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Living Hope EFC

Art Smith

Living in Unity with Those we Disagree with: part 1. Rom.14:1-8

DTS Articles: "Alcohol, Liberty & Policy."

- Robert Lightner's position VS Darrell Bock's.
- So...which position is right? Should the dedicated Christian abstain?
- Is one who abstains more serious, dedicated to God? More spiritual?

Q: How do Christians get along when they disagree over such issues?

- If we are all under the Spirit's control, shouldn't we agree on issues?
- On which issues are we allowed to disagree?
- Is this question/ topic even relevant in our day? In our church?

In Rom.14-15 Paul spends 1 1/2 chapters giving instruction to the Church on the topic of "disputable issues," doubtful disputations (KJV).

The gray areas of the Christian life. (To say nothing of 1 Cor.8 & 10.)

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DISPUTABLE ISSUES IN CHURCH TODAY:

Definition: Issues that are morally neutral in themselves, on which God's Word does not give us definitive Revelation to do or not to do.

- **Cultural issues where Christians have different preferences & convictions. Areas that God's Word neither commands nor forbids.**

Hymns VS Contemporary songs. Christian VS secular music. Drinking alcohol. Smoking. Dancing. Movies. Dress. Bible versions.

- Investing in Stocks: which? How we spend out money? Gambling?
- In the South – mixed bathing was a sin. J.V. **McGee's wife** was from the south & when they moved to California and went to the beach the first time – it took her 24 hours to recover.
- S. Penn: A group won't use electricity, but grows tobacco (Swindoll).
- Wearing jewelry? Make-up? Pierced ears. Tattoos...
- Q: - Who is right & who is wrong? Is there a right or wrong?

Before we look at what Paul says about HOW to get along with each other, lets consider WHY these issues exist & always will.

THE PROBLEM IS RAISED BY Insufficient biblical data.

- There is no "1 verse" that tells us something is right or wrong.
- And we must make reasonable biblical decisions, convictions.

A helpful grid for judging issues: Four levels of certainty.

(1) The Bible is not equally clear, that is - we don't have equal Revelation- on every issue it mentions. (2) Not all issues are of equal importance. (3) Therefore, the degree of our certainty or conviction depends on the level of biblical Revelation we have.

Level one: Absolute Certainty. (100%) (We can be dogmatic!)

- We have explicit Bible statements about something. There are clear commands or prohibitions. There is no question what God says.

EXAMPLES: Inspiration. Deity & humanity of Christ. Salvation by grace. 2nd Coming. Virgin birth. All have sinned. Hell & heaven.

Level two: Virtual Certainty. (100-75%) (We can construct doctrines)

- The Bible clearly implies a truth – even though it may not come right out and state it in a verse. We compare texts & draw conclusions.

EXAMPLES: Trinity. Rapture-when. Divorce & remarriage. Mode of baptism. Giving & tithing. 1,000 year reign of Christ.

Level three: Questionable Certainty. (75-25%) (We make principles)

- We find less info. We try to build "air-tight" convictions but can't. Educated beliefs (guesses). There is degree of legitimate disputability.

EXAMPLES: Spending money. Investments. Debt? Alcohol? Church Gov't. Conscientious objection to war.

Level four: Speculation. (25-0%) (We have opinions & preferences.)

- Scripture is virtually silent. We use deductive reasoning, biblical common sense, formulate sound principles, it is more like *counsel*.
- Most of these are cultural preferences & opinions.
- We say: "Here is my opinion, why I believe this way."
- BUT we cannot be dogmatic on these!

EXAMPLES: Animals in heaven. Hymns VS contemporary. Smoking. Dancing. Movies. Dress. Sermon length? Style of worship.

Compare all four: The issues Paul is addressing in Rom.14 & 15 are in the bottom 2-3 categories. These categories make up much of our lives.

- If we allow our preferences to become dogmatic – *the standard of what's right* – we are going to separate from a lot of Christians.
- **We must be dogmatic where the Bible is, and not where it is not.**
- **It is when Christians & churches go beyond what the Bible says** and make disputable issues matters of right or wrong (absolutes) that unity becomes impossible & **opinion is substituted for Revelation.**

SO WHAT DOES GOD TELL US ABOUT HANDLING THESE ISSUES?
 ("How to love a brother or sister when we disagree over convictions.")

CONTEXT: In the church in Rome (as everywhere) there were Jews & Gentiles from varied backgrounds. There would be many varied opinions

VS.1-3 – Paul states the overarching instructions.

¹Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. ²One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does,

Key Q: Who are the weaker & stronger that he is talking about?

THE WEAK: those whose *faith* is not persuaded of their full liberty in Christ to participate in certain non-moral practices.

- **WW:** The weak in faith were believers who felt obligated to obey legalistic rules concerning what they ate & when they worshiped."
- **Vs.2** – Vegetarians. **Vs.5** – Observes certain days as more important.
- **Q: Why would he behave like this?** - **Lev.23:3-4. Acts 10:9-14.**
- **Reasons:** OT Law. Traditions. Childhood training. Associations.
- **The same is true with many disputable issues today.**

THE STRONG: those whose faith is persuaded that they can participate in these non-moral practices. – **Vs.2** They can eat anything. **Vs.14a. Vs.5.**

- **Q: WHY do they believe this?** 1 Cor.1:30; **Col.2:9, 16.** Rom.14:17.

1 Cor.1:30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, **our righteousness**, holiness and redemption. = **He understands his r'ness is a gift from God, not by works.**

Col.2: ⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and **you have been given fullness in Christ**... ¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were to come; **the reality, however, is found in Christ.**

Rom.14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace & joy in the Holy Spirit

- **Jesus** told Peter that NO MEAT is unclean: **Acts 10:15.**
- APPLIED TO TODAY: They drink wine, dance, use NIV Bible.

NOTE: This is opposite of how we often define "weak" & "strong."

The clash comes when they sit down at the same table to eat together.

WHAT DOES GOD TELL US TO DO ABOUT OUR DIFFERENCES?

To The Strong: Vs.1- "Give the weak unqualified welcome into your fellowship. Don't merely tolerate them, but give a warm acceptance."

- And don't welcome him to attack his opinions and try to convince him to "come into the light" and believe like you do!
- Don't judge him for his difference of opinion.
- **Vs.3** – Don't ridicule or despise him. –1 Cor.8:1 "Knowledge puffs."
- We have no idea why he is holding to his convictions.

Article: Alcohol, Liberty & Policy – Lawrence Terlizzese, "Indulgence."

"Indulgence has its problems...I choose to support the young person who vows abstinence in absolute defiance of raging alcoholism on our college campuses. Or the person who can never touch a drink because of an abusive drunken father, or the individual recovering from addiction. I also choose to support the Christian who accepts a glass of wine as a friendly gesture from family or friends because it would be rude not to."

The tendency of the strong is to look down on those who don't do what they do, and to dismiss them as "irrelevant, inferior, unimportant, less spiritual." This destroys UNITY in the church & may destroy a brother!

To The Weak: Vs.3- "Don't condemn the person who does what you cannot do and what you may even think is sinful."

- ***The natural response*** of an over-sensitive, scrupulous conscience is to judge those who have liberty to do what we cannot.
- Often, the weak judge the strong as unspiritual or unchristian in their conduct. If I can't drink wine – I might admit that the Bible permits wine drinking, but in my heart – I know that truly mature, spiritual Christians do not do so because of the appearance of evil associated.
- Paul says: "Such thoughts & attitudes are not correct, nor biblical."

WARNING: Much friction in the church comes because people hold different opinions on non-moral issues, and think their opinion is God's final answer, the only correct interpretation of Scripture.

John Ortberg calls these issues "boundary markers." "Boundary markers are highly visible, relatively superficial practices that serve to distinguish people inside a group from those outside." (Y Jesus' 12 didn't wash, 26).

- In Jesus day the Jews had hundreds of such BM's (Mark 7).
- ***"Narrowing religious devotion to the boundaries is a constant temptation for people of faith."*** We want to believe we are different.
- These become **litmus tests** for determining who is in our group.
- Of course...this automatically means we don't accept others.

Q: BUT is this what God desires from us? Does God condone "schisms" or divisions in the body of Christ over these issues?

- Why has Paul been focusing on **love** the last two chapters (12-13)?

POINT: Christian fellowship is never to depend upon everyone having the same opinion on disputable issues! The HS is the power of UNITY.

WHY DOES GOD TELL US TO ACCEPT THOSE WHO DISAGREE?

1- Vs.3. Because HE accepts both, 15:7.

- A person is not more or less spiritual or right or accepted by God if he does or does not eat meat, dance, drink wine, worship on Sunday.

Article: Alcohol, Terlizese. "You can't measure if one is walking with Christ by abstinence. You can't prove Christian character by it. There's nothing distinctively Christian or biblical about it."

There are plenty of non-smoking & non-drinking pagans. Perhaps your abstinence is not being perceived as holiness but as snobbishness."

2- Vs.4. We are not one another's Master! But fellow servants.

"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

- Many like to play *church boss* & tell others how they should act. But this is God's job, not ours. God makes each believer stand in Christ.

3- Vs.5. Behavior in disputable issues is a matter of conscience.

"One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

- God requires us to live according to our conscience.
- We cannot judge the heart or motive of another! –**1 Cor.4:1-5.**
- We must treat/trust others as we want to be treated/ trusted.

4- Vs.6-9. Every believer belongs to Jesus Christ, the Lord.

⁶He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

- To attack or criticize a fellow believer for his liberty or scruples is to strike at the Lordship of Christ in his life, and even play God.
- Each of us will answer to Christ. None of us will escape His throne.

SUMMARY

1- Is one who abstains more serious, dedicated to God? More spiritual?

2- If we are all under the Spirit's control, shouldn't we agree on issues?

- We are allowed to disagree on non-moral cultural issues.

3- Is this question/ topic even relevant in our day? In our church?

4- Which do you identify with more? The strong or the weak in faith?

- Is your tendency to judge others, to look down on non-participating?

5- God accepts that person you disagree with. Do you?