

Disagreements and More Disagreements Romans 14:5-6

We started to look at this chapter last time we were together and saw that there were two groups of people with very deep convictions about whether they should eat certain foods or not. There were the strong who ate meat and then there were the vegetarians who for conviction sake before God did not eat meat. And this is such a long section that we realize that it must have been a very bitter divisive point for these early believers. And when certain applications of our Christian life are clear in our minds, it is so easy to form cliques and even look down on others. And the fact is that we care about God, and we do care about others. We want God to be honoured and glorified and magnified. So these issues of how we live out our Christianity are important.

Now let me say that there are very clear and universal commands and statutes in the word of God that condemn certain behaviour and it is always wrong to do those things. We realize murder or lying or adultery or stealing or even coveting or materialism are always wrong. And that is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about certain activities or ways of living out your Christianity that might be wrong for one believer and for another it might be acceptable. We might see this as a clear path to living for the glory of God, where another sees that path as nothing but dishonouring to the very name of Jesus. Remember, these issues are present because we care about Jesus and others, and we truly want God to be glorified. And may I say more often than not the church is split over issues like meat and vegetables more than any doctrinal issue, because we assume that meat is deeply theological and we assume that we know best.

And then in verse 3 Paul says something extraordinary. He says not to pass judgement on that person who disagrees with you over the meat issue. And he gives the reason right at the end of the verse, **“for God has welcomed him.”** In other words, this individual who is seeking to live for Christ is justified in his sight. He is welcomed by God. And what this means is that there are bigger issues and larger and grander truths that should occupy our hearts. Such as the gospel that was heralded in the opening 11 chapters that hold and keep us together and cement us in Christian love towards one another that should be of preeminent importance. We can be so consumed by other things that the gospel takes a back seat, and we do not even notice it, or we do not even notice how we are treating other believers and even talking about them.

Paul goes on and gives another reason why we should not judge them and that is God is the ultimate judge. If they are seeking to honour God, and seeking to glorify Him, and we do not think that they are right, God is the one that every single person will give an ultimate accounting before. And he mentions is at the end of verse 4, **“And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”** And this is the doctrine of perseverance. At the end he will not be condemned by the Lord but through the grace of Christ he will stand before the holy God of eternity. And if God is the one that will cause him to stand then who are you to condemn him? We realize the message that is to consume us and galvanize us together is the gospel. We can argue about whether the church should be open during a pandemic or whether we should wear

masks, and in the end those who lead make a decision and will be answerable to the Lord, but it is incredible to hear the statements made by individuals on both sides. "I don't know how these individuals can preach certain portions of God's Word, the judgment of God is upon them." And all the while they are not ignoring the Scriptures but seeking to honour God. Who are you to judge them? Are there not greater more glorious truths that should consume your heart and unify the true people of God?

And Paul's answer to that question is yes. And he gives us another example of how this all plays out in verses 5-6 this morning when he discusses certain holy days. There are some Christians who do not celebrate Christmas, who do not have a Christmas tree. There are some who do not celebrate any holy day whatsoever, and there are others who do. There are others who admit that Jesus was not born on December 25, but his birth is worthy to be remembered on a special day, and reflect on during that day as a special emphasis by the people of God. There are some congregations that meet on Saturday, which is the Sabbath, and do not meet on Sunday the first day of the week. There are some believers that believe that the Sabbath has been replaced by a new Sabbath and that is the first day of the week when Jesus rose from the grave. And believers, just like the Old Testament Sabbath should refrain from all work. Christians should not even be employed on the Sabbath through shift work or anything else. There are others that see Sunday as just another day. It has some significance because the Lord's people meet, and we should not forsake the meeting together because it is commanded in the Scripture. And you look at all these positions and they are deeply held. This is how you honour the Lord!

Do you see how this could cause problems in a local church setting if people held to all these views? Well, what if individuals in a congregation held different views on the pandemic? What if people held different views whether racism was systemic and taught in the very fabric of our educational institutions, and some people thought it was not? What if some had a parenting style that was more free and another had one that was more constraining to the child? We differ on so many issues, some more emotional and explosive than others. How much television should one watch or should they watch any at all? And as society changes the issues will change but it is always a meat and vegetable problem.

So as we think through these issues, let's look at what Paul commands here, and let us seek to glorify God, and seek to glorify Him the way he wants. Let us seek to think the best of individuals even when we cannot see eye to eye. So I want us to see two things here in this passage that I hope will help us live lives to the glory of God in the church of Christ.

1. We need to have clear and strong convictions. V.5.

What Paul says here is so fascinating because it is not anything that we would expect. In fact, in one way it seems to be throwing more gas on the fire, and if you know anything about fire, that does not put out the fire but quite the opposite. And that is that he does not want us to be wishy washy about our faith and convictions as we live to the glory of God. He wants us to use our minds and think through issues, and come to clear headed conviction about how God will be glorified and stick with it. But are not the strong convictions about these secondary issues the problem that create

divisions? Isn't this the problem that we have too deep convictions about the way we live and function for the glory of Christ in this or that situation?

Those are great questions that as we work through will help us live for God's glory but also help us live with one another. Look at what he says in verse 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.**" So you can see the two groups in this verse. The one esteems certain days. In Rome, many of the Jews would close their shops on the Sabbath. And many new believers when they became Christians, did not see any specific teaching in their minds that eliminated the Sabbath regulations, so as a way of honouring the Lord they ceased from their labours on the Sabbath. Others recognized that each day is holy to the Lord, and one day was the same as the other, and whether they ate or drank they did all to the glory of God. Now each would have their own set of Scripture references. And certainly Paul would class himself within those who esteem all days alike even though he was a Jew.

And look at what Paul says here about this issue, "**Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.**" Doesn't that make the problem worse? Aren't strong convictions about secondary issues the problem? Should Paul say, "lighten up, get over yourself or whatever"? And the answer is no. "Fully convinced" means to have strong and settle convictions. I have thought through the issues and have come to clear convictions. So what are you fully convinced in your mind? You are fully convinced that you are thinking right about this issue. You are thinking that the position you hold is honouring to God. And that actions that you are taking are glorifying to him. But here is where we have to be so careful, and this is where this whole passage turns. My position is not the only way that one can honour the Lord. My conviction on this issue is not the only way. And that takes humility. Although I see it crystal clear, I look over at another brother or sister and they see it totally different, and they think that they are honouring God through their convictions and actions, and if they acted contrary they would be sinning against God.

Can we talk about these issues? And the answer is yes. I love to begin when I get into these kinds of discussions by saying that good people disagree, and even asking permission to talk when someone brings up these subjects. "Now you know that I hold different convictions on this issue, I do not want to argue or battle with you. I value your friendship and fellowship, so do you want to hear why I hold the position that I hold?" And that takes the emotion out many times, and then I also listen realizing this person really is trying to honour Christ even if I disagree with him, and he or she is a dear brother or sister in Christ whether we agree or not on this issue. I hope I explained that so it is at least half clear.

2. We need to realize that my fellow believer is trying to glorify Christ. V.6.

I want us to realize once again, that we are not talking about sin here but about Christian brothers and sisters seeking to honour the Lord, and they express that honouring in different ways. I can remember being at a T4G conference and there was a gentleman that got up that was going to present a musical number. His name was Shai Linn. He was a Christian music rapper. And I will be quite honest. I cannot for the life of me see how rap music could ever honour God. I don't get it at all. But as the

words came up on the screen, I saw that what he had written was truly honouring to God. Listen to the second stanza of Supreme, **“He's the seed that was conceived in the womb of a virgin The Son emerges in a manger while the angels serenade Him It's the birth of the Saviour, the great I Am became a man Came as a lamb and would be executed to execute the plan A substitute to stand, in the place of the wicked On the cross, He was lifted, but we considered Him stricken and afflicted**

Just like the prophets predicted, He came at the proper moment To stop His opponent and lay down His life to offer atonement.” And all his songs are deeply theological. He has one that is on the doctrine of election where the truths are fantastic. But I still do not get rap. Now if another brother or sister is listening to this genre are they sinning? And the answer is no. I have heard complicated arguments about why this might be sin, but they are unconvincing at best.

And this is the point that Paul is making. We are not all the same. Look at verse 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.”** Now I want to make it clear that this is so different from over in Galatians 4:9-11, **“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”** There Paul condemns them for holding to holy days. The reason why is the Judaizer controversy where they were trying to earn their salvation through their effort. Here, it is not earning salvation but honouring the Lord. Eric Liddell did not run the hundred metre dash in Paris in the Olympics because it was on Sunday, which he considered the Sabbath, which I believe is not the Sabbath. But the reason why he is celebrated by believers is not because he was trying to earn his salvation but because he sought to honour the Lord. He ended up winning a gold medal in the four hundred, but that is not the point. He was willing to honour God no matter what the cost.

So let me borrow three points made by James Montgomery Boice over these verses. Three guidelines that will help us live for the glory of Christ and help us function when others disagree with us. One is what we saw in verse 5, and that is we need to be fully convinced. We have to think things through. We have to use our minds. It is not that good people disagree so I will not think about it. No, we want to honour and seek to magnify God in the best way that we can. It also does not mean that we cannot talk about these issues in a Christian manner. We realize we grow as we talk and listen and discuss. It not only brings understanding but it brings light, and helps us honour Christ. We might even be convinced by someone else or they might convince us. Remember in this passage there are those who are strong and those who are weak.

The second principle is to realize that there is more than one way to honour God. that should be evident here. The person who holds a specific day is seeking to honour God, and the other person who does not seeks to honour Christ. The one who eats meat and the other who just eats vegetables both seek to honour God. Again, this is so important. Both individuals are seeking to follow Christ, not make excuses for sin in their

lives. And this is such a critical question to ask: are we seeking to honour God by the decisions that we make, by the music that we listen to, to the places that we go, that the fashions that we dress with? Are we asking the question: what is the highest way, not what is acceptable, but what is the highest way that I can express by faith in Christ and honour him by what I am doing? There is nothing that should consume our hearts and lives more than seeking to honour our God. And we should celebrate when we see others seeking to honour and glorify Him. Are we doing that?

The third guideline that is so helpful is the activity that I am engaged in and the position that I have taken can I be thankful for what I am doing? Can I give God thanks? Look at the end of verse six, **“and give thanks to God.”** So the one who eats praises God that He has given him all things to enjoy. The one who abstain praises God that he can honour him through this small sacrifice, but both can praise and thank God for what they are doing. This really cuts two ways. One is that if another believer is praising God and seeking to honour the Lord in what he is doing in his conduct or his work or whatever, then we should be able to have some sense of praising God. Again, remember verse 4 that we leave the ultimate judgment up to God. If you think that he or she is wrong then if it is not direct sin you should let the Lord handle that situation.

And the second thing is over doubtful things that the Word of God does not explicitly address, what are the principles that I can glean from God’s Word that will help me live out my testimony? And remember, it is not whether this is permissible or allowable, but can I honour God through this activity and pleasure? After engaging in it can I praise God for allowing me to engage in it? Have I brought some dubious doubt or offence to his name because others do not understand? If God has brought this glorious salvation through the costly sacrifice of his Son how can I best make him known. For Eric Liddell he could not race on a what he considered a holy day. For another it might be to race on that day as to the Lord. But can I thank God afterward? That is always a heart searching question.

The hardest aspects many times of our faith is not getting our theology right. We need to study and learn, but some of the most difficult aspects is living in light of those truths. And it is difficult, especially when others in the household of faith will disagree on what truly honour the Lord. The question then becomes how will we treat one another? Will we welcome them as God has welcomed them? Will we glorify Christ and even recognize that in our growth in Christ, in our maturing in the Christian faith there is room for disagreement in these areas? May God give us the grace to honour him both in how we live and how we treat others.