

## “Resolutions Regarding Relationships”

**Romans 14:1-6**

January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

It's the first Sunday of a New Year - an opportunity to look forward with hope, and to review last year with discernment. Here are some not very serious resolutions for 2021:

- My New Year's resolution is to read more, so I've turned on the subtitles on my TV.
- My New Year's resolution is to procrastinate. I'll start tomorrow.
- I was planning to give up my bad habits for the New Year, but then I remembered that no one likes a quitter.
- I'm not buying a 2021 calendar until I see the trailer.

From tumultuous years like 2020, we can glean lessons learned by looking back in order to improve ourselves for present and future spiritual growth. I find this helpful:

I am the New Year. I am an unspoiled page in your book of time.  
I am your next chance at the art of living. I am your opportunity to practice what you have learned about life during the last 12 months.  
All that you sought and didn't find is hidden in me, waiting for you to search it, but with more determination.  
All that you dreamed but didn't dare to do, all that you hoped but did not will, all the faith that you claimed but did not have—these slumber lightly, waiting to be awakened by the touch of a strong purpose.  
I am your opportunity to renew your allegiance to Him who said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

*Isn't that good?* Today, we return to the sermon series on the New Testament Book of Romans. Four Sundays ago we wrapped up our study of **Romans Chapter 13**. Among the things we learned studying that chapter were these:

- God appoints those who serve in positions of governing authority. That means your political or governmental nemesis serves at *His* desire, pleasure, and appointment.
- Christians are to subject themselves to the governing authorities *because* God has appointed them. (Remember, Paul wrote this letter to people upon whom the Roman government - no friend of Christ or His Church - was imposing its authority).
- God's purpose for government is to protect its people from evil. Sometimes, the evil is a military threat; sometimes the threat is political or economic in nature. It may even be that the threat is to the public health of a nation's people. In these arenas and more, government may require its people to take certain actions and/or refrain from certain others in order to protect themselves and others.

**Romans Chapter 14** begins a new section of Paul's letter. The section runs from **Romans 14:1** through **Romans 15:13**. The theme of this section is the importance of God's people getting along with one another. Paul identifies two kinds of people in his instruction – those weak in the faith, and those who are strong.

**Romans 14:1-6:**

“Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things. <sup>2</sup>For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>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.”

“As we can see, the believers in Rome were divided over special diets and special days. Some of the members thought it a sin to eat certain foods like meat, so they ate only vegetables. Other members thought it a sin not to observe Jewish holy days. If each Christian had kept his convictions to himself, there would have been no problem, but they began to criticize and judge one another. The one group was sure the other group was not at all spiritual.

Unfortunately, we have similar problems today with many “gray areas” of life that are not clearly right or wrong to every believer. Some activities we know are wrong, because the Bible clearly condemns them. Other activities we know are right, because the Bible clearly commands them. But when it comes to areas that are not clearly defined in Scripture, we find ourselves needing some other kind of guidance. Paul gave principles of this guidance. He explained how believers could disagree on nonessentials and still maintain unity in the church.” (Wiersbe, 558)

One of these principles is stated in verse 1 – “Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things.” Synonymous with “receive” are words like ‘accept’ or ‘welcome.’ **We are to accept and welcome into our fellowship those who are weak in the faith!** But, we are not to welcome them by passing judgment on “doubtful” things they hold on to.

What might Paul have in mind when he writes at the end of verse 1, “disputes over doubtful things?” *Can it be that there were Christians in the same congregation in Rome who were in conflict with each other?* Every church will have two or more of its members who will disagree over things, but the really disappointing thing is what these people disagreed over. They disagreed over opinions and preferences. There is some conflict over doctrine at times, but the significant majority of conflicts, at least in my observation are over things that really don’t matter ultimately.

Such “doubtful things” (“quarrels over opinions” *ESV*) fall within the “gray area” I mentioned a moment ago. The original Greek word for such things is *adiaphora*, or things that are ‘morally neutral.’ Properly defined, *adiaphora* is “tolerance of actions or beliefs not specifically prohibited in the Scriptures.” (*Random House College Dictionary*, pg. 17). The problem arising from within the Church in Rome was that things they assigned high importance to were often merely ‘morally neutral’ or matters of indifference – they were *adiaphorous*! In Rome, some people maintained that eating certain foods, or refraining from eating certain foods, was a very serious

matter. Look again at verse 2, “For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.”

By this point in redemptive history, Jesus had pronounced all foods clean (**Mark 7:15-19**). There, the lesson is that defilement comes from within, not what we put into our stomachs. And, in the Book of Acts, there was the time where the Apostle Peter saw a vision of a great sheet filled with all manner of animals coming down from heaven. Peter heard Jesus say to him, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat...what God has cleansed you must not call common.” (**Acts 10:9-16**).

Another principle found in verse 3 of **Romans Chapter 14** follows naturally – “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.” **This is the teaching that the one who has no scruples when it comes to diet (“him who eats”) should not look down on those who are not at the same point in their sanctification** – (who’s scruples do not allow him/her to eat). Conversely, those who haven’t understood matters of Christian liberty when it comes to diet shouldn’t judge those whom they believe are sinning with abandon when they eat foods thought to be unclean.

A scriptural example of this is found in Paul’s first letter to the Church at Corinth (**I Corinthians Chapter 8**). There, seasoned Christians were eating meat that had been offered in worship to idols. After such meat was sacrificed, it was often either eaten by the priests or re-sold. It was good meat; what a shame to throw it away! Some Christians properly understood this meat could be eaten without sinning. After all, an idol was nothing! However, there were believers in Christ who didn’t think Christians could eat meat sacrificed to idols. *How could anyone, least of all a Christian, eat such polluted meat?*

The conflict wasn’t with the meat; rather, it was with the differences in the spiritual maturity of the meat-eaters and the non meat-eaters. Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians that those whose conscience wasn’t disturbed by eating meat had the responsibility to make sure they weren’t causing their weaker brothers to sin. Paul wrote, “...Beware lest somehow this liberty... becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak” (**I Cor. 8:9**). Paul shared his ministry aim in such cases – which should also be ours. We read in **verse 13 of I Corinthians 8** – “...if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

Back to our text in Romans, Paul exhorts there should be none of this judging and criticizing each other, as brothers and sisters in Christ, because “God has received (us).” The Christian holding an opposing viewpoint to yours has been “received by God.”

Verse 4 then should hit us right in the heart – “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.” Scorning others and judging them if they see things differently than you do, or act differently than you do, is not Christian behavior. Those other believers in Christ answer to Jesus. Leave it with Him.

“Because God has received us, we must receive one another. We must not argue over opinions and doubtful matters, nor must we judge or despise one another. Perhaps St.

Augustine put the matter best, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” (Wiersbe, 559)

With verse 5 and the first half of verse 6, Paul uses another illustration to make his point - the honoring of days. “<sup>5</sup>One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>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*.”

Many people much smarter than me have studied these verses and they are not unanimous in their findings. *Just exactly how are we to take this discussion of esteeming a day?* Some believe this day refers to the Lord’s Day (as opposed to the Jewish Sabbath). And, there is much to commend itself to that position. Seventh Day Adventists do not recognize the first day of the week – Sunday – as the day for corporate worship like we and the significant majority of Christianity does. Instead, they retain the Old Testament Sabbath. We must be careful not to let such a practice divide us from each other. *Isn’t it possible, likely even, that the committed Seventh Day Adventist, in every other way, an orthodox child of God by faith in Christ, shouldn’t be seen as an enemy, but received as a brother in Christ?*

Another possibility is recent. We’ve just come through the annual Advent season culminating on Christmas Eve with the birth of the long-promised Messiah in the long-forecast town of Bethlehem. Some in church circles think that Christmas Day is the holiest day of the year regardless what day of the week on which it falls.

Historically, the Reformers didn’t treat such mid-week holidays with much significance. The Reformers point was this – every Sunday is the holiest day of every week. *Did you know that the word “holiday” is an abbreviation of “Holy Day?”* Let us then, friends, have a high view of Sunday in our practice and planning – it is the New Testament day of worship for God’s people. I would venture to say that the most important day of worship the week of Christmas is the Sunday on either end of it – Christmas Day, if it is on a Sunday would then be the best of all possibilities!

I’m not saying we should not celebrate Christmas Day; but, rather that we must esteem Sunday as the spiritual highlight of every week (you can still find wall or desk calendars that have Sundays and holidays in red).

Commentator William Barclay put it best when he wrote, “It is not the day that we ought to worship, but Him Who is the Lord of all days.” (Barclay, 184)

As we bring this message to a close, with today’s passage, Paul encourages the strong to refrain from any activity that will discourage the weak. The strong often have a tendency to look down on the weak and regard them as inferior Christians, while the weak, knowing that it would be wrong for them to do something that the strong do, all too easily hold that the strong are sinning and slip into condemning them.

Commentator Leon Morris notes, “The church was never meant to be a cozy club of like-minded people of one race or social position or intellectual caliber. Christians are not clones, identical in all respects.” (Morris, 476)

I close with some questions for you to ponder and apply:

*What privileges or freedoms are you willing to do without for the sake of ministering to a fellow believer in Jesus Christ?*

*To what extent would you go for a fellow member of your church for whom Jesus lived and died?*

*What, specifically, can you do today, the week ahead to show you deferring to other Christians?*

*Whose liberty will you uphold, your own, or another believer in Christ’s?*

*What does the Bible say you should do?*

I leave you with Oliver Cromwell’s words to the rigid Scotsmen of his day deserve a hearing. He said, “I beseech you by the bowels of Christ, think it possible that you may be mistaken!”