

## Notes

### Handling Disputable Matters (14:1-15:13)

- Paul gives some insights into handling disputable matters or grey areas - matters of Christian conduct that are not specifically spelt out in the Bible. Christians may have differing convictions concerning matters of indifference – whether it is right or wrong – because the Bible does not specifically forbid them.

#### 1. Problem Described: Different Convictions (14:1-5a)

- Paul is discussing the relations between those he calls “weak” (14:1) and those he calls “strong” (15:1). 2 issues were at the centre of the dispute.
  - The 1<sup>st</sup> issue concerns diet (14:1-4). The weak believer was in the habit of eating only herbs or vegetables. Others in the Church had no scruples about eating meat.
  - 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Jews observed Jewish holy days (14:5; cf Col 2:16). Others held that all days were alike – each day to be dedicated to the glory of God.
- Paul says to the stronger brother, accept or “receive” the weak. Paul adds the weak are not to be received to “doubtful disputations.” Paul is urging the strong not to debate with the weak in faith and judge them accordingly.
  - V3a - Those who take a more open view towards such disputable matters must not despise or look down on others who do not share their convictions & regard others as immature Christians.
  - VV3b,4 - Those who are more conservative towards such disputable matters must learn not to pass judgment on those who are more open.
- We are to rise above these differences as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to deal with these differences with humility and love.
  - Each should realize that it is God whose verdict counts. The strong & the weak have been accepted by God based on faith (v3c). These secondary matters do not determine whether a person is saved or not (cf 1 Cor 8:8).
  - Both are servants of the Lord (v4). There should be no lordship over others. The Lord is able to establish both the strong and the weak.

#### 2. 3 Principles for Handling Disputable Matters

##### *(i) Be Convinced for Ourselves, 14:5b, 21-23*

- It is important to be fully convinced that it is the right thing to do. One can hurt one’s conscience by simply following the conduct of other believers.
  - Eating meat or drinking wine (vv21-22), Paul says, is not wrong. But a believer must be able to proceed with confidence of faith in all that he does, without feeling guilty or condemned in his heart.
  - The rule for the believer is: abstain if in doubt (v23). A Christian must never violate his conscience, and to do so is sin for him.

No matter what others say or do, we should not violate our conscience. We need to do what we are convinced is right to do. The action itself may be permissible, but if you doubt it, it is sin.

(ii) *Be Confident Before God, 14:6-12*

- Seek to Glorify God (vv6-9). Paul's emphasis is whatever we do, we must do it "unto/to the Lord" (4x in v6). Our motive matters. As believers, we belong to the Lord, and we live for the Lord (vv7-8). Whatever we do, let us seek to do what pleases & glorifies God (1 Cor 10:31).
- Be Accountable before God (vv10-12). Every believer will have to give an account of himself to God at the judgment seat of Christ. As we think about this awesome moment, we will be less inclined to judge others and more concerned with living our own lives righteously before God.

(iii) *Be Considerate of Other Believers, 14:13-20*

- Avoid causing Offence/Stumbling Block (14:13-15). We must abstain from anything that will cause a brother to stumble.
  - Paul says explicitly that "*there is nothing unclean*" – v14 (1 Tim 4:3-4). Nothing is inherently unclean.
  - Paul adds, "*but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*" If a person regards it as such, then for him it is unclean (1 Cor 8:9-13).

Paul pleads with the strong that they might be considerate toward the weaker brother so as not to cause him to fall (v15). The issue is not our personal liberty; it is walking in love towards one whom Jesus loved and died for. A Christian is free to exercise liberty and he is just as free not to exercise it. The key principle that regulates conduct in morally indifferent matters is the principle of love (v15). Our liberty is not intended for us to indulge the flesh but serve one another through love (Gal 5:13). Liberty and knowledge must be balanced with love.

- Seek to Edify (14:16-20). Rather than putting stumbling stones, we should put "stepping-stones" to lead others toward maturity. Christian liberty is not to be used in such a way as to bring reproach to the faith (v16). The way to minimize this is by noting the principles or priorities of the kingdom of God (v17). The kingdom of God does not consist in observing the distinctions between meats and drink; it is about being right with God (righteousness), peace (between brethren), and joy in the Holy Spirit – that is the kingdom of God. Let us concentrate on these things! Doing so, we will be pleasing to God and approved of men (v18). What is important is not the FOOD that goes in but the FRUIT that is produced by God. Everything is permissible but not everything is profitable or beneficial (1 Cor 10:23). We are to pursue what leads to peace & edifies others (v19).
- Summary & Applications:
  - We should develop godly convictions. Do not go with the flow of our culture.
  - We should pursue godly relationships by diligently working for peace and doing the things that build up one another.

- We should preserve godly priorities. Do not tear down the work of God in a brother or in church over secondary matters.

3. Practices of Christian Liberty (15:1-13)

(i) *Bearing & Pleasing One Another, 15:1-6*

- We are to support and sustain the weak (Gal 6:2).
  - First, we are not to please ourselves (v1). Consideration for others takes precedence over what we ourselves would like to do.
  - Second, we are to please our neighbours, to seek to do what is for the good of others (v2). The meaning of "good" is further brought out with the addition of "*his good to edification*" (1 Cor 10:33).
  - Third, we are to please others as Christ did (v3). Jesus is the ultimate example of one who did not please Himself but put others first (Ps 69:9; cf Matt 20:28).
- We can appeal to Scriptures because they are written for our instruction, to teach us hope.
  - Through "patience" or endurance. This means that by patiently enduring sufferings, in connection with the comfort which the Scriptures furnish, we might have hope.
  - And "*comfort of the Scriptures*" - By means of the consolation or encouragement which the writings of the OT furnish.
- Paul speaks of a "God of patience." How patient God is with us! With this is linked "consolation" or encouragement. The implication is that God is the giver of steadfastness and encouragement. Paul proceeds to pray that God will give believers a spirit of unity, that with one heart and mouth they might glorify God.

(ii) *Accepting & Receiving One Another, 15:7-13*

- Just as Christ has accepted us, we are to accept one another, though we may differ in opinion about many minor matters. Christ was a "*minister of the circumcision.*" He came as a Servant of the Jews (Matt 15:24) to fulfil the promises made to the patriarchs. But God's plan includes outsiders – Gentiles were always part of God's plan. He also came for the Gentiles that they too might glorify God for His mercy. As far back as Abraham, God promised blessing to "*all families of the earth*" (Gen 12:3).
- "*As it is written*" - To document the fact that God intended salvation for Gentiles as well as the Jews, Paul quotes a list of OT references (Ps 18:49; Deut 32:43; Ps 117:1; Isa 11:10). Paul is using the Jewish Scriptures to show the Jews that God has opened the door of salvation wide for the Gentiles to enter. That is the essence of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19). V13 - Paul pronounces the benediction. God is called the "God of hope." The hope that God creates leads to joy and peace.