The Community of Christ:
Who’s to Judge?
Romans 14:1-12

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Romans 14:1-12
New International Version

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. 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. 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.

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. 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. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. 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. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

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

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

The Word of the Lord: 
Thanks be to God!

Don’t you just love to judge others? Don’t you find pleasure in judging? We judge people by their clothing, their jobs, their friends, the kind of car they drive, the music they listen to, their hair style, their family and even where they live. The list could go on and on.

And don’t ever let facts get in your way of judging others, right?

In the early church, Paul was confronting a common problem. We know that the church began among the Jews, and of course Jewish believers brought with them many of their Jewish beliefs, such as dietary restrictions and their respect for certain holy days.

But when the church began to expand and receive non-Jewish believers, soon there were members of the church who did not follow the Jewish dietary restrictions or observe certain holy days. So who was right? The strict observers or the non-observers?

According to Paul, neither was right. Each was doing what their conscience told them to do. And each one is answerable to God.

We really don’t face the exact same problems in the church today, do we? In fact, today we have become very tolerant of dietary restrictions because of diabetes and other diseases like that. We understand that some are
vegetarians and this gives us no problem. But we certainly must not try to force our dietary restrictions upon others.

I recall one time I was on one of the many weight loss diets I have tried over the years. Carmen and I were visiting with our family and I made the mistake of telling them of my latest diet. Bad move on my part! It seemed the whole time I was there, I had to explain every bite of food I took, as to whether it was allowed on the diet or not. I was being judged every time I sat down to eat and believe me, it was not a fun visit!

Nor do we today seem to have much of a problem with holy days. Or do we?

When I was called to my first church\(^1\) after seminary, I tried to be sensitive to how others viewed the role of a pastor. In those days, there was some debate over what was proper for a Christian to do on Sunday.

One Sunday, friends invited us to go to a park with them. There was a lake there, so they said we could go swimming. Carmen and I had no problem with that. Our two young boys loved to swim and it would be a great time of good, clean family fun.

However, we lived beside three dear older ladies who were sisters and who were members of our church. They were very traditional and conservative. Unfortunately, our driveway was between our house and their house. As we dressed for the outing, putting on our bathing suits, I silently prayed that we could walk out and get in our car unseen by our dear friends next door.

As I walked out the front door and turned toward the driveway, I discovered that our very dear friends had chosen that day and that hour to sit out on their porch! Almost sheepishly, we greeted them and hurriedly got in our car and left.
Now I must say that our friends never did mention this incident and never did judge us for going swimming on Sunday. And, it was a wonderful day at the park.

Was I wrong for considering the feelings of our friends next door? I don’t think so. I believe that as Christians we should never flaunt our preferences. I would never want to cause anyone distress over something I would do, and that is why I was trying to be considerate of the beliefs of our dear friends next door.

One commentator said, of this passage from Romans, “It is tough to praise God if you are busy passing judgment on other people.”

I found a story which I want to share with you. A young minister graduated from seminary was called to a church in a very small town. He had been there only a couple of weeks when he received the call every new minister dreads, the call to do his first funeral.

The person who had died was not a member of his church. She was, in fact, a woman with a very bad reputation. Her husband’s job kept him away from home much of the time and she had rented rooms in their house to men who worked on the local railroad. Rumor had it that her behaviour was not always proper when her husband was away.

The young preacher, faced with this, his first funeral, could find no one who had a good word to say about this woman. That is, until he entered the local old-fashioned grocery store on the day before the funeral. He began to talk to the store owner about his sadness that the first person he would bury would be someone about which nothing good could be said.

The store owner didn’t reply at first and then, in his silence, he appeared to make a decision. He took out his store ledger and laid it on the counter between him and the minister. He opened the ledger, and covering the names in the left-hand column, he pointed to grocery bills written in red ink ~
groceries that people had bought on credit and then he pointed to the column that showed the bill had been paid.

He said, “Every month, that woman would come in and ask me who was behind in their grocery bills. It was usually some family who had sickness or death or some poor woman trying to feed her kids when her husband gambled away their money. She would pay their bill and she made me swear never to tell. But, I figure now that she is dead, people ought to know, especially those who benefitted from her charity and who have been most critical of her.”

And this brings to mind the words of Jesus, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.” (Matthew 21:31, NIV) Do you know to whom Jesus said this? The chief priests and the Pharisees (see Matthew 21:45). Scary, isn’t it? If these who were the leading religious figures of their day will have a hard time entering the kingdom of God, then how will you and I get in?

When I was a senior in college, I was very blessed to be called to my very first church as pastor. It was a small country church in the little village of Ashton, West Virginia. Our neighbors across the highway never bothered us, as they were a herd of cows whose passion every day was to graze in their pasture.

One of the dear saints in that church was a fine Christian lady named Cleo. Cleo was very aware of Jesus’ injunction that Christians should not judge. So, she would say, “We can’t judge, but we can be ‘fruit inspectors’.”

We are known by our fruits. May our fruit not be that of a judgmental spirit.

What about you and me? Do we have the judgmental spirit? Are we always looking at the other guy and pointing out his or her faults? Do we see the speck in their eye and ignore the log in our own eye? Could it be that our judgmental spirit comes from jealousy of the other person?
In these days together we are thinking about the community of Christ. We are thinking about what that community looks like and how it is different from the culture around us. We are thinking about our own role in that community and what our behaviour and our attitudes should be? So how do we measure up?

Did you notice how this passage from Paul ends? It says, “So each of us will have to explain to God about the things we do.” (Romans 14:12, ERV) Yes, every work we did here on earth will be judged. I recall my theology professor in seminary saying that he imagined that each of us would be standing there, before God, while every single action, every thought, every deed we ever did was read out loud. I sat there and got cold chills when he said that. Scary, isn’t it? Maybe we should watch what we say and what we do, for it will probably come back to haunt us.

I close with a quote from Jesus: “If you judge others, you will be judged the same way you judge them. God will treat you the same way you treat others.” (Matthew 7:2, ERV)

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, Father of all humankind, we ask that You would give us the humility and the insight to see the log in our own eye before we criticize the speck in the eye of the other person. In this community of Christ, the very body of our Lord Jesus, may we be loving toward each other and understanding of the various weaknesses we all have. May our doors always be open to the stranger who would come in to meet Jesus. We thank You for calling us together to be members of Your family, in Jesus’ name.

Amen

All Scripture references are from New International Version®, NIV®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984,
1. First Baptist Church, Ravenswood, West Virginia, where I was pastor from 1970 to 1973.
   www.fbcravenswood.org

2. “Commentary on Romans 14:1-12”, by Audrey West, Associate Professor of New Testament,
   Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago, IL,


4. “A group of individuals in charge of temple worship in Jerusalem, and regarded as leading
   representatives of the Jewish people, who came into conflict with Jesus Christ and plotted his

5. “Of the three major religious societies of Judaism at the time of the New Testament (the
   Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes), the Pharisees were often the most vocal and influential.
   . . . The name Pharisee in its Hebrew form means separatists, or the separated ones. They were also
   known as chasidim, which means loyal to God, or loved of God – extremely ironic in view of the
   fact that by His time, they made themselves the most bitter, and deadly, opponents of Jesus Christ
   and His message.” From “Who Were the Pharisees?”, by Wayne Blank,
   http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/pharisee.htm

6. Easy-to-Read Version (ERV), copyright © 2006 by World Bible Translation Center

7. Dr. Dale Moody, who was a professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1948
   to 1984.