

Romans 14:1-11 (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.

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

8 For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

This morning we are considering again the topic of dealing with disputable things. Ultimately we are learning how to live with people who are different than us. We will go back to verse 5 to emphasize a point.

5b Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

By now you may be tired that I keep bringing up this point. But since the Bible is repetitive I figure it might be called for.

The word for convinced here is to fill one with any thought, conviction, or inclination. And then it goes on to say "in his own mind".

So should you believe something since the leadership says to? Is it a virtue to simply accept someone else's point of view? No. It isn't. **Your** faith must be **your** faith. And for it to be **yours** you must think about these types of issues. You must study it. You must mull it over. You have to think about it until you come to a conclusion. Now we can use each other's input to help us. That is a wonderful

use for fellowship time. But please, do not accept my word for it. Don't accept your parent's word for it. Listen carefully to your parents and teachers. Listen well to any believer with wisdom. But it is **you** who must study to be a well approved workman. It must be **your** faith. Or it will never stand when confronted with the world.

I am always comforted when in discussions like in Sunday school someone brings up a verse that appears to say something opposite to what I preached on. That usually shows that a person is studying it for themselves. That person is thinking it through. That person has questions for how things fit. The thing taught is not being blindly accepted.

As parents, as our children get older we need to keep this in mind. Sometimes what we perceive as being challenges to our authority are not. (Sometimes they are, but sometimes they are not.) Sometimes it is our children trying to be convinced in their own mind. And don't be surprised when at times they make stands on things that make no sense at all. Be patient and if they are sincere they will come around. But if we punish them for trying to do this for themselves, or if we bully them to accept what we say period, all we do is assure that they will never be convinced in their own mind. They might stop **saying** things. But that doesn't mean they will stop **thinking** them.

And think about this too. How many stupid things have you believed? How many errant things have you believed? We need to be patient with each other. We need to be patient with our children. And we need to be patient with new believers as they make the conclusions for themselves. If we can teach people **how to think** and **how to understand scripture**, we will best guide them into drawing good conclusions in their own mind about what God wants them to do. We must teach people **how to think** and **what** to think will fall into place as they study for themselves.

So this process that Paul is describing does not consist of brow beating or power positioning or threats or outbursts of wrath and temper. It is based on faith and reason and scripture and love.

Notice too there is no mention of any kind of God-zap. This stuff is revealed by **God**, for certain, but the process is described as a **reasoning** process that studies what God has already revealed. So we get to our positions **by work and thought**. It is not normally by a supernatural **experience**.

Now let's look at verse 6. We have just looked at the place of reason in this process. But we see in verse 6 that reason doesn't tell the whole story.

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.

There are two things I want to bring out of this verse.

- 1- The importance of it being To the Lord and
- 2- The litmus test of thanksgiving

Ok, so we arrive at a reasonable theological position. We are convinced about it. We can draw it out on paper and make a reasonable argument for what we believe. Is that all there is to it?

No.

Let me illustrate:

Mothers, have you ever had one of your children bring you a flower and in bringing it to you they drug mud across your carpet? Or maybe they made you a meal and in doing so they made a wreck out of your kitchen? Or maybe your husband did something for you, not knowing that he actually made your life harder? That is often how we are with God. We are doing something. And we are doing it **to the Lord**. We are doing it **to please Him**. Our whole heart is in it. We are doing what we are doing for the right reason. We are doing what we believe is the right thing. We may be right or wrong about that. But our heart is inclined properly. We did the best we could in deciding the right thing to do. We intend to carry out that thing in the best way possible. But inevitably there are things we know and things we don't know. Now, being convinced in our own mind is important. But it is not as important as why we are doing that thing. Do you see what I am saying?

The intent of why a person is doing what they are doing is more important than **what** they are doing. Because if the intent is right, the "what" can be molded and directed with little effort. If the person's **drive** is right, correction will be easy. But what about the opposite?

How do you feel about a chore done by a child who only did the chore because he or she knew how miserable his life would be if he did not do it? They did the chore resenting the whole time that they were forced to do it. Do you get any sense of satisfaction out of the chore being done? It may be done perfectly. The child may have known exactly what you expected and did it in a way that surpassed your expectations. But you knew there was no love for you in the

child's heart. Now let me ask you. Is being **right** about what pleases you as important as **the desire** to please you?

Any parent knows the answer to that. So we should have no trouble understanding the thrust of verse 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.

Believers are people who live to the Lord. All through scripture we find that those who are loved by God become lovers of God. There is something different about them. Something that only God can change. And while they have their ups and downs and their bouts with fleshly living, at the end of the day the trend of their heart is Godward. **It may not be pretty, but it is pretty amazing.**

Let's see what the apostle Paul says about his own life.

Philippians 1:19-26 (NKJV)

19 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

20 according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith,

26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

See what Paul is saying.

His life was about **Christ** being magnified. That was his purpose for existence. He understood that. His existence was to **live to the Lord**. It is the same idea.

And how will that happen? Well Paul doesn't know the particulars. While he is living he will glorify God. When he stops living he will glorify God. That is all he knows.

How does he view it?

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Another way to say that would be **I live to the Lord**. That is how Paul saw his life.

I think a lot of our mental misery is created by the fact that we forget this truth. We allow ourselves to live **to other things**. Maybe we live for pleasure. Maybe we live for comfort. We have a million ways of living **to ourselves**. And as such we lose perspective on what our lives are for. We start expecting things that we are not free to expect. We pursue things we are not free to pursue. We evaluate things in a way that we should not evaluate them. Why? Because we are not our own. We were bought with a price. As such we are to glorify God in these bodies. Loss of perspective is one of the most dangerous things that can happen in the Christian life. If you view your primary purpose in life as being happy, you will soon evaluate **this life in Christ as a rip off**. He sure isn't living up to the job you have assigned to Him as your pleasure coordinator. Are you dissatisfied with your position in life? I am not talking about your spiritual condition because sometimes we **should be** dissatisfied with our behavior. But what about your life conditions? Do you feel the impulse to run from them, to abandon them? You need to seriously get back to the question, what is your life for? Do you see your life as the Lord's and are you living to please him? I am not saying that won't be situations you need **help** with or **intervention** with. Sometimes there are situations you will need to flee from or get help with. But how do you view your life? What perspective do you see your life from? Can you say **for me to live is Christ and to die is gain**.

It is interesting that both our Romans text and the Philippians text go from living **to** Christ to dying **in** Christ. The two cannot be separated.

Paul goes on in Philippians:

22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.

23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

How can you tell if you are living to the Lord? It shapes your view of death. As you grow in the Christian life, this life loses its appeal. It owns less and less of you. All the things that matter are held where you are headed. You want to be in the environment where Christ is, where sin isn't. You want to be in the land where you can truly let down your guard and rest. You begin to see your death as leading to your reward. And while the **process** of death is not appealing, the **reality** that comes afterward is **very** appealing. We begin to find ourselves living in this ambivalence. The best description of ambivalence is watching your mother in law drive off a cliff in your new Mercedes. You feel strongly in two directions. You have mixed feelings.

How do you see your life? Do you have ambivalence? Do you have two strong desires? That is one more evidence of new life.

Now back to verse 6 of our text and the litmus test of thanks.

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.

We see here that the meat eater sees the meat he is eating as being offered to a being as imaginary as superman, so he eats the meat and he thanks God for what God has provided. He eats it in a faithful thankful relationship.

We see here that the vegetable eater is not grumbling against God for the meat that he cannot have. Instead he eats the vegetables thankful for food and grateful to the God who provided it to him.

Notice 2 things here.

Negatively put, they are not grumbling.

A believer does not view God as a cosmic killjoy. We see lots of parables in the New Testament about this sort of thing. A believer sees that all good things are from above, given to us by God. And because of the **salvation** He has provided to us and our **trust** in His character, we do not allow the devil to cast doubt on God's character. We fight that off with truth. We talk back to the devil with the words of God. We refuse to allow a mutiny in our souls.

If you find a person who holds a position but he holds it in misery, he either has a wrong view of God or he is not a believer. God does not punish his children. He may discipline them for their good. And that isn't pleasant. But he does not punish them to carry out His wrath. God has no wrath for His children. It has all been satisfied by Christ. So if someone acts like they are victim of God, they have a serious spiritual problem. How about you? When you are doing those things that God requires, do you feel like His victim? You need to get to the bottom of that because you will find a lie deeply planted in that discontent.

Positively put, believers are thankful.

This is the evidence of someone who is holding a faithful position. They view God **as God is** and they cannot help but express their gratitude to Him. They see that the things that God withholds are not things **they should have** anyway. They recognize the goodness in God that would forbid them harmful things. They see the things that God wants them to do as being good things, benevolent things, even when they are very difficult. A person walking in faith walks in thanksgiving.

When we are dealing with brothers and sisters with different views than our own, this is what we are looking for. We hear their position. We hear their statement of what they believe and why. We may disagree with their position completely. But watch and learn. How are they **carrying out** their position? Remember what we looked at. The position by itself is not conclusive. Are they walking **in faith**? When Adam and Eve ate the fruit in the garden, how thankful were they? You don't see any sign of thanks. The evidence was that they wanted to keep their act hidden from God. They were not receiving it from God's hand. They were taking something that was not allowed to them.

Have you ever noticed that you find the same thing goes on with you? If you want to watch a movie, or play a game, or read a book that is questionable, do you give thanks when you do it? No. If it is not in faith, it is sin. And if it is sin we give ourselves away. We tend away from prayer by instinct. We **know better** than to insult God that way. We don't want to invite Him into the activity. We want to separate ourselves from Him. We want to hide from Him or at least distance ourselves from Him. Have you ever considered that, if we would do nothing that we could not thank God for while doing it, we would live very faithful lives? Thanking God really is a litmus test. Oh, we can fool ourselves and play games with ourselves I guess. But deep in our hearts, if we have a faith given to us by God, **we know** when we are violating that faith. **We know** what we can thank God for and what we cannot. **We know** when we are doing something that goes against our conscience that we cannot be thankful to God for that thing. After all, God didn't give it to us. We took it.

So when someone presents their position to us that we disagree with, we need to watch if the person can genuinely thank God while they are participating in that thing. The meat eater, in our instance, could genuinely give thanks without any tug to his conscience. The vegetable eater could not thank God for the questionable meat. But he could and would thank God for the vegetables. If we are in close proximity to a person, it doesn't take long to see the sincerity of their position or of their faith. If they are living to the Lord, they can thank God for what they are doing. If they cannot thank the Lord, they are not walking by faith. Are you doing anything that you cannot thank God for? Are you doing anything you feel the need to hide from God. You need to consider those things closely. Maybe you should have freedom to do that thing before God but you are guilty of that morbid scrupulosity. If you consider the truth carefully you may find you are free to do that activity. But you must do that work. You may also find that your

conscience will not allow that activity. If so, stop. So remember as you go through this week, ask your self about everything that you do- can I thank God for this?

Bottom Line:

The church of Christ should never divide over issues that are not clearly discernible in scripture.

If a brother can read scripture,

can believe scripture,

can live according to his belief in scripture,

can show you why he believes what he believes from scripture

can live in the spirit of thankfulness toward God in the path he has chosen

and if that brother is not despising you or judging you for the differences

there is no reason to divide.

Some would have you believe a church's exclusiveness is a sign of their greater piety, their greater adherence to scripture. Maybe they use only the King James Bible, they worship only on Saturday, they only accept pre-trib rapture, a baptism only counts if it is by immersion, and we can go on and on. But often all that exclusiveness displays is their narrow mindedness and their lack of understanding. They cannot accept that a brother can be different than them, think different than them, or live different from them. Sometimes Christians can believe very controversial things. But we shouldn't be surprised by that. When our world, and even the church sometimes, comes to understand who God really is, we find He is very controversial. He offends our sensibilities. He goes against what we expect. He is kind and fierce at the same time. Yet He is God none the less.

So we will find that we, as believers, will understand what the Bible says in different ways. People like Martin Luther were seen as being radicals. The prophets in scripture often appeared as oddballs and social misfits. But they were some of God's favorites. Their stands were not comfortable and they were very hard to live with. But they were faithful. And those who divided themselves from God's prophets in the past, due to their taste and preferences and due to their concern for what people thought were, quite frankly, in the wrong.

The same is true today. We have seen many divisions over unessential matters.

Oh they seem like they are essential. They seem like core doctrines. But when we really look at them we find that they are not. The faith of those who hold those positions is every bit as real as ours.

I have said this often but it bears repeating. Mike taught me many things I will never forget. But one of the most important is the need to listen to a person and watch a person to find out if they have faith. There are many people who misunderstood him, often maligned him, but he would overlook their insults when he believed they had faith. If he saw evidence of faith he would grant them a benefit of the doubt. He would treat them differently. He would accept them, even if he found their theology or way of life very unpleasant. He would let their insults roll off him. And he would look for ways to minister the truth to them. He understood our text. He understood that what matters is faith expressing itself in love. He understood the importance of doctrine. And at the same time he accepted those who couldn't spell the word doctrine. Sometimes I would come to him for counsel all worked up about some stupid thing that someone believed and he would bring me back to the proper framework. If the person is a believer they serve the same Master. Sometimes they need their error corrected. But sometimes they just need received in love like Christ received us.

I found that, even with his gruff exterior, he often offered acceptance more than he received it. He often extended fellowship more than it was offered to him. To me, in many ways, he showed me how to apply this text. He had the ability to rationally and objectively destroy arguments that uninformed people would bring up against him. He could have treated them in a way that would have left them embarrassed and humiliated. But if he believed they were coming to him in sincere faith, he would receive them and correct them as gently as he was capable of.

We, at this church, have had our differences. Some things are more important to us than others. We prioritize some things differently. We become frustrated with each other's decisions. We view various passages of scripture differently. I would guess, if we pushed it hard enough, we have some very substantial differences of opinion. Well, praise God that He would receive such an oddball group of people like us. Praise God that since He loves us, we can love each other. And as you walk before God in thanks, and I walk before God in thanks, we are getting ever closer to our eternal destination of glory in His presence. There is no reason for our division, only love.