

# 6

## Accept



**QUESTION 1:**

***How do you decide what's not worth arguing about?***



## THE POINT

Strong relationships are not hindered by differences of opinion.



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In a perfect world, everyone would agree with me, everyone would bring up their kids like I do, everyone would vote for the candidates I endorse, and everyone would spend their money like I spend mine.

What a wonderful world it would be if everyone started reading from the right script, which just so happens to be the one in my hand!

But the reality is we don't always see eye-to-eye. The question for each of us is: What do we do when we disagree? A lot of us spend an enormous amount of time persuading—trying to get the

“blind” person to subscribe to our point of view. But what if that approach doesn't work? What happens when you talk until you're blue in the face and the other person still stands his or her ground? Is the relationship over?

In the Book of Romans, Paul taught us to remain humble when we have differences in opinion. Clearly, some hills are worth dying on and at times we need to stand our ground, but Paul helped us to see where to draw those lines. Paul's instructions guide us to maintain strong relationships in spite of any difference of opinion.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ROMANS 14:1-4

**<sup>1</sup> Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able to make him stand.**

Paul addressed the importance of peaceful relationships—not simply staying in the same church but staying closely knit together. Romans 14 indicates rival groups of individuals were popping up in the church because members were joining forces according to their personal persuasions and preferences. Believers became critical of one another for holding different views. This division was wrong and out of place, especially given the fact that they were arguing over petty things. They were not debating the gospel or dividing over whether Jesus had truly died for their sins. They were not debating the most effective ways to reach their community for Christ. They were arguing over foods and festivals.

### QUESTION 2:

***How should we behave when we disagree as Christ-followers?***

Paul later referred to these two groups as the weaker and the stronger (Rom. 15:1). What made one group stronger was their spiritual maturity; they rightly understood Christian liberty. Those in the “strong” group were far from perfect, but they understood that whether a person ate meat or only vegetables and what day another person considered holy did not point to disobedience or a lack of love and commitment to Christ.

Who were the people in the “weaker” party? These included the Christians who had grown up week after week with certain rules and practices that were deeply ingrained in them. Some also may have come from pagan backgrounds and thus believed the food sold in the markets was not good for food. These believers were every bit as saved as the “strong” believers. They were committed followers of Christ, but their conscience kept them from embracing new freedoms.

While one group may have been more mature in their thinking, both groups were guilty of a critical spirit. Rather than running each other down and resenting the positions held by the other group, Paul challenged them to “accept” one another. Accept carries the idea of welcoming others and being generous toward them. The world defines acceptance as a full affirmation, even endorsement, of a person’s

beliefs and practices. The Bible doesn’t use the word accept to mean to condone sin. Instead, it’s a desire to stay close, even when both parties see things differently.

It’s important to keep in mind that Paul was talking about disputable matters—those things Scripture is silent about. In Romans 14, Paul was addressing “gray areas” in the Christian life. Still, in verse 4, he made it plain that each of us will have to answer to God for the way we have lived this life. God is not going to ask me what I thought about another person’s actions. God is the Lord and Judge over the other person. I’m not.

#### QUESTION 3:

*What unintended damage can occur when we judge one another?*

## ROMANS 14:13-15

**<sup>13</sup> Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister. <sup>14</sup> I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself. Still, to someone who considers a thing to be unclean, to that one it is unclean. <sup>15</sup> For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died.**

The “stronger” group had a more mature understanding of freedom, but Paul still challenged these believers not to be insensitive by flaunting their freedoms. They should avoid offending others.

Out of respect for others, mature Christians will restrict their freedom, removing anything from their lives that would cause others to feel wounded in their conscience. Our personal relationships should trump our personal

## ACCEPTING DIFFERENCES

*In the space provided, compare “disputed matters” (Rom. 14:1) we might disagree about with indisputable matters of the faith. List some examples of each. Then answer the question.*

**Disputed Matters**

**Indisputable Matters**

How do you determine the difference?

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*“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

EPHESIANS 4:2-3

freedoms. The strong should move toward the weak.

Simon was a vibrant, young worship leader. While in college, he was often called on to lead the music in chapel services as well as in surrounding churches. One Sunday, he was invited to bring his band and lead the music at a more traditional church. The pastor was very kind and appreciative, but he did request that Simon wear a coat and tie, the normal attire for their church leaders. Feeling insulted, Simon hung up the phone and wondered: “How could this church insist on a dress code that is not found in Scripture? Why can’t they accept me for who I am?” Simon made a decision in the heat of his emotions. He rejected the pastor’s request and arrived on Sunday in his faded jeans and favorite t-shirt. His attitude? “Those people can get over it.”

It’s easy to fall into Simon’s selfish, self-centered way of thinking. It’s likely that you—just like me—at some point have tried to justify your behavior by saying, “Those people need to get over it.” But this mentality doesn’t build healthy relationships. Furthermore, wounding your brother or sister in Christ for no good reason is wrong.

We need to have the opposite attitude. Whenever we consider the conscience of others as we make adjustments to our lives, we are demonstrating maturity more than compromise.

#### QUESTION 4:

*How do you balance exercising your freedom and avoiding stumbling blocks?*

## ROMANS 14:16-19

**<sup>16</sup> Therefore, do not let your good be slandered, <sup>17</sup> for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> Whoever serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and receives human approval. <sup>19</sup> So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.**

The most important things in life are not meats and vegetables! Though we must eat to live, we do not live to eat. So what is to be our main focus?

- ▶ We live to make the kingdom of God and His glory known throughout the earth.
- ▶ We live to build His kingdom and promote His purpose.



- ▶ We live to see our Savior return in power and glory, with our lives prepared and poised for service.

We serve Christ when we give proper proportion to trivial things and keep the cause of Christ in full view, refusing to “major on the

minors.” In so doing, we sense God’s pleasure and enjoy growing relationships.

We are called to wear the badge of a servant. Again, we’re talking about preferences and differences of opinion. Certainly, times may arise when we must make a clear moral and biblical stand, and that stand could cause division. Even then, however, we must stand for truth in a loving way, with unity in mind.

When someone disagrees with us or offends us, our natural reaction is to run away from the person, build a wall of defense, or just keep our distance. In some situations these boundaries are needed, but the healthiest Christian response is to maintain the relationship. We are called to stick with it and serve the people God has placed around us.

Scripture compels us to do our part to preserve relationships. The kingdom of God is about “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.” May we promote these things in the lives of our families and our churches and never give up on the hope of healing.

#### QUESTION 5:

***How does serving Christ in this way change how we approach disagreements?***



