

Romans, pt.21, 14, 5.6.07
Dealing with Differences

Introduction:

Context: Roman Gentiles & religious Jews were coming to faith in Christ. Some had a lot of religious/pagan baggage attached to them. They had some strange beliefs & practices some of which were overtly sinful (13.13) & others that were in the parameters of Christian liberty. Coming out of this dark or legalistic background, some were quick to jump away from anything pagan and others wanted to maintain old patterns.

Paul is giving guidance on how to handle differences in areas of Christian liberty...how to practically love others as expressed in 13.8-10. These differences in Christian liberty were probably some of the source of quarreling in 13.13b.

CRITICAL: There are areas of our lives where the Biblical principles or mankind's laws are either silent or very broad. In these places, there is freedom & liberty to make choices which may be different from other believers and yet not be sinful choices. These are places where good people disagree & that's okay

These areas include - marriage, # of children, where you should live, occupation, school, worship styles, women in ministry, home school/public school/Christian school.

The Bible may give a decision making framework on these areas, but not be explicit on the particulars. Example on marriage - The Bible makes clear some essential qualities for a spouse - a believer, not angry, not addicted to substances, sincere love, etc. As long as they meet the Biblical conditions, the decision is between you, the other person & God.

CRITICAL: There are essential & non-essential Christian beliefs. Essentials is where the Bible is black & white & include things like the inspiration & authority of Scripture, Jesus Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection &

return, salvation by faith, holy living, sexual purity, honoring your parents, etc. Non-essentials include things like: what version of the Bible to read, how you worship God, how the church is run, building or no building, mission support, etc.

Setting: Believers turning from their former lifestyle begin advancing in their relationship with God. They either start making judgments against other believer's practices or develop practices that are different than standard Christian practices, but at the same time aren't sinful. He is addressing established believers on their response.

ACCEPT OTHER BELIEVERS WHO ARE GROWING IN THEIR FAITH (14.1-6a)

- Paul's target audience is established growing Christians.
- "Accept other believers"
 - It means to accept into one's fellowship & into one's heart.
- "Don't argue with them" – receive the person with a genuine welcome w/o a debating his weaknesses
 - About food – vegetarian, eat only kosher foods, eat meat sacrificed to idols.
 - About which day to worship on – Sabbath, Sunday, any day
- People who come from spiritually dysfunctional backgrounds – extreme fundamentalism, extreme Pentecostalism, false religions, no religion, liberalism – and begin flowing in genuine Kingdom of God Christianity sometimes have the tendency to overcompensate & not only strongly reject some or all their previous beliefs & the attendant practices, but anything that smacks of their former life. Paul is saying to the established Christians & the ones moving from their former life, "dude, chill out."
- They cling so tight to the controls of the plane that they respond to every little bump/difference as a major problem/issue that must be addressed.
 - It's important that the person not get connected with a hard line zealot or group that is stuck on tangents. This could wreck them. I'm all for getting them connected with zealots (LITS group), but not those who will divert them from the

essentials to the non-essentials. Example of person growing in the Lord & then getting into the KJV only camp, etc.

- These people have been spiritually vandalized and it's going to take them some time to learn what is essential & non-essential in the faith. It's like you're house has been robbed & it takes you some time before you're accustomed to coming home w/o wondering if a robber is in the house. While they are making that transition, just accept them.

DON'T CONDEMN ONE ANOTHER IN AREAS OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (14.3-4, 13)

- "Condemn"/ "look down"
 - Mentality: Live as I live/do as I do/then & only then will I fellowship with you.
- There are essentials that we must agree upon. Essentials are those things that God is clear about in both natural law & His Word, such as, the inspiration of Scripture, Jesus, the HS, salvation by faith in Christ, marriage, respect, practical dimensions of love, etc.
- There are many places of non-essentials where there is freedom to disagree both from Biblical issues to daily issues. For instance, the form of church gov't & the form of civil gov't. All forms of gov't have their pros & cons & God gives us freedom to choose.
- Halloween/Santa Claus/Easter bunny. This a place of disagreement.
- **Critical:** We can quickly quench the work of God in someone's life when we condemn him in an area of Christian liberty.
 - In the 60's & 70's the issue of hair & clothes. "We need to love these people & make them cut their hair & put on a suit as quick as possible." We'd get them saved & feel this obligation to take them to the barber & JC Penneys as quick as possible. This turned them off to God. We forgot the principle: Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart." We turned a non-essential into an essential; a person gets liberated & then we put handcuffs on him

- **Critical**: When someone jumps on you in an area of Christian freedom, blow it off! Don't get angry at the person or start questioning whether it's truly right...just bless the person & move forward.

TRUST THE LORD'S ABILITY TO CHANGE THE PERSON (14.4)

- They are the "Lord's servants" & he is responsible for them. They are not "your servants."
 - Anyone like it when someone is correcting your child in an area of freedom. We need to watch out for out for each others kids when we see them doing things that are sinful or could hurt them. When it comes to freedom, we don't say anything even if personally dislike it.
- God hasn't made us the Holy Spirit patrol. He is well able to bring conviction and the needed course corrections to his servant's lives
- Those of us who have a real sense of right & wrong or are highly opinionated need to guard our tongue & hearts when we see a person doing something that we disagree with b/c it is a matter of preference or freedom.
- We have an obligation to address sin in other's believer's lives who we are in relationship with but that's not what Paul is referring to in this passage. He's addressing the different preferences & convictions people have where there is freedom.
- **Critical**: We must be careful not to quench the work of God in someone's life in a matter of liberty. God is well able to work it out of them. You can really mess them up!
- If the person ask your opinion then give it as "your opinion."

RECOGNIZE & AFFIRM THE OTHER PERSON'S DESIRE TO HONOR THE LORD

(14.5 - 9)

- It's important to note that the other person's hearts desire is to honor God with his life. This really softens my heart towards the person.
- I may not like the person's preferences but I affirm that he loves Jesus.

- Worship styles – it shouldn't matter; acknowledge that the other person's desire is to honor God.
- There is freedom when we bless others that we disagree with.

REMEMBER, IT'S GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO JUDGE NOT MINE (14.4, 10 – 13a)

- We are given directives to confront those in sin (16.17–19). These people were clearly teaching something contrary to Scripture. They had crossed an “essential boundary”. Jesus' own words in Rev. 2 & 3 to churches that were tolerating sin.
- Yet, when it comes to Christian liberty, I am to let God judge.
- **ILL** – Standing in a box. God gives you a wider revelation & you step out of the box. There's new freedom & liberty; you call to others in the box to join you; some do & other's start persecuting you; instead of moving forward with God you start judging those who are judging you & get a bad attitude about them; or you let their condemning words steal your new found liberty or you walk around the box in an air of superiority. The tendency is for those emerging from the box to get in a fight with those in the box.
- There is so much freedom when we let God do his job & quit trying to correct & change everyone else.

LIVE IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU WILL NOT CAUSE ANOTHER BELIEVER TO STUMBLE AND FALL (14.13b – 22a) – v.15

- You need to be looking out for the other guy.
- Does the Bible allow for the consumption of alcohol? Yes. Two principles
 - In moderation
 - If I consume it, will it cause another person to stumble
- Girls & their clothing. You have to be thinking about the guys. When Ms. Renetta says something, she's not being an old fuddy-dud, she's thinking about the guys
- Going to the movie in Mexico...the people begged me not to...Mary Poppins was showing...I didn't go b/c it would have weakened their faith.

LIVE YOUR CONVICTIONS (14.22b – 23)

- You must see a distinction between personal convictions & the essentials of the Christian faith.
- **Critical**: We hurt people, run people off, bind people up, make them stumble, bring confusion, etc. when we speak of our convictions as though it is essential Christian doctrine or our convictions should be other's convictions in matters of Christian liberty.
- We can & should provide guidance in matters of liberty, but we can't pretend they are God's convictions.
- You need to be immersed in the Word so that your convictions reflect Biblical values. But, you need to be humble enough to admit that you don't know everything and this is where the Lord has you now.
- **If you're questioning your convictions, then don't do it. This is where it becomes sinful. You must be fully convinced that's it's not sinful.**
- Celebrating the Jewish Feasts; Col.2.16f. My opinion is that they are good, but they aren't an essential Christian belief. If you aren't immersed in the Word then when you hear a speaker who has a lot of conviction about a non-essential belief then you can get dragged into this thing & potentially turn a non-essential into an essential.
- Halloween. Should a Christian participate in Halloween? People that come out of witchcraft, etc have strong opinion to absolutely not, etc. Others say, what's the big deal? If the city fathers decree, everyone must kill a cat on Halloween & sacrifice it to the moon god, I'm not doing it (I may kill a cat!) & I'm not aligning myself with Halloween.
 - If you're questioning your conviction then don't do it because that's what makes it sinful. Whatever you do in areas of Christian liberty must be done out of a conviction that it's okay.

Conclusion:

- In essentials unity

- In non-essentials liberty
- In all things charity (grace/love)