

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 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? 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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

ROMANS 14:1-4

¹ Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. ² One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. ³ One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.

What's the difference between *united* and *unified*? If you were to take two enemies, handcuff them together, 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 not simply staying in the same church but staying closely knit together. Romans 14 indicates believers became critical of one another for holding different views that were petty. They were not debating the gospel or dividing over whether Jesus had truly died for their sins. They were arguing over foods and festivals. *What foods should we eat—and not eat? What days should we celebrate on our calendar?*

Who were the people in the “weaker” party? These included the Christians who had grown up with certain rules that were deeply ingrained in them. These believers were just as saved as the “strong” believers, but their conscience kept them from embracing new freedoms.

While one group may have been more mature in their thinking, both groups were guilty of a critical spirit. Paul challenged them to “accept” one another. The world defines acceptance as a full affirmation, even endorsement, of a person's beliefs and practices. The Bible doesn't use the word *accept* to mean to condone sin. Instead, it's a desire to stay close, even when both parties see things differently.

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 2:

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

Paul later referred to these two groups as the weaker and the stronger (15:1). What made one group stronger was their spiritual maturity. Those in the “strong” group understood that whether a person ate meat or only vegetables and what day another person considered holy did not point to disobedience.

QUESTION 3:

How would you summarize Paul's instruction in these verses?

ROMANS 14:13-15

¹³ Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died.

QUESTION 4:

What's your initial reaction to Paul's message in verse 15?

As previously mentioned, the “stronger” 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 no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.”

Before my kids were old enough to pick up after themselves, they would leave assorted toys scattered across the floor. I soon discovered the wisdom of clearing a path. It only took one disastrous trip to the fridge in the dark for me to realize the pain of a stumbling block.

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. We should move toward the weak.

Simon was a vibrant, young worship leader. One Sunday the pastor made a request that Simon wear a coat and tie, the normal attire for their church leaders. Feeling insulted, Simon 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 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.

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

“God’s purpose in our differences is to enable each of us

→ to help the other ←

reach his or her potential for God and good in the world.”

AUTHOR UNKNOWN



ROMANS 14:16-19

¹⁶ Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval. ¹⁹ So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

The most important things in life are not meats and vegetables! Though we must eat to live, we do not live to eat.

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 eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

- ▶ 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: “Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval.” We serve Christ when we ...

- ▶ ... give proper proportion to trivial things.
- ▶ ... “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).
- ▶ ... keep the cause of Christ in full view and refuse to “major on the minors.”

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

QUESTION 5:

How would you describe our responsibility for building peace among Christ-followers?

Verse 19 is particularly helpful in completing this thought: “So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.” We are called to wear the badge of a servant. Again, 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, however, we must stand for truth in a loving way, with unity in mind (Ephesians 4:15).

When someone disagrees with us or offends us, our natural reaction is to run away from the person or build a wall of defense. In some situations these boundaries are needed, but we are called to stick with it and serve the people God has placed around us.

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

BUILDING PEACE

Select one of the following statements and briefly write any difficulty you experienced with accepting someone who may have thought differently than you on that topic.

- Different thoughts on your favorite band
- Different thoughts on your favorite sports team
- Different thoughts about what or how you eat
- Different thoughts on how to discipline children
- Different thoughts on politics
- Different thoughts on abortion

Write:

Two vertical dashed lines forming a large rectangular space for writing.

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 his or her actions go against your convictions, forgive. Do not hold these actions against this individual.
- ▶ **Let go of your desires.** 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 the other person more than you love your rights or opinions.**