

**Romans 14:1-12**

1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. 5 Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God. 7 We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 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. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? 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 give praise to God." 12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

We have been covering the letters of the Apostle Paul in order to see that the focus of his theology and ministry is very much applicable to contemporary society. Paul is the ideal pastor because of his commitment to Lord. He encourages the buildup of the Christian person. He discourages judging, gossip, and engaging in conflict. He believes in a shared ministry where the people join together for the common goal of serving the Lord. He is focused on sharing the Good News for the gospel message to grow. That is a very brief synopsis of who Paul is as person, his attitude toward ministry, and his care for the church as the body of Christ. It is important to remember that his overall worldview is an attitude of togetherness, acceptance, and devotion to Christ.

When studying the Apostle Paul we not only learn about his devotion to Christ but he also teaches us to be devoted to Christ. If we really look into our own inner beings we must confess that this is a concept that we believe in but most people in society do not live by. In order to be devoted like he is takes a complete change of the individual being. There are several reality TV shows that are about people with addiction, drugs, alcohol, hoarding, eating, etc. They all require one key thing – a change of the person. There is no magical solution; people have to change themselves. Living by the ways of the world is addictive because the world is full of temptation. The Apostle Paul teaches you to surrender from the ways of the world and live your life devoted to following Jesus. He emphasizes on more than one occasion that this results in tremendous joy. That is because real satisfaction is internal while most people seek external stimulus. Devotion comes from surrendering your life completely to Christ. Then the Holy Spirit fills you with wonderful peace and joy. I preach and teach devotion and surrender repeatedly because it is a frequently repeated lesson in scripture. It is also who we are to be as Christians and disciples and it is taught by Jesus Christ himself. This is Scripture to live by Matthew 28:19-20 "Go ... make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (NRSV). That is exactly what Apostle Paul did and that is what we are to do.

Today's Scripture addresses judging, welcoming, arguing, and opinions. First of all we know that we are not to judge. Christ put an end to judging others. Judging is a way of seeing yourself as being better than others or more righteous than others. But it is not about who is or who is not righteous. In this particular case the Apostle Paul addresses those who are weak in faith. Well, it not about judging who is or who is not weak in faith, it is about not rejecting anyone. We are to welcome those who are not on the same page as you are theologically. Paul addresses issues that pertain to OT customs – the food rituals of the righteous. Paul's perspective is that those who hang onto the food rituals are weak in faith. They need these rituals and traditions as a crutch of support to determine righteousness.

The Apostle Paul teaches not to argue over opinions which are a matter of individualism. What we think is right or wrong and what we think others should or should not do. Recently I was engaged in a conversation. Again when someone finds out you are a pastor they tend to want to talk about religion. Well, he is a member of a denomination that recently split. I told him that disagreements come from individualism. He said "I don't know about that." I didn't have time to engage in full theological discussion so I asked "Why do we split over homosexuality, ordaining women, or musical instruments? The whole of Protestantism is splintered over opinions, and individual ideas about our faith. Now what did Jesus say about homosexuality, ordaining women, or musical instruments? Nothing, so when we argue and split over these things, we are not following Jesus, we are not being a united body that is devoted to what Jesus said and did." The We are not to focus on individual ideas about actions that are perceived as righteous. We are all to honor the Lord and keep our focus on Jesus.

Once again the Apostle Paul teaches complete surrender. We do not live to ourselves, we live to the Lord and we belong to the Lord and each one of us will be accountable to God. People just don't see how easy and simple it is. Direct your attention to the Lord. If we cannot live our lives by the teachings of Jesus there is no reason to get distracted by other issues. Jesus is the center of our theology. Arguments, complaints, and conflict come from individualism, because it is focused on opinions, pain, emotions, attitudes, and ego. The Apostle Paul teaches unity and peace in following Christ. We are to be united together by being focused on Christ. There is one thing we all can agree on - we are to live our lives as Jesus teaches us to live, focused on and following the words and actions of Christ. All problems come from human differences of opinion. You may be right and you may be wrong and you may be both partially right and partially wrong.

I learned a valuable lesson from a manager several years ago. I don't remember the details or the problem but I do remember a valuable lesson. He said "George, you are dead right. You may be right but you are dead right. For you it is a no win situation. You can win the argument but it is not in your best interest. It is in your best interest to not try to win the argument but instead, focus on a solution.

You will not be able to remember every specific detail of every lesson ever taught in the Bible, but you can get the big picture. What it means to be a Christian is a changed life. The Holy Spirit fills you and directs you in life and it is a joy to live a life of devotion.