

AN ORDER TO IT ALL 6: DIVERSE PRACTICES

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. (Romans 14:13, NIV)

MANY CLUB MEMBERS CHOOSE THEIR CLUB ON the basis of the people they enjoy company with while there, whether on the course or in the clubhouse. In fact, we reserve a whole category of membership for those who prefer only this aspect: social members.

Others, however, come for the golf. But even that brings disagreement. I remember my dad saying that he preferred his club to the one across town, because the course provided more day-to-day interest for him. Meanwhile, a friend I know drives right past my dad’s club and goes several miles more to another club, stating that the golf course is superior. It’s a bit like the coffee wars. Some people won’t drink their coffee anywhere but Starbucks, while others will drink anything except Starbucks. Both sides have been called coffee snobs!

On the one hand, we can say, “To each his own.” And when it comes to golf or coffee, there’s surely no harm in that. But what about in the church? In the “real world” of church practice, we know that there are differences from denomination to denomination and congregation to congregation. But if God’s rules are God’s rules, shouldn’t they be applied the same in every place?

Well, here’s one stickler you may have heard about. When it comes to worship, some churches follow the regulatory principle, which says that worship should consist only of those practices prescribed or demonstrated in the Bible. Other churches follow the normative principle, which conversely states that if God’s Word doesn’t prohibit it, worshipers can do it. What we see in this is an allowance according to interpretation and conscience. This isn’t true in every case. It would, for instance, be heretical for a Christian church to worship another god. But how Christ is worshiped—with drums or without drums, with dancing or without dancing, with psalms only or hymns only or new songs only—is a matter of diversity. It is also an opportunity for unity.

In Romans 14, Paul gave guidelines to the church for upholding one another’s consciences in the midst of diverse opinion’s about rules. Though we are permitted to hold on to what seems right to us when diversity is allowed, we set aside judgment and defer to others when it’s necessary for the sake of unity.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2018 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: https://youtu.be/LYmf2_O10Kk.

Opening questions What are you looking for when you decide where to play golf or where to become a club member? How about when you’re choosing a place to worship?

READING Titus 1:10-16; Titus 3:9-11; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Absolutes (Titus 1)
 How does this passage demonstrate that some things are not negotiable? What are some of these things? What does verse 16 point to as the measure of true knowledge of God?

Silly arguments (Titus 3)
 What did Paul include in his list of “useless” pursuits? Give some examples of these in our current time. How firmly are we to treat a divisive person?

A careful freedom (1 Corinthians 8)
 Why must we be careful of our own knowledge of the way things work? How deferential was Paul willing to be over negotiable matters (verse 13)?
