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God Alone is Lord of the Conscience

Romans, Part LXII

Romans 14:1-12

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I. Old Covenant Shadows (Lev 11, 23)

Paul teaches that if a so-called brother breaks God's law, then we are to exclude him from the fellowship of the church unless he publicly repents of his sin (cf. 1 Cor 5:12-13). So does that include the food laws and festal laws of the old covenant? *"No! Not at all!"*

¹⁶So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

II. Overview (14:1-15:13)

We find ourselves at the beginning of an extensive section (14:1-15:13) which urges both Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome to _____ *one another*. He begins by exhorting, *"Receive one who is weak in the faith..."* (14:1) and concludes, *"Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God"* (15:7). The *"strong"* were those who understood that Jesus fulfilled and, thereby, *"abrogated"* (WCF 19.3) the ceremonial laws of the old covenant. The *"weak"* were those who continued to observe these ceremonial laws as a matter of personal conscience.

- 14:1-12 Do not despise or judge your brother regarding doubtful things [weak]
- 14:13-23 Do not cause your brother to stumble [strong]
- 15:1-6 Please your neighbor for his good that you may praise God together [strong]
- 15:7-13 Receive one another to the glory of God [all]

Romans 14:1-12

¹Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. ³Let 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.

⁴Who 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. ⁵One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He 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. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ¹¹For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God." ¹²So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

III. God in Christ is the Judge of His People

"God alone is Lord of the _____, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith or worship." (WCF 20.2)

A. Do not despise or judge your brother (1-3)

The *"strong"* understood the teaching of our Lord Jesus who declared all foods clean in the new covenant (cf. Mk 7:17-23; Acts 10:9-16). The *weak*, on the other hand, missed this redemptive change on some level. Nevertheless, Paul wants them both to *receive one another*; the *strong* must not despise nor the *weak* _____ his brother (3).

B. Who are you to judge another's servant? (4-9)

God alone is Lord of the conscience and, as regards the various ceremonial regulations of the old covenant, God has left our consciences free. In the new covenant, the critical issue is not the food or the festal calendar but a heart of worship and thanksgiving:

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim 4:1-5)

In the new covenant, *thanksgiving* sanctifies the food and hallows the day. What matters is not *what* you eat but *how* you eat it; not *which* festal days you observe but *how* you observe them. For "food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse" (1 Cor 8:8 cf. Rom 14:17).

C. Why do you judge your brother? (10-12)

IV. Thinking Biblically about Food

A. Ceremonial versus Moral Law (Mk 7:14-23)

Paul teaches that the *ceremonial laws* of the old covenant are no longer obligatory in the new. Rather they are *adiaphora*, matters of indifference. Jesus taught (cf. Rom 14:14):

¹⁴And [Jesus] called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." ¹⁷And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²²coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (Mk 7:14-23)

The Pharisees believed that the ritual purity laws taught that external purity makes one more acceptable to God. Jesus taught that they pointed to the need for internal purity.

B. The Meaning of Adiaphora

God's moral law alone regulates our _____. Where God has not spoken, therefore, we must make allowances for, we must *receive*, one another.

C. The Haughtiness of Foodies

"Over the past several years, through the steady evangelism of my wife, Deanna, I have become more and more convinced about the injustice and unhealthiness of our dominant systems of food production and consumption. For Deanna, this is expressed in a commitment to "good" eating – eating that is both healthy and just, enjoying foods that are the fruit of local gardens and farms, and eating foods that contribute to our flourishing." (Smith, *You are What You Love*, p. 59)

V. Conclusion