

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. <sup>2</sup> Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to pass judgement 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall give praise to <sup>[f]</sup> God.’

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

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Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> ‘For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

<sup>24</sup> When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; <sup>25</sup> and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”

<sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, “Pay what you owe.” <sup>29</sup> Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” <sup>30</sup> But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place.

<sup>32</sup> Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?” <sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. <sup>35</sup> So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’

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Prayer: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

A summary of our two readings this morning could well be:

We are not called to criticize or judge one another but to forgive one another.

In his letter to the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, Paul calls for and encourages a peaceful coexistence in church congregations. Whether someone has a mature faith or a weak faith, all should care for and accept each other.

The believers’ diet was then (and in some places still is) a point of contention. Some of the Christians were happy to eat all and every sort of food, while others followed strict rules about what they believed a Christian could and could not eat. Paul made it clear to them that more important than the food that people ate was that the Christians loved

and cared for each other and did not scorn or criticize one another. There is a famous saying:

‘People in glass houses should not throw stones’

Perhaps today’s reading leads us to a more positive saying:

‘People in God’s House should support one another not shoot one another down.’

It was not only different foods that caused divisions in the Church in Rome. Christians there also had different views on things like feast days. Paul wrote,

‘Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike.’

Perhaps Paul wrote as he did because the Jewish Christians wanted all the believers to observe all their Jewish feasts and traditions, and the Gentile converts felt no obligation to do so. A modern day analogy might be the differing views on what a Christian can and cannot do on a Sunday. For example, many Christian rugby players will happily play games on a Sunday and some will not. Euan Murray is an example is a Scottish International who played for a number of clubs including Northampton Saints but after becoming a Christian refused to play rugby on a Sunday. Other Christians play top level rugby but find ways to have a Sabbath (rest day) on days other than Sunday when they need to.

Christians have different views on lots of things, but what is most important when that is the case is not that they all try to convert others to their personal point of view. What is most important is that believers have a mutual love and respect for each other. The Christian focus in matters of different opinions should always be that as Christians we are ready to serve one another with the aim of building up the church rather than enforcing our individual preferences on others. Paul wrote,

“We do not live to ourselves..... we live to the Lord ..... we are the Lord’s .....”

Jesus’ death and resurrection on behalf of all believers provides the foundation for Paul’s reasoning. We are to reverence Jesus and live our lives in order to show our gratitude to Jesus and to reverence Him. What we find in today’s teaching from Paul is that we should respect one another when we have legitimate differences of opinion over issues that do not contradict explicit biblical commands. Obviously we should all have the same view on things like lying, stealing, murder, idolatry, sexual misconduct... and the list continues .... But on other matters such as diet and ways of celebrating God’s goodness, different ways of worship, and the varying ways by which we serve God and love our neighbours ..... These differences should lead to enriching the life and witness of the Church and not to stifling it.