



Light from the Word

Romans 14 (Part 2) - Resolving Disputable Matters

Editor's note: this month continues a three-part series of teachings from Romans 14.

In the Word we find basic doctrines that are indisputable tenets of the Christian faith and must be believed to acquire salvation. We also have beliefs and convictions which we hold personally that can vary from person to person or from group to group, such as the meats and days discussed by Paul in Romans 14:2-6. These are “disputable matters” or issues about which brethren can have varying degrees of conviction.

From time to time, these matters can cause conflict between brothers or sisters. We are called to avoid such conflict by loving one another,¹ and esteeming our brother higher than ourselves.² If we fail to love and esteem, we must reconcile with each other in light of our differences.

Our first step in that direction is to remove “the beam out of (our) own eye.”³ This requires self-inspection. Paul writes, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.”⁴ Our first question to self might be, “why exactly do I hold these convictions?” Are they based firmly on the Word of God, or is it simply that we have always understood or preferred thus and so. Or are there events of great pain or great joy that have shaped how we view life? How do our own thoughts and convictions reflect the whole Word of God? These are just a few examples of things to consider while coming to a conclusion that we are “fully persuaded.” Second, we must consider that, while “all things are lawful”⁵ (“all things” being disputable matters and not sin), all things are not necessarily expedient or edifying. In light of our conviction, we find ourselves willing to adjust,

not necessarily our conviction but our behavior, to achieve peaceful reconciliation with our brother. After careful inspection of self, and in a humble and loving attitude, we are now ready to receive our brother and take the second step, to discuss the mote that is in his eye.⁶

The next condition in resolving a disputable matter with our brother or sister is to simply receive them in love. Paul instructs us to receive the one weaker in faith.⁷ Let us first consider who the “weaker in faith” person may be. It is very likely that neither party in a disputable matter feels they are the weaker in faith. In reality, each of us may fit that description at varying times in our life or as it relates to various issues. If we each lovingly esteem others, many heartaches and divisions are prevented no matter who the weaker in faith may be. We are taught to “bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.”⁸ When we “look not at our own things, but every man also on the things of others,”⁹ we will be sensitive and tender to receive the other brother or sister with whom we have a difference. This is not to say we will agree and come to the same conclusion on the matter. Neither is it to say that we throw up our hands and tolerate anything and everything. However, it does equip our hearts to love and esteem each other in the way Christ would desire. Hence we find the solution when we follow the above Scriptures.

Let us also consider what it means to “receive” as instructed in Romans 14:1. Another word for this is to accept. Is our heart in a position to accept our fellow believer as our brother or sister in the faith even while they may have different convictions in some areas? This is certainly not to say we should compromise sound doctrine. Nor is acceptance the same as approval. But we should consider the example of Jesus. He modeled acceptance in John 13

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Romans 14: Biblical Remedy

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as He washed the dust of denial and betrayal from the feet of His disciples knowing they would all forsake Him. Even with that knowledge, He still demonstrated the perfect picture of “accept” in serving and love. Is this picture a reflection of the way we treat, esteem, look at, talk to, or talk about those believers who have differences in lifestyle or conviction than us? Let us receive them in the biblical sense of this word.

The final condition in resolving a disputable matter is to seek peace. Scripture clearly teaches us to “*follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*”¹⁰ Are we willing to put peace with our brother or sister above our passion in a disputable matter? When we overemphasize the importance of issues that vary among the brethren, it only spreads the seeds of discord. The enemy wants to use differences among us to wedge apart and divide us. Satan is well aware that it is possible to take very minor issues and turn them into some major mountain that splits apart the unity of the brotherhood. Paul

states that “*the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty.*”¹¹ This means our enemy deceives by very sneaky means. In using disputable matters to divide the flock, the devil craftily uses minor differences to win major victories against the kingdom of God.

Imagine a flock of sheep dividing and biting each other because of petty preferences in the texture and color of the grass they prefer. How much more difficult is it for the shepherds to keep the sheep together and protected from wolves? Paul exhorts us to “*endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”¹² Endeavor is an action word. It takes effort, energy, and perseverance. When we mix sincere love of the brotherhood with this endeavoring, it has the power to pull out any roots of bitterness that may be growing in our hearts. Jesus instructs us that when we love each other as He loves us, the world will identify us as His followers.¹³ When we divide and argue disputable matters, just what does the world see in the church? Are we not shining personal flashlights in each other’s eyes and compromising our born-again witness while there are millions of souls stumbling in

darkness and needing the light of Christ’s truth and love and grace?

In conclusion, there are three conditions laid out in Scripture to deal with disputable matters among believers: examining our own heart, receiving each other in love, and seeking peace. Although Satan works hard to sow discord and bitterness in the church, if we are willing to pursue these three virtues, it disarms him of many of his fiery darts. Each sheep in the flock of God is special to the Shepherd. He designed us, guides us, leads us, and uses us each in a very personal and unique way. Even though all the sheep have the same Shepherd, yet this Shepherd is intimate with each of us and desires all of his sheep to be at peace with each other and Him.

(Footnotes)

¹ John 13:34-35

² Phil 2:3

³ Luke 6:41-42

⁴ Rom. 14:5

⁵ 1 Cor. 10:23

⁶ Luke 6:41-42

⁷ Rom. 14:1

⁸ Rom. 15:1-2

⁹ Phil. 2:4

¹⁰ Heb. 12:14

¹¹ 2 Cor. 11:3

¹² Eph. 4:3

¹³ John 13:34-35