

PROPER APPLICATION OF ROMANS CHAPTER 14

It should be a cause of deep concern when we read articles or hear sermons preached that even remotely suggest that Romans Chapter 14 might be used to justify fellowship with those who are teaching and practicing things that will condemn souls to eternal condemnation.

One of the problems observed among those who are writing and preaching on this subject is a failure to understand the precise nature of the matters discussed in this chapter. Many are heard to say that the chapter pertains to those who “conscientiously differ on some of the applications of the God-given pattern.”

There is a basic flaw in such reasoning. The weak brother did not accept that all meat is clean - so in what way was he applying the truth God had revealed? The problem is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 8:1 where Paul wrote: “1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” He also dealt with this in 1 Corinthians 8:7 where he said: “7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.” The problem being dealt with was knowledge - not application. Since it is a case of knowledge, and the one who did not have the knowledge was not sinning in what he did (which was consistent with his conscience), neither sinned unless one tried to force the other to violate his conscience.

Many smoke screens have been introduced in order to cloud the issue, and cause some to think that the problem here is just a difficulty in distinguishing between binding truth and allowable differences (cf. Phil. 1:9-11). Such things as the attempt to bind upon people the use of the King’s English in the offering of public prayers are offered in an attempt to take attention away from the real issue at hand. But, where is the parallel between this and the eating of meat, observing of days, or using “Thee” vs. “You?” The one without knowledge {i.e. weak brother} was allowed to go on eating vegetables because it was not sinful, and he didn’t understand that it was permissible to eat meat. The one who uses “Thee” instead of “You” is weak and without knowledge, and still accepted because he does not sin when he uses “Thee.” When we have proven this, that is all we have proven. Where are these “allowable differences” in divorce and remarriage to be found in God’s Revealed Truth?

I have yet to find a single person who would like to relegate differences on divorce and remarriage to differences in application, fail to say that the revealed pattern of divine truth on marriage, divorce and remarriage cannot be questioned or changed in any way. One man and one woman for life with one exception (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6, 9; Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Hebrews 13:4). Anything taught or practiced which contradicts sound doctrine must be rejected as error. BUT - what some are teaching and practicing today contradicts the divine order, and it is NOT simply a matter of application, nor is it a matter of indifference. It involves a lack of respect for the divine pattern, and thus a lack of respect for the One who gave it.

All spurious arguments aside, the basic principle laid down by the Lord for marriage, divorce

and remarriage is as simple as the plan of salvation: BELIEVE + BAPTIZED = SAVED. Man says: BELIEVE + SAVED = SHOULD BE BAPTIZED. Is this just a matter of application of divine truth? If not, what about: FORNICATION + DIVORCE = REMARRIAGE. This is what Jesus taught. Glen Lovelady taught in his debate with J T Smith: DIVORCE + FORNICATION= REMARRIAGE. Are they the SAME? Of course not! It is NOT just a matter of application. Glen Lovelady made the same accusations against J T Smith and any who opposed him that are being made today. In fact, he went one better and said we were guilty of “forbidding to marry.” {1 Timothy 4:3} Think about this: IF the “second putting away” doctrine is merely a matter of application, is it possible that the disciples were not able to make that application in Matthew 19:10 when they said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry?" Couldn't they understand that if you just keep yourself pure, and wait for that mean, evil spouse who put you away for no reason to remarry or to move in with someone, you can remarry? The truth is they made the Only application that could be honestly made - When a divorce takes place for any cause other than sexual misconduct on the part of One of the parties, neither party is permitted to remarry! Plain and simple, this is what they understood, and they saw that it might be better not to marry than to be put in such a position. IF the “second putting away” doctrine is true, then any marriage that is terminated for a cause other than sexual misconduct on the part of one of the parties can result in one of the parties being permitted to remarry when the other remarries or moves in with someone. If not, why not? This is where the students have gone further with this than the teacher. Ron Halbrook is not willing to accept the natural consequences of his theory, while some of his students have taken it to the logical conclusion. I continue to ask for any of the advocates of this doctrine to show us where we find the Scripture or Scriptures which tell us what one must do when they have been divorced by another, in order to qualify for remarriage? If no such Scriptures are forthcoming, than all in that condition may have the right to remarry. Sure doesn't sound like what the disciples understood when Jesus said it, does it? The fact is that none have the right to remarry when one spouse puts away the other for a cause other than sexual immorality. That's it - because Jesus said so.

The plea is heard that “differences in application that do not violate the God-given pattern for marriage, divorce and remarriage should not be made tests of fellowship.” To this I would say a hearty amen. But how might we apply the “God-given pattern for marriage, divorce and remarriage” differently without violating the pattern? There might be at least one valid case in point. I know of a man who believes that all who divorce can eventually have the right to remarry, provided they “repent.” His mother believes that no one has the right to remarry. Do they only differ in application of the “God-given pattern for marriage, divorce and remarriage?” Of course not! BUT I could have fellowship with his mother, knowing that in what she believes, she is not violating the “God-given pattern for marriage, divorce and remarriage.” I cannot, on the other hand, have fellowship with her son, because he is clearly advocating the violation of the “God-given pattern for marriage, divorce and remarriage.”

Many years ago, the institutional people were saying that when we opposed the Orphan home and the college and the Old Folks home in the church budget we were “Trampling on God-allowed liberties.” We know, of course, that this was all they could see that could not find any Scriptures to justify what they want to practice. Today, should we be able to show from the pages of God's Word that He allowed a “second putting away,” after a divorce for a cause other than sexual immorality had taken place, this would be true. But the fact remains that the “second putting away”

is not found in the pages of God's word. It is the product of the overactive imagination of men trying to justify that which God does not permit. Who is driving the wedge here? Those who require that we stay within the bounds of "that which is written," or those who want to "go beyond that which is written?" True virtue is found in strict adherence to "that which is written," not in allegiance to "conservative" or "ultra-conservative" causes.

It is not a matter of application that Romans 14 is all about. It is a matter of weak vs. strong and knowledge vs. ignorance. Truth is violated when someone tries to justify unlawful practices by calling it simply another application of the same truth. I suppose the Baptists might make the same argument. They have all the elements, just the WRONG ORDER!

Some attempt to introduce the "doubtful things" Romans 14:1 in an effort to prove that when there are doubts concerning Divorce and Remarriage, we should not have disputes over these things. Do they mean to imply by this that what Jesus taught on MDR contains "doubtful things?" I would like someone who believes this to please list all of the doubtful things brethren can differ on, and still be faithful in service to God. Such may give lip service to "speak the same things, be of the same mind and the same judgment," but how could this ever be if the Lord left us with so many "doubtful things" that determine our eternal destiny? The only thing "doubtful" about what Ron Halbrook, Harry Osborne, Tim Haile and others are teaching on Divorce and Remarriage is the origin of their doctrine. It did not come from God. So where do you suppose it came from?

Look carefully at the "doubtful things" of Romans Chapter 14 before trying to make an application of them to matters pertaining to Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage. The NKJV text says: "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things." The KJV has: "doubtful disputations" and the NASV has: "not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions." The Greek word used here is defined for us in this way: "diakrisis (diavkrisi", (1253)), a distinguishing, and so a decision,...; in Rom. 14:1, "not to (doubtful) disputations" is more literally rendered in the margin "not for decisions (of doubts)." "Doubtful" is defined by Vine in this way: "dialogismos (dialogismov", (1261)) expresses reasoning or questioning hesitation," Thus, our "receiving" a brother into fellowship is not conditioned upon an agreement or forced decisions concerning all his internal doubts. As Paul says in Romans 14:5 "5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." Take note that the matters discussed here are not condemned by God - therefore they are morally neutral!

Brethren may worship together even when they disagree in matters about which God is indifferent. Some brethren ridicule us when we say that there are matters about which God is indifferent. But consider what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 8:8 "8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse." What does this mean if it does not mean that eating meat is a matter of indifference as far as God is concerned? A weak brother may have personal, inward doubts about authorized liberties that a strong brother may practice, but fellowship is not restricted because of this disagreement. Obviously this "agreeing to disagree" does not involve sinful doctrines and practices but things which are inherently "good," "clean," and "pure." {Romans 14:14,16,20} With "doubtful things," of this nature, fellowship includes acceptance of the actions in question without the necessity of change, without debating or questioning, without the threat of discipline. There must be no "contention," as is necessary about

doctrinal matters -Jude 3 “3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” There must be no judging. Clearly, these instructions apply to matters of liberty, but could NEVER APPLY to sinful matters condemned by God. All fellowship in "doubtful things" is founded upon the fact that "God has received him" in innocent (i.e."good," "clean," "pure") {Romans 14:14,16,20} practices.

It is my sincere belief that the efforts to place practices that deviate from the prescribed order which God has given in Romans Chapter 14 is nothing more than a small crack in the dam which will someday bring down a flood on us that we do not want! It is precisely the same tactics used to introduce every innovation in the divine order that has caused the church to go into apostasy in the past. Small, subtle changes, appealing to the emotions, jerking at the heart strings, and justified as “doubtful things.” These things are only doubtful to those who refuse to accept the truth.