

WHEN CHRISTIANS DIFFER

Romans 14:1-23

3/13/16

The New Testament clearly teaches that we are no longer bound by the OT dietary restrictions and Sabbath regulations. (Acts 10:9-16; Colossians 2:16-23; Galatians, Hebrews)

Some Christians have not come to that realization.

There was tension in the first century church between those who had come to Christ out of a Jewish background and those who came from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

vv. 1-2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.

Some thought that they were still required to observe Old Testament dietary restrictions (no pork, shell fish, etc.)

v. 5a One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike.

Some thought that we as Christians still need to observe the Jewish Sabbath and holy days

v. 21 Some thought it was okay to drink wine, others didn't.

Christians today sometimes differ on what they think is okay.

Some Christians believe it is wrong for women to cut their hair or to wear make-up or jewelry. (SDA, United Pentecostal, Amish, Mennonite.)

*I have a neighbor who believes that we should obey the OT dietary restrictions and observe a **Saturday** Sabbath.*

*Some in our community believe that **Sunday** is the Christian Sabbath and that it is wrong to work or play sports on Sunday. Others see no problem with having softball games on Sunday.*

The issue of alcoholic beverages still divides the Christian community in our day.

Christians differ over English translations, musical styles, dress codes, tattoos, etc.

How are we to deal with our differences as Christians where the issue is not clearly defined in the New Testament?

How were we to respond to one another?

How are we to respond to those who differ with us in some of these areas?

1. We are to accept one another. 13:1-4

Accept means more than to just tolerate one another.

It means that we are to warmly welcome them

Just as Christ has accepted you cf 15:7

But not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions

a. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats. vv.1-3a

- Those with weak consciences thought that it was sin not to follow those OT restrictions.
- Those with strong consciences knew that we were no longer under the OT rules and restrictions in these areas.

Unfortunately, the strong often hold the weak in contempt.

They ridicule the weak and call them legalistic and self-righteous.

The weak on the other hand think that the strong are ungodly carnal Christians (if they are saved at all).

b. We should accept one another because God has accepted him. vv. 3b-4

- Who am I to reject a person whom God has accepted?
- Who am I to judge God's servant?

God's judgment is the only one that counts.

To his own master he stands or falls And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Romans 8:33-34 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

2. Each of us must be fully convinced in our own mind. 14:5-12

a. We need to be fully convinced because we belong to the Lord. vv. 5-9

- Everything we do we should do for the Him.
 - ◆ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord,
 - ◆ He who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God.
 - ◆ He who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks to God.

v. 8 We all belong to the Lord

1 Corinthians 6:20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself

Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

b. We need to be fully convinced in our own minds because we will all give an account to God. vv. 10-12

We will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Non-Christians will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment and delivered into the Lake of Fire.

Christians will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ where we will receive rewards and loss of reward. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:10-17; 2 Cor. 5:10).

God is the final judge.

So why do you judge your fellow Christian?

Why do you regard your brother with contempt?

Each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

3. Don't to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14:13-23

a. If your brother is hurt because of food, you are no longer walking according to love. vv. 13-18

13 Stumbling block- when our behavior emboldens or entices someone to violate his/her conscience or fall into some area sin. cf v. 23

Matthew 18:7 "Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

1 Corinthians 8:9 But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

1 Corinthians 8:12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

14 Even if the thing we are doing is not sin, we are sinning when we embolden others to violate their consciences. Cf v. 20

◆ We should never pressure someone to do anything that they feel is wrong.

15 We destroy those for whom Christ died.

When what we do emboldens a weaker Christian to violate his conscience, we *hurt, destroy* and *tear down* the work of God in that person's life.

- ◇ Harm his Christian walk
- ◇ Hinder her spiritual growth in Christ
- ◇ Harden their hearts to sin
- ◇ Harm their fellowship with God
- ◇ Place them under divine discipline
- ◇ Cause them to lose heavenly rewards (not salvation)

Is it really worth it for me to harm a fellow Christian so that I can enjoy some food, drink, or activity?

A number of years ago we saw a young woman come to Christ who had been heavily involved in the party scene as a non-Christian.

Some Christian college students convinced her to go to a local bar with them.

Being there caused her to stumble back into her old lifestyle for a period of time.

We should never say, "I have freedom in Christ to do this if I want. If they can't handle it, that's their problem."

Spring is almost here. I frequently talk to young men who struggle with temptation because of how some Christian women dress.

Christian women should never say, "That's their problem. I will dress however I want to."

These are fellow Christians for whom Christ died.

Their wellbeing is more important than your rights.

We should choose to limit our liberty out of a love for one another.

In 1995 Playboy magazine in conjunction with national sportswriters selected Florida State University center Clay Shriver for its preseason All-America football team.

This is one of the highest preseason awards a college football player can receive from sportswriters.

Essentially Clay was being named the best player in the country at his position.

Yet Clay asked to be removed from the list.

Clay didn't want to embarrass his mother and grandmother by appearing in the magazine or give old high school friends an excuse to buy that issue.

"I don't want to let anyone down, and number one on that list is God."

Clay Shriver knows what it means to walk in love.

b. Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. vv. 19-23

It is my Christian duty to think about how my actions affect others.

- ◆ Does it promote peace?
- ◆ Does it build up others or tear them down?
- ◆ Will it cause another Christian to violate his/her conscience?

A loving Christian voluntarily limits his/her liberty out of concern for a weaker brother or sister in Christ.

4. Bringing the Message Home

a. Don't do anything that would violate your conscience.

- Are there honest doubts in your mind? Don't do it?

Even if it is not be wrong, if you have doubts and go ahead and do it, you are in reality rebelling against God.

b. Both the weaker and stronger Christians need to examine their beliefs by the scriptures.

- Each needs to see whether the Bible really commands or forbids a practice or whether it is a matter of conscience.
 - The problem is that each of us is susceptible to thinking our own prejudices and taboos are sacred.
- c. Even if the Bible leaves us free, we must decide to abstain if it leads others to sin.**
- It may mean that you and I need to forego some of our freedoms for the sake of others.
- d. Be sure that you are truly saved.**
- Admit that you are a sinner.
 - Believe in you heart that Christ died for your sins and was raised again the third day.
Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;
 - Choose to receive Him as your Lord and Savior.

John 1:12