

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## Dealing with Disputable Matters

Romans 14:1-12

2000

### Introduction

The Bible is very clear -- God's wants believers to live together in unity!

1. In the Old Testament, David wrote ...

Ps 133:1 "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

2. In the New Testament, Jesus prayed ...

John 17:20-21 "... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Unfortunately, one of the greatest threats to unity in the church comes not from eternal persecution but from internal disunity caused by differences over what Paul refers to as *disputable matters*.

Now there are certain things that aren't up for debate. For instance, it is always wrong to be drunk. It is always wrong to have sex outside of marriage. It is always wrong to murder. In both the Old and New Testaments, God has clearly revealed his position on these issues. But there are other issues that are not clearly addressed in scripture and which the Bible neither encourages nor prohibits.

Should a Christian drink, or dance? Can we smoke? What day should a Christian worship on and what translation of the Bible should he read? Can a person be a true believer without ascribing to the five points of Calvinism? Is it okay for Christians to go to movies and if so, what ratings are acceptable?

Godly, mature and fruitful believers can disagree on these issues and both be right. That's hard for us to understand at times, but that's what Paul teaches in this passage.

Disputable matters have been with the church since its inception and will remain with the church until the return of Christ.

So ... what should we do when we find ourselves holding different convictions from our fellow believers over disputable matters?

### I Dealing with Disputable Matters: Food

A. We are to **accept** those whose faith is weak [Verse 1]

*Accept* = Proslambano (imperative form) = "To receive"

Rom 15:7 "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you."

*Weak in [the] faith* = Astheneo = "To be feeble (in any sense)"

Interestingly, the *weak* brother is not the one who is carnal, but often appears to be the most spiritual. He is the one who seems to be the most morally upright, the one who is the most disciplined, and the one who appears to have the highest standards of conduct. What Paul is saying is that when it comes to disputable matters, the brother who is more legalistic is the *weaker* brother.

In his commentary on Romans, William Barclay says this about the *weaker* brother:

1. He has not yet discovered the meaning of Christian freedom; he is at heart still a legalist; he sees Christianity as a thing of rules and regulations. His whole aim is to govern his life by a series of laws and observances; he is indeed frightened of Christian freedom and Christian liberty.
2. He has not yet liberated himself from a belief in the efficacy of works. In his heart he believes that he can gain God's favor by doing certain things and abstaining from doing others. Basically he is still trying to earn a right relationship with God, and has not yet accepted the way of grace. He is still thinking of what he can do for God more than of what God has done for him.

Paul's encouragement regarding the weaker brother was to receive him. Don't reject him; don't ignore him; don't treat him with disrespect. Don't try to win your point or demolish him with your Bible knowledge. Instead, embrace and enjoy the diversity of the body of Christ without passing judgment on disputable issues.

1. One man's faith allows him to eat everything [Verse 2a]  
As believers who are a part of the New Covenant in Christ, we are not bound by the OT ceremonial or dietary restrictions.

**Illustration:** Peter and the sheet that was lowered from heaven with unclean animals  
Acts 10:15-16 "The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven."

2. One man's faith allows him to eat only vegetables [Verse 2b]  
There were two reasons that certain believers refused to eat meat:

1. OT dietary restrictions

The OT Law had very clear dietary restrictions that limited the type of meat that a Jew could eat. For instance, a Jew could not eat pork but could eat lamb as long as it was kosher – drained of its blood.

2. Meat sacrificed to idols

In Rome, there were pagan temples all over town. And the meat that was sacrificed to idols would then be sold in the local markets.

Understandably, some believers had a hard time with this and felt that to buy and eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol made the person who ate the meat a party to idol worship. But in the markets, you really never

knew where the meat came from. So, some Jews came to the conclusion that a vegetarian diet was the surest way to avoid eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. It was a rather extreme position, but one that assured them of a clear conscience.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons ... They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.”

**Application:**

Now, the eating of meat sacrificed to idols is not a problem for the church today. We have different disputable matters that tend to create disunity in the church? Movies and television, Alcohol, Smoking cigarettes, Bible translation, Calvinism vs. Armenianism, Sabbath keeping, and the list goes on.

With each of these issues, we are not talking about essential doctrines such as sin, the deity of Jesus Christ, salvation by faith, or clear scriptural commandments against adultery or lying. We are talking about non-essential, disputable issues where godly men and women have differing convictions.

**Illustration:**

Two of the most famous Christians in the 1800s in England were Charles Spurgeon and Joseph Parker. They were both phenomenal preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Early in their ministries they fellowshiped and even exchanged pulpits. Then they had a disagreement, and the reports got into the newspapers. Spurgeon accused Parker of being unspiritual because he attended the theater. Interestingly enough, Spurgeon smoked cigars, a practice many believers would condemn. In fact, on one occasion someone asked Spurgeon about his cigars, and he said he did not smoke to excess. When asked what he meant by excess, he answered, “No more than two at a time. Who was right? Perhaps neither, perhaps both! Better yet would be to realize that the two could disagree and both be in the will of God.

B. We are not to pass **judgment**

1. The *strong* must not look down on the *weak* [Verse 3a]

**Look down** = Exoutheneo = “To despise or to consider less than nothing”

In other words, if you are strong, you must not reject the one who is weak. You must not belittle him or be critical of him – privately or publicly. Instead, the strong in the faith are to live in a loving, patient and understanding way with those who are *weak* by offering to them unconditional love and acceptance.

1 Corinthians 8:9 “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.”

2. The *weak* must not condemn the *strong* [Verse 3b]

**Condemn** = Krino = “To try, condemn, punish”

In a legal sense it meant to find an accused person guilty of a crime.

C. We are not to judge someone else’s servant [Verse 4a]

**Judge** = Krino = “To try, condemn, punish”

The reason we are not to judge each other is that we are not responsible for one another's conduct when it comes to disputable matters. If the person is God’s servant, then it is God’s responsibility to judge his behavior.

**The question then is this:** Is it ever appropriate to judge others? It depends!

1. We are not called to judge those outside the church - 1 Cor 5:12a
2. We are, however, responsible to make judgments within the church body when it comes to clear doctrinal and moral issues. - 1 Cor 5:12b
3. We are not called to judge or condemn believers over disputable issues.

1. For God has **accepted** him [Verse 3c]

**Accepted** = Proslambano = “To receive”

If God doesn’t make an issue of something, what right do His children have to do so? If the strong and the weak have equal acceptance before God, it is sinful and arrogant for us to do otherwise.

2. To his own master he stands or falls [Verse 4b]

**Stands** = Steko = “To stand fast or persevere”

**Falls** = Pipto = “To fall down or fail”

3. And he will **stand** for the Lord is able to make him stand [Verse 4c]

**Stand** = Histemi = “To continue, firm and established”

Jude 24-25 “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy ...”

## II Dealing with Disputable Matters: Special Days

A. People have different views on “**Special Days**” [Verse 5a]

1. One man considers one day more sacred than another

Some members of the early church came out of Judaism and were convinced that it was necessary to continue observing the Old Testament feasts and festivals.

Others were convinced that the proper day to worship was Saturday, the traditional Sabbath. Others said worship should take place on the first day of the week – Resurrection Day, Sunday. And the debate continues on today.

### Illustration:

Seventh Day Adventists are regularly tucking fliers under my door letting me know that by holding Sunday worship services that I am sending people to Hell.

#### 2. One man considers every day alike [Verse 5b]

The Christian Gentile's conscience argued that every day is equally devoted to the service and worship of God.

Colossians 2:16-17 "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."

Now Paul was not condemning those who chose to observe certain festivals or the Sabbath. But we must be careful to not fall into the sin of the Judaizers who taught that salvation is achieved by faith and the observance of the Law.

Galatians 4:9-10 "But now that you know God-or rather are known by God-how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!"

#### B. Each person should be fully convinced in his own mind [Verse 5c]

**Fully Convinced** = Plerophoreo = "To be fully persuaded or assured"

Paul's conclusion is somewhat surprising. He is making the point that people with opposing viewpoints on disputable issues can both be perfectly right. But don't force your convictions on everyone else.

Rom 14:22-23 "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. 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."

#### 1. To the one who regards one day as special: [Verse 6a]

##### a. He does so to the Lord

Col 3:17 "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

#### 2. To the one who eats meat: [Verse 6b]

##### a. He eats to the Lord for he gives thanks to the Lord

**Thanks** = Eucharisteo = "To express gratitude or thanks"

1 Timothy 4:4-5 "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

3. To the one who **abstains** from meat: [Verse 6c]
  - a. He abstains to the Lord and gives thanks to the Lord  
1 Cor 10:31 “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

### III Dealing with Disputable Matters: Attitude

#### A. We are not to live for **ourselves** [Verse 7]

##### 1. None of us lives to himself alone

In other words, our decisions and choices in life must be measured not simple by what leads to our own benefit, but also what leads to the benefit of others.

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

##### 2. None of us dies to himself alone

In every matter of disagreement, we ought to remember that not only do we belong to the Lord, but we also belong to one another. We are brothers and sisters.

1 Corinthians 10:33 “... I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.”

#### B. We are to live for the **Lord** [Verse 8a]

**Lord** = Kurios = “To rule, have dominion over, exercise lordship over”

##### 1. If we live, we live for the Lord

2 Cor 5:14-15 “For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

##### 2. If we die, we die to the Lord

Phil 1:20-21 “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.”

Everything you do, including your dying, should be done for the singular purpose of pleasing and glorifying God.

#### C. We are not our **own** [Verse 8b]

##### 1. If we live we belong to the Lord

##### 2. If we die we belong to the Lord

1 Cor 6:18-20 “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

#### IV Dealing with Disputable Matters: Eternal Perspective

A. Jesus Christ is the only one **qualified** to judge others [Verse 9]

1. By virtue of the fact that Christ died and returned to life

Rev 5:9 “And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (4 creatures and 24 elders)

- a. That He might be the Lord of the dead
- b. That He might be the Lord of the living

B. We are **not qualified** to judge others [Verse 10a]

1. It is not appropriate for us to judge our brother

Our job is to serve the Lord, not to self-righteously judge our fellow believers.

2. It is not appropriate for us to look down on our brother

1 Cor 4:2-5 “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.”

C. Jesus Christ is the only qualified judge [Verse 10b]

1. We will all have to stand before God's **judgment seat**

**Judgment seat** = Bema = “A platform of judgment”

Two judgments are mentioned in the Bible:

1. The Great White Throne Judgment: Judging the sins of unbelievers

Revelation 20:11-15

2. The Bema Seat Judgment: Distributing the rewards of believers

2 Corinthians 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

a. Every knee will bow before Him [Verse 11a]

b. Every tongue will confess to God [Verse 11b]

Philippians 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

2. We will all have to give an **account** to God [Verse 12]

**Account** = Logos = “A reckoning, a report and explanation”

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 “If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day

will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

The only person you are going to be responsible to give an account for is yourself. Not your neighbor. Not your spouse. Not your pastor. Not the person sitting in front of you or behind you.

**Conclusion:**

When it comes to disputable matters, let's not judge each another. Let's not treat each other with disdain or ridicule. Instead, let's love one another by accepting one another -- especially when it comes to disputable matters.

Rupertus Meldenius gave a motto to his followers that I think we would be wise to accept:  
*“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”*

And let's remember the words of Jesus before His crucifixion and after his resurrection:

Matt 16:27-28 “For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”

Rev 22:12-13 “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”