

Community of Many Minds

Thomas Robinson, *Life Renewing 5*, October 22, 2017

Romans 14:1-9

^{13:12} The night has advanced, but the day has drawn near. So then let's cast off the works of the darkness and get dressed in the armor of the light. ¹³ Let's walk as is fitting for the daytime, ¹⁴ Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and as for the flesh don't make provision for its desires.

^{14:1} **Welcome** the one who is **weak in faith** – not for deciding about different opinions.

² One person **has faith** that they can **eat everything**, while the one who is **weak** just **eats vegetables**. ³ The **one who eats** must not **despise** the **one who doesn't eat**, nor must the one who doesn't eat **judge** the one who eats, for **God welcomed them**.

⁴ Just **who are you to judge** a **servant** of someone else? It's in relation to their own Lord that they stand firm or fall. And they'll be made to stand firm, for **the Lord has power to make them stand**.

⁵ One person **judges one day as above another**, while another **judges every day the same**. Each should be **fully convinced** in **their own mind**. ⁶ The one who **thinks** about the day, **thinks in relation to the Lord**. The one who eats, eats in relation to the Lord by giving **thanks to God**, and the one not eating, in relation to the Lord refuses to eat, also giving **thanks to God**.

⁷ For **none of us lives** in relation to self alone, and **none dies** in relation to self alone. ⁸ For if we live, **we live in relation to the Lord**, and if we die, **we die in relation to the Lord**. If we live, therefore, and if we die, **we belong to the Lord**. ⁹ For with this very aim, **Christ died and lived again**, in order that for both **dead and living**, he might be **Lord**.

Romans 12:2

² Don't let yourselves be shaped by this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, in order that you may discern what is God's intention – which is for what is good and pleasing and mature.

Romans 5:6, 8

⁵ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for us ungodly. ... ⁸ God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 14:14

¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean (common) in itself, except that to one who considers something unclean, to that person it's unclean.

Romans 15:7

⁷ Welcome one another as the Christ has welcomed you, for God's glory.

I Corinthians 8:6-7

⁶ For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things exist and toward whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and we through him. ⁷ But this knowledge is not in everyone. Some, since they've been accustomed to idols until now, still eat food as offered and dedicated to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled.

Galatians 4:9-11a

⁹ But now that you've come to know God – or, better, to be known by God – how can you turn back again to that weak and worthless world system? Do you want to be slaves to it again? ¹⁰ You are observing days, and months, and seasons, and years! ¹¹ I am afraid for you.

Matthew 23:8-11

⁸ "Don't have yourselves called Rabbi, for you have one teacher, and all of you are brothers and sisters. ⁹ Don't call anybody on earth your Father, because you have one Father, who is heavenly. ¹⁰ Don't have yourselves called instructors, because the Messiah is your one instructor. ¹¹ But the greatest among you will be your servant."

1 Corinthians 10:31

³¹So, if you eat and if you drink and if you do anything, do everything for God's glory!

Welcoming When It Matters

Paul is helping the Romans see a basic vision for the new communities that include Jew, Gentile, Roman, foreigner, slave, free, prosperous, poor. At the same time they transform the life and actions of all by the renewing of mind. The center is what happened in Jesus – living in a world created and sustained by the one God seen in Jesus' self-giving love. This creates a living body with a great diversity of body parts: gifts, cultures, weaknesses.

Welcome/accept/take to yourself is the basic theme, tested when serious differences arise.

We sense distance: "weak in faith" – eating vegetables? Faith to eat everything? To us "weak in faith" means doubt. We might reverse the terms. For Paul "stronger faith" is seeing the meaning of Jesus' story to define a relationship to God by real transformation by Grace, Faith, and Love, rather than various religious practices. But Paul knows those practices carry great weight and are a powerful language for both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul speaks of food and observing days, not of Jews and Gentiles, since both could have scruples. Conflicts over externals tend to be flashpoints and undermine a deeper unity. Why doesn't Paul just declare the "weak" to be wrong? Something larger is at stake.

The Collapsed Hierarchy

The Romans lived in a hierarchical, enchanted world. Defined classes and strata. Holy places and powers (gods spirits demons) everywhere. Rites and rituals mark identity, ethnicity, stage of life. The later church took over hierarchical structure, with saints, angels, relics.

"Modern" western society tried to rid itself of that hierarchy and enchantment/superstition. People are equal, interchangeable members of a bureaucratic/democratic society. The universe is material, without purpose. No holy times, places, foods, people, etc. except as private preferences. Technological mastery drives progress, controlling wealth, power.

Paul sees neither of these in the Gospel. Hierarchy remains, but it is collapsed into one basic relationship between the human and God. The whole world is holy in the sense that it is pervaded by God, creator, sustainer, lover, redeemer. No humans are interchangeable in a bureaucratic sense, rather radically diverse like body parts. They come together in their common relationship to God, in sharing a common story (Abraham to Jesus and beyond), and as a practice of faith and love. Trusting God as living God is fundamental to reality.

Each person stands "in relation to" the Lord. "*Who are you to judge...?*" Remarkable! Even an Apostle is not over the believer, rather a fellow-believer with a distinct commission. The Lord's care and love for each person sets the attitude the community tries to embody.

One Lord – Many Minds to Cultivate

Paul ties this one-step hierarchy to the heart of human existence and the Gospel. We are creatures of God. The creator/redeemer's love shown in Jesus means that all of us have a permanent personal relationship to the Lord. He understands all our weaknesses and helps us precisely there. We grow by bringing every action "in relation to" the Lord, his love, service, grace. That is Faith growing stronger, encompassing every aspect of life.

All of life and death is touched when the creator becomes incarnate and shares it. His death and life means that our death (so alone?) is surrounded by life, the life of our Lord.