

**“The Vegan Option”**  
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**September 13, 2020**

**Romans 14:1-12**

<sup>1</sup>Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling 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 judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. <sup>4</sup>Who are you to pass judgment 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 honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor 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 judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment 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 God.”

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

One of the first transitions made by early Christians came because of the success of their missionaries. They went out spreading the Good News to any and all including pagans. Many of the new recruits were not schooled in the Hebrew Bible but they warmed to Jesus teachings. According to Matthew this process had already begun before Jesus death and resurrection, <sup>15:22-23</sup> a Canaanite woman arrived shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." But Jesus did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We think reluctance to change is a new thing but the first Jewish Christians responded reluctantly to letting all these unschooled heathen in the door because they did not know how to behave in church. There's that old saying about the camel. You don't let him poke his nose into the tent because soon it's full of camel and there's no room for the people.

The difficulty in this first challenge was just how much Jewish tradition should govern the rapidly heathenized church. There was a line where we stopped being Jewish and started being Christian. Today's passage emerges from the time of that crossing. You might have a hard time finding a butcher who offers sacrificed beef, although some Angus Cattle might not see it that way. In the cities of the Roman Empire the best source of steaks was the local temple. The priests couldn't eat it all and made a

lucrative side business selling off Jupiter and Juno's leftovers. Animal sacrifice was still being offered at the temple in Jerusalem so Jewish people saw eating food offered to other gods as betraying the one true God. So, who knew if that hamburger came from McDonalds or Minerva? There was a Far Side cartoon featuring Eve the snake and an apple and the snake is saying, "Well, I think it's been washed."

As we parted from Judaism we didn't do away dietary rules because of early compromises with the pagans, we were led by the spirit in ways that made embracing them possible. But we should never forget the parting that became Judaism and Christianity because the spirit may prompt us to retrieve things set aside when we embraced the new way. It got so bad at one point that a few Christians wanted to do away with the Hebrew Bible all together, I thank God that our rich tradition kept the first and only part of the Bible Christians needed. What gets thrown away in one era may become valuable in the next and so it's better to set aside what they kept as well as what they discarded.

Finally, there are a whole new set of reasons for people to only eat vegetarian or vegan and none of them involve sacrifice to other god's. Today people mind what they eat in order to care for God's creation in ways that would seem peculiar to the first believers. It is no longer a weakness that motivates food choices because we do not ascribe power to any other gods. So when I am enjoying *Tofurky* with my son in law again this Thanksgiving it is not a sign of weakness but strength of his commitment to the environment and our future. But, I still reserve the right to complain about it.