

cf-d03

The apostle Paul speaks on agreeing & unity

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Community Disciplines: Romans on Discipline,
Part 3 (chapter 14b)

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Offense. Some who oppose the instrument would argue that they are “offended” by the instrument, a concept taken from the KJV translation –

(Rom 14:20-21 KJV) For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

The use of “offend” in the KJV is just a bad translation. That’s not what the Greek word translated means. And, of course, if the KJV were right, then any church member could control the church by choosing what is and isn’t offensive. (And this is exactly how this verse has been abused over the years.) More importantly, the word translated “is offended” does not appear in the best manuscripts. Thus, the language doesn’t appear in newer translations.

If the elders choose to establish a second service with instruments, they’ve not imposed any peer pressure on those who oppose instruments to participate in what they consider sinful. Some members may well be offended, but they aren’t being caused to stumble – sin against their consciences. And that’s Paul’s concern here.

Submission. (Romans 12:1 ESV) *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

No, the correct way to read the passage is in terms of *submission*. You see, in chapter 14 Paul is continuing the thoughts intro-

2 duced at the beginning of chapter 12. It's about sacrificing yourself. Those who wish to bring in instruments submit to those who do not by continuing an a cappella service. It's trouble and expense, but it's forbidden to ask someone to worship contrary to his conscience. Those who wish to sing a cappella submit to those who do not by agreeing to the second service and not grumbling, leaving, or dividing. Both submit to the others by refusing to judge or condemn those who disagree. Both get their way. Neither get all that they want. Submission works.

Humility. (Romans 12:3 ESV) *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*

Closely tied to submission is humility. If I'm humble in my doctrinal views, I recognize that I just might be the one in error. At the least, I'm sympathetic to the errors of others. There but for the grace of God ...

If I can muster some genuine sympathy for my brother — even though I disagree with him — I'll not run over him and I'll not insist on separating myself from him just because we disagree. (Of course, this is within the household of faith. Only those within grace are forgiven of their error.)

Division. If the a cappella advocates leave over the second service, *they* are guilty of division — and may well pay with their souls.

(Romans 12:16 ESV) *Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.*

(Romans 12:18 ESV) *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

(1 Corinthians 3:16,17 ESV) *Do you not know that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [plural]? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you [plural] are that temple.*

Those who wish to insist on a cappella only will argue that the pro-instrumental camp is the one that's really divisive. And that

would be true if they threatened to leave or divide the church over the issue. It might even be true if they made no allowance for worship solely a cappella. But if the a cappella members can stay and not violate their consciences, they are not being forced to leave. Indeed, if they leave because they choose to violate Romans 14 — because they damn and look down on their brothers — they are the divisive ones and the ones in violation of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

Condoning. Perhaps the biggest lie taught in the 20th Century Churches of Christ is the false and heretical notion that by staying, the a cappella members would condone the sin of their instrumental brothers and thereby participate in their sin. But Romans 14 plainly contradicts that teaching. Yes, there are boundaries, but how to interpret the silences of the text and to the binding effect of post-apostolic writings is not the line. Not even close. Indeed, if the line is found here, then all errors damn — and we're all going straight to hell when we die because none of us is perfect, not even doctrinally perfect.

(Romans 14:13,14 ESV) Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

We're all sinners. We all worship with sinners. By worshiping with sinners, we don't condone the sin — rather, we approach God's throne of grace together. We encourage and support each other. We help each other make it to the end.

Shalom. *(Romans 14:17 ESV) For the kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

What makes for peace? Well, I know two approaches —

* Always give in to those with the strictest scruples and never require them to deal with those they disagree with. Give the weakest brother in the church control of the church. OR

* Get along even though you don't agree on everything.

Which is truer to the text? Which one is truer to the theme sentence —

4 (Romans 12:1 ESV) *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

If Romans 12:1 is true, why on earth would we require the stronger brothers to submit but not the weaker brothers? Both should submit, and refusing to challenge the weakest members will leave them forever weak. That's not loving. That's not right. No, both have to submit. The stronger brothers cannot run over the weaker brothers. They can't shut down the a cappella service. They have to make allowance. And there may be times when the services can't be separate when they just have to leave their guitars at home. They submit — out of love.

The weaker brothers submit, too. They have to let the instrumental brothers stay and worship “to the Lord” as their consciences dictate — out of love. And neither side gets to claim a victory over the other. It's not about winners and losers. It's about submitting. You see, the greatest victory is being the most like Jesus. And if we can just learn to think this way, the a cappella members will be grateful to the instrumental members for their consideration and love and refusal to look down on them. And the instrumental members will be grateful to the a cappella members for their consideration and love and refusal to look down on them. Or we could just split, declare each other damned, and be angry to our graves. That's been tried, too. And some will pay very dearly for their refusal to be like Jesus.

RAY REMARKS: No division is *necessary* when brothers disagree. If both love and honor Jesus, no division will begin or continue. If they understood that use or non-use of musical instruments is a matter of opinion, every loyal, loving Church of Christ (church of Christ) could be part of Christian Churches/Churches of Christ. Why not?