

GROWING — Empowered for Fellowship I

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As we've gone through the pandemic, we have certainly accumulated thoughts, behaviors, and opinions. Many of these have swung us wildly away from one another. As the church, we are called to unity in King Jesus above all else, and so we navigate the waters of maintaining unity despite differences of opinions.

Our case study today comes from Romans 14, where two groups of Christians, the Jews and the Non-Jews (Gentiles) had sharp differences of opinion.

How do we preserve love, honor and respect for one another when we disagree?

Romans 14:1 - 19

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat

does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? 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 acknowledge God.’ ”

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

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification

The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 14:1–19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



There is a cancer that can quickly spread in any community, especially in churches — our judgment of each other from the heart.

Thankfully, there are four principles in Romans 14 that show us how to navigate these waters.

Principle 1

If we want to overcome a self-righteous judgment of each other from the heart, walk with each other and come together to listen to each other.

Accept the one whose faith is weak.

Principle 2

Recognize that some matters are disputable and should be done without quarreling.

Dying For — These are issues that are worth dying for. Closed-handed issues.

- The Gospel of Jesus
- Trinity
- Authority of Scripture

Dividing For — There are some things that are so important that we can't walk in relationship together. We wouldn't die for them, but it would be really difficult for us to walk for

- Human sexuality
- Biblical Marriage
- Women in Ministry
- Spiritual Gifts

Debate For — These are open-handed issues. Different interpretations of scripture

- Alcohol

- Age of the Earth
- End Times Views

Decide For — Issues that are up to conscience

- Tattoos
- Home-schooling vs. Public schooling

The error of the world is to move things as far down the scale as possible. "Live your truth."

The error of the church is to move things as far up the scale as possible. "I will die on every hill."

We don't want to make the mistake of compromising our unity over things that are debatable. As a general rule, there should be more debate for and decide for issues than divide and decide for issues.

During the pandemic, did you ever take a decide or debate for issue and make it a die for or divide for issue where scripture doesn't warrant that?

Did you elevate these issues to such a level that you hated your brother or sister in Christ? To where you broke off relationship and decided you won't be in the same church as them?

Churches have had families leave because they have elevated decide and debate for issues to the divide for issue where the matter was more debatable. This is not God's way.

How do we handle sharp differences of opinion?

If we humble ourselves and listen to people who sharply disagree with us and understand why they hold the view they do, we may actually grow

Principle 3

Do not judge someone who holds a different opinion (over disputable matters.)
Debate & Decide for issues.

Principle 4

Each must be fully convinced your issue. Let scripture be your guide, but recognize which areas are ones of conscience, ones of debate, ones that threaten unity, and ones that we should give up our lives for.



We're not addressing every single question today because we want to empower you to have conversations together, to get down off high horses, have humility, grace, and listening to each other.

One area in which this applies is masks and vaccination:

- There are some who are vaccinated and no longer see a reason to wear a mask. Ok by government mandate to do so.
- There are some who are vaccinated who still want to wear masks.
- There are some who are not vaccinated and have good reasons why they don't want to be yet as they wait to see what the effects are. Perhaps they are concerned about child bearing or underlying health concerns with doing so. Some of them may continue wearing masks and some won't if it's mandated by the gov.

- There are some who are not vaccinated, who want to be but medically, they are unable to. Some of them will continue to wear masks and stay clear of public gatherings.
- There are others who are immunocompromised or suppressed who have to make the tough choice of protecting themselves, wearing a mask, and whether they come into public settings.



You don't live to yourself alone. If you judge from your high horse someone else who serves God, that same measure will be applied to you as you both kneel before the judge of Heaven and Earth.

We want to be a church that unifies in King Jesus, discerns our beliefs and not divide and die for the wrong things.

- We want to be a church that lives for Christ and puts away our judgments and quarreling over disputable matters.
- We want to be a church that properly discerns our beliefs, convictions and opinions in the right categories.
- We want to be a church where there is freedom on the debate for and decide for issues that we don't divide for or die for the wrong beliefs.

We want to keep unity in the essentials, diversity in the non-essentials, and in all things, charity.

Take a moment for you to quiet your heart... Ask the Holy Spirit.

1. Search Me. See if there be any offensive way in me. In this area of self-righteousness judgment.
2. Have I elevated a decide for or debate for issue to the die for or divide for category?
3. Have I treated with contempt my brother or sister who thinks differently than me as less spiritual, lower in value, and separated myself from them?