

Be Gracious and Godly
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**Disputable Matters
and
Judgment Calls**



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«Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.» (Philippians 4:5)

All Scripture references
in this writing are taken from the
Authorized King James Version



We Christians need to be gentle and generous in our judgment calls concerning disputable matters and the freedom of other believers to be convinced in their own minds, before God, about their involvement and participation in those matters.

There are indisputable matters of the historic, scriptural faith of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that we must stand firmly upon; such as the doctrines of Christ, the Triune Godhead and so forth. These are not open for debate, though some would attempt to make them so.

We are to avoid non-productive, or even destructive, back and forth contentions about disputable matters that can lead to the ruination of the hearers.

«Of these things put *them* in remembrance, charging *them* before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, *but* to the subverting of the hearers.» (II Timothy 2:14)

If someone genuinely comes to us with a sincere, seeking heart-felt question about the reason for our faith, **«But**

sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:» (I Peter 3:15), that is a different scenario and we should and need to be prepared to answer these questions as best we can or point them to a reference work or more knowledgeable Christian who can. These are legitimate questions about the faith. God will enable us to give Holy Spirit inspired replies as they are needed.

We are to avoid like the plague judging our brothers and sisters in disputable matters. Those things such as but not limited to styles of music, length of hair, eating or not eating meat, methods of baptism, clothing restrictions that have little or nothing to do with modesty but much to do with personal preferences and human traditions, and so forth. The list could go on and on.

«¹Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations. ²For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. ³Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. ⁴Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. ⁵One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. ⁶He that regardeth the day, regardeth *it* unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard *it*. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. ⁷For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. ⁸For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and

whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. ¹⁰But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written, *As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. ¹²So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.»* (Romans 14:1-12)

On the other hand, rest assured we are not, as the old saying goes, to “throw the baby out with the bath water” and come to the erroneous conclusion that there are no standards. There are standards, general guidelines, and ways of conduct and dress that have much to do with godly wisdom and being the very best witness we can be for Jesus Christ to the lost world. One of the very first reality checks a new believer must come to grip with is that you’re going to stick out as different, odd, or even strange to non-Christians, if you’re being a Christian with your life and from your heart.

Listen; do you know why a dog wags its tail when it’s happy to see someone or barks at passing people or cars? Because, he’s a dog! His dog nature does what comes natural and he can’t help but be what he is, a dog. If you’re a genuine Christian but trying to not stand out as different from your non-Christian associates, acquaintances and co-workers, if you’re putting a lot of energy into attempting to fit in, you’re going against who and what you are. It’s not natural for you to be like your unsaved friends and co-workers.

«But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath

called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.» (I Peter 2:9)

«Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you*:» (I Peter 4:4)

I don't mean to be harsh, but the truth really is that you need to accept the fact that once you receive the Lord as your personal Savior in your heart, you should stand out as being different; stand up and be counted as belonging to Jesus Christ. There's no place in God's kingdom for undercover Christians. Your decision for Christ should not be a shallow one. We, the body of Christ, do people a great disservice when we allow ourselves to hide our candle under a bushel basket and keep our faith secret and personal.

«¹⁴Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.» (Matthew 5:14-15)

Each new believer should make a point of seeking out godly Christians of maturity in the faith, seasoned in the wisdom and practical aspects of a life lived for Christ. New believers, and those who are not so new, will benefit from their counsel in these matters.

«Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is safety*.» (Proverbs 11:14)

«Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.» (Proverbs 15:22)

«For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is safety*.» (Proverbs 24:6)

«A wise *man* will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:» (Proverbs 1:5)

«He that walketh with wise *men* shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.» (Proverbs 13:20)

«The wicked is snared by the transgression of *his* lips: but the just shall come out of trouble.» (Proverbs 12:13)

Of course the very first thing, as new Christians or old, we should do is stop and ask God, "Is this Your will for me in this area? If not, what is it, Lord"? Many of our questions would need to go no further than that. God would let us know in our hearts. God uses the godly counsel of men and women of substantial and godly faith who have been taught of God's wisdom by His spirit and through years of experience in the walk of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to avail ourselves of such godly counsel often. God will many times use such people to speak to us.

Two things we need to avoid concerning disputable matters can be stated this way: God may lead you to forsake something or to take up another. Do not make the mistake of automatically assuming that because God has so dealt with you about an issue that He has given you a mandate or an across the board doctrine to enforce onto other believers. God may be dealing with you specifically on an issue that He knows that you, personally, need to deal with. Many believers down through the centuries

have had the Holy Spirit lead them to put down or pick up a practice or activity that would ordinarily be perfectly legitimate for a Christian to be involved in, only to discover months or even years later that God would tell them to pick that very practice or activity up again and use it to God's glory and purposes, i.e. playing a musical instrument, theatrical productions, television, etc. Don't rashly conclude that everything God tells you to put down or take up is sin for everyone else in the body of Christ or the world if they don't follow suit. God is very personal and deals with individuals in an individual way – always consistent with the Holy Scriptures. Since God deals very personally with you, allow Him to do so in the lives of others also. We are not each other's Holy Spirit! And number two...

Don't confuse personal preferences for "Thus saith the Lord" commands as holy or unholy activities. We all have personal preferences and convictions that we bring to our Christian life from our former life experiences. Many of these are not sinful, just personal, and biased. For example, a Christian brother experienced the Holy Spirit dealing with him regarding his practice of going to the movies - the big screen! God convicted him at a very young age because of the worldly mindset and content of the movies. Although the movies he went to see were innocent in content, it did not portray a life of Christian separation. Regarding the recent movie "The Passion of Christ," many Christians frequented the cinema without conviction due to the religious content. However, this brother's strong personal conviction prevented him from going. He could not however, either condemn or condone his brothers and sisters in Christ for going as the Holy Spirit had not convicted them of this practice.

«Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the

unclean thing; and I will receive you,»
II Corinthians 6:17

We often develop personal preferences and convictions after we are born again by God's Spirit. Again, everything we may like or dislike, prefer or not prefer is not automatically either sinful or righteous. To use another simplified example, you may like pie a la mode with vanilla ice cream and I, on the other hand, may not like vanilla ice cream, but only chocolate, plus I can take or leave apple pie. (Actually I love them both!) Is either of us more righteous or unrighteous because of our food preferences? No. Life is full of things that have to do with God's gracious gift of liberty in the ordinary things of life that, even in this fallen world, are good gifts from the Father of Lights. Let's enjoy this godly liberty and not judge others as they enjoy theirs.

Music is an area often the focus of much judgment. Remember, Christian music is any music with godly words, God honoring lyrics and messages filled with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. You may like country style music and I may like folk rock style. It is a grave error on the part of either of us to judge our brother in his music style preferences. I'm not talking about songs with ungodly lyrics or hanging out in bars to listen to your music style. I'm talking about the multitude of Christian, gospel lyric filled songs that are in many music styles. Hymns, southern gospel, black traditional gospel, country gospel, pop gospel, rhythm and blues gospel, folk gospel, bluegrass gospel, and yes, even rock and rap gospel. I may not like, enjoy or appreciate some of these music styles; I may even hold the opinion that some of them aren't music.

As a Christian, what I need to keep in mind is that just as God gives me the liberty to not like them, so I need to give others the same liberty to like them. Where I must draw the line is this; I must not equate my music style of

spiritual blessing, those that convey words of godly content and inspiration to me, with God's judgment against all other music or for mine. Other areas in which many differ within the body of Christ are the motor racing sport, frequenting a family restaurant that serves alcohol, and mixed swimming. These are just a few areas we could debate all the day long and to no profit to anyone. However, the main question at hand is—do any of these things that we are attracted to appeal to the flesh? If so, it could be a serious matter of separation.

Disputable matters. There are things that are sinful under any circumstances or conditions, no matter who or when they are indulged. We're not talking about such. We are referring to disputable matters upon which every man must give an account to God personally for his choices and be led by his Holy Spirit informed conscience to choose as God allows him to do.

We are not to judge our brothers and sisters in such matters but allow them the same type of freedom to hear from God and be led by the Holy Spirit as we desire and reserve for ourselves. God demands separation but God is responsible for the convicting!

Be Gracious *and* Godly,
my fellow followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.



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