

SEEKING UNITY IN THE MIDST OF DISPUTE

Romans 14:1-12

Introduction: The Most Misunderstood Passage in the Bible

I. Christians Will Disagree over “Disputable Matters” (v.1, 2, 5)

A. Definition of “Disputable matter”

- o This refers to a practice/activity that the Bible does not forbid, but that some Christians are nevertheless uncomfortable with
- o Paul uses the term “weak” (v.1) to describe Christians who abstain from these disputed activities
 - Paul does not use this term in a pejorative sense. He does not mean these people have “weak” faith in Christ.
 - Instead, Paul uses “weak” because these believers lack the understanding/maturity to realize their freedom in Christ

**** Key point:** This section is only dealing with practices the Bible does not forbid and is not dealing with activities that the Bible clearly forbids. When it comes to the latter, Christians are called to take strong stands against such activities (Rom 12:9)

B. What Examples Does Paul Give of “Disputable Matters”?

- o Some refrain from meat and eat only vegetables (v.2)
 - Likely that some Jewish-Christians were still trying to maintain OT purity laws regarding food. Thus they avoided meat out of fear it was not “kosher”
- o Some honor certain days above others (v.5)
 - Again, Jewish Christians in Rome might have insisted on honoring OT feast days or Sabbath days
- o Some refrain from drinking wine (v.21)
 - Some may have feared that the wine was offered as a libation to pagan gods
- o Modern examples of “disputable matters”?

II. How to Handle Disagreements Over Disputable Matters (v.1-6)

A. Accept One Another (v.1)

- o "Welcome" the one you disagree with; don't let this hinder fellowship
- o And don't welcome each other just "to quarrel over opinions" (v.1)

B. Do Not Judge/Despise One Another (v.3-4, 10)

- o The strong (who understand their freedom in Christ), are called not to despise (v.3, 10)
 - This is a reference to looking down upon a person in a condescending way
- o The weak (who abstain from certain practices), are called not to pass judgment (v.3, 10)
 - This refers to how believers condemn another person on their own authority (as opposed to the Bible's)
 - The reason Paul opposes this is because we do not have the authority to do this: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls" (v.4)

****Key question:** Are you despising or passing judgment on someone today?

C. When it Comes to Disputable Matters, Focus on Your Own Behavior Rather than Others'

- o Whether you participate or abstain from a behavior, be convinced in your mind it is godly (v.5)
 - In other words, if you are doubtful about a behavior, don't do it!
- o Whether you participate or abstain from a behavior, do it "in honor of the Lord" (v.6)
- o Whichever way you choose, remember "we will all stand before the judgment seat of God" (v.10)

Discussion Groups

1. Do you find yourself struggling more with “despising” others, or “passing judgment on others?”

2. Why is it so important that we properly define what it means to “judge” someone else? How does the world misunderstand the biblical meaning of this term?

3. How does focusing on yourself, rather than others, help keep you from despising or judging people?
