

SESSION 6

Accept



QUESTION 1:

How do you decide what's not worth arguing about?

THE POINT

Strong relationships are not hindered by differences of opinion.

THE PASSAGES

Romans 14:1-4,13-19

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

What a wonderful world it would be if everyone started reading from the right script, which just so happens to be the one in my hand!

But the reality is, I don't live in a perfect world ... and neither do you. We don't always see eye-to-eye. The question for each of us is, what do we do when we disagree—when the other person seems to miss our “right” way of seeing things?

A lot of us spend an enormous amount of time persuading—trying to get the “blind” person to subscribe to our point of view. But what if that approach doesn't work? (And it often doesn't.) What happens when you talk until you're blue in the face and the other person still stands his or her ground? Is the relationship over?

In the Book of Romans, Paul taught us to remain humble when we have differences in opinion. Clearly, some hills are worth dying on and at times we need to stand our ground, but Paul helped us to see where to draw those lines. Paul's instructions guide us to maintain strong relationships in spite of any and every difference of opinion.

Romans 14:1-4

1 Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

2 For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

3 Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

What's the difference between being *united* and being *unified*? If you were to take two enemies, handcuff them together, and lock them in a room, you'd see two persons united but not unified. Just because people are *together* doesn't mean that they are *unified*.

Paul addressed the importance of peaceful relationships—not simply staying in the same church but staying closely knit together. Romans 14 indicates rival groups of individuals were popping up in the church because members were joining forces according to their personal persuasions and preferences. Believers became critical of one another for holding different views. This division was wrong and out of place, especially given the fact that they were arguing over petty things. They were not debating the gospel or dividing over whether Jesus had truly died for their sins. They were not debating the most effective ways to reach their community for Christ. They were arguing over foods and festivals. *What foods should we eat—and not eat? What days should we celebrate on our calendar?*

Paul later referred to these two groups as the weak and the strong (Rom. 15:1). What made one group stronger was their spiritual maturity; they rightly understood Christian liberty. Those

in the “strong” group were far from perfect, but they understood that whether a person ate meat or only vegetables and what day another person considered holy did not point to disobedience or a lack of love and commitment to Christ.

Who were the people in the “weak” party? These included the Christians who had grown up week after week with certain rules and practices—rules and practices that were deeply ingrained in them. Some also may have come from pagan backgrounds and thus believed the food sold in the markets was not good for food. These believers were every bit as saved as the “strong” believers. They were committed followers of Christ, but their conscience kept them from embracing new freedoms.

QUESTION 2:

How should we behave when we disagree as Christ-followers?

While one group may have been more mature in their thinking, both groups were guilty of a critical spirit. Rather than running each other down and resenting the positions held by the other group, Paul challenged them to “receive” one another. *Receive* carries the idea of welcoming others and being accepting toward them. The world defines *acceptance* as a full affirmation, even endorsement, of a person’s beliefs and practices. The Bible doesn’t use the word *receive* to mean we should condone sin. Instead, it’s a desire to stay close, even when both parties see things differently.

It’s important to keep in mind that Paul was talking about disputable matters—those things Scripture is silent about. He’s not talking about black-and-white sin. For example, when a believer sees a brother in Christ walking down the street in a drunken state, he should challenge his choices (Eph. 5:18). Likewise, if a Christian discovers her sister in Christ is involved in sexual immorality, she has an obligation to confront her (1 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 6:1).

In Romans 14, Paul was addressing “gray areas” in the Christian life. Still, in verse 4, he made it plain that each of us will have to answer to God for the way we have lived this life. God is not going to ask me what I thought about another person’s actions. God is the Lord and Judge over the other person. I’m not.

QUESTION 3:

What unintended damage can occur when we judge one another?

Romans 14:13-15

13 Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.

14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

15 But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

As previously mentioned, the “strong” group had a more mature understanding of Christian freedom, but Paul did not let this group off the hook completely. He challenged these believers not to be insensitive by flaunting their freedoms. They should avoid offending others: “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”

Before my kids were old enough to pick up after themselves, they would leave their blocks, cars, and assorted jagged toys scattered across the floor. In light of this, I soon discovered the wisdom

of clearing a path to the kitchen each night. It only took one disastrous trip to the fridge in the dark for me to realize the pain of a stumbling block. Crash! Boom! Pow! This was not the racket from a Batman movie, but from Ben Mandrell falling on his face after tripping over one of those little foot daggers.

Of course, I couldn't be angry at my baby boys for causing me to eat carpet. They didn't know any better. Unfortunately many Christians are fully aware they are putting down stumbling blocks. They know some Christians see a particular activity as offensive, but they don't care. They're going to do it anyway.

Out of respect for others, mature Christians will restrict their freedom, removing anything from their lives that would cause others to feel wounded in their conscience. Our personal relationships should trump our personal freedoms. The strong should move toward the weak.

Simon was a vibrant, young worship leader. While in college, he was often called on to lead the music in chapel services as well as in surrounding churches. One Sunday, he was invited to bring his band and lead the music at a more traditional church. The pastor was very kind and appreciative, but he did request that Simon wear a coat and tie, the normal attire for their church leaders. Feeling insulted, Simon hung up the phone and wondered, "How could this church insist on a dress code that is not found in Scripture? Why can't they accept me for who I am?" Simon made a decision in the heat of his emotions. He rejected the pastor's request and arrived on Sunday in his faded jeans and favorite T-shirt. His attitude? "Those people can get over it." It is easy to fall into Simon's selfish, self-centered way of thinking. It is likely that you—just like me—at some point have tried to justify your behavior by saying, "Those people need to get over it." This mentality does not build healthy relationships. Furthermore, wounding your brother or sister in Christ for no good reason is wrong.

We need to have the opposite attitude. Whenever we consider the conscience of others as we make adjustments to our lives, we are demonstrating maturity more than compromise.

QUESTION 4:

How do you balance enjoying your freedom and avoiding stumbling blocks?

Romans 14:16-19

16 Let not then your good be evil spoken of:

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

So what is to be the main focus of believers? The kingdom of God. In verse 17, Paul wrote, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

- ▶ We live to make the kingdom of God and His glory known throughout the earth.
- ▶ We live to build His kingdom and promote His purpose.
- ▶ We live to see our Savior return in power and glory, with our lives prepared and poised for service.

Paul goes even further to keep us on track: “He that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.” We serve Christ when we ...

- ▶ ... “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

- ▶ ... give proper proportion to trivial things.
- ▶ ... keep the cause of Christ in full view and refuse to “major on the minors.”

In so doing, we sense God’s pleasure and relationships thrive.

Verse 19 is particularly helpful in completing this thought: “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” We are called to wear the badge of a servant. We are talking about preferences and differences of opinion. Certainly, times may arise when we must make a clear moral and biblical stand, and that stand could cause division. Even then, we must stand for truth in a loving way, with unity in mind (Eph. 4:15). When someone disagrees with us or offends us, our natural reaction is to run away from the person, build a wall of defense, or just keep our distance. In some situations these boundaries are needed, but the healthiest Christian response is to maintain the relationship. We are called to stick with it and serve the people God has placed around us. As we wash the feet of our friends as well as our foes, we keep the focus on Christ and not ourselves.

We may never see a greater test of the depth of our love than when disagreement hits our family. Families sometimes have fierce disagreements. As a result, fathers and sons, sisters and brothers may suffer from years of estrangement that stem back to a single heated discussion. Sadly, decades can pass, and the substance of the argument will be completely forgotten, but the wall of separation stands high and unyielding. Civil wars are usually the worst kinds of clashes. A family has no winners when Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas gatherings are removed from its scrapbook of memories.

Scripture compels us to do our part to preserve relationships. The kingdom of God is about “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” May we promote these things in the lives of our families and our churches. Never give up on the hope of healing.

QUESTION 5:

How does serving Christ in this way change how we approach disagreements?

ENGAGE

In the space provided, compare “disputations” (Rom. 14:1) we might disagree about with indisputable matters of the faith. List some examples of each.

Disputed Matters

Indisputable Matters

How do you determine the difference?

LIVE IT OUT

What will you do to build relationships in spite of any differences of opinion?

- ▶ **Extend grace.** If someone has offended you because their actions go against your convictions, forgive. Do not hold these actions over their heads.
- ▶ **Let go.** You may feel perfectly free in Christ to participate in some activities, but others do not. Let go of your freedom to engage in the activity in order to respect and serve the other person.
- ▶ **Agree to disagree.** Meet with someone with whom you have a difference of opinion. It might help if you each communicated why you hold to a certain conviction; in the end, however, you may still choose to agree to disagree. Maintain love and respect for the other person in spite of the difference.

Your relationships are more important than your opinions. Love Christ by loving other people more than you love your rights or opinions.

