

97-06-08b

Okay, we're ready now to resume. And we're looking here in Romans chapter 14. We've seen something of what the Scripture has to say about the issue of our lifestyle, our example, both the one that we personally set and the way that we view the lifestyle or the example of other believers.

And we have to be careful. We can see good qualities. We can see good examples in other believers.

And we can note those who walk according to a good example, the example of Paul the Apostle, the example of Jesus Christ himself. And we know that there are qualities that are worthy of emulation. It's one of the paragraph C comments that you find on fitness reports or commendations in the military that so-and-so has set an example worthy of emulation in the service.

And there are examples that we see. We can see prominent people in ministry or in evangelism or in our own periphery who we view according to the standard of the Scriptures and find that in this area they excel. And that is a great pattern.

That's a great example. It's a great role model in that area. And it's great, but we don't observe and follow that example for its own sake.

We observe and follow it because it reflects the fulfillment of a biblical standard, a standard which we ourselves seek to fulfill. And there's a subtle difference there. We don't want to consciously or unconsciously get ourselves involved in human celebrity-ship or hero worship or putting someone on a pedestal.

The only human being that belongs on a pedestal in our soul is the Lord Jesus Christ. And we can thank God that there are those who have been able to incorporate spiritual, biblical principles into their life. And we can see that it is possible to excel in those areas in the lives of our fellow believers.

But we just have to be careful to not emphasize the person rather than the work that God has done. That's why Jesus said that when our light shines before men, they will glorify the Father. And Peter echoes that concept in 1 Peter 3 as well as 1 Peter 2. I did not read, but I will read now, 1 Peter 5, in his talking about elders in the church.

This is something that, of course, pertains in our age. 1 Peter 5. Peter says, There's the confidence Peter has that he's going to be a partaker, that he has an inheritance at the coming of Christ. But he tells the elders, Not as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

And when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. Likewise, you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another and be clothed with humility.

For God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time. So, this is the concept.

It is worthwhile to observe lifestyles, but we have to be careful that we are doing it for the right reason. Now, we have this example that Paul has set, which was an epistle. It was New Testament truth for those who didn't have a New Testament in the early days of the church.

But we have the New Testament now, and we can observe his example even though he's not living among us. So, he tells us, for example, in Philippians, we left off looking at Philippians 3, verse 17. You can see in that same book, Philippians 4, that Paul echoes this idea once again of his own personal example.

Philippians 4, verse 9. He starts in verse 8. Brethren, whatsoever things are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, if there is any virtue, if there is anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things. We talked about that concept of meditation in our first session. What does it mean to meditate on good, noble, lovely, pure, virtuous things? What does that mean? Do we just try to put ourselves into sort of a transcendental calm state by thinking about fields full of flowers? There used to be a popular practice in churches even, in conservative denominational churches, to encourage people to sit and relax and visualize themselves in a beautiful, peaceful spring field with the dew on the leaves and beautiful wildflowers, and then to visualize the Lord Jesus and to see themselves as holding his hand and walking through this field like they did in the days when he was on the earth and so forth.

This is a terrible thing. This is an awful thing. And Dave Hunt has done a good job of pointing this out because it does two things.

First of all, it is the incorporation of Eastern transcendental meditative techniques into Scripture. We don't need to visualize, we don't need to imagine, we don't need to fantasize about the Lord Jesus Christ. And Dave Hunt makes a good point.

If you have a room full of believers doing that, is it the same Lord Jesus Christ in each fantasy? Does he look the same? Does he act the same? What is the reality that people are creating in their minds? It's a different Christ for each person. We don't have a couple of dozen different Jesus Christ. We have a single Lord and he's revealed in the Scripture.

We don't have to fantasize about him. If we want to see him and experience his presence, we do it the biblical way. And that is by learning, knowing, and obeying his commands and walking in faith.

That's when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and makes his home in our hearts. So it's a subtle thing, but in doing this, this becomes a substitute for biblical truth. This fantasy of a wonderful, kind, and caring friend walking through the tulips hand in hand is not a biblical model.

That is a substitute for reality. It's a substitute for truth. And that's what transcendental meditation is.

Well, what's real meditation? If we're going to sit and meditate on things that are lovely and virtuous and of good report, what does that mean? Well, we can meditate on the application of these things in practical experience. What about our life? What about the conversation that we have with our spouse? How do we treat them? How do we answer their questions? How do we interact with them in front of other people? Do we dishonor them consciously or unconsciously? Do we belittle them consciously or unconsciously? That's something to meditate on. It's something to think about.

We may have room for improvement in those areas, and that's something good. That's something worthwhile. What about the decisions that we make? What about the habits that we have developed? What about the ways we spend our time? You know, you've got your classic things, how much TV do we watch, and so forth.

But these are things to meditate on. How can we bring out and emphasize and nurture the good and the virtuous things in our life and minimize the things that are not glorifying God? That's something to meditate on. And so Paul says in verse 9 here of Philippians 4, the things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Now, we always have this nice phrase, God be with you. We have a little song, God be with you till we meet again. Our word goodbye is a contraction of the expressed wish, God be with ye.

And goodbye, that's where that word came from, God be with ye. And everybody says it, and it's taken on a life of its own. But what does it mean, God be with you? Paul says here, if you concentrate on these things and follow this example, the God of peace will be with you.

Well, this is not just a little goodbye wish here. This is the indwelling presence of God the Father, the God of peace. Go back to John 15.

Go back to the teaching of Jesus Christ in the upper room about the indwelling presence of the Father and the indwelling presence of Christ. It is not automatic at salvation. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is, and you have your whole issue of how unified is the Trinity, and if I have the Spirit, don't I have the Son and the Father also? But in the experiential sense, in the practical sense, in the perceived reality of the presence of Jesus Christ and the presence of God the Father, that comes through knowing the word, making it the object of faith, and putting it into practice.

And that takes meditation. It takes practice. And when we do that, when we think about these

things, that we learn and receive and hear and see and do these things, the God of peace will be with us.

And it's a promise. It's a practical statement of how the indwelling presence of God the Father comes about. And it's worth thinking about.

Wouldn't that be a wonderful thing? How far astray could you go if you had a real and perceived sense of the presence of Jesus Christ and God the Father in the midst of our soul? What a wonderful guiding light that would be, and it is. But we have to pursue that. We have to want it, and we have to be willing to make changes and think about what we're doing.

That's a part of maturity, to think. What am I doing now? What am I about to do? Is this right? And all of us have room for improvement in that area. And in that sense, we never do arrive.

We always fall short in various ways. And so this is a challenge. That's the mark of the upward calling, that prize in Christ Jesus that Paul said he pursues.

So Paul sets himself up as an example. 2 Thessalonians 3. Every time Paul states this principle, we have a slightly different view. We have new concepts that are communicated.

In 2 Thessalonians 3. Verse 6. We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition, the paradosis, we studied Friday night, which he received from us. There is a body of teaching that's a part of the fundamentals. It's in that list in Hebrews 6. Verse 2. The foundation of change of mind away from dead works, faith toward God, baptisms, teaching.

And those have been combined, unfortunately, in nearly all of our English translations, but they're two separate items. It's not the doctrine of baptisms. It's not teachings about ablutions.

They are two separate items in the list. They're separate genitives. Baptisms is one, the procedure for purification.

How do we maintain our fellowship and our function with God? And teaching, didache. Paradosis is a synonym for that, and there's a body of teaching that we incorporate. That's what takes us from babyhood to adulthood in our life as believers.

And Paul says, mark those, withdraw from those, every brother, every Christian who walks disorderly and not according to that body of teaching, that paradosis, that didache, that is central in the list of foundational things. Not according to the teaching which he received from us. For you yourselves know, in verse 7, how you ought to follow us.

Bold statement, isn't it? It doesn't say how you ought to follow Christ or how you ought to follow the Bible. It says how you ought to follow us. For we were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but we worked with labor and toil night and day that we might

not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

Well now, isn't this a good passage to make a case that we can model behavior for other people and we can consciously set an example? What is he talking about here? What is his example? It is not being disorderly. It's following the teaching that he received and passed on to them. Paul did a lot of things that he didn't have to do.

He supported himself rather than accepting support from the churches, not because he didn't have the authority to reap a salary or reap support from them, but because he had their interests at heart and he did not want to obscure the gospel. We know what the gospel is. It's not only evangelism.

It's also this body of teaching that guides us as believers. Paul did not want to raise a false issue. He didn't want to throw people off stride by making an issue out of his support.

And so he walked in a certain way before them and that was a conscious decision on his part. In the light of their observation of him, he didn't say, by the way, I'm an apostle and you owe me some support. He said, I'm teaching you the principles of the Word of God.

And he went out and supported himself. He mended nets, made tents, rather, as his tent mending occupation or his occupation with labor and toil night and day and kept from making himself a burden to any of them. So this is a subtle principle.

We have to meditate on this a little bit. What does this mean? He's setting an example consciously for people. Is he trying to get them all to work with their hands and not receive support from the church? No.

He's not trying to influence their behavior by what he's doing. He's trying to keep their minds focused on the Word of God. His motivation for setting this example and walking orderly is to be sure that they're focused on the Word and that they are built up and not torn down, that they are focused on God and His Word and not distracted by non-essential issues.

He has a right that he does not exercise. It's the law of love. It's the law of supreme sacrifice at work.

We have the right to do things, but we refrain. In the interest of someone else, it's an expression of love. It's not a desire to set oneself up in a dependency relationship.

There's a lot of talk today about codependency and the harm that comes from being dependent on another person. The point here is, we don't try to make others dependent on us. We try, hopefully, to encourage believers to be dependent on the Lord and on His Word and His Spirit.

We are not reliable enough for people to depend on us. So, Paul illuminates for us this principle.

And this is important now when we come back to Romans 14.

Because this chapter, this section, makes an issue out of lifestyle, out of example. Receive one who is weak in the faith. Well, now, wait a minute.

I thought we just saw that we're supposed to withdraw ourselves from those who walk disorderly. What's the difference between being weak in the faith and walking disorderly? Well, he explains that here. Receive them.

Pars lombano. Bring them face to face. Acknowledge them.

But not to dispute over doubtful things. Not for arguments. Not to try to argue them into being different than they are in their lifestyle.

This is a great temptation because we have the knowledge. We have been taught. We've heard the hundreds of hours of Bible class.

We've got the notes. We've got the doctrines written down. We know what's lawful and what's not.

What's good and what's bad. We see someone doing something different. We see someone that has a different view.

And we want to correct them. We want to say, well, look, you've got this all wrong. Let me be your benefactor here.

Let me help you see the light. And Paul says, don't do that. You can accept someone who has a misunderstanding, but not for arguing.

Not for a convincing lecture series. Here's someone who believes he may eat all things and someone else who is weak and eats only certain foods. They've got to hang up left over from their misunderstandings about the law of Moses perhaps that some foods ought not to be eaten.

Let not him who eats... Who is the person who eats? Would he be more mature or less mature? He would be more mature, wouldn't he? He understands the principles that it isn't what you eat. Jesus taught this even in the Old Testament age. It isn't what goes into a man that defiles him.

It's what comes out of the heart. So here's a believer who knows a little more, who's a little further along. Let not him who eats... Have contempt for is what this word means.

The one who does not eat. Now the one who does not eat is the weaker brother. Let not him who does not eat judge.

That's the danger for the weaker brother. To judge the believer who's further along. To decide that they are in the wrong somehow and to judge.

Krino is the verb here. For God has received him. So then he goes on in verse 4 to address the weaker believer.

We know that because of the verb. Who are you to judge another's servant? So here's the category of believer who is judging the others. So these are the weaker ones judging the stronger ones.

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand for God is able to make him stand. Now, will all believers stand before God? No, we won't.

Not all of us will stand. Some of us, because of rejection and rebellion against the truth are going to suffer the penalties in Romans chapter 2. Who do not by patient continuance and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality. The self-righteous, the arrogant, those who reject the truth of the word will not.

What category of people are we talking about in this chapter, in this section of scripture? We're talking about believers who are pursuing a relationship with God, who are seeking to operate in love. And when they come together, they don't gather for dispute. They gather for growth and up-building.

And what Paul is saying here is if this person is in the wrong, God is going to correct him. God is going to make him stand. If he's receptive, if he's positive and sensitive to the teaching of the word and the ministry of the spirit, God will make him stand.

God will correct him. The word of God is profitable for what? Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be mature and thoroughly furnished unto all good works. That's what the word of God does.

That's not what believers do for one another, is it? It doesn't say Christian fellowship is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, does it? It says the word of God. So, this is between the believer and the Lord. Now, how do we balance this with Philippians? Withdraw from the believer who walks disorderly.

That's the difference. Here he says, stick together, be unified. Don't come together for disputes.

In Philippians he says, separate from the believer who walks disorderly. These believers are not walking disorderly, are they? They're seeking to do what they do to God. Look what he says.

One person esteems one day above another, in verse 5, another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord.

That's the assumption we're making here, is that in this group, people are doing what they do because they want to please God. You can scratch out the second part of that phrase. It's a later

addition in the Greek texts.

He who does not observe the day to the Lord, he does not observe it. It's not in the best texts. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks.

Here's a person who is looking to God, who has that contrite heart, goes before the Lord, and does what they do because they want to please the Lord. He who does not eat to the Lord, he does not eat and gives God thanks. We're, for the sake of argument, assuming here that these believers are on the road.

They're making progress. They're just at different places in the road. Some of them are in the early part, some of them are a little further along.

But they both have the same attitude. They both have the same desire to please God. Well, the desire alone doesn't take us to maturity, does it? We are in a process of learning, and some of us are further than others.

So if we're a fourth grader, we shouldn't be despising the first graders. And if we're a first grader, we shouldn't be judging the fourth graders. That's the point here.

God will do the correcting. God will do the teaching in the right time and the right place, and this is a mistake that we often make. And the further along we get, the more susceptible to this we are.

It is a strong temptation when we learn something to immediately go and find everybody else who has any interest in the things of God and foist it on them and get them to see it the way we see it. Well, here God has taken years to build a foundation in our soul and bring us to the point, build us up to the point where we can understand this new truth. And we immediately assume that because we know it and understand it, everybody else ought to immediately know it and understand it and apply it just like we do.

Well, we have to recognize that look how long it took God to teach us that principle. He is probably in that process with other believers and maybe they're not at that point yet. And it's not our place and it's not our calling as soon as we learn something new to immediately go out and convince everyone else and get them to change and do what we're doing and live how we're living, prioritize what we prioritize.

We have to allow for different stages of growth, different speeds of growth. Some of us take years to learn things that others of us pick up in a few weeks or a few months. And that's God the Father's call.

And we have to be aware of that and be tolerant as believers are tolerant of us, hopefully. So, we have to resist the temptation to correct and rebuke and instruct one another. We also have to resist the temptation especially since we, many of us have pursued the teaching of the Word of

God for many years and hopefully we're somewhere in that later category where we know more and are therefore responsible for more.

We have to resist this temptation to despise the one who does not eat, to have contempt, to look down on and belittle in our minds or in our conversation or in our behavior those who don't understand as much as we do. And there has been a lot of this corporately in groups and congregations and gatherings of believers who have had a strong teaching emphasis. It's easy to look down the nose and say, well, look at these poor denominational churches down here.

They're all hung up on legalism. They're all hung up on this and that and the other. And we have contempt for them.

We despise them. And we immediately write them off and say, you know, God can't be doing anything in that person's life or in that church or in that group or in that ministry. Look at this obvious error they're committing.

Look at this very simple thing they don't understand that I understand. And so we write them off and we dismiss them as unimportant and a place where God is not doing any work. And not allow for the fact that sure, here's a place of error.

Here's a place where they don't have an understanding. However, that does not mean that God is not at work or that there are not other areas where they are standing in God's eyes. They may be standing in that very thing.

Look at this principle. One person esteems one day above another. One person refrains from eating and yet he is doing that to the Lord and he's accepted.

Now there's a thought. Has it ever occurred to us that somebody can be operating according to a legalistic standard, can be observing taboos and yet be acceptable in God's sight as they do that? Yes, it is ignorant. Yes, as they learn and grow in the Word they are going to discover that that's not a requirement for righteousness.

But, if they are doing it in ignorance and at that time that is their understanding of how to please the Lord, this scripture says they are acceptable in God's sight. Well, now we are way out of line in judging them and saying, well, you're observing this in ignorance and so you're wrong and you're useless and you're not worthy of my company and my fellowship or my toleration because here's this very simple thing that you obviously don't understand so God can't be anywhere in your life. That's wrong and we need to caution ourselves if we do think that we have learned.

Like Paul says, let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. And if we think we know something we better be careful because we probably don't know near as much as we think we do. And this is one of those areas.

We need to be careful about contempt. I would offer you this thought. There is no room in the life of a growing believer for contempt of any sort.

Contempt for a political party, contempt for a political official, contempt for believers in whatever category, contempt for a denomination or a ministry or a radio preacher or an evangelist. There is no room in our souls for contempt. On what basis do we have contempt? On what basis do we despise someone or something? It is a corrosive attitude and it is an open door to mental attitude sin.

It's an open door to the expression of arrogance. It's an open door to stumbling. If we catch ourselves looking down our nose, we need to stop right then and say, what am I thinking about? Our goal should be up-building, should be toleration, should be accepting one who is weak in the faith, not for the purpose of dispute, not for the purpose of correction, but for the opportunity, whether present or future, to be a means by which we can speak the truth to one another in love.

Our goal should be up-building. At our best, when we observe these things, our attitude is going to be one of hope, one of concern, and one of love, that this person is going to learn better and is going to make progress. Here's an opportunity for prayer.

Here's an opportunity for concern. Here's an opportunity for brotherly love, not for contempt, not for division, not for argument. This brings us to a principle which I'd like to review very quickly, and that is the idea of ignorant sin.

You can go back in the Old Testament, we won't turn there, but in Numbers chapter 15, the middle of the chapter to the end, starting in Numbers 15, 23 and following, the law of Moses addresses the issue of ignorant sin. What if you unknowingly err? There is a provision for that, and there is a contrast made in Numbers 15 between an ignorant sin and the sin of the high hand. If you sin rebelliously, you have the knowledge and you sin anyway.

And the penalty is much greater if you know what you're doing and fail than if you don't. It's still a sin, it still requires a sacrifice, but it's much less. And God makes allowances for the fact that we are going to be immature, we're going to be ignorant.

And the things we do in ignorance, we receive mercy for. Look at John chapter 9, verse 39. This is after the episode of the man born blind.

Jesus heals him. He goes to the Pharisees and there's this very entertaining dialogue that takes place where this unlearned man puts all of these very wise and learned Pharisees to shame. And Jesus talks to him after that and identifies himself as the Messiah.

And the man in verse 38 says, Lord, I believe, and he worships him. Jesus says, For judgment I have come into this world that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind. And this is a contrast between this blind man who has an attitude of humility and

when he recognizes the Lord worships him, and the Pharisees who have abundant evidence that Jesus is the Christ.

This man tells them. He says, Since time began, look at verse 32, since the world began, it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.

But they answered and said, You are completely born in sins, and are you teaching us? And they cast him out. So, seeing, they blind themselves. They become blind.

And here's a blind man who sees. So Jesus says, Those who do not see may see, and those who see may be made blind. Then some of the Pharisees who were with him heard these words and said to him, Are we blind also? Which, of course, is the gist of the statement.

Jesus said to them, If you were blind, you would have no sin. But now you say, We see. Therefore, your sin remains.

And this has the idea that we don't have as much responsibility when we do not yet know. But once the revelation comes, we're responsible for it. Sin done in ignorance.

And this is what we have to remember about our fellow believers. Not everyone has got the foundation in their soul that we have. And they're not ready to understand some of the things that we understand.

And we are called to toleration. We are called to have the affection and the understanding and the care that an older sibling would have for a younger one in a family, or should have. In Luke chapter 12, verse 47 and following, you have the picture of the servant who knows his master's will and does not do it.

Luke chapter 12, verse 47, that servant who knew his master's will and did not prepare himself or do according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know and committed these things deserving of stripes shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given from him much will be required.

And to whom much has been committed of him they will ask them more. So our knowledge gives us a greater degree of responsibility. And those who don't yet have that knowledge aren't held to that standard.

And what God is looking at is the heart. Someone can be observing a legalistic standard. Someone can be in a traditional, denominational church, committing all of the errors that we have learned our way out of and know better.

And that does not disqualify them in God's eyes. And God may be at work in a mighty way in their life, and they have an active ministry and are bearing the fruit of the Spirit. And it's not our place

to say, but look at these obvious mistakes they're making and to show contempt.

That's the risk that we run as knowledgeable believers. And we've got to watch out. It's wrong.

And we will be held accountable for our knowledge, not for theirs. And they will be held accountable for their knowledge, not for ours. And so we have to be very careful in this regard.

What did Jesus say on the cross? Father, forgive them. Why? For they know not what they do. Ignorance is a basis for leniency, for mercy, for forgiveness.

Father, forgive them. Luke 23, 34. For they know not what they do.

And they truly did not. You can take a look at Acts 3.17 where Peter is speaking, and he talks about the fact that they denied the Holy One and the just in verse 14 and asked for a murderer to be granted to you and killed the prince of life whom God raised from the dead of which we are witnesses. And in verse 17 he says, Yet now, brethren, I know that you did it in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

They didn't know that they were crucifying the Lord of glory. And there is leniency, there is mercy on that behalf. Now, if God can have mercy and leniency for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, we can certainly have toleration and leniency for believers who do things out of ignorance, who haven't yet learned.

The criteria in our mind is not what believers do or fail to do. It's their attitude. And we have to make a judgment call.

Is this someone who is walking disorderly and they know better? Or is this someone who's not yet learned? We happily tolerate little babies who make messes at regular intervals. We change their diapers, we wipe their chins, we change their clothes and their bedding. We tolerate them because we love them and we know that they're in the process of growing, and they're going to grow out of that.

It's the same thing in the spiritual world. Why do we not have the same level of toleration and affection for baby believers who are learning and growing and are not yet at our level? In 1 Timothy 1, verse 13, Paul calls himself the chief of sinners at one point, doesn't he? And yet in 1 Timothy 1, Paul makes an interesting statement about himself. He says that he received mercy in 1 Timothy 1, verse 16.

However, for this reason I obtained mercy that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life. Look at verse 13. I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man, but I obtained mercy.

Why? Because I did it ignorantly in faithlessness. God had mercy on Paul because he did not know what he was doing. And he calls it blasphemy.

Do you think Paul as a Pharisee was blaspheming God the Father? No. This is sort of a backhanded reference to the deity of Jesus Christ. Blasphemy is to blaspheme deity.

And Paul was speaking against the Lord Jesus. And he says, I was a blasphemer. Well, he was speaking against the Lord Jesus.

And that was blasphemy. A persecutor and an insolent man. I obtained mercy because I did it in ignorance and faithlessness.

And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. And there were believers who accepted Paul, realizing that he had done these things in ignorance. And when the knowledge came to him, he responded.

And he comes after the Damascus Road experience. And believers, at the peril of their lives, accepted Paul and applied this very principle that we're studying this morning. And finally, you can recall our recent study in Hebrews chapter 6 that those who have tasted of the Word of God and the age to come and have been enlightened and so forth, if they fall away, it's impossible to renew them again to repentance.

They have the knowledge and are actively rebelling against it. That's a different situation. As long as they act out of accord with what they have been taught and what they know to be true, that's like the number 15 sin of the high hand.

It's rebellion. And that is the believer to withdraw from. Who, having heard the truth, who ought to know better and consciously reject that truth and go a different way, that's when we withdraw.

That's when we separate. That's when we do not accept someone into our circle of intimacy. So, we recognize that we have been the beneficiaries of this mercy God has put up with us with great patience and our ignorance as we have learned our way along.

And we are to show that same divine love toward one another. We should not have any room in our souls for contempt. We should be looking for ways to encourage one another to love and good works.

That's the purpose for assembling, isn't it? In Ephesians, not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is, but looking at one another and encouraging one another for love and good works. That should be our goal. And we need to stop and meditate on those things.

We need to stop and think. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? That's what counts. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your loving kindness and your mercy toward us. We thank you for your patience as we slowly grow and begin to comprehend the things of Christ. We pray that God, the

Holy Spirit, will shed abroad that same divine love in our hearts, show us where we are insensitive and have failed in this area.

We pray that we will not have contempt, that we will not despise our fellow believers, but we'll recognize and express the same grace that we ourselves have received. We pray that as a result we will draw closer to the example of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the wonderful examples we have in Scripture of those who, by faith and patience, wait for the fulfillment of the promises that you have made to us, both for now in time and for the eternal future. We thank you again for the privilege of studying your Word.

We pray that these things will illuminate and motivate us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.