

When Christians Have Genuine Disagreements

How Then Shall We Live? - part 3

Romans 14

Sept. 20, 2015

“In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” -St. Augustine

Day One-Receive One Another (vv. 1-4)

1. You find disagreements in business, at school, at church, and in your own home.

How are we to respond when we have disagreements of opinion about what is "spiritual," or in matters of lesser importance? Paul gives us three great signposts: (1) Receive one another, (2) Edify one another, (3) Accept one another (this last one is in Rom. 15).

Romans 14:1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

2. "Disputable" matters means less important things about which we have opinions or tastes. Examples would what is "real worship" music, how dressed up should we be for church, or foods we "shouldn't" eat. Think of these as *gray areas*.

3. "...*him whose faith is weak*" means Christians who tend to be more legalistic about lesser matters. In the church in Rome, the weak Christians were judging stronger Christians who were more free in Christ for not following Jewish dietary laws and Jewish holy days. Weaker Christians make lesser matters standards of spirituality.

² *One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.*

4. Paul provides a specific example. If you read this verse as a solid biblical argument against being a vegetarian, please read verse 3.

³ *The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.*

5. Here, "*the man who eats everything*" (he's free in Christ to not have to follow lesser matters) still has a problem. What is it in v.3?

6. Both the strong and weak Christians have a similar issue. The stronger "look down" on the weaker (v. 3), and the weaker "pass judgment" on the stronger (v. 1).

7. Because God has accepted us (v. 3), we must accept one another, even though we don't always see eye to eye.

⁴ *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Day Two-Receive One Another (vv. 5-9)

1. Paul will help us think a few examples through...

Romans 14:5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

2. What does it mean to “be fully convinced in his own mind?”

⁶ *He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

3. Ask yourself what it is that makes a day “holy” or makes what we eat “holy.”

4. **Underline** the word "Lord" every time it appears in v. 6 (above) and vv. 7-9.

⁷ *For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.*

⁸ *If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*

⁹ *For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*

4. What point do you think Paul is trying to make in these last three verses?

5. Do your eyes tend to travel horizontally toward others when you engage in lesser things? Do those eyes tend to be critical of others who differ with you? What different effect would eyes that are moving vertically, upward, have on your attitudes toward others?

6. Whether we observe a special day or not, eat or not, live or die, for whom do we do these things? For whom do we not do these things?

7. If we are so focused on doing all these things “unto the Lord,” what concern will we have for the way others may be doing things? How should our attitudes change toward others who think differently than we do?

Day Three-Receive One Another (vv. 10-12)

Romans 14:10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

1. Paul addresses both groups.

2. Search yourself and answer Paul's two questions honestly. How do you see "self" being promoted in your answers?

3. Paul gives us a great equalizer. We will all stand on equal ground before God.

(Note that the judgment spoken of here is NOT the "final judgment." Paul is speaking of the judgment of our "works," not our "sins." This is the same word used of a judge at an athletic competition where those who won received rewards).

4. Paul gives us two more great equalizers. Underline them both:

¹¹ *It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'"*

¹² *So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

5. Paul quotes Isaiah as he promises that every knee will bow and every tongue confess. Is this a day you look forward to eagerly or with some apprehension?

6. Does the idea of giving an account of yourself to God change your response to the previous question?

7. If the idea of giving an account for yourself gives you pause, it may be appropriate for you to examine why that is. What *approaches to others* might you need to begin to take?

8. If you are struggling with the idea of giving an account, remember also what we learned in Romans 6-8 and keep in mind the assurance from Romans 8:1.

9. Paul reminds us to focus more on what equalizes us, what we share in common, rather than our natural bent to focus on what makes us "better" or "more spiritual."

Day Four-Edify One Another (vv. 13-18)

1. In relating to others with whom we disagree on lesser things, Paul gives us signposts to guide us ahead: (1) Receive one another. (2) Edify one another.

Romans 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

2. What are three things Paul tells us NOT to do?

3. Paul has us think thru an example of different opinions about food. In the Corinthian church, some believers thought that they should not eat meat that was being sold after it had been used as a sacrifice in a pagan temple. Other believers had no problem eating the meat offered at a pagan temple. To them, meat is meat. Each group saw itself as the "more spiritual."

¹⁴ *As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.*

¹⁵ *If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer **acting in love**. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

4. What are two important principles at work in dealing with this "food" controversy?

5. "Acting in love" is the first principle. In dealing with differing opinions and actions Paul says don't use the question, "How does it affect me?" Instead use the question, "If I go ahead and do this, what affect will it have on my brother or sister?"

¹⁶ *Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.*

6. Sometimes we Christians are not much different from the Pharisees, who made mountains out of molehills, and who majored on the minors. Paul again lifts our eyes for some much needed perspective:

¹⁷ *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,*

7. What strikes you about v. 17, especially in light of our study?

¹⁸ *because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.*

Day Five-Edify One Another (vv. 19-23)

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

1. What two aims should we keep in mind as we consider how we are to approach gray areas?

2. "Make every effort" - tells us that these two aims trump any lesser matters!

²⁰ *Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.*

²¹ *It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.*

3. Allow me to summarize Paul's words into four important statements:

- a. The strong believer needs to grow in LOVE.
- b. The weak believer needs to grow in KNOWLEDGE.
- c. The weak must LEARN from the strong.
- d. The strong must LOVE the weak.

4. Where do you find yourself on this continuum? Which one resonates with you the most? Jot down an example.

²² *So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.*

²³ *But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

5. What do these verses say to you about the strength of your convictions?

6. Are there places where your convictions have become so strong that they have slipped into dogma or legalism?

7. Close your time by meditating on this statement as well: "Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. Knowledge must be balanced by love."