

The apostle Paul continues his exhortation on loving one another by explaining to us what love looks like in a practical sense. Because we are all made uniquely and have different experiences, we are bound to understand things differently. While we should all agree on the essentials: Jesus is divine, born of a virgin, lived a sin free life, died for our sins, and rose again (1Corinthians 15:3-4), we will often disagree on non-essential issues. The early church was having difficulty agreeing on whether you should eat meat sacrificed to idols, or which day to gather to worship. In our passage for today and next week, Paul is teaching us that these issues are a matter of personal conviction (Romans 14:23).

¹ As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. We are all at different stages of growth in the Lord and we all have a long way to go. As believers who have come out of darkness into light, we should realize that we will often misunderstand or even be ignorant of certain spiritual things. Paul has already told us that our attitude should be that of humility (Romans 12:3). While the church is a home for saints, it is also a hospital for sinners. We will have those who come into the congregation thinking they are spiritual giants. Others will come feeling they are hopeless sinners. We will not win them to a life of humility by confronting them with their true condition. Only love, patience, and grace, along with time, will open our eyes to the greatness of our need for Jesus. We welcome everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord no matter what their condition. We grow together by reading God's word and by hearing the Spirit speak through its pages (1Peter 2:2). However, we don't welcome others to quarrel over our differences. We welcome them that we might grow together in Christ likeness.

Now the apostle will address specific things that the church in Rome was quarreling over. *² One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.* This may have had to do with a kosher diet or it could have been the concern over meat offered to idols. Even today, messianic Jews are concerned about whether they should keep the dietary laws or not. They don't see it as earning their salvation, rather, as descendants of Abraham they want to continue to try to keep their part of the covenant. To eat meat that is not kosher or in which the blood was not drained properly, would be ignoring their covenant. One side would say that Jesus had fulfilled the covenant for them, while the other side would say they were honoring God. This issue has nothing to do with who Christ is or of salvation. It is not of central importance to our faith. Arguing about this issue then and now would benefit no one (Titus 3:9). So what are we to do? We should understand that each brother or sister does what they do in honor of Christ. Do not let differences get in the way of our fellowship.

Commented [notes1]: 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (ESV)

³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

Commented [notes2]: Romans 14:23 (ESV)

²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Commented [notes3]: Romans 12:3 (ESV)

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Commented [notes4]: 1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation-

Commented [notes5]: Titus 3:9 (ESV)

⁹ But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.

³ *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.* How do we know that God has welcomed both? They have both trusted Christ for their salvation. That is the only way we are welcomed by God (Romans 15:16). The external dos and don'ts have nothing to do with our salvation. If Christ has welcomed our brother, who are we to pass judgment him? Our tendency is to believe that everyone should have the same convictions that we do. When we see others that do not share our convictions, our flesh wants to despise them or pass judgment on them. Paul is telling us that that is the old nature (Galatians 5:15).

We must be clear that this is not addressing obvious sinful acts such as adultery, fornication, theft, slander, gossip, and other sins clearly mentioned in Scripture. In other passages Paul encourages us to clearly point these out (Galatians 6:1). That does not mean that we are to police one another's actions, but when a sinful act becomes evident, the church must address it (1 Timothy 5:20; Luke 17:3). But these obvious sinful acts are not what Paul is talking about in this passage. He is addressing issues in which both sides intend to honor God.

⁴ *Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.* How helpful this would be to the church at large if we would all put it into practice. Your elders at this church have had those who disagreed with them on minor issues, year after year. In each situation your elders would pray and ask the Lord for discernment and wisdom to know whether we had missed God's will. They never accused the other party of being wrong, but instead would report if they have the same or a different conviction. We respect one another's convictions. However, when a person's convictions are continually contrary to that of the elders, it is probably time for them to seek a church that has similar convictions (Hebrews 13:17). This does not mean that one side is right and the other is wrong. That may be the case, but sometimes God is leading each in a different direction.

Pastors are frequently the object of the judgment of others. Perhaps you have experienced the same thing. Having experienced such criticism should cause us to be all the more cautious about passing judgment on others regarding minor issues. The final analysis is that we are all God's servants, and we will all give an account to Him. It is only His grace that will cause us to stand before Him. It is certainly not that we had every doctrine figured out.

There are times when what is right for one person may be wrong for another. While the alcoholic should never have a glass of wine, certainly others are not forbidden to so. All hard-working people with high metabolisms may enjoy a large meal, it may be detrimental to the health of someone else to eat the same meal. One person may benefit from reading five chapters from God's word each morning, while another finds

Commented [notes6]: Romans 15:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

Commented [notes7]: Galatians 5:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Commented [notes8]: Galatians 6:1 (ESV)

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Commented [notes9]: 1 Timothy 5:20 (ESV)

²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

Commented [notes10]: Luke 17:3 (ESV)

³ Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,

Commented [notes11]: Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

more benefit in focusing on one paragraph each evening. One person may be called to fast a day every week, while another person's health may not allow them to fast at all. Because the body of Christ is so unique, and each member has his or her own calling, the Holy Spirit will lead each of us uniquely. In these issues, one size does not fit all. There is a vast difference in the church worship services of different cultures, and yet their hearts are one in honoring Christ as Lord and Savior. When we stand in judgment over our brothers and sisters in these minor matters, we are simply declaring our own weakness of pride. – It's alright; you can say, "OW!"

Paul now moves to another point of contention that is still with us today. 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.* There are Seventh Day Adventists, and those who believe no work of any kind should be done on Sunday. There are those who worship on Sunday but believe every day and all work is sacred. We can certainly discuss our differences cordially and try to understand why each has come to the conclusion they have reached, but in the end, each is honoring the Lord according to their convictions. On the other hand, if a conviction is based on convenience or is an excuse, that is another matter; but if they sincerely believe they are honoring God, then we should not argue over the issue (2Timothy 2:23-24).

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.* It is the heart that counts. Why are they doing what they do? If it is to honor the Lord and give Him thanks, then the heart is in the right place. Arguing only distracts from our unity. Discussion for the sake of understanding and learning is different from arguing or passing judgment. It's the attitude of superiority that distracts from our unity and riles up the old nature (Matthew 20:25-26).

⁷ *For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.* ⁸ *For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* Each of us lives and dies to the Lord. We don't answer to others in these peripheral issues. We will all stand before the judgment seat of the God who sees our hearts, and we will account for our actions. (Hebrews 4:13) There will be no hiding of our motivation then. If our heart was to honor the Lord in the action we chose, who will stand before God and condemn that action?

Can you imagine the scene? It is your turn to testify. Your sins are covered by the blood of Christ. The scene of your life comes up in which you believed the Lord wanted you to fast and pray for a day. Someone from the crowd jumps up and yells, "He should have fasted for three days!" It's not a very likely scenario when we are all standing before God who knows our hearts (James 5:9).

Commented [notes12]: 2 Timothy 2:23-24 (ESV)

²³ Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 20:25-26 (ESV)

²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant,

Commented [notes14]: Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Commented [notes15]: James 5:9 (ESV)

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

Our choice of actions shouldn't be to conform to others' convictions but to live out our own before God. There are times when we will curtail our freedoms for the sake of weaker believers (Romans 12:13), but that is another matter. We don't live for the praise of man (John 12:43). We live to please God because of all He has done for us. For each of us that is a unique path. For couples there is an overlapping of the call and plan of God, but even then each has their own personal relationship with God.

⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. Jesus died and rose to life to make it possible for us to have the privilege of knowing Him as our Lord. You see, either He is our Lord or we are our own lord which is a pretty pathetic condition. Without Him coming to earth as a man and taking our sins we could never know Him as Lord for we would always have the sin nature in the way (Romans 5:17). It is accepting the forgiveness of sins through His sacrifice that makes it possible for us to yield to Him as Lord and know the joy and comfort of being His servant. We are either a servant of sin or of Jesus (John 8:34). There are no other alternatives.

The dead in Christ are alive in Him and have escaped the condemnation that sin brings. Remember that Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live," (John 11:25) Those living on earth and those who have gone before us have had the privilege of choosing Jesus as Lord. Are you enjoying that privilege? Are you letting Him direct you each day in humble obedience? That would include allowing others to be led by Him just as you are, personally and individually, and yet together in loving unity (1Corinthians 12:4-7).

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹ for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." The Spirit is having Paul drive home this point because it is so needed in the church throughout time. Should you despise a one-year-old because he or she cannot jump rope or read a book? A spiritual one-year-old may grow up to be a mighty servant of God that far surpasses you in expressing the fruits of the Spirit. The person you pass judgment on because of spiritual immaturity may have a word from God for you that pulls you up from despair (1Corinthians 12:23-25).

I look back on the people I have known as believers and it humbles me to know that some who I thought were the mightiest backslid into sin while some whom I thought were the least proved faithful to their last day. Some I despised ended up encouraging my ministry and others I thought exemplified a godly life walked away from the church. When we stand before God, we will stand with just one other person with us, the Lord Jesus (John 14:16). In the final conclusion all that matters is our relationship to Him. Did we do what we did out of love for Him, in obedience to the Holy Spirit (Matthew 7:22-23)?

Commented [notes16]: Romans 14:13 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Commented [notes17]: John 12:43 (ESV)

⁴³ for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

Commented [notes18]: Romans 5:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes19]: John 8:34 (ESV)

³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

Commented [notes20]: 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;
⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.
⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Commented [notes21]: 1 Corinthians 12:23-25 (ESV)

²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty,
²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it,
²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

Commented [notes22]: John 14:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,
 Here "Helper" is also translated Advocate or Counselor. The Holy Spirit is our second legal advocate but Jesus is the first and has the proof of our redemption in His scars.

Commented [notes23]: Matthew 7:22-23 (ESV)

²² On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" ²³ And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

¹² *So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.* I can just hear the objections, "But Pastor, I thought in Christ we escaped judgment?" You have (John 5:24). But you will still give an account of how you lived out your salvation. Do you remember the parable of the talents? One man doubled what was given to him and received authority over much more. Each will be rewarded according to what they have done with God's investment in them (Matthew 25:21). We will all have the greatest prize of all, the presence of God, but God does reward us according to our faithfulness. It is a sobering thought. **What have you done with God's investment in your life?**

In summary, let me attempt to reiterate what the apostle Paul is teaching us. We do not all have the same convictions because we are not all equally mature. We should not quarrel or condemn others who have a different conviction on minor issues. We all need to obey our conscience to honor the Lord. We might differ on what is allowable to eat or drink or the day of worship. We are not masters over one another, but are all under the Lord. We do what we do because we want to honor Him. We answer to Him. He died and rose to be our Lord, each of us, individually as well as corporately. Each of us will one day stand before God and give an account of our actions (2Corinthians 5:10). Thankfully, He is able to make us stand.

In our day, the dividing issues may be the rapture, or what entertainment is permissible, or the style of worship, or any number of things. We are not to despise or judge one another for differences. In fact, we are commanded to love one another (Romans 12:10). As long as we are in Christ and do what we do out of a sincere heart because we love the Lord and one another, we will have no regrets when we stand before God on that day, regardless of our critics.

I want to add a word of caution. We will have brothers and sisters who don't understand this passage. They will insist that you should be led the same way they are led. They will judge and even despise you. Don't return the criticism. Take what they share with you to the Lord and His word. Know what you believe and why. Then just keep on loving your brother and sister regardless of what they say to you or about you. Remember, a previous verse: ¹⁸ *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* (Romans 12:18) Live to please Christ and not man, and on that day when we stand before God, you won't be disappointed.

Questions

- 1 What must we agree upon? Where can we differ?
- 2 What was the first issue Paul raised?
- 3 Are we the judge of God's servants?
- 4 Can we differ on what is right and wrong? When?
- 5 What was the next point of contention?
- 6 How do you decide which is right?
- 7 Why did Christ die and rise again?
- 8 Are you enjoying the privilege of having Jesus as your Lord?

Commented [notes24]: John 5:24 (ESV)

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Commented [notes25]: Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

²¹ His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'

Commented [notes26]: 2 Corinthians 5:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Commented [notes27]: Romans 12:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

- 9 What are you doing with God's investment in your life?
10 What is the message of today's passage and how can you live it?