

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

Video Lecture Series

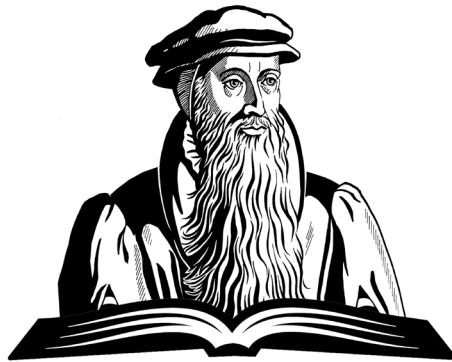
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Module 2

THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

Lecture 6

Conclusion and Exhortation



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2021 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. A. T. Vergunst is minister of the Gospel at the Reformed Congregation of Carterton, New Zealand, a congregation of the Reformed Congregations of New Zealand.

www.rcnz.org

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

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
- 6. Conclusion and Exhortation**

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

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

Module 2 ~ Lecture 6

Conclusion and Exhortation

Welcome, to the final session on this subject study from Romans 14 and 15, on the Law of Love in Matters of Christian Liberty. So as we wrap up these studies on this important subject, I have reviewed with you a number of principles that we have derived from this passage in Romans, and hopefully it will help you to read Romans 14 and 15 well. We saw that believers don't always think alike, and they will always remain that way about unessentials. We know that Christian liberty issues can have the potential to really strain our relationships among us in the local churches. And to avoid that was the third principle, and that helps us to focus on major, nonnegotiable truths of the Bible that are black and white. And let's carry one another. We're not all of the same maturity—that was the fourth principle. We're not all having the same level of understanding of the gospel. And Paul has given, in the fifth principle, the main call to the strong in the faith, to bear with the infirmities of the weak in faith. And the weak in faith are told to stop judging the strong in the faith.

So now, in this final study, I want to do two things. First, let's look at the first part of Romans 15, expound this concluding passage, and then we'll wrap it up with just a few practical observations as we close this study.

So, Romans 15 is Paul's conclusion of the King's orders about how to maintain Christian fellowship and mutual respect among the believers. So, let's remember that Paul considered himself as one of the strong in the faith. That's totally clear from how he begins Romans 15 with, "We." He includes himself, "We then that are strong." And what are the strong to do? Well, we've looked at the previous chapter, that we are not to despise them. We are to do what it says in chapter 15, verses 1 and 2, we are "to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." Instead, "Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."

Now, if we compare Scripture to Scripture, this passage in Romans 15 is expounded best by Paul's own example, and I've already referred to that, but I'll refer to it once again in 1 Corinthians 10. Now I'll only quoted it partially, just to illustrate Romans 15. Paul says, "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more" (Romans 9:19).

Paul became servant unto all. Now, he gave up his rights, as a Christian. And he, at times, adjusted himself to be a Jew with the Jew, a Gentile with the Gentile. What a gracious and magnificent glory of Christ has this apostle shown in his own example. Yeah, he literally gave up his privileges. He often bound himself again with things that were totally unnecessary, in the practice of his Christian walk, so that he would not be an offense. Paul accommodated himself regularly for one purpose, to be effective in sharing with one the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, again and again, in 1 Corinthians 10, you read, “that I might gain the Jews,” or, “that I might gain them that are under the law.” And in referring to the lost Gentiles, “that I might gain them that are without the law.” And again, referring to the weak, “that I might gain the weak.” And then finally, in one sweeping summary, “I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.”

Now, if you turn to 2 Corinthians 11:29, Paul gives us an additional insight that’s quite revealing. He writes, “Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?” The weakness Paul referred to could be general weakness or sickness, but the second half of the verse 29 forces me to conclude that the “weak” refers to the weak in the faith. Thus, when Paul met the weak in the faith, he became weak with them, in order to love them. And he didn’t do that to indulge them in their views, but he did that to build a bridge. He did that to nurture a relationship with them. This man accommodated himself to establish a connection on their level. Well, what did he mean with, “who is offended, and I burn not”? If the strong in the faith, by their actions, made brothers stumble into sin, Paul experienced some kind of a righteous anger—“I burn.” Such a lack of charity towards a fellow brother, he says is sin, and that made him angry—righteously angry. The exercise of Christian charity is an essential duty. However, does that then mean that the strong is always and only to bow to the views of the weak? Well, that question is answered in Romans 15, the first four verses, where the King’s orders are: “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us”—that is, the strong—“please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”

Now earlier, we called attention to the word “to bear” or to take up the infirmities of the weak. You’ll remember that that word described the porters who carried the luggage and assisted the travelers. That’s God’s direction. The strong are to give assistance to the weak in the faith to help them, as they are lagging behind in their faith journey, burdened. So in this context, that contains a significant direction. No, the strong are not simply to bear their views for the sake of peace, but they are to help the weak in the faith to be freed from their burdens, their scruples, which are experienced as bondage and fear. Friends, ignorance is never the mother of true devotion. And therefore, in due time, in the right manner, we are to deal with the weak in the faith, as Aquila and Priscilla did with Apollos. We read about that godly couple, they expounded to Apollos the way of God more perfectly. Now that’s how the strong in the faith are to do with the weak in the faith. And the best way to do that is not so much to focus on the issues that divide. It is rather to focus on the larger picture of the glory of Christ’s salvation. One learned expositor wrote these words I will quote: “It is both our duty and our privilege to pass on to fellow Christians the light that God has given us. Yet, that instruction must be given humbly, and not censoriously. It has to be given in the spirit of meekness, and not with contention. Patience must be exercised. The aim should be to enlighten the minds, rather than to force their will. For unless the conscience is convicted, the actions would be hypocritical.” Now perhaps it is nicer to leave the weak in faith alone, and to

ignore them as much as possible. But friends, that is not the King's order. His order is different—assist them, bear with them. Do not please yourselves, in verse 2, does not mean, just don't eat the meat, just don't keep special days, or just keep the special days. No, it's not just a direction like that—that we abstain from something they really like. No, it is instead a call to a task that you and I might even dislike. And the task is expounded in verse 2, we are to instruct the weak. Notice, we are to instruct them “for his good.” We are to edify our neighbor or our brethren in the faith. And to edify is to build them up in their faith. We are to do everything to remove their ignorance. We are to do all gently, lovingly to free their conscience from these unnecessary scruples, by deeper instruction in the divine things.

Now, this might not be so pleasant, but we are not called to please ourselves, the Scripture tells us. True, it may be a thankless task, as you may not succeed, or worse, it may bring upon you a measure of reproach, instead of appreciation. For Paul alludes, in verse 3, to what happened to Jesus Christ himself. As Jesus sought, out of love, to instruct the Pharisees on their misinterpretations of the law, what happened? He was reproached as a lawbreaker. One example is John 9, verse 16, where it records an example that must have grieved the Lord Jesus to hear. It is said there, “Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God”—why?—“because he keeps not the sabbath day.” Count on it, friends, as the Master was reproached, so you, his servant, will be. One other commentator on Romans 14 and 15 stated this, he says, “It is often necessary to assert our Christian liberty at the expense of incurring censure. We may offend good men in order that right principles be preserved. Our Savior consented to be regarded as a sabbath breaker, a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. Christ did not, in those cases, see fit to accommodate his conduct to the rules set up. He saw more good would arise from a practical disregard of the false opinion of the Jews on various aspects of their life.” So to be reviled for doing our duty has been the experience of Jesus and others, and therefore, in verse 4, Paul refers, in general, to the various people in the Old Testament, like the prophets, who spoke often very unpopular truths. He says, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we”—the strong in the faith—“through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Now, patience is needed when we work with the weak in the faith, who often are slow to let go of their views. But comfort is also needed, when for doing God's word of instructing the weak in the faith and trying to help them, you meet with reproach, you will be labeled, you may even be rejected.

Well, this brings us to the end of Paul's instruction. Now, as usual, the Apostle brought his teaching either to a doxology, or to a prayer. And notice, in this case, it brought him to prayer, in Romans 15, verses 5 and 6: “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That's a prayer for all believers, whether strong or weak in the faith. Without Jesus Christ, and without his Holy Spirit within us, fights and failures will be the outcome of dealing with these explosive issues in the Christian liberty. Now let us therefore be fervent in lifting up these petitions, as they are given here before God. For it is not only a wall of ignorance that blocks the light, it is also stubbornness or pride that binds our heart to our views that could be wrong. How easy it is to become the devil's advocate when we deal with the matters of Christian liberty. Soak, therefore, every effort to enlighten your weaker brother, in prayer. Beg him to subdue the workings of pride in your own heart. Implore God to prepare the soil for the seeds of truth that you will share with him or her. And please, let us pray for the meekness, for the graciousness, for the wisdom to guide our dialogue. Seek God's help to choose the right time, as well as the right words. Wrestle to have your heart filled with glory of God as

your supreme purpose. When Paul directs us to pray for like-mindedness, he is not thinking about uniformity of our opinions. It is harmony, in the midst of diversity, that we are to aim at. Clearly, babes, younger believers, and older believers will not be like-minded about matters in this subject of Christian liberty. But they should be filled with affection toward each other. And it is in such a relationship that quarrelling would be gone, ill feelings set aside, and forbearance and acceptance practiced in charity. And what an amiable company this would be!

Let us pray for a church in which the older bear the infirmities of the younger believers—a church family where the younger believers look with respect to the older ones, even if they don't necessarily share all their light and their understanding. And such a unity among diversity would be God-glorifying, and according to Christ Jesus. It will be according to his will, and it will be according to his example, and it will infect, and it will enflame the spirit of worship, as we come together, as verse 6 concludes, "That ye may with one mind and with one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." One said it well, "If God, who will not receive an offering while one is alienated from his brother,"—Matthew 5:23, 24—"that God will not accept the praise of a company of believers where there are divisions among them. Tongues which are used to back-bite one another in private cannot blend together in singing God's praises." So Paul concluded in one final exhortation to all parties, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God."

And finally, friends, let us part with a pastoral side note. Romans 14 and 15 is never endorsing a relaxed morality among Christians. God's standards of morality are unchanged and are of the highest degree according to his holy law. Holiness is God's chief beauty, and the believer's chief duty. Hebrews 12:14 exhorts us, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." One Thessalonians 5:22 exhorts, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." And Peter exhorted his readers, in 1 Peter 1:15, "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." And Jude 23 echoed that with saying, "Hate even the garment spotted by the flesh." Christian freedom and liberty go hand-in-hand with the strictest moral tenderness. And therefore, if a brother or a sister is seeking to walk in obedience about the matters that God requires, and raises conscientious objections based on the Scriptures, such a person is a tender believer. He's not just a weaker believer who needs to grow up, or who needs to be pitied for being narrow-minded, but such are believers who ought to be followed in their devotion of walk and talk towards their Lord and Savior.

So let's all take a look into our bosom first, and let's ask whether the boundaries that we draw are God's boundaries. Let's all be convinced that whatsoever does not raise the moral standard of a church community is not of God. Now, it is doubtful you can be a Christian in anything, unless you are a Christian in everything. Now the cross of Jesus is rough and deadly to sin, and anyone claiming to be crucified with Christ, while dallying with sin or what leads towards sin, better think again. And therefore, I leave you with three questions to make your own, and to ask often. They will prevent much harm, and they will bring much good.

Question 1 is—Is my motive for living to glorify God, or to indulge myself? Let that question be uppermost asked in all we do, and also in all we refrain from doing.

Secondly—Will my choice be a source of contention to my loved ones, my church family, and to others? Now let that question guide you, if you have to deny yourself, or patiently and gently instruct others in the truths of God.

Now thirdly, and lastly—Will my choice in Christian liberty weaken my Christian usefulness, and distract me from my main purpose for living? And our main purpose for living is to glorify

God and to enjoy him forever.

May God bless these studies on this word that we have done in this session in Christian liberty.
To him be all the glory. Thank you.