

Do You Strive For Peace With Others?
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Romans 14:13-23

- CONFLICT...the mere mention of it can cause a reaction in some folks
- ?? What are some ways people react when there is conflict? Fight or flight.
- Some HATE all conflict; some LOVE it.
- Sometimes in meetings in my company, one of the executives will write on the board: "Remember, CONFLICT is GOOD!" (We sometimes tend to avoid conflict)
- ?? When is CONFLICT GOOD?
- ?? When is CONFLICT UNHEALTHY or COUNTER PRODUCTIVE?
- What about CHURCH CONFLICT or CONFLICT AMONG BELIEVERS?

Christianity Today did a survey of pastors in 2004:

- 95% have experienced church conflict and on average 20% were in it right then.
- What do churches have the most conflict about? CONTROL
- 85% of (pastors) cited control as a leading contributor. Matters of doctrine or cultural issues ranked low compared to power and personal preference. When we asked pastors to name the most likely cause, again control (44%) outdistanced the other factors, with vision/direction a remote second (22%).
- Size matters: We found this especially true in congregations of 200 or less. Some 49% of pastors of smaller churches said control is the number one problem, compared to less than one-third (31%) of churches of 500 or more.

Some of you have heard me relate the story as a teenaged preacher's kid witnessing a man stand up in a church business meeting interrupting my Dad to say: "We didn't come to hear you read scripture...we came to VOTE!"

Conflict is INEVITABLE...even among believers. Sometimes conflict is necessary and right. And conflict CAN bring good outcomes. But some people just love to FIGHT!

If you were around in the 60s and 70s you remember a cigarette ad in which the people in the picture each had a black eye...what was the slogan?
"I'd rather FIGHT than SWITCH!" Some people just love to fight.

There's a worn-out line we use about marriage: You can choose to be RIGHT or to be _____ (HAPPY).

The question Christians need to ask ourselves: "Is what we're fighting over, WORTH fighting over?"

- Let's review last week's study on the first twelve verses of Roman's 14.

- ?? Fill in the blank: Christians must RESPECT and LOVE each other, even when we don't agree on _____. (Disputable Matters or NON ESSENTIALS)
- ?? What were the two EXAMPLES Paul gave as NON ESSENTIALS in that day?
- ?? In your own words, how would you DEFINE a NON ESSENTIAL?
- Look back at three verses from that sum up last week's lesson...volunteers to read?

Romans 14:1 (Paul writes..)

1 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

Romans 14:10

10 ...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.

Romans 14:12

12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

We quoted an old saying about this:

"In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity" (or, Love)

We also said, when it comes to things on which the Bible is silent: what may be perfectly fine for you may be SIN for me as a MATTER OF MY OWN CONSCIENCE.

That brings us to the question, how can a STRONG or MATURE believer enjoy Christian LIBERTY but not hurt a WEAKER Christian or make them STUMBLE over a NON ESSENTIAL?

Romans 14:13-23. (NIV1984)

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall.

22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. 23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. (Prayer)

- Verse 13: Paul is direct: STOP PASSING JUDGMENT on other Christians (about NON ESSENTIALS)
- ?? What does he say to do INSTEAD? 1. Make up your mind... 2. NOT to put a stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.
- What does it mean to make another believer STUMBLE?
- I used to hear old people pray: "Lord, help me not to be a stumbling block but a _____(stepping stone) to others." Pretty good THEOLOGY there!
- If we study the words Paul used they not only mean leaving something where someone can trip over it...the other word can also mean a TRAP.
- There's a difference. I might accidentally leave something and you don't see it and trip...or I might PUT something in your way to TRIP YOU UP.
- Verse 14: Paul was certain that all foods were CLEAN. BUT...(what?)
- If YOU regard it as UNCLEAN then it's UNCLEAN FOR YOU...in your CONSCIENCE
- ?? - Verse 15: Why is it dangerous is for me to IGNORE how my brother or sister feels?
- "You are no longer acting in love" You might DESTROY your brother for whom Christ died.

Chuck Swindoll writes:

"Nothing is clean or unclean by itself. Inanimate objects can be neither good nor evil because they do not have a mind or a will. However, perception can be a powerful thing, especially to an untransformed mind. The sights, sounds, and symbols associated with someone's sinful past can pose a genuine threat to spiritual progress. When you find yourself in their company, however, voluntarily set aside your liberty for a time."

- Verse 16: "Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil." It might not be SIN for you, but if it would cause another to STUMBLE, don't even let there be a HINT of it in your life when you are around them.
- Verse 17: Paul says KEEP THE PRIORITIES in order! What the Kingdom of God IS and IS NOT ABOUT!
- ?? In verse 17, what does Paul say the it's NOT about? Eating and drinking...(in other words?) doing what I want to do...having my RIGHTS!
- ?? Also in verse 17 - What IS the Kingdom of God about? Righteousness, peace, joy.
- ?? Look at verse 18, If we put our brother or sister above our RIGHTS and DESIRES, whom do we please? Please God and are "approved by man".
- Highlight or underline verse 19...it's a DIRECT ORDER:
- "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.". That should be our constant goal!
- Verse 20 puts it in perspective: Don't destroy God's work for the sake of food...for the sake of HAVING MY RIGHTS.

My RIGHTS are no longer RIGHT if they cause another to STUMBLE into sin.

- In case we didn't get it...verse 21: "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do ANYTHING else (emphasis mine) that will cause your brother to fall."

Regarding verses 22 and 23, Warren Wiersbe writes:

"There are certain truths that all Christians must accept because they are the foundation for the faith."

Greg Decker's comment about ORTHODOXY- The word orthodox, from Greek orthos ("right", "true", "straight") + doxa ("opinion" or "belief", related to dokein, "to think"),[1] is generally used to mean the adherence to accepted norms, more specifically to creeds, especially in religion.[2] In the narrow sense the term means "conforming to the Christian faith as represented in the creeds of the early Church".

- I could do a 15 week study on this topic...here are the Cliff's Notes.
- We need a YARD STICK to measure whether a church; ministry; or teacher is in line with ORTHODOXY: For example...
 - What do they believe about who God is?
 - What do they believe about who Jesus is? God/man or just a man?
 - The virgin birth? His death, burial, and resurrection? His return?
 - What about the trinity?
- You need to do your own research to KNOW what we believe
- Where would I find the YARD STICK for ORTHODOXY?
 1. The historical CREEDS of the church: Apostles Creed for example.
 2. We Baptists don't tend to quote the CREEDS...some say "not creeds but SCRIPTURE" (Article on this: <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=18642>)
 3. What do Southern Baptists believe?, The Baptist Faith and Message. <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/>

As Wiersbe says: Certain truths are the FOUNDATION FOR OUR FAITH...for sure!
BUT...is THAT what most of us fight about?

Wiersbe goes on to say...

"But areas of honest disagreement must not be made a test of fellowship. If you have a sincere conviction from God about a matter, keep it to your-self and do not try to force everybody else to accept it. No Christian can "borrow" another Christian's convictions and be honest in his Christian life. Unless he can hold them and practice them "by faith," he is sinning. Even if a person's convictions are immature, he must never violate his conscience. This would do great damage to his spiritual life."

So, What's the Takeaway?

As Paul said in verse 19:

"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."
We said, verse 20 puts it in perspective: Don't destroy God's work for the sake of food...for the sake of HAVING MY RIGHTS.

Paul also wrote in...
Galatians 5:13-14

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

But I HAVE MY RIGHTS! Would you rather be RIGHT or be HAPPY...living in harmony with your Christian brother or sister.