

Discipleship Questions

How can members of God's family refuse fellowship and cause division by showing favoritism?

What are God's solutions to showing favoritism?

What are matters of personal liberty in God's family?

How can matters of personal liberty create divisions in God's family?

How should members of God's family treat one another in matters of personal liberty?

How should members of God's family not treat one another in matters of personal liberty?

How can members of God's family demonstrate the same spirit of Diotrephes today?

Who should God's family not accept into fellowship?



God's Family

Lesson 10:
Accept
One Another

God's family should accept (welcome, receive) anyone who is in fellowship with God (1 John 1:5-7; Acts 9:26-28). Problems (e.g. division) come when those in fellowship with God will not accept one another (e.g. due to matters of personal opinions). Therefore, we need to evaluate what it means for God's family to accept one another.

James 2:1-13

Some of the issues about accepting one another develop by members of God's family showing favoritism due to earthly standards (e.g. wealth, status, race, ethnicity) rather than godly ones. In these scenarios, a person may be shut out of the blessings of fellowship due to such judgments. This happened in Jerusalem concerning Greek-speaking widows among the church being neglected (Acts 6:1-7). This also happened among the Corinthian church when some who apparently had food divided from those who did not (1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 33-34). However, this can also happen when someone is just viewed in a lower tier in fellowship (such as in James 2), even though others may not be entirely neglected from the fellowship. Such failure to accept other brothers and sisters in Christ is a failure to obey God's law of love and makes you guilty of sin! Instead of making such merciless judgments based on human standards of worthiness, you must love and show the same mercy you want to receive!

Romans 14:1-12

As people from various backgrounds (e.g. Jew and Gentile) became Christians, there were often tensions due to prior customs. For example, Jewish law had certain restricted meats (Leviticus 11) and certain holy days and festivals (Leviticus 23). In addition, there was an issue concerning meat that would be involved in idolatrous sacrifices (1 Corinthians 8-10). So long as such things were never observed to return to the bondage of the Law of Moses or to approve of idols, these were matters of liberty and conscience that were up to the individual. They were matters that God had approved but not commanded. In such matters, members of God's family must accept those who disagree with them (as being weak in the faith without the proper understanding) and not look down on those who differ. Furthermore, the weak one must not judge (condemn) those who disagree as being in sin. God alone will judge such matters. So, members of God's family must be accepting in such matters of personal liberty today.

Romans 14:13-23

God expects that His family will not argue over these matters of individual liberty and conscience. Furthermore, the one who is convinced there is nothing wrong with these matters of liberty can still make a brother or sister who is not convinced sin by violating his/her conscience. Rather than helping one another get to Heaven, this destroys the work of God over issues that don't matter to God (e.g. food). It is better for one to deny himself/herself of a liberty to help your brother or sister to go to Heaven (1 Corinthians 9:19-27)! So, rather than arguing over such things and setting potential stumbling blocks for one another, God's family ought to be pursuing what promotes peace and builds each other up spiritually!

Romans 15:1-7

Putting the things God had been instructing about matters of individual liberty into action can be challenging, particularly for the one who has the accurate knowledge about God's will. It can be tempting to separate from one another and reject each other as brothers and sisters, refusing to work together. However, division is not God's answer. Instead, self-denial, patience, and unity are what God desires for His family to live in harmony with one another. So, the brothers and sisters will have to receive each other as being in fellowship with God,

despite the differences in how they view and individually practice such matters of individual liberty/conscience that do not matter to God!

3 John 1:9-11

The apostle John warned about a man named Diotrephes. Diotrephes demonstrated the spirit contrary to receiving/accepting one another. He would elevate himself to be the judge of those in fellowship with the church. He rejected John's authority and refused to welcome fellow believers (perhaps some sent from John). He even stopped others who welcomed such people and put them out of the church. This man is then clearly labeled as being evil and unworthy of imitation. Sadly, there are still many who will use human opinions and standards to refuse to accept fellow believers into fellowship today and imitate the spirit of Diotrephes.

2 John 1:7-11

Although God teaches the importance and necessity of accepting those who are in true fellowship with God, it is also true that not everyone is in fellowship with God, and some must not be accepted into fellowship. This text illustrates the point that some do not have God. For example, the Scriptures are clear that those who are teaching false and not living according to the teachings of the Scriptures and refuse to repent must not be accepted into fellowship (Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:6-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15).

Conclusion

God wants all the members of His family to accept, receive, and welcome one another as members of His family. It only works to divide and discourage whenever some in God's family are unwilling to accept other members of His family. However, God also wants His family members to be wise and discerning to recognize that not everyone is part of His family or should be accepted into fellowship. The only standard that must be used is God's word.