

**May 31, 2020 “Accept” Bible Studies for Life**

How do you decide what is not worth arguing about?

- the issue doesn't really matter
- I'm not interested in that particular issue
- I don't know enough about it to either agree or disagree
- arguing about it would cause more trouble than it's worth to win the argument
- we can agree to disagree
- the other person will not be persuaded by *any* argument (neither will I)
- our friendship is worth more than the issue we might argue about
- don't want to hurt the other person's feelings

Today we look at Paul's teachings on agreeing to disagree. During this Pandemic, you have probably had some differing opinions from others. We have been given a lot of information, but what is the best information?

Do I wear a mask? Do I choose not to wear a mask?

Do I stay at home? Do I choose to go where I want to go?

We will have different opinions, but we cannot let it Divide the Body of Christ. We cannot let it destroy friendships and relationships.

**Today's Point: Don't let differences of opinion damage your relationships.**

Accept People with Different Opinions. Listen for how to treat each other.

Romans 14:1-4 (NIV) Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. 2 One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 3 The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted him. 4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

The church at Rome was composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The two groups had developed distinct cultural ways of expressing their faith in Christ. When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he was in Corinth. He had not visited Rome, but may have corresponded with Christians living there. The Holy Spirit led Paul to address Christian unity and some of the issues concerning their differences.

How should a mature Christian treat a person who is weak in the faith?

- accept all believers
- avoid arguments on disputed matters – things like the color of the carpet, traditional or contemporary worship, KJV or NIV
- don't pass judgment on them
- welcome opportunities to fellowship with them

On what basis should believers accept one another?

- God accepts each one of us
- we are each accountable to God
- He is the one who works in our lives to shape and mold us to His purposes

What issues did Paul believe were not worth fighting over?

- whether to be a vegetarian or a meat-eater
- disputable matters
- from verse 5, what days to worship
- we might interpret that to include what activities are proper for Sunday
- issues where Scripture offers no clear-cut standards

God had accepted them through grace by their faith in Jesus Christ, they were to respect one another.

What life-style rules and issues do Christians have different opinions about today?

- styles of dress
- type of music in a worship service
- should we allow drums in the church
- what activities are permissible on Sunday
- should we be selling things in the church
- what forms of entertainment are acceptable
- is drinking alcohol acceptable
- what version of scripture do you use

Paul said we should not be critical of another believer's faith practices. He gave the example of a master-slave relationship. A household servant served in the home of his or her master and was often considered a member of the household. The servant had only one master to whom he or she was accountable. No one else had the authority to judge that servant's acceptability.

As Christians, we are accountable to our Lord. We must not criticize other Christians whose beliefs and practices regarding **secondary matters** differ from ours. We cannot compromise our beliefs about what the Bible says. That is the Word of God and we are to believe every word of it. Is it not for us to question someone's salvation. God is the only one who can accept or reject someone from His household of faith. Each person will be justified before God. We will all stand before Him on the Judgment Day.

Do Not Cause Another Person to Stumble. Listen for a warning from Paul.

Romans 14:13-15 (NIV) Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Paul called on the mature Christian to lead the way in building unity. The mature Christian should avoid petty criticism and judgment of others. We are to love others and not be a stumbling block or pitfall to the weaker Christians. We are to avoid any actions that might lead others to sin. Paul urged his readers to choose Christian love over self-interest.

What responsibility does the mature believer have toward the spiritually weaker brother?

- stop passing judgment
- don't flaunt your freedom
- act in love

What if the weaker believer is distressed, offended and outraged by your expression of your freedom? What should be your response?

- don't continue to distress a fellow believer
- act in love
- don't bring up the issue just to belittle them

What reasons did Paul give to support his instructions that the strong have responsibility toward the weak?

- don't be a stumbling block or put an obstacle in their way
- don't act in such a way that will cause the other person to sin
- if your attitude over the issue causes them anger to the point that they cut off fellowship from you, that is not acting in love

What if you are the person with the weaker faith? What if the freedom expressed by someone else is something you feel is wrong? How should you act?

- realize they are responsible to God, not to you
- is it a specific scriptural command or principle?
- is it something that may be cultural or the way you were raised as a believer (dancing, movies, styles of clothing)
- be careful about your confrontation and the way you act

How can Christians share a spirit of unity despite having different views on certain practices?

- what do the scriptures say
- work together on the things you *do* agree on
- worship together ... praise the Lord together
- pray together

Christianity is not individualistic. We live in relationship with God and in relationship with other believers. It is important for us to have peaceful relationships. We do not want to cause painful, sorrowful or bitter feelings with other believers. Joy could be dimmed, peace could be ruined, and spiritual growth could be damaged. Christ died for the weaker Christians as well as the mature ones. No one wants to destroy the spiritual growth of another believer.

Listen for how to build up one another.

Romans 14:16-19 (NIV) Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Paul urged mature Christians to guard their reputations and the reputation of the church. He encouraged them to build an honorable reputation with those inside the church as well as those outside the church. In Philemon 2:15, Paul urged them to “be blameless and pure” and “shine like the stars in the world.” In Timothy 3:7, Paul required that church leaders have “a good reputation among outsiders.” Paul also taught that church members needed to take seriously the impact their conduct could have on their reputations as well as on the church’s reputation in the community (I Corinthians 5:1-3.) It is important that we consider how others will be impacted by our actions.

What kind of situation might result in good being spoken of as evil?

- you do something nice for someone and it is interpreted as trying to earn special favor
- you complement someone and they take it as making fun of them
- you work hard to present a nice vocal solo and you are accused of showing off
- you make a suggestion on how to improve something and are accused of being negative

What three attributes of the kingdom did Paul cite?

- Righteousness – right relationship with God
- Peace – honorable relationships with other people, Christ alone makes peace possible
- Joy – Experiences of knowing Christ personally

How do we pursue peace in the church?

- work together to minister to one another, to people who need Jesus
- aware of one another’s feelings
- encourage each other, rather than criticizing
- praying for each other, with each other
- act in love, accept one another – even if we differ in some of our convictions

Major on what matters most. We are called to serve the people God has placed around us. We are to build one another up and we can do that when our focus is on Christ and not on ourselves. Don’t let differences of opinions damage your relationship with others. Are you one of the “Mature Christians?” Do you do and say the right things so a weaker Christian will not stumble?

## Application

Extend grace.

- If someone has offended you because their actions go against your convictions, forgive.
- Do not hold these actions over their heads.

Let go.

- 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 what they express to you.