

24.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Romans 12:18

Following Christ leads to a revolution in how we engage with others. The Apostle has already addressed the need for the believer to bless others, which begins with the imperative: let love be genuine (Rom. 12:9). But we live in a world where people will not share our pursuit of honouring Christ. These people can be argumentative, contrary, deceptive, selfish, and even nasty. If we choose to respond in kind, two things will result. Firstly, we will be estranged from the one we have entered into conflict with, and secondly, we will be dishonouring Christ.

1. Based on this New Testament injunction, will it be possible to completely avoid sharp disagreement or heated conflict with everyone? Explain.

In the world, relationships with others are regularly viewed as *competitive*. Every competitive person generally has the goal to win. The assumed belief is that *if you win, I lose*.

2. Following the example and teaching of Christ, what is another way to view our interactions with others?
 - a) If I lose, I'll do everything I can to make sure you lose as well.
 - b) If you win, it doesn't mean you're right or that you're better than me.
 - c) Rather than making *winning* the goal, I can make *understanding* you, and your point of view, the goal.
 - d) Just because I disagree with you, doesn't mean that I don't like you.
 - e) Both c) and d).

3. Read Philippians 4:1-3. What does this passage tell us about even Christians getting into disputes with each other, and how they sometimes have to be dealt with?

4. According to the Apostle Paul's later instruction, in Romans 14:19, what positive steps can we take to make it more likely that we will live peaceably with all people?

5. How does the granting of Romans 15:13 make it easier to live peaceably with all people?

Perhaps one of the reasons some believers might find it so difficult to live peaceably with others, is that they themselves are not enjoying the peace of God in their own souls. When someone's soul is disrupted by guilt or shame, hurt or unforgiveness, pride or bitterness, or, hypocrisy or duplicity, they forfeit their peace with God. This makes them prone to quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder (see Second Corinthians 12:20).

6. How would applying this injunction by the Apostle Paul have a bearing on our church? Discuss.

Amen.