

What Ought to Be the Believer's Attitude toward Unbelievers (Romans 14:1-12)?

It must be stated that, amongst our church family, the foundation for our faith is the Bible (*II Timothy 3:16*) and not a denomination, council, statement of faith, or individual. Though groups exist that do believe the Bible, there is no single denomination in existence today that wholly follows after it. Despite this, we must understand that this is how Bible-believers have existed throughout history. There have always been groups that largely distort and corrupt the scriptures, while a small, faithful group sought to adhere to the doctrine of Christ.

Every religious group is faced with a decision, when others will not follow their doctrine: they can either allow the outside world to believe what they want, or try to compel them to conform to their religion. For instance, during a period called the Dark Ages (about 6th-16th century AD), the Roman Catholic Church dominated most of the known world. During this time, under the leadership of the Pope, the Catholics physically compelled others to follow Catholic teachings or face imprisonment, torture, or even death. This attitude of persecuting unbelievers does not lie with the Catholics alone. The Muslims, Jews, Anglicans, Puritans, and many others all have a history of persecuting those of different faiths, with varying degrees of persecution. Some of this still exists today!

The only monotheistic groups that have always held to the belief of religious liberty are those that hold solidly to the scriptures as Bible-believers. Why do we believe this way and not like others? We do, because the Bible, being our authority of faith and practice, clearly reveals God's mind concerning those that do not believe and tells God's children how they ought to act toward them.

A. God's Decree about Every Person (Romans 14:5-12)

Romans 14 is clearly speaking of the believers' relationships with one another, but can also be applied in regards to their relationships with those that do not believe. From this chapter we can pull several great truths.

First, we see that **God allows every person to believe what they want to (Romans 14:5-6)**. We call this mankind's free will. God did not create us to be robots that were compelled to worship and serve Him, but gave us a free will to be at liberty to decide to worship and serve Him or not. It is the responsibility of every human being to figure out what will be their final authority for faith and practice (self, Scripture, other holy books, etc.) and what they believe about God, given the evidence presented. It is also up to every person to be fully persuaded in their own mind what they will do with God.

Notice that God does not give His children the ability or permission to compel those that do not believe to believe in Him. The old saying goes, "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still." More importantly, the scriptures also tell us that God's children may walk in the flesh, but do not war after it (*II Corinthians 10:3-6*)! Our God will take care of all things one day, even those that do not believe in Him and His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore, believers have no right to pass judgment upon or persecute someone else's heresy or try to compel someone get saved!

As we continue through *Romans 14*, we can see secondly that, not only does every person have the God-given freedom to believe or not believe and follow or not follow the Lord God, but also that **no one gets away with their belief or disbelief**. Though a person may not believe in God, their disbelief does not make Him go away! Instead, that person will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment and be judged for their unbelief (*Romans 14:7-12*)!

Scripture tells us that none of us lives or dies to ourselves, meaning that our lives are not our own; they are gifts given to us by the Creator (**Genesis 1:26**), with the hope that we will serve Him (**v.7-8**). Not only did God make us, but Jesus Christ bought all of mankind through His work on Calvary (**Acts 20:28**); therefore we are twice-owned by the Lord God (**v.9**). No matter what the atheist, agnostic, or spiritualist says, it does not change the Truth that Jesus bled, died, and rose again for their sins, even the sins of the whole world! He did this, so that He could be the Lord of both the dead and living.

Because we are owned by God, we will also be judged by Him for either our sins or works of righteousness. The Bible talks about two final judgments at the end of time: one for the saved and another for the unsaved. **The Judgment Seat of Christ**, mentioned in this passage (**v.10**), is the judgment for the saved. Their sins are not mentioned, because they are washed away and forgiven by the Father. Instead, they will be judged according to what they did with their salvation. (**I Corinthians 3:12-15; Matthew 25:14-30**)!

The second judgment is often called **the Great White Throne Judgment** and is found near the end of **Revelation**. This judgment is not one of works for reward, but of sin for punishment, because the people standing before the Lord Jesus will not have trusted in Him as their Savior. This will be a time of great weeping, as the saved are present and the lost are found guilty. Their sentence is that they be thrown into the Lake of Fire to never be seen again (**Revelation 20:11-15**).

At both judgments, Scripture tells us that both groups (saved and unsaved) will bow the knee and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. For the saved it will be a time of confirmation and joy, but for the unsaved it will be a time of great sorrow (**v.11-12**).

How about you, dear friend? Which group do you stand with: the denominationalists or the Bible believers? Does the Bible hold a special place in your heart and life? What about the judgments? Will you stand in the one for the saved or unsaved?

If you have questions about these things, please drop by our house or place of meeting, or give us a call or write an email, and we will be happy to help encourage you through the scriptures.

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