

Bible Studies

Disputable Matters



Read Romans 14v1-15v2, 1 Corinthians 8v1-13, 1 Corinthians 10v23-11v1.
 Even doing a study like this can be dangerous, it can bring to the fore things best left alone, it can promote disagreement instead of understanding. The choice is yours, in these passages Paul give the tools to promote understanding, but we must use them!

Does the Bible say it is wrong to watch TV?

The Bible gives very clear directions on many issues. On others it does not give such clear instructions. Living in this world, we will inevitably face situations where the Bible does not give a direct teaching. TV's were not invented in Jesus day. We have to know the Bible well enough to make a judgement on these things. We have to know ourselves well enough to know what is dangerous for us.

Over the years Christians have held strong views on things like alcohol, gambling and smoking. Other Christians have held diametrically opposite views. In these passages, Paul talks about things that are matters of conscience. He points out that in some cases what is wrong for one person may not be wrong for another. *When the Bible does not say a clear yes or no how should we form an opinion? How should we treat those who disagree with our opinion? Under what conditions should we limit our freedom?*

What issues does Paul identify as contentious?

- Romans 14v2&6b**
- Romans 14v5-6a**
- Romans 14v14&20**
- Romans 14v21**
- 1 Corinthians 8v7**
- 1 Corinthians 8v10**

Which of these are issues for us today and how important are they?

Several of these are interrelated, at first glance the issue may seem to be vegetarianism, but it is not. *Unclean food* is probably *unkosher food*, food the law prohibits, like pork or shellfish. Lev 11v7-10. Food that Jesus declared clean. Mark 7v19.

You may ask *'why on earth would a Christian want to eat at a pagan temple?'* It must be understood that in Paul's day most, if not all, meat sold in the market was ritually slaughtered in a pagan temple, they were the only slaughter houses in the Roman/Greek world. Similarly, the only banqueting halls or restaurants were housed in temples. Eating was part of worship, it was also part of the fabric of society. So whether or not a believer may participate was a very important issue. Effectively the issue Paul is dealing with is, *to what extent must a Christian separate himself from the world.* This is still an importance issue for us. The principles Paul gives still apply.



What issues would you identify as disputable, or matters of faith?
What makes something a disputable matter?
Does everyone acknowledge that these are matters of conscience?

No, by nature, people hold strong views and maintain that they are Biblical. The problem comes when we impose what is right for us, onto other people who feel differently. Often these issues are cultural and differ from country to country. If a culture has a real weakness in a given area, it's church might feel the need to take a strong stand as a counter measure.

The first question we have to ask is **what do the scriptures say?** Is this thing really allowed/prohibited for believers? To complicate things it is not enough to base our conclusion on one verse, if we did so, eating pork would clearly be wrong. We have to apply the whole Bible to a subject, not just a carefully chosen verse.



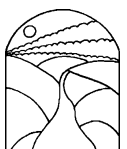
Can you see a whole new reason for reading the Bible?
Would understanding someone else's reasoning help you?

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. Romans 14v5b

What does this mean?

How are you going to be fully convinced in your own mind?

It seems to me that Paul is saying you need to have a bases for your opinion on such matters, you have to understand the issues, the relevant Scriptures and have made up your mind before the Lord.



Some examples



For years the Church said that playing cards was wrong, because it was a time waster. Some people say that Christians should not get involved with high risk sports activities, like motor sport or sky diving, because of the danger of taking your own life.

What do you think?

What are the issues involved?

What does the Scripture say?

When might this be wrong?

Personally, I do not put games on my computer, I know I would spend all day playing them, instead of working. For me it would be wrong. For someone else it could be totally harmless. This is why we need to know our weaknesses.

What about boxing?

What about gun ownership?

What about pacifism?

What about smoking? 2 Pet 2v19, 1 Cor 6v12

Can we hold different views about such things?

What was Paul's view about marriage? 1 Corinthians 7v7 & 40

Paul was single and he clearly felt this was the best way to be. I do not agree "*It is not good for the man to be alone*". *Genesis 2v18*. Paul clearly says that this is his opinion. That this is what is right for him and others have the right to agree or disagree as the Lord leads them. To have forbidden men to marry as Paul himself points out, would be wrong. 1 Timothy 4v2

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. Romans 14v22b

What does this mean?

If something is clearly unscriptural what attitude should we take to it?

Can we be wrong with our convictions?

Just because we are convinced about something does not make it right. In Corinth some people thought prostitution was included in things that were permissible. Doubtless they had no qualms about it and were convinced in their own minds. Paul has to tell them they are wrong. 1 Corinthians 6v15. There are clear limits to our freedom and our own convictions are not the final judge. Consequently we must keep an open mind and be prepared to change our views as we grow.

Are our consciences infallible? 1 Timothy 4v2, Titus v15

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:4

Do you think that sometimes it is best to ere on the side of caution?



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. Romans 14:23

If you are not sure about something what should you do?

As you grow in Christ, you will find your views change on many matters. When we first come to Christ there may be things that are not wrong, but have a hold on us that needs to be broken. (so we burn our CD collection). Later as we grow, these things are no longer an issue for us and become harmless. Other things remain dangerous and must be left well alone. There may also be things that at first seemed harmless to us, but as we grow we come to realize are wrong and have to be left behind. The closer you come to Christ the more you understand and the more you need to change.

Can some of these issues be especially dangerous at different times in your walk?

Something does not have to be evil to be wrong, it just has to keep us from Christ!



For me the big question is does it lead to sin?

Read Matthew 5v29-31

What does this passage mean?



If you have a problem with lust, is going to the local swimming pool likely to lead you into sin?

Would it be wrong to go? Would it be sin to go?

Does this mean it is wrong for Christians to practice mixed bathing?

This is an example of something that could be harmless to one and very dangerous to another.



Read 1 Corinthians 10v23 6v12

What is the difference between what is permissible and what is beneficial?

There are clearly things that we are free to do that will be harmful to us. Therefore we should avoid them. Paul wants us to be engaged in things that will build us up.

Is everything permissible?

Oh! No it is not, some things are clearly not permissible! Paul wrote Corinthians in reply to a letter they wrote to him asking him a series of questions. 7v1. At times Paul quotes from their letter. Most scholars believe this statement is a quotation which Paul then addresses. Paul is not endorsing the view that we can do whatever we want, he is arguing against it. This is why the NIV places the statement in quotation marks. (the common Greek of Paul's day did not use this kind of punctuation). The CEV goes further and prefixing it with "some of you say", this is not in the Greek.

Bible Studies

Disputable Matters



Read Romans 14v1-15v2, 1 Corinthians 8v1-13, 1 Corinthians 10v23-11v1.
Even doing a study like this can be dangerous, it can bring to the fore things best left alone, it can promote disagreement instead of understanding. The choice is yours, in these passages Paul give the tools to promote understanding, but we must use them!

Does the Bible say it is wrong to watch TV?

The Bible gives very clear directions on many issues. On others it does not give such clear instructions. Living in this world, we will inevitably face situations where the Bible does not give a direct teaching. TV's were not invented in Jesus day. We have to know the Bible well enough to make a judgement on these things. We have to know ourselves well enough to know what is dangerous for us.

Over the years Christians have held strong views on things like alcohol, gambling and smoking. Other Christians have held diametrically opposite views. In these passages, Paul talks about things that are matters of conscience. He points out that in some cases what is wrong for one person may not be wrong for another. *When the Bible does not say a clear yes or no how should we form an opinion? How should we treat those who disagree with our opinion? Under what conditions should we limit our freedom?*

What issues does Paul identify as contentious?

Romans 14v2&6b

Eating meat or only vegetables

Romans 14v5-6a

Keeping one day as holy (Sabbath Sunday)

Romans 14v14&20

Eating unclean food

Romans 14v21

Drinking wine

1 Corinthians 8v7

Food sacrificed to idols

1 Corinthians 8v10

Eating in a pagan temple

Which of these are issues for us today and how important are they?

Several of these are interrelated, at first glance the issue may seem to be vegetarianism, but it is not. *Unclean food* is probably *unkosher food*, food the law prohibits, like pork or shellfish. Lev 11v7-10. Food that Jesus declared clean. Mark 7v19.

You may ask *'why on earth would a Christian want to eat at a pagan temple?'* It must be understood that in Paul's day most, if not all, meat sold in the market was ritually slaughtered in a pagan temple, they were the only slaughter houses in the Roman/Greek world. Similarly, the only banqueting halls or restaurants were housed in temples. Eating was part of worship, it was also part of the fabric of society. So whether or not a believer may participate was a very important issue. Effectively the issue Paul is dealing with is, *to what extent must a Christian separate himself from the world.* This is still an importance issue for us. The principles Paul gives still apply.



What issues would you identify as disputable, or matters of faith?

What makes something a disputable matter?

Does everyone acknowledge that these are matters of conscience?

No, by nature, people hold strong views and maintain that they are Biblical. The problem comes when we impose what is right for us, onto other people who feel differently. Often these issues are cultural and differ from country to country. If a culture has a real weakness in a given area, it's church might feel the need to take a strong stand as a counter measure.

The first question we have to ask is **what do the scriptures say?** Is this thing really allowed/prohibited for believers? To complicate things it is not enough to base our conclusion on one verse, if we did so, eating pork would clearly be wrong. We have to apply the whole Bible to a subject, not just a carefully chosen verse.



Can you see a whole new reason for reading the Bible?

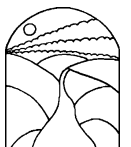
Would understanding someone else's reasoning help you?

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. Romans 14v5b

What does this mean?

How are you going to be fully convinced in your own mind?

It seems to me that Paul is saying you need to have a bases for your opinion on such matters, you have to understand the issues, the relevant Scriptures and have made up your mind before the Lord.



Some examples



For years the Church said that playing cards was wrong, because it was a time waster. Some people say that Christians should not get involved with high risk sports activities, like motor sport or sky diving, because of the danger of taking your own life.

What do you think?

What are the issues involved?

What does the Scripture say?

When might this be wrong?

Personally, I do not put games on my computer, I know I would spend all day playing them, instead of working. For me it would be wrong. For someone else it could be totally harmless. This is why we need to know our weaknesses.

What about boxing?

What about gun ownership?

What about pacifism?

What about smoking? 2 Pet 2v19, 1 Cor 6v12

Can we hold different views about such things?

What was Paul's view about marriage? 1 Corinthians 7v7 & 40

Paul was single and he clearly felt this was the best way to be. I do not agree "*It is not good for the man to be alone*". *Genesis 2v18*. Paul clearly says that this is his opinion. That this is what is right for him and others have the right to agree or disagree as the Lord leads them. To have forbidden men to marry as Paul himself points out, would be wrong. 1 Timothy 4v2

Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. Romans 14v22b

What does this mean?

If something is clearly unscriptural what attitude should we take to it?

Can we be wrong with our convictions?

Just because we are convinced about something does not make it right. In Corinth some people thought prostitution was included in things that were permissible. Doubtless they had no qualms about it and were convinced in their own minds. Paul has to tell them they are wrong. 1 Corinthians 6v15. There are clear limits to our freedom and our own convictions are not the final judge. Consequently we must keep an open mind and be prepared to change our views as we grow.

Are our consciences infallible? 1 Timothy 4v2, Titus v15

My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 1 Corinthians 4:4

Do you think that sometimes it is best to ere on the side of caution?



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. Romans 14:23

If you are not sure about something what should you do?

As you grow in Christ, you will find your views change on many matters. When we first come to Christ there may be things that are not wrong, but have a hold on us that needs to be broken. (so we burn our CD collection). Later as we grow, these things are no longer an issue for us and become harmless. Other things remain dangerous and must be left well alone. There may also be things that at first seemed harmless to us, but as we grow we come to realize are wrong and have to be left behind. The closer you come to Christ the more you understand and the more you need to change.

Can some of these issues be especially dangerous at different times in your walk?

Something does not have to be evil to be wrong, it just has to keep us from Christ!



For me the big question is does it lead to sin?

Read Matthew 5v29-31

What does this passage mean?



If you have a problem with lust, is going to the local swimming pool likely to lead you into sin?

Would it be wrong to go? Would it be sin to go?

Does this mean it is wrong for Christians to practice mixed bathing?

This is an example of something that could be harmless to one and very dangerous to another.



Read 1 Corinthians 10v23 6v12

What is the difference between what is permissible and what is beneficial?

There are clearly things that we are free to do that will be harmful to us. Therefore we should avoid them. Paul wants us to be engaged in things that will build us up.

Is everything permissible?

Oh! No it is not, some things are clearly not permissible! Paul wrote Corinthians in reply to a letter they wrote to him asking him a series of questions. 7v1. At times Paul quotes from their letter. Most scholars believe this statement is a quotation which Paul then addresses. Paul is not endorsing the view that we can do whatever we want, he is arguing against it. This is why the NIV places the statement in quotation marks. (the common Greek of Paul's day did not use this kind of punctuation). The CEV goes further and prefixing it with "some of you say", this is not in the Greek.