



How Shall We Then Live? Part 4

(In re: to the weak – cont.; In re: to Christian pastors)

1. In respect to those Christians possessing many intellectual problems¹ (“the weak”), God expects those stronger (those w/few or fewer intellectual problems) to:

1.1. patiently accommodate their intellectual inabilities (e.g., ignorance) (1a) “bear with” = Patiently endure/compensate for (i.e., make extra allowances for that person/act so as to neutralize their deficiency). “the failings” = Failure caused by inability versus rebellion (e.g., Act 14:8 “crippled”). “weak” = Weak in understanding/thinking – most especially as it relates to the Christian Faith (See 14:1 “weak *in faith*”; e.g., many Jews didn’t believe Gentiles could be saved. God was only willing to save the descendants of Abraham². Hence why so much attention/biblical support related to Gentiles in vv 9-12 [Heb 2:16 w/Gal 3:27-29]).

1.2. protect them from exploitation (1b-3) = They (b/c of their intellectual inabilities/ignorance) are not to become the butt of our jokes or the people we take pleasure in running down (we are “not to please ourselves” by them). Instead, we are to help shore up their deficiencies (“Let each of us please our neighbor for his good, to build them up”). We are also to protect them by taking the position that whatever is said against them is said against us (their “reproaches” are our reproaches; anyone who makes fun of/has a problem w/them is making fun of/has a problem with us). Another important way we are to protect the weak is by not allowing them to be lynched (unlawfully executed/condemned) because of their intellectual shortcomings. A common problem among the weak, is not only their inability to defend themselves, but their moral gullibility (i.e., others are able to easily convince them that they are in sin when they are innocent³). Hence the reason the OT has so much to say about this problem and about the need to investigate or establish the facts before judgment is passed (Psa 72:4 and Pro 31:9 “the poor...the needy” = Refers not only to the financially needy, but also the intellectually needy; Deu 17:1-7 “inquire diligently...if it is true” = No assumptions as to guilt are to be made – even where there is confession, until facts can be established – which includes among those claiming to commit the crime. In this respect consider Pro 18:17 = Innocent confess to sin that is refuted after examination by others. Justice therefore includes making sure that those confessing to sins possess understanding [i.e., are not weak] as to what they are confessing – e.g., the difference between sinful thoughts/temptation and mental sin/coveting; Lastly consider Mat 9:36 “helpless” = Not protected by their shepherd [fig. for pastors – those possessing the intellectual ability to protect the weak among them – Similar to Eze 34:1-5 shepherds not giving their flock justice {v16 “I will feed them in justice”} which includes protecting the weak]).

1.3. promote harmony by welcoming them to be a part of our inner circle of fellowship in the same way Christ has welcomed us (4) “For whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction” = The principles of compensation/protection of others established under the OC (e.g., not allowing the weak to be lynched) are still applicable today (under the NC). Hence the reason Jesus pardons (or protects) His people from sins done in ignorance. IOW: He protects those whose failure is due to intellectual problems/ignorance of what God requires/prohibits. (5) = The encouragement and endurance granted by knowing how Jesus patiently compensates for and protects us (in our ignorance) should cause us to never exclude or avoid the intellectually weak in the Body of Christ. Rather we are to be in “harmony” (i.e., getting along through close proximity and frequent contact). From a practical standpoint, that means including them in our inner circle of friends. This is how we corporately bring glory to God and “welcome one another *as Christ has welcomed [us – or humanity]*” (6-7). We may not view ourselves as hard to welcome or put up with, but given Jesus’ perfect mind and morality, we are like putting up with a baby stricken with diarrhea and no diaper. Given however how Jesus treats us, you would never know. We are identified and welcomed as Jesus’ Bride, the closest relationship that can exist between people (Rev 19:7).

¹ Intellectual problems = Ignorance of what God requires or prohibits.

² See *Contesting Conversion* by Matthew Thiessen.

³ Innocent people confessing to crimes is more common than it should be. More than a quarter of the 365 people exonerated in recent decades falsely confessed to committing the crime.

According to Paul, the greatest proof that Jesus has indeed welcomed us – or brought us into His inner circle was His condescension to become God’s “promised” Savior to both Jews and Gentiles (8-13) = Through “believing” both Jew (the “circumcised”) and “Gentile” can know the “joy”, “peace” and “hope” of salvation. And that because of Jesus’ willingness to set aside the pleasures and privileges of Deity living in Paradise and become “a servant” to God’s people. IOW: to take on the weakness of human flesh and become our sacrifice. This is how Paul understands the term “servant” in relation to Jesus (Phi 2:4-7) = Imagine how it must have felt for the Jesus to leave behind the only thing He had ever known and become one of us – including experiencing the very human reality of death. He went from infinite strength and eternal stability to finite strength, frailty, suffering and finally death. And He did it all so that we might be in eternal harmony (the inner circle) with God (Joh 17:20-24). PNTM = We are to do the same w/the intellectually weak among us (welcome them by making them a part of our inner circle).

2. A Christian pastor (v16 - “a minister of Christ Jesus” and “the gospel of God”):

2.1. should be “satisfied”, “proud” or feel he has “fulfilled the ministry” only when his people are both faithful *and* knowledgeable enough to give accurate instruction to others in respect to what they believe (14, 17-19) “satisfied” (v14) = Happy (Consider Heb 5:12-14). “to bring the Gentiles to obedience”(v18) = Paul took pride (v17) in knowing that his actions (“by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God”) had secured faithful obedience among the Gentile Christians. This he saw as a sign that he had fulfilled the gospel ministry in the various areas entrusted to him (“Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum” = An area spanning over 1,000 miles and including over a dozen churches).

2.2. speaks as God’s New Covenant priest with great authority for the purpose of making sure that the lives of his people are holy and pleasing to God (15-16) “very boldly by way of reminder” = Paul’s prior instruction regarding the gospel was spoken with authority – or with the expectation that the Roman Christians would understand their submission was not optional (“boldly” [τολμητής] = Assuming a place of authority - 2Pe 2:10; e.g., Rom 2:1-6, 11:22). “because of the grace given me by God to be a minister” = Paul saw his appointment and authority as a minister as coming from God. “in the priestly service of the gospel of God” = Paul identified himself as functioning as a priest. The Apostle John confirms this office as being a part of the New Covenant just as it was in the Old (Rev 1:6 w/Exo 19:6; See also Isa 66:21; 2Co 1:21 “anointed” w/Lev 8:12; 132:16 w/Mat 16:18-19). “so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” = God’s reason for reestablishing the office and authority of the priest was the same as before: to make sure that the lives (or “offering”) of His people was holy (“sanctified”) and pleasing (“acceptable”) to Him. IOW: to make sure that God’s people were being obedient to His Law (Mat 5:23-24 = Obeying the Law [practicing justice/righteousness] is what sanctifies – or makes the offering [or our plea for forgiveness/mercy] acceptable - or pleasing to God. Hence Isa 56:1-7; Amo 5:21-24; Hos 8:12-13. Hence also Pro 21:27 or Mar 12:33 and Pro 21:3 = What God wants more than anything, are faithful people – not people who constantly need forgiveness because they are constantly living in rebellion to His laws). The authority and role of God’s NC priests in seeing His people produce such faithful obedience is essential and a blessing to the covenant community. Why? Without such appointed authority and their function (as the church’s enforcers), the majority of God’s people would shipwreck their souls (e.g., the period of the Judges – Jug 21:25). Consider also (Mal 2:6).

2.3. understands that leaving his current field of ministry for another is out of the question until he has secured faithful obedience among those under his gospel oversight (those saved under his ministry) (19b [“I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ”] w/20-25 w/28-29 “I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ” = I will bring you Christ’ blessing or help) = The most important point being established in these verses is not Paul’s desire to preach where Christ was still unknown, but rather that pursuing other ministry – including helping out existing ministries such as the church in Rome, was not an option for Paul until he had fulfilled his obligations in his current field of ministry. Which means this: God is against planting (spiritual) orphanages (i.e., churches planted by pastors who leave before securing all parts of the Great Commission – Mat 28:19-20).

3. Faithful obedience is the expected response to King Jesus (18 w/Gen 49:10).

4. We have an obligation to financially help those who have helped or are helping us spiritually (25-27) “they owe it to them” = They have an obligation. “material blessings” = Financial support (1Co 9:7-14). “their spiritual blessings” = Salvation is from the Jews (Joh 4:22).

5. Protection from unbelievers (or false believers), prosperity in our work for God and times of refreshment are things God wants us to pray for in relation to ourselves and others (30-33).