

Lesson 12: *Present Controversies*

As the twenty-first century and third millennium dawn, the church of Jesus Christ is again faced with some very divisive, controversial issues among its members. The seeds for the present discussions were sown nearly three decades ago as some began to contend for unity-in-doctrinal-diversity like the denominations. Teachings on divorce and remarriage have provided the clearest test scenario for this philosophy.

Unity-in-Doctrinal-Diversity

The sects of men have long championed the concept of unity-in-doctrinal-diversity, whereby people and churches with contradictory beliefs can say they are in fellowship. The Bible, of course, teaches unity-in-doctrinal-conformity (1 Cor. 1:10) while foreseeing a diversity of opinion regarding those things that are best called authorized liberties.

The major vehicle for espousing unity-in-doctrinal-diversity is Romans 14. The context involves disagreements among Christians over matters of authorized liberty, actions which God treated with indifference regarding participation or abstinence. Paul uses the eating of meats and observation of days and makes plain that one was neither better nor worse in either decision on them. The context is limited by its own language to things that meet the following descriptions:

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| 1. done by one weak in faith (verse 1) | 6. good (verse 16) |
| 2. sinful to condemn doer (verse 3) | 7. doer received by God (verse 18) |
| 3. each answer equally right (verses 5-6) | 8. pure (verse 20) |
| 4. done "to the Lord" (verse 6) | 9. won't cause stumbling (verse 21) |
| 5. clean (verse 14) | 10. done in faith (verse 22) |

Some today have advocated placing instrumental music, modern dancing, social drinking, pornography, homosexuality and absolutely everything short of the deity of Christ in this context so that every view is protected and deemed viable. This would seem to forge a unity among all believers, but unfortunately, it is a false unity that actually begets enmity with God (James 4:4). Before something can be placed into Romans 14, it must fit the context, which does not include a diversity of beliefs on any matter that could prove costly to the soul.

Romans 14 has been appealed to in order to protect beloved friends who teach error on divorce and remarriage, as well as to broaden the door to the church that it might include those who do not want to repent of unscriptural marriages or give up worldly lifestyles that are popular in today's society.

Divorce and Remarriage

Christ's teaching in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:3-9 would seem to be clear. God only authorizes a divorce for cases in which one spouse has committed adultery against the other. The innocent spouse is free to remarry while the guilty is implicitly forbidden to remarry. In addition to those who hold looser beliefs than this on the subject with sincere conviction, there are many who are just more concerned with numbers than genuine conversions, and are attempting to pervert this plain teaching in order to widen the door to the church again. 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 makes it clear that spouses separated for some reason short of adultery should remain unmarried or be reconciled. Repentance would require one to cease an unscriptural marriage should he want to be saved.

Worldliness

Paul's condemnation against lewdness (Gal. 5:19) has also come under fire in a church bent on imitating the world. Mixed swimming, modern dancing and immodest attire are finding proponents everywhere.

1. Define unity-in-doctrinal-diversity and describe why so many find it appealing (Jude 3).

2. What did Paul say in 1 Corinthians 1:10 that blunts the movement for this form of diversity?

3. Does the context of Romans 14 extend to matters of authorized liberties? What does that mean? Give examples.

4. Does Romans 14 extend to matters of doctrine like baptism (immersion vs. sprinkling), instrumental music in worship and divorce (for adultery vs. any cause)? Explain.

5. Are pornography, abortion and social drinking protected by Romans 14? Explain.

6. What is the single ground given for a scriptural divorce (Matt. 5:31-32)?

7. What is true of any man who marries a woman who has been put away? What is true of any woman who puts away her husband for a reason short of adultery and then marries someone else?

8. According to 1 Corinthians 7:10-11, what should spouses who separate for reasons other than adultery do?

9. Since society sanctions divorce in the courtroom and culture, should the church adapt its teaching to conform to popular opinion and maintain a stronger base for conversions (1 Peter 1:24-25, 4:11)?

10. What does repentance of making an unscriptural union require (Rom. 6:1)?

11. Thayer's definition of "lewdness" in Galatians 5:19 includes "indecent bodily movements" and "unchaste handling of males with females." How would the apostle's condemnation of lewdness in that passage touch on issues like immodest dress, mixed swimming and modern dancing?

12. Why is it wrong to attempt to broaden the door of the kingdom (Matt. 7:14, James 4:4, Matt. 18:3)?