2 Jn 9-11; 1 Tim 1:3**)
 - i. The preacher cannot yield to the demands of those who are offended by strong preaching. (**2 Tim 4:2-4**)
 - ii. He should however yield in personal matters.
 - c. We need to learn how to be longsuffering! (**Col 3:12-13**)
 3. Some applications of church discipline fall in this area.
 - a. Without elders, this is one of the most difficult areas for a business meeting to decide.
 - b. I have seen some disagree with the collective decision and refuse to participate.
 - c. I have disagreed with the lack of action of a local church but took action as an individual according to my understanding. (**1 Tim 1:19-20**)
 - d. While in these matters we are still able to work together, each will give account before God as to how we have handled His word. (**1 Cor 4:4-5**)
 4. We will be sorely disappointed when we expect all in the business meeting to have the same understanding and maturity.

III. We must avoid those things that unnecessarily provoke our brethren

- A. Use your words carefully! (**Eph 4:29; Col 4:5-6**)
1. There is considerable pressure on spiritual men who are teaching.
 2. A single mistake can have huge consequences. (Ex. Factory that burned a few years ago.) (**Jas 3:5**)
 3. We can “demand” others line up with what appears to be a threat.
- B. We must always guard our hearts. (**Prov 4:23**)
1. We need to distinguish between emotion and principle. We may in our emotions show an unbalanced emphasis.
 2. In bitterness the real problem will be untouched. (**Mk 15:9-11**)

Conclusion: Let each of us patiently work for the Lord.

- A. A rash decision can cause much damage to the Lord’s cause. Is it like Paul and John Mark? (**Acts 15:36-40**)
- B. Let each of us pray for wisdom and longsuffering in this great work. (**Jas 1:2-5**)