

Student Name: _____

The Bible and Disagreement

Background

As the early church grew in the years after Jesus's resurrection, its membership became a mix of believers from Jewish backgrounds (Jews) and believers from non-Jewish backgrounds (Gentiles). Their different backgrounds resulted in disagreements about what Christians should believe and do. One disagreement concerned whether it was acceptable for Christians to eat meat sold in the Gentile markets, which was often ceremonially dedicated to pagan gods. Some believers felt this would be participating in worship of these gods; others felt that because the so-called gods were nothing, eating meat dedicated to them meant nothing. The result was that one group felt guilty doing something (eating meat) for which the other group thanked God! You are going to look at three passages in which Paul gives instructions for how Christians should handle this disagreement.

A. Read Romans 14:1-3 and answer the questions below. (The one "whose faith is weak" is the one who feels guilty eating meat offered to idols: non-existent pagan gods.)

- 1. How do you feel when a friend feels guilty about something that seems fine to you?**
- 2. In 14:1, the Apostle Paul gives two instructions. First, he says to _____ the one whose faith is weak (who feels guilty eating meat offered to idols) and then he says not to _____.**
- 3. Both those who felt it was fine to eat the meat and those who did not were tempted to treat each other poorly. In 14:3, what does Paul caution each group not to do to the other?**

A. Read Romans 14:14-18 and answer the questions below. (An “unclean” food is one that God forbids his people to eat. In these verses, Paul is still talking about meat offered to idols.)

- 1. What is Paul’s conviction (14:14) about whether meat offered to idols is or is not unclean?**
- 2. In verses 15-18, what seems more important to Paul than having everyone agree with him about whether the meat is unclean or not? Put what you think he is saying into one short sentence in your own words.**
- 3. Read 1 Corinthians 8:4 and 7-13 and summarize in one or two sentences how Paul’s instructions here sound like his instructions in Romans 14.**
- 4. Read Galatians 3:1-5. Here is another disagreement, this time about whether salvation comes through faith in Christ or through conformity to the demands of the Torah, the Jewish law. Here Paul seems less inclined to live and let live. Why is his approach different here? Do you think he would still insist that love guide our response to others in this case?**
- 5. Christians today don’t argue about eating meat offered to idols, but we do disagree about other issues. One area of disagreement is how science and faith relate to each other, especially when it comes to how and when God created. Do questions about faith and science touch the basis of salvation (like the question of faith and law) or are they less central and more about how to respond to our culture (like how to approach meat sacrificed to idols)? How do you think the Apostle Paul would tell you to treat Christians who disagree with you about these things?**

Romans 14: 1-3, 14-18 (NET)

Now receive the one who is weak in the faith, and do not have disputes over differing opinions. One person believes in eating everything, but the weak person eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not despise the one who does not, and the one who abstains must not judge the one who eats everything, for God has accepted him.

I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean in itself; still, it is unclean to the one who considers it unclean. For if your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy by your food someone for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what you consider good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God does not consist of food and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. For the one who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by people.

I Corinthians 8:4,7-13 (NET)

With regard then to eating food sacrificed to idols, we know that “an idol in this world is nothing,” and that “there is no God but one.” ...But this knowledge is not shared by all. And some, by being accustomed to idols in former times, eat this food as an idol sacrifice, and their conscience, because it is weak, is defiled. Now food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse if we do not eat and no better if we do. But be careful that this liberty of yours does not become a hindrance to the weak. For if someone weak sees you who possess knowledge dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience be “strengthened” to eat food offered to idols? So by your knowledge the weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed. If you sin against your brothers or sisters in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. For this reason, if food causes my brother or sister to sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause one of them to sin.

Galatians 3:1-5 (NET)

You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort? Have you suffered so many things for nothing?—if indeed it was for nothing. Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?