

BIBLE LIFE MESSAGES

The Sacrificial Life Involves Tolerance of Others' Opinions

Romans 14:1-12

1 When our four children were growing up we disciplined them when they rebelled against our parental authority. We always tried to keep in mind, however, what we expected from each of them in respect to their age at the time. We would respect their maturity level while pushing them gently toward greater responsibility.

This also needs to happen in the body of believers. We can't expect a new convert to instantly be at the same spiritual maturity level as another believer who is further along in their Christian walk.

Christian maturity may not always be in proportion to length of time in the faith either. Some grow faster than expected. Others get bogged down with distractions like church traditions or doctrinal interpretations.

A Christian brother or sister may have a different understanding of an issue than you do. They may not have developed their faith to your level. The issue may be very important to you and you may have a great

deal of emotional attachment to it. Do you have trouble accepting another person as a Christian brother based upon his agreement with you on that issue?

Earlier, when God's word spoke about presenting your bodies as a living sacrifice ¹ by renewing your mind, ² one of the implications of that sacrifice involves not making matters of opinion a test of fellowship.

Romans, Chapter 14, verses 1 through 12, give us guidelines for helping the Christian community deal with differences of opinion, particularly when those issues involve strong emotional ties.

The first guideline is . . .

¹ Romans 12:1.

² Romans 12:2.

I. You Have a Right to Your Opinion Only If the Lord Has Not Clearly Spoken on the Subject – v2-5³ 2

You have a right to your opinion only if the Lord has not clearly spoken on the subject. The emphasis here is on “clearly”. God’s word always trumps your opinion! 3

A controversy in the early church at Rome, for instance, was the meat eating question. Verses 2 through 5 says, **One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The 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, for God has accepted him. 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.** 4

³ Romans 14:2-5.

A Jewish believer often abstained from certain meats sold at a Gentile (non Jewish) marketplace. ⁵ Many Jewish converts kept their strict kosher laws found in the Law of Moses. ⁶ Meat found in a Roman market may have been sacrificed to a pagan idol or be ceremonially unclean. ⁷

A Gentile (non Jewish) Christian seldom worried about such things. To him, meat was meat. Besides, ⁸ sacrificial meat was the best money could buy! When a congregation had people from both of these backgrounds, there must have been friction over this very emotional issue. These adult Jews, recently converted to accepting their Messiah as Lord and Savior, were emotionally tied to the traditions they were raised with. This was a big deal to them! ⁹

Did God speak clearly on this issue? ¹⁰ In Acts, Chapter 10, ⁴ Peter's vision on Simon's rooftop

⁴ Acts 10:9-16, About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well

seemed to indicate Jewish food laws were obsolete. But remember, the purpose of the vision was to change Peter's racially prejudiced mind! Besides, verse 2⁵ indicates that the vegetarian may have been the weaker brother. ¹¹

What's the answer? ¹² This is an opinion matter. Rather than be critical, let love govern your attitudes towards one another! ¹³

A second controversy in the early church was the festival day question. This is brought out in verse 5, **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.** ¹⁴

The Jew celebrated festivals on certain days. Leviticus, Chapter 23, verses 1 and 2 state, **“Speak to**

as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.

⁵ Romans 14:2, One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.

the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. These feasts were commanded by God in the Old Testament! ¹⁵

What were the great feasts? In Leviticus, Chapter 23, verses 4 through 8, ⁶ there was the Feast of Passover commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. ¹⁶ In verses 15 through 21 ⁷ we find the Feast of Pentecost,

⁶ Leviticus 23:4-8, “ ‘These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: The LORD’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.’ ”

⁷ Leviticus 23:15-21, “ ‘From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the LORD. From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the LORD. Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings—an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. The priest is to wave the two lambs before the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest. On that same

commemorating the giving of the Law of Moses. ¹⁷
Then, in verses 33 through 36, ⁸ was the Feast of
Tabernacles celebrating life in the wilderness. ¹⁸

We also had the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur,
commanded by God in Leviticus, Chapter 16, verses 1
through 34. ¹⁹

Then there were the post exile festivals of ²⁰
Dedication ⁹, Hanukkah, which celebrated the
purification of the Temple in Jerusalem; ²¹ and the
Feast of Purim ¹⁰ which commemorated saving the
Jewish race from extinction.

day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be
a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

⁸ Leviticus 23:33-36, The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'On the
fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and
it lasts for seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For
seven days present offerings made to the LORD by fire, and on the eighth day
hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is
the closing assembly; do no regular work.

⁹ I Maccabees 4:59, Then Judas and his brothers and all the assembly of Israel
determined that every year at that season the days of dedication of the altar
should be observed with joy and gladness for eight days, beginning with the
twenty-fifth day of the month of Chislev.

¹⁰ Esther 9:20-32.

The Gentiles had their feasts too. They just didn't make a big deal out of them. It's like us Americans celebrating Presidents' Day on the third Monday of February, not because we are venerating the presidents, but because it's a three day weekend. ²²

Did God speak clearly on this issue? ²³ The three feasts and the Day of Atonement were commanded in the Law of Moses. ²⁴ But didn't the cross take care of the legal demands of the Law? ¹¹ Yes. But, to someone who had been raised with this in his background, it was an important and emotional issue. ²⁵

What's the answer? This is an opinion matter. Let love govern your attitudes towards one another. Notice verse 6, **He 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.** If a festival brought

¹¹ Colossians 2:13-14, When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

to mind the Lord like the communion service does for us today, do it! If every day is used to bring honor to the Lord, do it! ²⁶

What are some of the more modern issues over which church fights have occurred? ²⁷

How about some of the great historical issues? ²⁸

What method does your church use to financially support missionaries? Do you support them directly or through a church agency? Big fights resulted over this! ²⁹

Should women be allowed to preach the sermon on Sunday mornings? How many denominations wrestle over that one? ³⁰

Does your church use instruments to support congregational singing on Sundays? What does Ephesians, Chapter 5, verses 19-20, mean when it states, **Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for**

everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do you interpret Colossians, Chapter 3, verse 16, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. I bet it depends upon which side of the fence you're on! 31

How about the emotionally heated issues today? 32 How about capital punishment? Does the government have the right to execute people? Is this committing murder? 33 How about abortion? Can we kill babies if their tissue can save lives in the process? What if a mom's life is at stake? Are you Pro Life or Pro Choice? Can Christians genuinely be on both sides of this issue?

Where does the Bible clearly speak? You have the right to your opinion only if the Lord has not clearly spoken on the subject! In deciding this, consider the next guideline . . . 34

II. The Lord is More Concerned About Attitude

Than He is About Opinion – v6-8 ¹²

The Lord is more concerned about attitude than He is about opinion! We, even as Christian brothers and sisters, can get so wrapped up in our critical attitudes that we lose perspective.

One day, at the piano, a dad and his little son were singing the song “Praise Him, Praise Him, All Ye Little Children”. You may remember the song. It starts out with “Praise Him, praise Him, all ye little children. God is love, God is love.” Then you love Him, then you thank Him, then you serve Him, etc. You can make up bunches of verses as you go along. Kids love it! After a couple dozen verses dad finishes. His son looks up in surprise still expecting more of the song. “Dad”, he proclaims, “you forgot to crown Him!” So, they sang

¹² Romans 14:6-8.

the last verse, “Crown Him, crown Him . . .”¹³

I think we can get so focused on being right theologically in the presence of those around us that we forget to crown Him!³⁵ Notice verse 6 here, **He 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.**³⁶ The first question to ask yourself is, Do you use your opinion to glorify the Lord?³⁷ Or, do you use your opinion as an excuse to do what you want to do?³⁸

The next verse, verse 7, suggests the next question, **For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone.**³⁹ Is your life centered around your own desires?⁴⁰ Or, is it centered around the Master’s will? The honest answer to these questions determine where your heart is, not just your intellect!

¹³ Forward Day By Day, cited in “Don’t Forget to Crown Him”, Our Daily Bread, September 2.

Regarding the concept of tolerance towards another Christian's opinions we have learned that you have a right to your opinion only if the Lord has not clearly spoken on the subject and that the Lord is more concerned about attitude than He is about opinion. The final guideline is found in verses 9 through 12. ⁴¹

III. Lord Jesus Judges Matters of Opinion – Not You! – v9-12

Lord Jesus judges matters of opinion, not you! ⁴²
Notice verse 9, **For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.** ⁴³ Lord Jesus earned the right to be judge when He died on the cross! ⁴⁴

The bottom line is this: ⁴⁵ compared with Jesus the rest of us are dirty rotten sinners! Isaiah, Chapter 64, verse 6, . . . **Our righteousness is like filthy rags!** ⁴⁶ We all deserve to die. ⁴⁷ In verses 10 through 12 we read

that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: " 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' " So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. ⁴⁸

You will be saved because of His love and grace, not because your life has been so good! Verse 4, **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.** ⁴⁹ Honest opinions will not stand in the way of that salvation! ⁵⁰ By the way, how can a sinner pass judgment on another sinner? ⁵¹

Therefore, let love govern your attitude towards one another, especially towards those who disagree with you on emotionally charged issues!

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