

ple ignore what the scripture says, often people are sincerely trying to follow the Lord to the best of their understanding. When this concerns matters that do not hinder our fellowship with them let us not pass judgment upon them, but work to grow with them avoiding any offense to them. Paul said – **“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.”** (Romans 14:13).

Stumbling blocks might take the form of ridicule that discourages the one with rigid convictions, or harsh rebuke that turns away the one with loose convictions. Neither serves the cause of Christ.

There may be times in which differences are such that we cannot in good conscience work in fellowship with our brethren. Perhaps we may be forced to urge them to be more cautious in their

conclusions. Even so we must always bear in mind in all such matters it is the Lord that will judge both matters and both sides.

By Kyle Pope



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Faithful Sayings

Olsen Park Church of Christ

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Services

Sunday: 9:30 a.m.
10:20 a.m.
6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.

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Charles Kelley
Pat Ledbetter

Deacons:

Dean Bowers
Eddie Cook
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“Whatever Is Not From Faith”

The tendency probably has been with man since the beginning. Perhaps out of fear or laziness, for some reason it seems easier to let someone else decide matters for us. This is harmless enough in matters such as where to eat, or what flavor or color of something to choose. Yet, when we do this with spiritual matters the consequences can be devastating. Who knows how many people throughout time have believed and worshipped in certain ways because others decided for them? This is so disturbing because the Bible tells us that we will stand before God as individuals, and be judged as

individuals. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says – **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”** (NKJV).

Sometimes I fear that in the church we may have promoted this same tendency without even realizing it. When people conform to the position brother “so and so” takes or believe something because a respected elder or preacher does, we are delegating to someone else a responsibility we dare not forfeit. This responsibility is the individual duty given to

“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12).

This is not to say that we should not study together and listen to the understanding of respected brethren. Nor is it to say that God has different standards by which He will judge different people. But simply that we will each answer to God ourself. In Romans 14:5 Paul was addressing a controversy that was alive in the first century. He instructed the brethren – **“... Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”** (Romans 14:5). In the same chapter Paul warned against acting with doubt by declaring – **“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.”** (Romans 14:23). This shows us that going against what a person believes to be right is itself sin.

The question arises – *What does it mean to act “from faith”?* Is that to say that whatever a person truly believes to be true is acceptable? Not necessarily! In the same context referred to above where Paul urged them to be “fully convinced,” he also proclaimed – **“...Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”**

(Romans 14:22). This tells us that a person can approve and believe the wrong things—things that can actually condemn him. What then is acting “from faith”? A few chapters earlier in the Roman letter Paul explains this. He declares – **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** (Romans 10:17). Thus, God’s word produces faith, and a person must act based on their understanding of God’s word. The standard of judgment will be God’s word. In John 12:47, 48 Jesus declared – **“And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. ‘He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him--the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.’”**

Since God’s word is the standard, what do we do when people draw different conclusions from the same standard? If we could fully answer this question we would, with one stroke wipe out most of the religious division that exists in the world today! We won’t pretend to offer such an answer but here are some parameters to set for ourselves:

1. Draw People to the Word. We must always be careful about the means we use to draw people. It must not be our particular philosophy of life, or “style” of faith (i.e. a slick order of worship or emotional appeal). We must even be careful not to try and draw people to our understanding of God’s word. That is no different than drawing people to us. Instead we must draw them to God’s word itself. By doing this we show them how to decide for themselves what God would have them to do, and perhaps even help us in turn discover flaws in our own reasoning.

2. Stress the importance of Christians being individuals of conviction. Each person must decide for himself what is right. We must always be true to the dictates of our own conscience as it complies with Scripture. Far too many Christians sit back and let their preacher or their elders wrestle with some issue of Scripture. Then they accept their views because they respect them so much. When we do this how can we know that the choices they have made are sound? We must feel a compulsion to study matters for ourself.

3. Never ask someone to violate their conscience. Though it may be hard for

us to accept, we must realize that if someone else differs with our understanding of Scripture the answer isn’t simply to have them surrender to our view. If we convince someone to change their thinking at the expense of violating their conscience we have gained nothing. While following our conscience may be either right or wrong (Romans 14:22) it is always wrong to violate our conscience.

4. Don’t hide the truth. We should always work to make all information on a given topic available to people. In doing so we help them make rational decisions for themselves. While we must be careful not to introduce a false doctrine to the unlearned, we should always be honest enough to answer challenges to our own views. This is hard to do. It takes courage and preparation. It is much easier to battle falsehood by simply attempting to silence it. Yet what this usually leads to is not, the victory of the truth but greater division. People become unaware of both sides of an issue. If something is true, it can take the heat of battle. If it is false we must expose it.

5. Avoid laying a stumbling block. While there will be cases in which peo-