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Romans 14:1-23 – *Through the Eyes of God*

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Romans 14:1-23

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written:

“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,
 ‘every knee will bow before me;
 every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

¹³ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. ¹⁴ I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. ¹⁵ If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. ²⁰ Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. ²¹ It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

²² So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who does not condemn himself by what he approves. ²³ But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

When we lived in Seattle a couple of years ago...

Kristi worked downtown.

Sometimes I would take the bus from our apartment to see her.

On one occasion I went to see her for lunch.

I was on the bus and my stop was coming up.

I yanked on the yellow cord above the window...

Signaling to the driver that I needed the stop.

As he slowed the bus, I gathered my things...

Quickly stood up not wanting to miss the stop...

And stepped out of the bus onto the busy downtown sidewalk.

What happened next is hard to explain.

All of a sudden, the world around me slowed down.

The people around me—

The man sitting with his back against the building...

Shaking a change cup in what was left of his stained tattered pants;

The confident-looking business woman in her black slacks and blazer...

Who was coming up from behind me...

Headed in my same direction but at a much more intentional pace;

The young man approaching me on his skateboard...

Head phones covering his ears...lost in his music—

Everyone around me slowed down.

And for no more than 30 seconds my vision was changed.

I was still physically seeing these people as I was before...

But something was happening...

Where I was seeing them through God's eyes...

Or at least seeing them how I imagine that God sees them.

My eyes locked with the people around me...

And in that slowed-down 30 seconds...

I saw people with an intense love, whoever they were.

I saw them in their full humanity as people God created.

I didn't see their flaws...

I wasn't overcome with judgment...

I saw them through God's eyes.

It didn't last any more than 30 seconds...

But when things changed back to normal...

My eyes were filled with tears.

I think God allowed me to glimpse people from his perspective.

The people in our passage this morning need a change of perspective...

Because there's a lot of judgment and condemning going on.

There is a dispute going on between Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome.

The Jewish Christians—

Growing up on their Hebrew cook book—

Are clashing with the Gentile Christians...

Whose cook book is more permissible.

According to the Old Testament, God's people are only allowed to eat certain meats. (Lev 11)

This is a big thing for Jews...

Following the food laws of Scripture.

It sets them apart as God's people.

They stand out because they don't eat certain foods.

Food laws help Israel to maintain their unique identity...

It keeps them from getting too comfortable with the surrounding pagan culture.

It is also a way for them to be clean before God.

If they want to approach a holy God in the temple...

Then they have to come to God clean.

They need to follow the laws God sets for them.

These special ways of living—

Recognizing food laws and observing holy days—

Were at the center of their lives...

In a sense, we can say it was the heart and soul of their faith...

Their connection to God.

This isn't true for Gentile Christians.

They grew up eating all kinds of meat...

Without any restrictions.

Especially now, knowing that with Christ all foods are clean...

It's hard for the Gentile Christians to see the Christian Jews' point of view.

Some Gentile Christians are looking down their nose at Jewish Christians...

Wondering why they're still tied to the food laws of old.

Some Jews Christians are judging Gentile Christians for eating whatever they please.

They're seeing each other's flaws...

And their clashing.

We're no different today.

We all come into the Christian faith with our baggage.

We all come with our different histories and ways of doing things...

And we all have a tendency to condemn and judge...

And we all have experiences of being condemned and judged.

Some of you grew up in families with a strict Sunday, Sabbath-day observance.

Sunday was for morning worship, lunch with family and friends, evening worship and rest in-between.

You can't understand why people grocery shop, work, do homework, and play sports on Sundays.

Maybe *you* condemn *them* for not honoring the Sabbath and keeping it holy...

And maybe they look back at you and say:

“You're so legalistic.”

“There's no way we can live like that in today's society.”

Maybe it's about worship style...

You look at Christians in other churches and say...

“I can't believe they worship like that...”

“It seems so worldly and irreverent.”

Or maybe, “I can't believe those Christians hold to those political views...”

“They want to prioritize the economy over the environment!”

“If only they understood God's care for creation.”

You've heard the phrases:

“If only they were more educated...”

“If only they were more in-touch with culture today...”

“If only they knew their Bibles better...”

“If only they weren't so legalistic...”

And these are just differences we see within our white, middle to upper class culture in North America.

Think about those coming from different countries and cultures altogether.

Our brothers and sisters coming from Sudan, Kenya, Philippines, Eritrea, and Singapore...

They must look at some of the things we do and scratch their heads...

Wondering why we're not more reverent or pious...

Wondering why we do some of the things we do.
 (Maybe if we made a better effort to hear their voices...
 And learn from them...
 We'd be strengthened as a church.)

Living as a Christian family—
 Living as the body of Christ—
 Is fraught with differences and difficulties...
 It's hard!

But Paul gives us corrective lenses.

Lenses through which to view this family that we're in.
 Instead of seeing them through the lens of "those people..."—

Those people who are different...

Those people we don't agree with...

Those people who've got it all wrong—

We're challenged to see them through a different lens:

To see them as people for whom Christ died.

When you look at your brother and sister—

Any Christian, no matter who they are or what they look like—

When you look at them...

See them as people for whom Christ died.

This is at the heart of Paul's message in Romans 14:

God accepts these people...

Because Christ has already given his life for them;

Christ has already made them acceptable.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross...

When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead...

And when the Holy Spirit caused us to believe on Jesus for our salvation...

God made a new family.

God made a new family and the requirements for entrance into that family are not:

How much money do you have?

How light or dark is your skin tone?

Do you have any tattoos or odd piercings?

What are your political views?

Do you have a post-high school education?

What biological family were you were born into?

What religion or denomination did you come from?

The only entrance requirement is that you confess Jesus Christ as Lord...

That you turn to him and only him for salvation.

Because when that happens...

God accepts you...

And we're all placed into his family based on that.

Paul's command is for us to put on our God Goggles...

Start seeing "those people" in the way God sees them.

What's it like having our God Goggles on?

First, before we look at anyone else...

We look at ourselves.

We recognize that Christ needed to die for us too...

This is humbling!

It's not just them.

It's me too.

I am just as sinful...

I am just as arrogant...

I am just as stubborn...

I am in as much need of saving (if not more) as they are.

We all stand in need of grace.

Second, with our God Goggles on...

We accept our brothers and sisters where they're at.

But this word "accept" isn't strong enough.

Because this gives us a sense that we have to merely tolerate fellow Christians...

Tolerate them whenever they're around.

The word accept here *really* means to "welcome."

Welcome the weak:

Include them in your fellowship.

Invite them into your circle.

Hold out your open arms to them.

Make room for them.

Don't judge them for their current maturity level...

Don't jump down their throat when they say something wrong.

Make room for them wherever they're at in the Christian faith.

My mom and dad are perfect examples of this:

When I was in university, I turned away from Catholic Christianity...

And moved more toward Protestant Christianity.

I was very immature in my approach to this...

Weak in my faith.

I thought I had all of the right answers...

And that Catholics were wrong about mostly everything.

My parents—

Devout Catholics—

Didn't kick me out of the house.

They didn't shun me or condemn me.

They made space for me where I was...

Even when it was uncomfortable for them...

Even when I was rude and condemning toward them...

Even when I attacked the faith that they held dear.

They accepted me and loved me through it.

I still belonged in the family...

And I was given the space to come into maturity.

They didn't just practice tolerance and let me do my own thing though.

No, they actively engaged with me as I struggled with immaturity.

When I was rude, they let me know about it...

But they also researched and had dialog with me...

They checked out other churches with me.

They were the "strong" ones God used to help me grow and mature...

And it happened because they welcomed me where I was.

Third, putting on our God Goggles means we sacrifice.

We put their growth before our freedom.

This is following the basic pattern of our Lord—

Who humbled himself, giving up his life for us.

Even though we may be stronger in some areas of the faith...

It doesn't mean we are free to do as we please.

Our aim is to live in unity and peace within our Christian family.

Our aim is to build people up...

Not tear them down.

So if it means refraining from meat or drink around certain people—

If it means giving up something that causes a brother or sister to stumble—

Then that's what we do.

As people who belong to the Christ our attitude cannot be:

“Their sensitivity/immaturity isn't my problem.”

It has to be:

“Christ died for this person...”

“They are the redeemed!”

“How can I walk with them through this?”

Fourth, our God Goggles make us willing to learn from them.

The body of Christ is made up of different parts...

And no part is useless.

Every part of the body serves a purpose.

Therefore, wherever a brother or sister is coming from—

Conservative or liberal;

Africa or North America or Asia;

Rich or poor;

Reformed or Alliance or Pentecostal—

We can learn from each other.

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit came down on the believers...

And it allowed them to speak in different languages...

So that people from all over the Ancient Near East could understand.

In heaven, there will be people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Our diversity as God's family gives full expression to who God is.

We can't understand the Kingdom of God or the gospel message...

Just by looking at it through North American eyes.

We need each other—

Different languages, ages, experiences, and personalities—

To live into the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

When we put on our God Goggles...

We humble ourselves...

Becoming willing to learn from all of God's people.

So, these God Goggles—

The one that help us to see God's people as the redeemed of Christ...

That help us to recognize our own need...

That help us to sacrifice and learn from our brothers and sisters—

Where can we buy a pair?

You already have them.

It's the Holy Spirit...

Given to you when you believe in Christ.

It's the Holy Spirit living in you...

Working in you for your own growth as Christ's disciple...

And working among God's family so we all grow up together in Christ.

Amen.