

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION *AND* THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

## Video Lecture Series

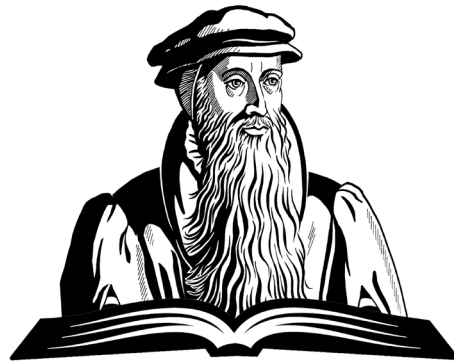
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Module 2*

### THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

*Lecture 5*

## The King's Instructions for the Weak



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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Module 2 ~*

## The Law of Love in the Church

1. Introduction
2. Three Principles for Harmony
3. The Strong and the Weak in the Faith
4. The King's Instructions for the Strong
- 5. The King's Instructions for the Weak**
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# CONFLICT RESOLUTION *AND* THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

## *Module 2 ~ Lecture 5* **The King's Instructions for the Weak**

Welcome, dear friends, to this fifth session on the Law of Love in Matters of Christian Liberty. We're studying this together from the Book of Romans, chapter 14, verse 1 through chapter 15, verse 7. So just to refresh and review, in our previous studies, I had derived five principles from this passage in Romans. And we've learned that first, believers don't think alike about the issues that are unessential, and that secondly, in the area of Christian liberty are many potentials to strain our relationships among believers. And therefore, the third principle to avoid this disharmony and division, we need to keep our focus on the major truths of the gospel, as the Scripture itself does. And fourthly, that within a church family, we're not all having the same maturity in faith. Some are young believers, some are mature believers. And fifthly then, that the strong in the faith are to bear the infirmities of the weak in the faith. In this study, we will consider our sixth principle in the Law of Love in the Matters of Liberty. And the sixth principle is that the weak in the faith are to stop judging the strong.

So these wholesome teachings of our wise and sovereign King are without dispute. Jesus himself once said, "Wisdom is justified of all her children"—Luke 7:35. And the churches that have wholeheartedly embraced and obeyed these instructions of the Lord are the living commentary on that truth. We know the wounds, and we know the divisions and destruction that could have been prevented, if both the strong and the weak in the faith lived by these instructions that are given to us, in the chapters in Romans.

So last session, we learned that the strong are to receive the weak in patience, instead of despising them. Now let's give our attention to the King's orders to the weak in the faith. And the weak in the faith are to love their brethren, and not to judge them and condemn the strong in the faith for their use of Christian liberty. How easily the weak in the faith attach labels to the strong, as being carnal Christians, or being second-rate Christians. How often do the weak in the faith even demand that others should be like them out of respect for their ideas or their convictions.

So what is God's will then for the weak in the faith? In Romans 14, verse 2, Paul stated the case of the weak in the faith in these words. He says, "For one believeth that he may eat all things:

another, who is weak, eateth herbs.” In other words, a few brethren only ate vegetarian meals, but the reason was not out of, let’s say, animal rights, or out of concern for health, or health issues. They did so because they were thoroughly convinced that all meat is forbidden. Now, strangely, this conviction wasn’t even based on the Old Testament legislation of Moses. For God the Lord allowed the Jews to eat the clean animals, and therefore, it appears to go even farther than the Old Testament revelation. The weak in the faith were conscience-convicted that all meat should be avoided. And why? Probably since the Roman society abounded in idolatry, they argued that all meat was polluted. Commonly, the meat was first dedicated to the false gods before sold on the market or put on the table of your neighbor. So they said, to avoid participating unknowingly in such idolatry, the weak felt no one should ever eat any meat that came from the Roman market. Paul has dealt with this issue already, or as well, in 1 Corinthians 10:22 to 33, and his counsel there is timeless. He simply counseled, Don’t ask. “Whatsoever is sold in the shambles”—which is like the meat market—“that eat, asking no question for conscience sake.” So why such counsel? Is ignorance bliss? No, that’s not his reasoning. His reason is, it doesn’t really matter whether the meat was offered to idols, for idols are nothing—they don’t really exist. All the heathens did was offering it to an empty nothing. For, he says, the earth, and the fulness thereof is the Lord’s. So the same thing, he counseled with regard to sharing a meal with unchurched people outside your home. He says, “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.” So why did Paul teach that we should not ask? One reason is that we would not defile our conscience. That if you would think it is wrong to eat anything that is offered to idols, you would eat or drink in disobedience, rather than in faith, if you are eating or drinking that. Now that is taught clearly in Romans 14, verse 22 and 23, so let me read this with a few clarifying comments inserted. “Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he allows”—or approves. “And he that doubts”—doubts that he is doing the right thing in eating—“is damned.” Now “damned” here means conscience stricken and burdened because he does things that he thinks are wrong to do. And Paul continues, “because he eateth not of faith”—that is, out of a tender belief that he is doing God’s will. “For whatsoever is not of faith is sin,” Paul concludes. Now, Paul did not teach that the doing of the thing—eating, or observing a special day, or whatever else it is—is sin. But if eating, or observing, or doing while thinking you are disobeying God, that is sin. Now why is that sin, while the think itself is not sin. Well it’s because we do it while we are convinced that God is displeased with what we do, and we are to do all what we do, or not do, to the glory of God, in love to him. But if I eat when I feel it’s not to God’s glory, or not good to do, well, I sin against my own conscience. So Paul counseled the weak in the faith never to violate their conscience.

But he has more counsel to give. So let’s turn back to Romans, chapter 14, and verse 3b. And he says there this: “And let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth.” In verse 10 and 12 to 13, Paul added, “Why dost thou judge thy brother? . . .for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. . . So then, every one of us shall give account of himself to God.” And notice, “Let us therefore not judge one another any more.” Now in these verses, the word “judge” is the key word—that’s emphasized. “To judge” here means to censure others with the purpose of condemning them. And it’s not just that the weak in the faith doesn’t agree with the actions—it’s not just that, no, the weak were voicing their strong condemnation about the actions of the strong in faith. Now, they may even go further than condemning their action. Often they begin to classify the strong in the faith as carnal, or as second-rate Christians, or perhaps they write them off as no Christian brother at all. Or the weak in the faith demand that others begin to do as they do out

of respect for their view. But do they have the right to judge others on the unessentials? Do they have the right to demand or insist that others cease to make use of their God-given liberties? Well God's answer upon these questions is given in Romans 14, verses 3 to 12. Now let's consider verse 4: "And let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." God gives us three reasons why not to judge fellow Christians in their use of their Christian liberty.

First, these brothers and sisters in Christ have been received by God. Now, notice the word "received" also found in verse 1, but here it is stated that God has received them. That means that Jesus Christ himself acknowledged them as brethren. Well, we need to, therefore, be very careful not to judge those whom the Lord himself acknowledges as his own children. You say, "But how will we know that the Lord has received them? Is that simply to be accepted by their claim?" No, a person's claim needs always to be matched by the walk of his life. So, is there repentance of the sins God's Word defines as sin? Is the person showing a life conformed to God's standards as seen in the Scriptures and in his Son? Is the fear of God and tenderness for God's name evident? Is there a seeking of God's pardon through the mediatorial work of Christ alone? Do we see a love for the brethren in which we're anxious to please them in charity? Do these people show a zeal and a burden for the unsaved? Now friends, if these matters are evident in their lives, these are the core matters. We are to judge of them in a most favorable manner. We must see them as received by God, and therefore, if received by Jesus Christ himself, who are we to judge them?

Paul's second reason why not to judge them is verse 4: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." In other words, we don't have a right to judge. We have no right to criticize. We have no rights to condemn Jesus' servants. Every believer is to give an account of their use of the Christian liberty to their Master, and for any of us to intermeddle with the Master's business is intruding ourselves on his throne. And if, in addition, we judge something a sin which he did not, then notice, then by default, we even judge God as wrong. Who are we to be so audacious? God is the judge, and let us leave all matters on which he has not spoken, to him.

The third reason for Paul's counsel is that they need not to worry about their fellow believers. Now Paul wrote this: "Yea, he shall be holden up" of God, "for God is able to make him stand." Now friends, this is one of the loveliest touches of the weak in the faith. Let me repeat what I have said earlier. It is really incorrect and uncharitable to label all the weak in the faith as legalistic. Many of these are very tender-hearted in their love for God. Many are moved by a genuine concern about the well-being of their fellow believers. Since the weak in the faith is not yet made perfect in love, there is still a great measure of fear in them. They worry—they worry about their brethren's salvation. They also still think that a number of these very unessential matters are a condition for salvation, or are mandatory for the saved. They're afraid—they're afraid if their brethren wander off into backsliding or spiritual compromise by their doing what they do in these unessential matters. And therefore, with very pastoral tenderness, Paul assures them that God is their security. And listen again, "Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." He will be able to make him stand firm in the faith of the gospel.

Do you notice how Paul brings both groups together, in verses 5 to 8, when he drew attention to the inner motivation of both of the groups, the weak and the strong? Let me just glean the main points from that portion of Scripture without reading all of it. First, if each is living upright, then each group is refraining or doing with an eye on the Master. Each are as the servants or the

maidens in Psalm 123: “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God.” Each in prayer, and on the basis of the study of the Scriptures, have come to a different conclusion about how they will live their life before God in the subject of Christian liberty. This is how Paul put it, in verses 5 and 6: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth” (with his eyes) “to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and” (also) “giveth God thanks.” In other words, both parties are seeking to please their Master. Both are convinced it is God’s will, and both seek to honor the Lord with obedience. So in this aspect, the weak and the strong are actually united.

So, are we giving each other that liberty to be fully persuaded in our mind? Well, brethren, if we detect in each other a sincere desire to do the will of God, then let us rejoice, and let us be charitable, even if we have a different opinion and judgment on these minor matters. If one, in his devotions to God, feels he is at liberty to eat meat, or to devote some common employment time to something sacred, and others who do not feel that they should not be accused of indulging their appetite or being carnal. And likewise, if someone senses that Jesus’ will regarding minor matters is different, such a person should not be despised or put down as narrow-minded.

Paul state in verse 5, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” That word, “fully persuaded” is a strong phrase. It’s not just an opinion, it’s not just based your feelings, it’s not based on your prejudice or your traditions. It is based on a deep conviction of a careful study of the Word of God. Later, in Romans 14:22 and 23, Paul asks, “Hast thou faith?” In other words, “Are you convinced that Jesus’ will is, let’s say, “A”?” “have it to thyself before God.” In other words, don’t condemn the others, and don’t push your convictions on those who are convinced that Jesus’ will is “B”. Be satisfied cherishing your view and act upon it in private, without bringing it forward to produce disturbance in the church. “Happy is he that condemns not himself in that thing which he allows. And he that doubts is damned”—or feels condemned—“if he eats, because he eats not of faith.” So the chapter ends, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” So the happiness of the mind promised here is only and always experienced in obedience to what we believe is Jesus’ will. So whatsoever is done in the realm of Christian liberty, as we have been searching this out, is sin, if it is done without a full conviction that it is the right thing to do. It will create great unhappiness, as your conscience will condemn you. Therefore, be fully persuaded in your mind you do the Lord’s will. And if you are, then do it, but judge not your brother who is at liberty, but despise not your brother who lacks the liberty. What a joy and a blessing of the Lord will be experienced, when in these minor matters, we allow each other the freedom, and give each other respect. Allow fellow Christians to commemorate, for example, the birth of Jesus Christ, or the death of Jesus Christ, or the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ on a specifically set aside day, if they deem this profitable for their edification. But please equally allow other brethren to omit such special days, if they feel totally convinced from Scripture that to mark such a day would be wrong. Judge not the one, condemn not the other. Allow liberty without enforcing your position. Now, with all matters that fall within the Christian liberty, let us leave it to Jesus to judge.

Paul draws our attention then, in verses 8 to 11, that as long as we live, we are bound to the will of our Lord. He is the Lord, both of the dead and the living. He is the sovereign Lawgiver over all. And one day, you and I will all stand alike before the same tribunal, and we must answer for our choices and conduct, not to our fellow man, but to Jesus Christ our Lord. And therefore, sit not in

judgment on each other, in all matters our Lord has not specified in his Holy Book.

Now, how fitting therefore to conclude this session with the words of verse 11 once more: “For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” Then we will all be given the opportunity to hear the final verdict of the King on our conscientious choices in the matters of Christian liberty. In the meantime, let’s be reminded: In all things essential, unity. In all things unessential, liberty. In all things, charity. That’s worth repeating again and again. Thank you.