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Romans

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. Romans 14:3

This is plain and clear. People eat meat because God has ordained that meat is to be eaten. Those who don't eat meat need to not be hostile to those who do. They have every right and freedom to do so and therefore, because God has allowed it, there should be no argument against it by those who refrain.

Likewise, there are those who abstain from eating meat. They may have a tender spot for animals; they may have an inability to eat meat because of their physical makeup; they may have a guilt complex that is deep-seated and which interferes with their ability to enjoy it. For these or any other reasons, they need to not be judged by "him who eats."

In either situation, if God has received that individual, how can we despise them? This thought goes right back to verse 10 of chapter 13, "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." If God has received a person, then for us to be unloving toward them is showing a disdain for the person whom God has already accepted. John would go so far as to say, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" 1 John 4:20

The very notion of "loving God" but then despising a person God loves is contrary to sound reason. We need to evaluate our relationships based on this higher perspective and be willing to accept the perceived shortcomings of another based on His view of that person. But again as noted in the previous verse, if someone is a contrarian and is violating set Scripture through their dietary restrictions by reinserting the law which has been set aside in Christ, then they are to be dismissed outright. Such legalism can only cause a wall between others and Christ. This cannot be accepted.

In the end, doctrine does matter. Without proper adherence to the precepts laid out before us, then anything goes. And this is not how God works in any dispensation. We are freed from the law but our freedom is not license to sin. There is, and there must be maintained, a proper balance in our lives and doctrine.

Life application: Don't lord your freedom to eat over another to their harm. Rather know that God has accepted them and so love them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

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.

Romans 14:4

As can be seen in this verse, Paul doesn't take sides on the issue of those "weak in the faith" and those who are well-grounded in matters of "doubtful things." Instead, he acknowledges that both have received exactly the same salvation by noting that they are "another's servant." In other words, if they are servants of Christ, then they are saved. Their weakness or soundness in doctrine isn't an issue which will change that. Because this is so, "Who are you to" so judge them?

If Christ has accepted someone through the exercise of their faith, and they never grow in doctrine, but remain weak concerning these disputable matters, that is between them and God. We have no right to judge their walk. Instead, "to his

own master he stands or falls." It is true that we should grow in the knowledge of the Lord; we should mature in our faith; we should endeavor to walk in soundness of doctrine. It is also true that someone who lacks these things is a weak and ineffective member of the body, but... he is still a member of the body.

And not only has he been accepted, but "he will be made to stand." What Paul is saying by using the term "stand" is that they will not lose their salvation over their lack of knowledge or growth; instead, they will continue on in His grace until the end. And the reason should be obvious: God doesn't make mistakes. If someone believes and is sealed with the Holy Spirit based on that belief (Ephesians 1:13, 14), then they have been adopted as a child of God. They will never fall again because "God is able to make him stand."

It would be unthinkable that God would receive someone and then turn around and "un-save" them. It is contrary to His transcendent knowledge, His omnipotent power, and His great love for the objects of His affection. Those who preach that one can lose their salvation are exactly who Paul is speaking directly to in this verse. When they point a bony finger at another in condemnation, Paul points right back (on behalf of the Lord whom he represents) and says, "Who are you to judge another's servant?"

It should be noted again though that the term "servant" is applied here. There are those who are in Christ and beyond such judgment, and there are those who are not in Christ. We must use doctrine and reason to defend against heretics who would impose that type of teaching which goes beyond or blemishes Scripture. While accepting our brothers who are weaker in the faith, we must be ready and able to stand opposed to heresy, confusion, and disorder.

Life application: When God's grace is extended to an individual, we are to accept that individual regardless of how they later develop. Not everyone will become a Billy Graham evangelist. Not everyone will become a Hebrew scholar. Not everyone will become a preacher. Etc. To each God has appointed a measure of faith and a measure of knowledge. Let us accept our brothers and sisters in Christ because God has already accepted them.

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. Romans 14:5

Paul turns now from food to days. He has demonstrated that what we eat is of far less importance than many claim, and that those who take the stricter path on dietary matters are actually the "weaker" of the faith, not understanding their freedom in Christ. Now, concerning certain days, he begins with, "One person esteems one day above another."

What is he talking about? The answer is so clear we may actually miss what is intended. He is speaking of observing a particular day for a particular purpose such as:

- 1) A Sabbath Day
- 2) A Day of Worship
- 3) A special holiday or "feast day"

Some people coming out of Judaism, or who have been influenced by the Jewish concept of a "Sabbath" esteem that day above the other days of the week. It should be noted that the "Sabbath" is Saturday. It is entirely inappropriate to say that the "Christian Sabbath" is Sunday. There is no such thing as a "Christian Sabbath." The Sabbath is the seventh day, as is outlined in the Old Testament. It was given to Israel under the law and it is not somehow amended or transferred to mean anything other than what was ordained at that time.

Some Christians may esteem Sunday, also known as "The Lord's Day," above other days of the week. They honor the Lord on this day because it's the day He rose from the grave, triumphing over it. This day, though not a "Sabbath," is considered a special day and may be called a "day of worship." By doing this, it honors God for His great acts which culminated in the resurrection and which look forward to the eternal state; the "8th Day" if you will.

And of course, there are those who go to church on other days, maybe both Wednesday and Sunday, thus esteeming both days as days of worship. Others meet on Monday, Thursday, or whatever. They have set aside a day, esteeming it above other days. There is nothing wrong with any of this so far. If they are living one or more days to the Lord, how can they be erring? But Paul goes on by saying, "another esteems every day alike."

Some people treat each day of the week alike. Without setting any particular day above the others, or by exalting all seven days, they are the type who "pray without ceasing." They "rejoice always." Likewise they, "in everything give thanks." They are the type who walk in the Spirit and may be less interested in externals than internals. Whatever.

Seeing this so far, there arises a problem in these observances which Paul wants to head off. Far too often, we get so stuck in the mud of our routine that we suddenly decide that "our way is best." When we see someone observing a day differently than we do, we become judgmental of their choice. But this is God's world and He sets the parameters for our Christian conduct.

By bringing into the discussion those who "esteem every day alike," Paul has demonstrated, completely and clearly that there is no set day (Sabbath, worship, etc) that is mandated within Christianity. There should be no finger pointing at those who observe differently than others. And yet we fail to see the clarity in Paul's words and we point bony fingers at those who observe differently than we do... a sad state of affairs. Endeavoring to accept what others do, when done to the glory of God, is good and honorable.

Having noted that it is perfectly acceptable to the Lord, according to Paul's instruction, to set aside any day as special or to esteem every day alike, it needs to be stated that mandating a Sabbath based on the requirements of the Law, is specifically contrary to what has been ordained for the church.

Paul has gone into great detail in the earlier chapters of Romans, and he will continue in this detail throughout his epistles, noting that the Law is not to be reintroduced now that it is fulfilled in Christ. Observing a Sabbath to the Lord, based on the Lord's finished work, in a voluntarily manner is fine; mandating a Sabbath based on the Law is "another gospel" and is to be condemned. We are not ever to reintroduce what Christ has triumphed over. Such an attitude sets aside the grace of Christ and makes us debtors to the entire law; requirements we can never meet. Such is a self-condemning act.

Life application: Concerning days, use your freedom in Christ to honor Him in the way that suits you best. But don't allow your freedom to be turned into a legalistic attitude towards others who worship differently. Be at peace in their conduct and may they be at peace with yours.

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. Romans 14:6

Paul now ties both previously discussed concepts, days and food, into one concise thought. He's already noted that some are "weak in the faith" and therefore fail to receive all the liberties found in Christ concerning the eating of food. On the other hand, there are those who understand that there is nothing which, as Jesus taught, "enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man." (Mark 7:15)

He has also noted that "one person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike." There are those who want to observe a traditional Saturday Sabbath to the Lord. There are those who desire to have a "day of worship" to honor the risen Christ. There are some who may wish to esteem Thursday above all others; whatever. And then there are those who hold all days in equal esteem. Additionally, concerning the Sabbath observances and festival days, particularly those once mandated under the law, Paul will tell us this in Colossians 2:16, 17-

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

All of these Old Testament things only pointed to Christ and His work. They are mere shadows of the reality found in Him. If someone wants to have a Yom Kippur observance in their church, there is nothing in Scripture to say, "do this thing" or "don't do this thing." On the contrary, if they mandate such an observance because it is a requirement under the law, then they have reintroduced the law where it has already been fulfilled; they have set aside the grace of Christ and are now debtors to the entire law.

But Paul's point in verse 6 isn't about those who mandate such things. It is about different people desiring to honor the Lord in their own way. And so he says, "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."

Those who observe any or ever day, do so to the Lord. If they don't observe any day, they don't do so to the Lord. The bony finger which points at the observer (or non-observer) is actually making an accusation against what the Lord has accepted. Likewise, those who eat whatever is set before them do so because the Lord has ordained that anything can be eaten, without violating a New Testament precept. And those who don't eat, do so in the understanding that they are not required to eat any particular thing; there is no mandatory food requirement in the New Testament and so they are free to not eat whatever they feel violates their conscience.

In both instances - days and food, and in both instances - observance or non-observance/eating or not eating, the person does so to the Lord and they do so in thanks to God. Therefore, what has been received in gratitude and in the freedom found in Christ, it is sanctified and acceptable. How clear this is, and yet the waters are so easily muddied.

These "doubtful matters" of food and days include many other issues not specifically addressed by Paul - styles of clothing, moderate alcohol consumption, types of music in worship, etc. These issues are left up to the individual. When judgment is rendered toward others over such matters, the inevitable result is legalism and imposed bondage. Be ready to defend your freedoms in Christ by knowing your Bible and what it allows.

Life application: Let us accept those who eat different foods than us and let us accept those who observe different days than us. And may we not find fault in their observances with the exception of those who mandate them as a precept which is contrary to Scripture. Only in such instances should we stand against their poor doctrine which can only lead others away from the truth found in Christ.