**The Book of Romans**

Part Five: God’s righteousness is revealed in His Loving Demands Upon His People. (Romans 12-15:13)

***Black and White or Gray?***

***Or, Why do we judge others?***

***Romans 14:1-18***

There are many clear commandments of Scripture, things that must be followed. These are things which, if ignored, create confusion in society, breakdown in relationships, and guilt within us. These are things which, as well, break or weaken our fellowship with God. Sins. But there are other things which are not as important or noteworthy, things about which Christians may differ. How are we to respond to such things, and how do we keep from looking down upon those who make different choices from our own? How do we preserve fellowship with those with whom we may disagree? Paul leaves us with several guiding principles.

***The Principle of Acceptance*** (Lighten up!) vv. 1-4

Welcome all, even those who may be “weak in faith,” but not as a pretext for arguments. Who are you to condemn someone Jesus has accepted? Paul is not denying that we must sometimes confront open sin (1 Corinthians 5:11-13; Matthew 18:15-20). But here the differences are in food choices, not sin, and these are not tests of fellowship.

***The Principle of Conscience*** (Live and let live!) vv. 5-9

We are free to choose, free to follow our conscience in observing holidays and what to eat. We are responsible only to God for such decisions, for we are His, and all of what we do (or eat) we do before Him and in His name. Make up your own mind about such things.

***The Principle of Accountability*** (Mind yourself!) v. 10-12

Like your brother or sister (whose behavior you may be questioning), you too will stand before the Lord to give an account. You will have your hands full with that, so concentrate on your own life, and stop worrying about someone else’s preferences. 2 Corinthians 5:10

***The Principle of Love*** (Stop judging!) vv. 13-18

Since all foods are clean (“kosher”), don’t let things like that be issues in relationships. Don’t create an unnecessary stumbling block (reason for offense). Love does not do that, but only what is good for our brothers and sisters in the faith. Matthew 18:1-14

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 Paul is addressing a burning issue of his day, namely, food restrictions of the Law and whether or not they were still applicable. That is not so much an issue in our own time, but there are many other choices which can become hotbeds for judgment and disagreement. We must not let that happen, for it unnecessarily divides the Body of Christ and creates barriers rather than bridges.

***1. We are family, not fruit inspectors.***

When our fellow believers follow differing paths in food, drink, recreation, music, or politics, we accept them because Jesus has accepted them.

***2. We are free, not in bondage.***

Freedom can be frightening, and so we turn to rules and laws to keep from having to think on our own. Don’t hide behind a tradition or trend to keep from making mature choices or allowing others to do the same.

***3. We are different, not the same.***

God could have made one kind of bird, mammal, or fish, one kind of flower or tree. But even a casual look around tells you that God loves diversity–in people, generations, and cultures, too. Deal with it. Embrace it. Enjoy it. It will do you good.