

Romans 14:1-23 (NKJV)

1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables.

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

Last week we saw that we are going to have **differences**. It is very very clear that the Body of Christ was **intended** to be made up of people at all different levels of understanding. It is clear that we will not all think alike. It is clear that the only way **we will get along as we should** is if we love each other the way Christ loves us. There will be some people who may have a **right understanding** of some things, but they do not do the weaker brother any good. There will be people who have a **wrong understanding**, but their faith may be more sincere and legitimate than those with a better understanding. So we better not allow our knowledge to make us cocky or arrogant.

We also better not be too quick to step. I have seen preachers who think that the highest good is to straighten out anyone who says something wrong or who believes a wrong idea. They will instantly take pride in making that correction and they will argue that this is the high ground of ministry. But it is interesting that the master preacher himself, Paul, took another approach. He was not at all afraid to proclaim the truth. And he didn't care what it would cost him. But he was loving and thoughtful in his approach. He discerned the proper time to discuss the topic and urged others to do the same. What this means is it will **require** discernment. We will need to consider what is in our brother's best interest. Anyone who has discipled a young believer knows this. You can't

address everything at once. You need to discern **the most important thing** and address **it**. Then in time move to the next thing and address that. It is kind of like teaching a kid to play baseball. You can't teach him to catch, throw, bat, and **how the infield should respond to a bunt** all at the same time. One thing at a time. Now let's look more at our text.

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4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Now let's look at this issue

The first example Paul uses is eating meat.

So what was this issue about eating meat?

Well, there are likely three applications.

The first I think to be the least applicable **then**, but it might be much more applicable **now**. It has to do with the idea of being a **vegetarian**. I Timothy tells us

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods (meats) which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;

5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Have you ever heard of PETA. No, not the bread. It is an acronym for an organization called People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. The slogan on their home page says, "Animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, use for entertainment, or abuse in any way."

Who says? They say. Where did their beliefs come from? I Timothy tells us they came from deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons. You will never find the things they claim as absolutes in the pages of scripture. In fact you will find just the opposite. The law clearly provides for ownership of animals and eating of animals. God himself told us that was ok.

Isn't it amazing how accurate the Bible is. The Holy Spirit told us 2000 years ago about the emergence of this philosophy. It is possible it already had a foothold in the time Romans was written. I don't know.

But look how Timothy answers these doctrines of demons. He says **which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.**

4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;

Look how clear Paul makes this. When he is done there is no doubt that there is a problem with eating meat because God made those animals for that purpose. I always liked the bumper sticker that says something to the effect of "if God didn't intend for us to eat animals, then why did He make them out of meat?"

Continuing on with this topic of vegetarianism, there are also some who would have us to believe that it is our duty as Christians to eat healthy and they will go on to **define eating healthy** as eating vegetarian. If someone tries that out on you, take them to our text in Romans. There is no problem if you chose to be a vegetarian for health reasons. That is fine. But you cannot make that an absolute for other believers. This is not something that God requires.

And a third application of vegetarianism- when I was in college a professor made the argument that it is wrong to eat meat because it takes a lot more grain to eat meat than it would if we just ate the grain. As a result we would have more grain to feed the world's hungry. Therefore we are wrong if we eat meat. I bought into that teaching for a while. But now I have difficulty believing that God didn't know the facts about animal feeding when He had the Bible written. And he said in both the Old and New Testaments that we can eat meat.

So our text deals with those who are pushing vegetarianism as some kind of absolute in scripture.

The next issue regarding the prohibition to eat meat is this. The Jewish people were taught that meat had to be kosher. And it would have been very difficult for them to locate food that had been killed according to the requirements of the rabbi's. And there were also many animals that were unclean and they were not allowed to eat those foods. So for them, eating meat conscientiously would have been very difficult if they were still trying to live by the Old Testament laws addressing those issues.

And the last issue, I think, would have been the most relevant to the Roman expagan audience. In their day much of the meat that could be purchased at any market would have been provided from the local temples. And since it came from a temple, it would have been offered to a god. It would have essentially been dedicated to that god. And eating that meat was then seen by many as a worship of that god. And if you were seen eating meat that was known to be offered to an idol, you would be viewed as participating in that idol worship.

That is why Paul addresses the Corinthians in I Cor chapter 8 as he does. We read this text last week to emphasize that strong in the faith and having knowledge of the faith are synonyms. This week we will look at the actual issue.

I will read pieces of the I Cor 8 text.

He starts like this

1 Corinthians 8:1-13 (NKJV)

1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.

2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.

3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him.

Notice that, right from the start Paul lays out what is most important. Having a relationship with Christ, having love for God, is more important than having knowledge about stuff. That is not saying that knowledge has no importance. It

is very important. But **what we know** about God is never as important as **being known BY God**. Paul makes the same point in our Romans text.

4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.

Here is very good doctrine. There are not a bunch of Gods. There is only one. The rest are imaginary or they are demonic. But they are not Gods. So if something is offered to a false god, it is all bogus. It means nothing really. It would be similar to an offering being given to superman.

Now skipping down to verse 7.

7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Paul is pointing out that not everyone sees it with this same objectivity. There are those who used to worship those idols. Now, they cannot help separate this meat from their previous experiences. If they eat the meat, it is as if they are worshipping that idol all over again. And they do not want to offend God by doing such a thing. Now is that a bad attitude? Absolutely not. It is a great **attitude**. It is simply lacking perspective, it is lacking information, it is lacking knowledge. It lacks the knowledge that we are free of those superstitions now. What we do with that meat will not make us better or worse, in itself. But what we do by faith, now **that** matters intensely.

So that is the issue with eating meat. It is the meat's association with idol worship that creates the issue.

Now notice that there is a correct and incorrect position here. If this were a true false question one answer would be right and the other would be wrong.

Let's say it went like this.

True of False

Eating meat that was offered to an idol is granting worship to that idol.

The answer is "False". But there are many very sincere Christians that would get that wrong. Yet wouldn't they appear to be the more committed Christians?

Wouldn't the ones who **forbid** that thing because of its association with evil be the **more conservative**? Wouldn't they be the more **staunch**? Well that might be how it would appear, but it isn't true.

There is an issue in our day that I think has similarities. It is listening to rock music. Now I am not talking about rock music whose lyrics are clearly immoral. I am talking about the music style, period. I have known people who have lived an immoral lifestyle and their lifestyle was couched in the environment of rock music. When they turned to Christ, they also turned from rock music. That music was associated with ungodly living and to turn back to rock music would be to turn from Christ. The problem is, the people with these convictions so often try to use scripture to say that the very nature of the music is evil. Yet I cannot find in scripture where it clearly says anything of that kind. This kind of reaction is very understandable. And the last thing I would want to do is encourage that person to listen to rock music. But at the same time I would **defend** another Christian who was being **condemned** by this person for **listening** to rock music. Do you see the similarities?

Faithfulness and conscience demand that a believer avoid **anything** like the plague that is **harmful** to their faith. That believer will have a tendency to be **legalistic** about that thing because it is difficult to believe that another person might have a different frame of reference. Yet the truth is that the thing is not bad in itself. Knowledge will reveal that.

But more important than the **truth of that issue** is the **faith of the weaker brother**.

I have been really struggling to know how to emphasize this point enough. All I know how to do is restate it. We must love each other where we are, not where we could be. We must love one another in our ignorance, because we are all in some state of ignorance. We must love one another in our foolishness, because we are all to some degree foolish. We can never allow truth on non essentials to become more important than love.

And how does Paul make this point? What is the truth that puts everything in perspective?

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

Why should we receive a brother without an agenda to correct them immediately or continually at points that are not essential to salvation?

Why should a brother with a morbid scrupulosity receive the brother who can do things by faith that he cannot do? What is the driving principle?

For God has received him.

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Do we ever irritate each other because of our weaknesses and blindnesses and our ignorance? Are we sometimes thoughtless and prayerless? Do we sometimes allow our flesh to guide us into places that cause ourselves and others harm?

Yes. Yes we do.

So why should we receive each other. Why should we love each other? Why should we keep fighting for each other?

God has received us. If God who is all knowing, all loving, all present, if that God can receive us in spite of **all the ways we have sinned against Him**, who are we to reject warmly welcoming into our fellowship someone who is in the same boat we are? Who do we think we are to do such a thing? How arrogant would we have to be to do such a thing? We need to be exceedingly slow to remove someone from our fellowship. We need to make sure that a person is steeped in rebellion and will not relent before we take action to remove them from our fellowship. The question is always, does God receive them? If a person is acceptable to God, they had better be acceptable to us.

And notice too that the person whose conscience will not allow them to do thing is not to **despise** the person whose conscience allows it. And the person whose conscience **allows it** is not allowed to **judge** the person whose conscience will not allow it.

I wonder how many church splits have happened because people failed to obey this simple command. How many church splits have happened over how the Sabbath is observed, what can be eaten, what can be drank, what music can be listened to, what entertainment can be enjoyed, what clothes can be worn, and on and on? These are all things that love should cover. But sadly people arbitrarily make them the lines of doctrinal purity and holy living. And a holy war ensues which, while it may be a war, it sure isn't holy.

I guaranty you that you will find yourself in one or both of these positions in your lifetime. You will have freedom to do what a brother cannot or you will be

prohibited from doing what another brother can. When you find yourself in either position you must remember Paul's command. The tendency for the legalist is to despise people with greater freedoms. And the tendency for those with greater knowledge is to judge those with less knowledge as being inferior. Both are wrong. And both are forbidden. And both are tempting. Keep that in mind when you find yourself in one of those positions. And if you are in that position now, do business with it. Are you despising someone who has greater freedoms? Are you judging someone who has greater limitations? It is simple. Stop.

Then Paul goes on in our text

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

This verse builds on the last.

Now every time we see this word "judge" we need to be careful what we do with it. There is a judging that we must do for ourselves and in our ministry to others. We must be able to use the word of God accurately and call things what they are. If something is a sin we must be able to judge it to be so.

But in this context and others, we are never to make the final determination of whether someone is lost or saved. We cannot pronounce a person doomed or damned. Even when we are required to remove a person from fellowship, **even then** we are not to pronounce final judgment. That is only known by God.

We also cannot judge a person's value or usefulness. We cannot determine some scale of importance for people. It is only our Master who can do that. And He has His own intentions for all His children.

Think how rude it would be if we were to enter a friend's business and start evaluating their employees right in front of the boss. That would be absurd. We would all know better than that. But that is what we do when we evaluate other believers based on the issues this text describes. Who do we think we are?

So when we encounter people who differ from us on various issues, whether they are more legalistic or more free to do things we question, we are not to withhold fellowship from them, judging them not fit to be a servant of Christ.

In that sense, it is not our job to judge. It is our job to receive. Again, if he is received by Christ, that is ultimately what matters. And it is God's problem to

make him stand. It will be God that works out the events in his life to make sure he gets what he needs to grow in the Christian life. It is our job to facilitate that as we are able, but it is not our job to determine that.

Now look at the last sentence.

Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

Every believer who is standing at the end did not get there by their own virtue.

They got there by the force of God. None of us, if left to our own devices, would be found standing at the end. None of us would.

Everyone who stands at the end was **made to stand**. And it was only God who was **able** to make him stand.

Doesn't this do two things instantly to your heart?

First, **it humbles** us. If we are a believer, we didn't do it. God did. And there was no virtue **of ours** that caused it to happen. So we can't start thinking we are better than any other servant of God. So we better not get too judgmental.

But then the other thing it does is **it makes our heart sing in praise**. At least it should. The weight of our salvation does not sit on **our** shoulders. It sits on God's. We **do not** have to depend on our diligence or fortitude or courage or willpower to get us to the end. No. We depend upon God. It is **He** who will cause us to stand. It is **He** who will give us what we need to stand. It is **He** who will organize our lives in such a way to make us stand. How that should cause our hearts to call out to Him in thanks and worship. He **is able** to do and **promises to do** that which we could **never** do. We do not need to worry about our weaknesses. We can fully rely upon His strength.

And all of us are exactly the same in this regard.

I am going to do something unusual this morning. I am going to assign homework.

Before we go over this next week I want you to read these passages:

Hebrews 4

Matt 11:28-30

Gal 4:8-11

Col 2:16,17

Next week we will look at the issue of observing days.