

Personal Ethics in the Pandemic

By Viki Rife

The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in a bit of a personal ethics crisis for me. Maybe you're experiencing it, too. It concerns how people are responding to others. I usually enjoy a good debate, but some of the heated arguments and people-bashing feel over the top. Some of the angst comes from going back and forth between comments such as:



“I can’t believe people are going out without masks. They’re endangering the entire population. How can they live with themselves?”

“People who wear masks are giving in to fear. They’re saying masks don’t make that much difference anyway. I’m just trusting God—he already has my days counted.”

“I can’t believe she took her kids to visit her mother! They could end up spreading the virus to others. How irresponsible! It’s a bad testimony.”

“My mom is struggling with loneliness, and I think that’s more dangerous than Covid-19. I’m taking the grandkids for a visit to cheer her up.”

“This is a conspiracy, and I have a responsibility to stand against such affront to our religious freedoms. I can’t believe others are so blind!”

“It’s our responsibility as Christians to set an example of submission to our authorities over us. Those who don’t are a bad testimony.”

The problem is, everyone makes a good point. We’re living in times where we’re all having to make decisions on things we’ve never had to think about. Our memories have no precedent for how to navigate these times, or nor have we had the opportunity to watch other godly Christians who’ve been through this. Personally, I find all the arguing especially disconcerting because many of those arguing are believers whose insights I want to trust. It would seem that the Bible doesn’t give us clear answers to how we should handle these times.

Or does it? As I read Romans 14, it gives us a template I believe can apply to these times. Paul was addressing differences of opinion among the believers. Their debates were over whether it was okay to eat food sacrificed to idols or what religious days should be observed. It seems their opinions were all over the chart.

Paul’s advice in the situation gives us some guidelines for handling the differences of opinions. It’s comforting to know we’re not the first generation to struggle to find God’s perfect will!

Interestingly, Paul didn't just give the believers a one-size-fits-all "right" answer. I'd like to pull out a few verses from this rich chapter that represent principles I'm trying to use as guidelines for relating to others during this pandemic:

1. **Be careful not to despise those who have a different opinion.** Verse 3 says: "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him."
2. **Focus on being sure of what I believe.** Verse 5: "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."
3. **My first priority should be to honor God.** Verse 6: "The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."
4. **Seek what leads to peace.** Verse 19: "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."
5. **My views are between me and God, not something to quarrel with others over.** Verse 22: "The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God."

I encourage you to spend some time reading the entire chapter. I think you'll conclude that its basic principles go far beyond the current pandemic. They also seem very appropriate for this election year, for example. In our efforts to determine our own position, let's be very respectful of the opinions of others, and not waste time in worthless arguments. It is enough for each of us to seek our answers and wisdom from God.