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What Would You Give Up? By Teresa Hampton

I grew up in a large family. Seven children. Three bedrooms. One bathroom. As you can imagine, every now and then there were some disagreements. To keep peace, we occasionally had to give up something, like taking a long, hot shower.

The family of God at Rome struggled with disagreements (Romans 14). There were some who were converted from idolatrous worship and for them, eating meat sacrificed to an idol violated their Christian conscience. More mature Christians understood, though, that meat sacrificed to idols was no different from any other, so they exercised their liberty to eat that meat. Their insistence to continue eating meat sacrificed to idols, despite the way it negatively affected others, became a source of stumbling for the young Christians.

Paul heard about these opposing views. Understand, this was not a doctrinal issue or a matter of right or wrong. Paul clearly taught that false doctrine was to be noted and refuted (2 Tim. 4:2-5). This issue was a matter of conviction based on personal conscience. Worse yet, the two parties' differences had devolved into a judging contest, both sides judging or condemning the opposing brothers. Paul reminded them that condemnation/judging is God's business, and men dare not assume His duties!

How would the matter be settled? Paul reasoned, *...let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way* (Romans 14:13). In other words, if it was going to violate the conscience of a brother or sister, they should no longer insist on their way. He said, *If your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died... for the kingdom is of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (vs. 15,17).

Paul continued, *Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food* (vs.19-20a). Eating meat or refusing to eat meat is not an

issue in today's churches. However, disagreements, angry words, and disunity are usually generated by opinions, wants, wishes, and insisting on our way.

What is the result for one whose conscience tells him it is sin? We destroy the work of God. If our liberty in matters of opinion causes a Christian to stumble, we are no longer walking in love! Paul encourages us to pursue peace, to edify or build up the church, and be willing to defer to our brother or sister in matters not involving doctrinal truths. He said, *We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please himself...* (15:1-3a). If no one's conscience is involved, both individuals should be willing to defer, for the sake of unity.

In either case, the question is still pertinent. What will you and I give up to maintain peace and love in the family of God?

Today's Verses: *I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1a-3), Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:18), Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).*