

ADULTS

**BIBLE
STUDIES
FOR LIFE**

Like Glue: Making Relationships Stick

Text Based Sermons

To Be Used With: Session Six: Stick With Acceptance

Sermon Title Possibilities:

When Differences Matter

Disputable Matters

Scripture: Romans 14:1-4,13-19

Connection with Unit Theme: Every relationship will have disagreements. It is what we do with these disagreements that shows whether we are following in the way of the master or in our own flesh. God has given us help in his word on how to relate to one another when our differences threaten to come between us.

Introduction:

Though I've seldom gotten a laugh out of this joke I still try to tell it.

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said, "Stop! Don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he said.

I said, "Well, there's so much to live for!"

He said, "Like what?"

I said, "Well, are you religious or atheist?"

He said, "Religious."

I said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?"

He said, "Christian." I said, "Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?"

He said, "Protestant."

I said, "Me too! Are you Methodist or Baptist?"

He said, "Baptist!"

I said, "Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?"

He said, "Baptist Church of God!"

I said, "Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God!"

I said, "Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?"

He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!"

I said, "Die, heretic scum!" and pushed him off¹.

¹ This is a joke I believe originally told by Emo Phillips.

Though we've got several jokes about the ridiculous reasons for church splits, the truth is disunity is no laughing matter. We laugh at things like this because we can identify our own silly reasons for ending relationships. The gospel calls us to accept differences and live life together even with those who have differing opinions.

Every church and every relationship is going to have a difference of opinion. And often differences of opinion on very significant issues. It is what we do with these differences that marks whether we respond as the redeemed or in the critical spirit of unbelievers.

I. On disputable matters we must accept those who differ

It is at times difficult to discern what is and is not a disputable matter. There are some issues that are so significant that we cannot place them in this category (things like the deity of Christ, salvation through Christ alone, etc.). What Tom Schreiner says on this passage is helpful:

“...the central concern of Paul's theology emerges in these verses. The very heart of idolatry is to refrain from glorifying and thanking God. Paul can tolerate diverse practices, which do not violate any biblical or moral norm, as long as they are motivated by the glory of God².”

What this means is that on these issues we must accept those who have a difference of opinion. Accepting them does not mean that you have to agree with them or even pretend that the difference is not significant. But what it does mean is that we still must honor them and respect them as our brothers and sisters in Christ. Knowing that the Lord is sovereign over their walk with Him we must trust the Lord to lead them and ourselves into all truth.

Application: Are there people in your life that you aren't accepting because of a disputable matter? How can you work to bridge the gap?

II. On disputable matters we must serve those who differ

In verses 13-15 Paul addresses those who rightly understand their Christian liberty. Even though he agrees with them theologically he does not agree with their critical spirit. He doesn't agree with their spirit because they have forgotten the greatest commandment; namely, to love. They should use their Christian liberty not to fight for their own rights but to serve. We have been freed to serve. This also means that at times we serve the conscience of a weaker brother or sister. Relationship trumps any supposed freedom.

Application: Are you going out of your way to serve those who differ from you? Your attitude matters just as much as your theology. Is there an area where you need to adjust in order to relate to other believers?

III. On disputable matters we must all pursue the kingdom

Paul summarizes well in verse 16-19. He helps both groups see that what is really significant is the kingdom of God. An inordinate attention to disputable matters usually indicates a discontent with the gospel. It is usually a symptom of not engaging in mission. When we pursue the

² Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1998. Print., page 720

kingdom it means there will be times when sharp—and necessary division—happens. But if both sides on an issue purpose to honor God usually peace and unity will occur.

Conclusion:

In his book, *Your Church Is Too Safe*, Mark Buchanan shares an interesting illustration from Lord of the Rings. He reminds the reader of Frodo and his companions arguing in Rivendell and he contrasts this with the solidarity they experienced on the way to Mordor. He connects this to church disputes:

Tourists make poor companions. Those who dwell in Rivendell form frail and shallow community. Only travelers—only those who venture out together on a dangerous mission—form community, community with sinews and sturdy bones. Travelers discover how hard and needed and beautiful and life-giving community like that is. Together, they risk much and give much and suffer much and love much...Any church too safe became that way because somewhere, somehow, they started wanting to dwell in Rivendell more than travel to Mordor. They started caring about fellowship more than mission, and in the end lost both³.

If disputable matters seem to be ruling the day, perhaps consider taking a trip to Mordor.

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³ Buchanan, Mark. *Your Church Is Too Safe: Why Following Christ Turns the World Upside-Down*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012. Print., page 62-63