"Differences of Opinion"

Romans 14:1-12

11-8-2020

Introduction:

* What should you do when you don't agree with a fellow- Christian over a disputable matter?

I. DON'T BE HIS <u>ENEMY</u> (vv.1-3)
(He has been received by God)

II. DON'T BE HIS <u>MASTER</u> (v.4)
(He has his own Master - God)

III. DON'T BE HIS <u>CONSCIENCE</u> (v.5)
(He is to be "fully persuaded in his own mind")

IV. DON'T BE HIS <u>MOTIVE</u> (vv.6-9)
(He is to please the Lord, not you)

V. DON'T BE HIS <u>JUDGE</u> (vv.10-12)
(He will be judged by God, so will you!)

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As believers, we have a wonderful Holy Spirit-produced unity.

We have a common bond in Christ because we share a common faith, common fight (against world, flesh, and devil) and a common future (heaven).

However, you don't have to live the Christian life very long before you come to realize that along with our unity comes diversity (cp. I Cor. 12).

Each believer is different. Different in age, color, background, culture, experience, abilities & talents, and understanding of the Scriptures.

While each believer (in order to be a believer) must agree on what the Bible says about Christ and salvation, there do exist some differences over certain interpretations of difficult passages and standards for Christian living.

Some things are undeniably and immediately clear, and some things require more intense study and thought.

No one agrees with everyone on everything. Praise God for our individuality!

Issues that some Christians divide over:

1. Bible interpretive differences ("sons of God" - Gen. 6:2; "born of water" - Jn. 3:5; "except it be for fornication" - Mt. 19:9)
2. Women wearing slacks, wigs, make-up
3. Birth control
4. The use of certain musical instruments in church
5. Observance of Christmas
6. Eating certain foods (EX: pork)
7. Doing laundry on Sunday
8. Translation issue
9. Men who wear a mustache, beard, or have hair over their ears
10. Music (EX: Bach, Beethoven
11. Interracial dating
12. Different political party/candidate
13. Differences on minor Bible interpretations.

There was a time in America when well-meaning Christians opposed Christian radio "because Satan was the prince of the power of the air!" (Wiersbe, p. 559).

Many times people are prone to hold to a certain standard which cannot be proven Biblically. Some standards that people hold to are not Biblical but cultural or traditional.

"This is what us southerners believe!"
"Our church has done it this way for 100 years!"

But the question is: What do you do when you don't agree with someone else over a disputable matter?

Some people fume (they get hot and angry; hold grudges)

Some people fight (physically or verbally - "mud slinging")
EX: the divisiveness at Corinth (I Cor. 1:10-13, 6:1-8)
the two women at Philippi (Phil. 4:1-3)

Some people freeze (become cold toward someone, and cut off all communication)

Some people simply give in (with no conviction of their own)
--There is no virtue in being "wishy-washy"

*** What should you do when you don't agree with a fellow- Christian over a disputable matter?**

It is to this question that Paul responds in Romans 14 - 15:13.

I. DON'T BE HIS ENEMY (vv.1-3)
(He has been received by God)

V. 1

"Weak in the faith" - possibly a new convert; someone who has not matured to a complete understanding of what God clearly says is wrong and what is not.

NOTE: In context, God is talking about a "weak" brother, not a "wicked" brother.

"Receive ye" - take to yourselves, embrace, fellowship with.

"But not to doubtful disputations" - not with the intention (or goal - "eis") of passing judgment about questionable things.

"Doubtful disputations" = to dispute over matters of opinion; we derive our word "dialogue" from the Greek "dialogismon." To dialogue is to verbally "go back and forth with opinions."

God's people waste much time and cause so many divisions because of arguing over opinions, speculations, non-essentials, gray areas, areas of Christian liberty, non-moral issues.

As a preacher, I must preach what is "black and white," not speculations.

I must proclaim God's Word, not opinions.

I must herald "Thus saith the Lord" not "This is what I think" or "This is what I believe."

There are some matters that we will disagree on.

But in our disagreements, let us not be disagreeable. Let us agree to disagree and still love our fellow-brothers in Christ. Let's not go looking for fights.

We will differ on some views, but we must never be obnoxious or sin in our attitudes toward those with whom we differ.

Gal. 5:15 - "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."

God is not teaching us that we are not to practice Biblical separation.

To honor God, we must separate over unrepented moral transgression (I Cor. 5:5-11) and over cardinal doctrinal deviations (Rom. 16:17). Biblical separation is a doctrine based upon the holiness of God (I Pet. 1:15-16).

Separation is a clear command of the N.T. (II Cor. 6:14-16; II Thes. 3:6-15).

NOTE: In the church of Rome were both saved Jews and Gentiles. "The Jew had a background with centuries of following a strict code dealing with sacred days and specific diets. This developed in him a strong devotion to scruples. Contrastingly, the Gentile was saved out of a pagan influence of life and often had eaten meat sacrificed to idols, participating in debauchery. Gentiles, once saved, had no problem with scruples." (Stitzinger, Romans notes, p. 74).

V. 2

"He may eat all things" = This belief is held by the more mature believer who knows God's N.T. regulations regarding eating such things as meat:

1) Mark 7:18-23 - It's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of his heart.

2) Acts 10:15 - Peter learned "what God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

3) I TIM. 4:4 - In a context describing an "end time" heresy of asceticism, God says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving."

4) In a passage very similar to Rom. 14, Paul states to the Corinthians, "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." (I Cor. 8:8)

5) Paul is clear in Rom. 14:14, "No meat is unclean of itself"

"Herbs" = vegetables

V. 3

"Despise him" = to regard someone as "nothing," as a "nobody." To treat with contempt or to look down upon.

There is a tendency for those who are fully aware of their "liberty" in Christ to look down upon those who live under a few more regulations than they do. They, with a feeling a superiority, look down their noses at those they view as ignorant "legalists."

Often those with such lofty attitudes are themselves "proud" (I Cor. 8:1-2), and tend to go to the opposite extreme of being almost "antinomian libertines."

Remember the words of Paul to such people - "Use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (Gal. 5:13) . . . and "take heed lest ye fall" (I Cor. 10:12).

"Judge him" - to criticize or condemn

There is a tendency among those who maintain an abundance of regimented extra-Biblical external standards to condemn those who don't hold to their "rules."

If you don't fit into their exact mold of practice and methodologies, you are a carnal, backslidden, "new evangelical" modernist!

"Externals" do in some cases reflect someone's spirituality, but they don't make you spiritual. True spirituality is internal first and foremost.

If God has "received him" (same word as in verse 1), we must not condemn him.

The strong must not despise the weak and call them immature. The weak must not condemn the strong and call them unspiritual. (Wiersbe, p. 559).

"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

Even in cases where a fellow Christian is living in undeniable disobedience to the Word, God says, "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (II Thes. 3:15).

Yet our old nature is so quick to make someone an enemy over the silliest, most trivial matters.

II. DON'T BE HIS MASTER (v.4)
(He has his own Master - God)

Paul is saying, Who do you think you are criticizing someone else's servant??

"Servant" = a household servant who belonged to someone else.

"Master" = Lord)"kurios") - this word occurs 10 times in this chapter (esp. v. 6 & 8)

Example of a sport player (ex. football) criticizing a player on another team. To his own coach, manager, or team owner, he must give an account.

Each believer belongs to God. Therefore, He is the one to say whether or not you are doing or believing what is right.

He determines whether you are rightly standing on your belief or whether you have fallen off the "deep end."

Not only does God determine how His servants are doing, but He also causes them to do what's right (v. 4b).

I have noticed that God actually blesses people who I don't agree with on every jot and tittle!!

I cannot tell another preacher who to fellowship with and who not to fellowship with (I can give him advice, warn him, etc., but I am not a "Baptist Pope").

III. DON'T BE HIS <u>CONSCIENCE</u> (v.5)

(He is to be "fully persuaded in his own mind")

"Esteemeth" = lit. to judge or consider

A particular day above another:

1) Holidays (ex. Jewish festival "Holy Days")

2) Sabbath (commanded in O.T. Law - Ex. 31:17. Not commanded in the N.T. Epistles; rather, we don't have to keep the Sabbath - Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16).

3) Lord's Day (the "first day of the week" - Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2. "The Lord's Day" - Rev. 1:10)

"Every day alike" - This believer would contend that every day is a "holy day"; that every day is to be a day devoted to the Lord and His work.

He would say, "We should not merely remember Him on Christmas or Easter; nor should we <u>merely</u> donate one day a week to God; nor should we limit our assembling to one day a week.

"Fully persuaded" - <u>totally convinced</u>, with full assurance that what I am doing is right.

Whenever you violate your conscience, you have sinned! (v. 23)

"If it is doubtful, it is <u>dirty</u>" (for you).

IV. DON'T BE HIS MOTIVE (vv.6-9)
(He is to please the Lord, not you)

V. 6

"He that regardeth the day" - the person who thinks highly of a certain day.

"Unto the Lord" = for the Lord; for the Lord's sake; for His glory, to please Him.

V. 6-8

"Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31)

"Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17).

Believers (esp. new converts) are often questioning certain practices (and rightfully so): "May I do this?" "Should I go there?" "Can I read this or watch or listen to that?"

The answer is simple, "Does participating bring glory to God? Can I do this as 'unto the Lord'? Can I thank God for this?"

Both men, though having differing views and practices, have the right motives - they believe and practice the way they do to please their Lord.

In Heaven, which of the two will receive a greater reward? Answer: If they both were acting out of conviction "fully persuaded" - they both will be rewarded equally.

God rewards based on the heart motive as you live according to what God has taught you and as your conscience dictates.

V. 7

"Liveth to himself . . . dieth to himself" = No man is an island unto himself. We are to do whatever we do for God since "we are the Lord's" (v. 8) (we belong to Him - I Cor. 6:20).

We do not live to please other men, or even ourselves, but to please God.

Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11; Mt. 28:18), and He is my Lord. It is for Him that we are to do whatever we do. Don't be intimidated by what man thinks of

you, but what your Savior thinks of you!

V. DON'T BE HIS JUDGE (vv.10-12)

(He will be judged by God, so will you!)

"No Christian has the right to 'play God' in another Christian's life." (Wiersbe, p. 559).

V. 10

"Set at nought" = to regard as nothing (same word as v. 3 - "despise")

"The judgment seat" = lit. the "Bema" seat; a judgment for determining rewards of the righteous - I Cor. 3:13-15 and II Cor. 5:10.

[Not a reference to the "Great White Throne Judgment" (Rev. 20:11-15), which involves unbelievers who are not part of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:6)]

V. 11

"Confess" = to speak out the same thing."

At the judgment, no one will deny the Lordship of Christ (cp. Is. 45:23; Phil. 2:10).

V. 12

“Every one" - the universality of the Judgment (no one excluded)

"Shall" - the certainty of the Judgment (future tense)

"Give account" - the content of the Judgment (God's ledgers will be opened)

"Of himself" - the personal evaluation of the Judgment

I will be held accountable for me.
You will be held accountable for you.

I will not be judged for your failings.
You will not be judged for mine.

Therefore, we ought to judge ourselves, not others (I Cor. 11:31).

We ought to fear the scrutiny of God not the scrutiny of others.

"It is encouraging to know that our success in the Christian life does not depend on the opinions or attitudes of other Christians. God is the Judge . . . " (Weirsbe, p. 559)

ILLUS: The division between Joseph Parker (who attended the theater) and Charles Spurgeon (who smoked cigars). God will one day set the record straight (SEE: Wiersbe, p. 560).

Conclusion:

What is God calling for in our lives?

--A mutual forbearance (patience)
(sometimes we simply need to bite our tongue and not contest someone's view)

--A degree of tolerance (understand)
(NOTE: Not on a cardinal doctrine or clearly defined moral practice, but on questionable areas of Christian liberty)
(Beware of becoming preoccupied with the trivial and missing the vital (Mt. 23:23).

--A dosage of love (I Pet. 4:8)
(Where we won't let our insignificant differences of opinion divide us)
Augustine said it this way: "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

--A time of introspection (self-examination)
(We need to worry more about ourselves; concentrate on casting the beam out of our own eyes)

People who are busy serving God have no time or desire to be investigating the lives of other Christians.

Example: Peter's question about John, "Lord, what shall this man do?" Jesus replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me!" (SEE: John 21:5-25).

There must be harmony in the family of God. In a home, you don't sever your ties to your brothers or sisters because of personal quirks and differences of opinion. Why? Because your love for each other binds you. So it must be in our spiritual family.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1).

UNITY . . . even with a few "differences of opinion."