

IMPORTANT UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT MATTERS OF OPINION

Romans 14:1-12

Introduction:

1. Those who specialize in conflict resolution observe that most disputes among Christians do not arise from so called *doctrinal* issues.
 2. When brethren do not get along it is most generally because they have different convictions in what we would style a matter of *opinion* or *judgment*.
 3. Romans 14 is the one chapter in the Bible that deals most directly with those types of problems.
 4. The problem isn't that we can't understand this chapter's instructions; the problem is that we are reluctant to practice its teachings.
- I. A Few Technical Points.
- A. The most significant phrase of the chapter is found in the first verse and is translated a number of different ways.
 1. "Doubtful disputations" KJV.
 2. "Decision of scruples" ASV.
 3. "Passing judgments on his opinions" NASB.
 4. "Disputes over opinions" RSV.
 5. "Criticize his views" Berkeley.
 6. "Judgment on disputable matters" NIV.
 - B. The Greek of the verse helps clarify its meaning.
 1. Diakriseis: "judgment, argument."
 2. Dialogismon: "thoughts, reasoning."
 3. Paul is telling brethren not to get into arguments or disputes about a particular kind of thinking certain brethren may hold.
 4. Since the thinking does not deal with matters of faith, or Paul would not accept it in any form, the thinking must have to do with mere opinions.
- II. *Apparent* Contradictions That Help Us To See Exactly What Paul Has In Mind (Gal. 4:8-11; Col. 2:16-23).
- A. In Galatians and Colossians, Paul takes a very hostile view of observing days.
 1. In Galatia the problem was *legalism*—imposing human rules as though they were necessary for salvation.

2. In Colossae the problem was a *pregnostic asceticism*—forbidding the exercise of full Christian freedom.
 3. The errors in both Galatia and in Colossae involved using human commands to insist that the observation of certain days was essential for salvation.
 4. Because Paul's remarks in Romans have to do with matters not imposed on brethren, there is no conflict between Paul's comments in Romans 14 and those in Galatians 5 and Colossians 2.
 5. Romans deals with the keeping of days in terms of what people elect to do as personal judgments; the other two Epistles concern themselves with the enforcement of an uncommanded keeping of days.
- B. When Apparent Contradictions Are Resolved We Need To Be Sure We Profit From The Resolution.
1. We are to honor the insights gained from both teachings since they each have a separate, important lesson to teach.
 2. Religious history and our contemporary times well demonstrate how easily one truth can be used to overrule another rather than to allow for full Bible harmony.

III. Some Things We Need To Understand About Opinions (Rom. 14:1-12).

- A. In matters concerning things that are not wrong in themselves and not in violation of a command addressing private concerns, private judgments and opinions are not to become occasions for divisions and disputes.
1. As long as a decision is not inherently wrong or in violation of a commandment relating to private expressions, we may choose to refrain from any food or to esteem any day in our personal expressions to the Lord.
 2. Such things are, however, in no way to be forced on another.
 3. If you want to refrain from work on Saturday as a matter of private devotion, that is your business.
 4. If you want to refrain from eating meat as a personal matter of devotion, that is your business.
 5. These things being so, we can see how more commonplace opinions should never be allowed to disrupt fellowship.
- B. If a brother or sister in Christ feels the need to privately do anything that is not wrong in itself, even though such is in no way required, we are not to get into arguments about it.
1. Usually teaching about Christian liberty will bring a change with time.
 2. However, God sets no requirements on such a change.

3. Some things we must acquire with time as we mature in Christ (Heb. 5:11-14).
4. Other things might never be understood in a mature way and yet one could still face Christ in Judgment without fear (Rom. 14:10-12).

C. Additional understandings:

1. The church as a body is not governed by the rules of private judgment; corporate worship and service have a God-given direction that is more specific than that for private expressions (I Cor. 11:17-34; I Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:11-12).
2. Within the context of authorized, corporate worship we may elect to have a variety of different expressions: when on the Lord's Day we assemble, how long services last, how many songs will be sung, how many prayers will be led, what the sermon, songs and readings will emphasize, etc.; but we cannot go outside the boundaries God has given to the church as a body (note that I Cor. 11:17, 18, 20 show a distinct "come together" aspect of church life that is governed by what the Lord has revealed, v. 23).
3. Even though the private expressions of individual Christians have more latitude than the corporate expressions of the body, individuals are cautioned about doing things that might be misunderstood as being immoral (I Cor. 11:5), or lead weak brethren into sin (I Cor. 8:4-7).
4. Balance must be maintained—being hyper-cautious can easily lead to legalism, being unconcerned can easily lead to liberalism.

Conclusions:

1. No opinion is worth division among brethren.
2. Liberty is the word when opinions are under consideration.
3. While there are opinions that can cause problems, a problematic opinion is not the same as a sin.
4. As the old adage says: In matters of faith—unity. In matters of opinion—liberty. In all things—love.

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