

September 13, 2020



We have chosen to follow Jesus' commandment to care for our neighbor, especially our most vulnerable neighbors (Matthew 22: 37-40), during the coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic. While we are not gathering at the church building, we have chosen to see this as a time for us to try new ways to worship, learn, pray, and stay connected ...after all, *God is always doing new things (Isaiah 43:1-19)!*

In these difficult times, we are committed to continuing to find ways to be the church.

Don't hesitate to be in touch if you need something, especially help...getting groceries or medicine, figuring out how to do all this online stuff, or just needing to chat. We are here to help!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Henry, the Elders, and Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Corona

In order to open the music, place the cursor on the title, press ctrl and click. That will take you to the appropriate YouTube location to open.

GATHERING SONG [Gather Us In](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us use this time to examine ourselves to see if we rest in faith. Let us pray that Christ's power may rest on us and reveal our weaknesses. May we discern the stirrings of divine power laid beneath the hardships of life in this time of worship

PRAYER

Gracious God, we thank you for your promise to be with us and among us today as we worship you in a spirit of humility and holiness. We invite you to be our "true mirror," to hold up before us your Word in such a way that we see our true selves. Help us also to see in a new way the fullness of your ineffable glory and transcendent grace and mercy. We await in the next hour your word to us, that by it we may be empowered to live in the world, announcing your rule of justice, reconciliation and peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Friend. Amen.

HYMN [Help Us Accept Each Other](#)

CALL TO CONFESSION

We know that we have not lived according to God's desires for us. The brokenness in the world, and the sin and despair in our hearts, threaten to consume us as a mighty flood. Yet God is our hope and our firm foundation. Let us confess our sin before our gracious God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Creating God, in love you moved over the waters of chaos and separated sea from dry land. And yet, we cling tightly to rigid boundaries of our own making. You claim us in the waters of baptism and declare us dead to sin and alive in Christ. But too often we deny that call, conforming ourselves to the whims of culture. At Pentecost, you released your wild and transforming spirit to flow through church and world. But we want to tame that wildness, channeling your spirit through banks of ordered safety. Transform us, we pray. Soften the unyielding edges of our hearts. Loosen our grip on "the way it's always been" and prepare us for the joy of "the way it still can be," through Jesus Christ. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Hear this good news. Jesus Christ is our ark! His power is unequalled, his grace is unrestrained, his strength is steadfast, and his embrace is sufficient to carry all that we are and hope to be. Believe the good news! In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

SCRIPTURE—Romans 14

Cultivating Good Relationships

¹ Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with—even when it seems that they are strong on opinions but weak in the faith department. Remember, they have their own history to deal with. Treat them gently.

²⁴For instance, a person who has been around for a while might well be convinced that he can eat anything on the table, while another, with a different background, might assume he should only be a vegetarian and eat accordingly. But since both are guests at Christ's table, wouldn't it be terribly rude if they fell to criticizing what the other ate or didn't eat? God, after all, invited them both to the table. Do you have any business crossing people off the guest list or interfering with God's welcome? If there are corrections to be made or manners to be learned, God can handle that without your help.

⁵Or, say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience.

⁶⁻⁹What's important in all this is that if you keep a holy day, keep it for God's sake; if you eat meat, eat it to the glory of God and thank God for prime rib; if you're a vegetarian, eat vegetables to the glory of God and thank God for broccoli. None of us are permitted to insist on our own way in these matters. It's God we are answerable to—all the way from life to death and everything in between—not each other. That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.

¹⁰⁻¹²So where does that leave you when you criticize a brother? And where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your where does that leave you when you condescend to a sister? I'd say it leaves you looking pretty silly—or worse. Eventually, we're all going to end up kneeling side by side in the place of judgment, facing God. Your critical and condescending ways aren't going to improve your position there one bit. Read it for yourself in Scripture:

“As I live and breathe,” God says,
“every knee will bow before me.
Every tongue will tell the honest truth
that I and only I am God.”

So, tend to your knitting. You've got your hands full just taking care of your own life before God.

SERMON

We who call ourselves Christian aspire to fulfill Christ's teaching—to do our best to be the body of Christ in the world. Yet, we find issues on which we cannot seem to agree. This isn't a new thing. The earliest Christians were torn apart by disagreements over what it meant to be faithful. Their differences were primarily over which laws were essential to follow and which engagements with the complex religious activities of the Roman Empire must be avoided. Disagreements included:

Whether a Christian could marry a non-believer. (No, according to 2 Corinthians 6:14; on the other hand, don't get a divorce, per 1 Corinthians 7:12-13.)

Whether a Christian man must be circumcised according to the Abrahamic covenant. (No, according to 1 Corinthians 7 and other Pauline letters, but others disagreed, per Acts 15.)

Whether a Christian woman was free to speak in church. (No, according to 1 Corinthians 14:34, but in 11:5 women are instructed to wear a head covering when they pray or prophesy.)

Whether a Christian could eat meat that had been offered to idols—so common a practice in the empire that by the time meat came to market, it would have been dedicated to some god. (No, according to Acts 15:28-29, but sure, if you understand that idols are not real, per 1 Corinthians 8:1-6.)

Paul is well known for his “when in Rome.....” statement. He makes clear that matters of food and drink and rigorously maintained schedules of discipline are matters of “things indifferent” to the status of one's salvation. Instead, Paul's words suggest that the attitude Christians should practice is one of acceptance and compassion for other members of their faith community.

He begins by encouraging all members of the community of faith to “welcome” those who are weak. The purpose of a Christian community is not to achieve total homogeneity, but to accommodate all into the household of faith on equal ground. As his example, Paul takes the issue of diet — a thorny point since Jews and Gentiles both began identifying themselves as “Christians.” It is not clear from Paul's reference here, however, just who the “weak,” these “vegetarians,” are — Jew or Gentile. There are no mandates against eating meat in the Hebrew Scriptures — indeed, the post-flood covenant God made with Noah (Genesis 9:2-3) specifically stipulated that humans could now be carnivores with a clear conscience. There were, of course, the later Levitical restrictions on the types of meat that were “clean” and on the proper way to prepare meat (removing the blood). But meat itself was not viewed as suspect in any way. Indeed, the rituals of temple worship were quite bloodthirsty — Yahweh demanded and received burnt offerings of fat and meat regularly.

Still, there were certain minority Jewish groups, who abstained from both meat and wine. Various non-Jewish groups also picked up this trait as well, as signs of their commitment to both a simple asceticism and a life of nonviolence. Still another reason for hesitancy to eat meat among both Jewish and Gentile Christians was a fear of eating that which had previously been ritually offered to a pagan deity. Paul addresses this possibility directly in 1 Corinthians 8, and it may be the reason behind these “weak” Roman Christians refusing meat. Finally, it is interesting to note here that Paul uses the term “weak” to indicate those who appear to have the strongest commitment to a disciplined lifestyle.

Paul is not concerned with proving one group more right than another. The crux of his argument is that just as God has welcomed all kinds of believers into the household of faithfulness, all those who serve within that household must learn to accept each other.

What Paul does insist upon is conviction — for nothing irks Paul as much as a tepid faith, a lukewarm commitment. Just as Paul had made “honor” a primary component of Christian character in Romans 12:10, he insists here that the ultimate concern of all Christians remains honoring God.

Paul crafts a masterful argument full of carefully balanced opposites. He begins by holding up living and dying to ourselves in contrast to living and dying “to the Lord.” Both Jewish and Hellenistic thought abhorred the selfish mindset Paul preaches against. Self-centeredness was generally decried as an empty, futile gesture.

Paul stresses the unity of this human family once again. Just as all are members of the same household of faith, all will stand before the Divine at the time of judgment.

Emphasizing Christ's lordship continually and vigorously is what makes Paul so sure that diverse perspectives, opinions and lifestyles are all acceptable within the Christian community. As long as believers have Christ at the center of their faith, Paul allows for all manner of diversity to remain within the Christian fold.

Culture wars do live on, don't they? The issues are different, but the temptation is the same: for conservative Christians to judge those who follow a more inclusive, culturally adapted way as unclean and unfaithful, and for liberal Christians to judge those who follow a more strict, literalistic law as narrow-minded and unfaithful.

Paul's warning to the early Christians on either side is this: if you are going to engage with one another only to do battle, don't bother. You may loathe the decisions your fellow Christians are making, but you do not get to be the judge. The only judge that matters is the Lord, to whom we are all accountable.

Despising one another is not a mark of *any form of Christianity*. *Instead, try asking what priorities the Lord has for our lives. For in the end, we are all accountable to God.*

Many preachers, especially, have hated compromise. Charles Stanley, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Atlanta, calls compromise a "landmine." Other preachers point to the "danger" and "storms" of compromise, and offer, thankfully, how one might "weather the storms" of compromise.

Still others note the "high cost" of compromise. Some see compromise as an enemy that must be "conquered." Some consider compromise a pact with the devil. "Better to die with conviction, than to live with compromise," said the late Adrian Rogers, pastor, author and president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

There are very few sermons in praise of compromise.

To be fair, when preachers rail against compromise, they're generally shouting about the danger of setting aside one's principles and core values in order to achieve unity, friendship or cooperation. Most preachers will acknowledge in a brief comment that compromise can be a good thing and perhaps even a necessary strategy. But having said this, as almost an afterthought, the pulpit pounding against compromise resumes.

Is it okay to compromise my core beliefs?

Of course not. No one wants to, or should, sacrifice their fundamental, absolute, core beliefs on the altar of public opinion. No one is comfortable with going along to get along. However, would it not be a good idea to be willing to reexamine one's core beliefs, given that yesterday's heresy is often today's orthodoxy?

And, as one surveys the theological history of the church, have not some so-called "core beliefs" changed, been modified and, on occasion, repudiated? Further, what kind of faith, what sort of mindset is it that is not afflicted, assailed and assaulted from time to time by doubts and misgivings? What sort of faith is an unexamined faith? Many of the great thinkers of the church wrestled with doubts.

Mother Teresa: "Darkness is such that I really do not see — neither with my mind nor with my reason — the place of God in my soul is blank — There is no God in me — when the pain of longing is so great — I just long and long for God ... The torture and pain I can't explain."

Martin Luther, whose willingness to reexamine what he had believed for most of his life led to the Protestant Reformation, once wrote about a crisis of faith: "For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy of God."

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon "Desire of the Soul in Spiritual Darkness," bluntly claimed: "I think, when a man says, 'I never doubt,' it is quite time for us to doubt him, it is quite time for us to begin to say, 'Ah, poor soul, I am afraid you are not on the road at all' ..."

Pope Francis: “If one has the answers to all the questions — that is the proof that God is not with him. It means that he is a false prophet using religion for himself. The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble.”

These quite earnest Christians may not have been seeking a theological compromise, but the very fact that they did not consider their belief system to be set in theological concrete tells us that all this shouting about not compromising our fundamental values and core beliefs is a bit silly. The landscape of church history is littered with the detritus of whitened theological bones:

The Great Schism of 1054, which separated Eastern and Western rite churches, was about the Greek word *filioque and its meaning*.

Many of the creeds of the ancient church were formulated in the context of hotly debated theological issues, which the average pastor today would have difficulty explaining to a puzzled congregation.

The core beliefs of some Christians have banned instrumental music, icons, dramas and dancing.

The core beliefs of other Christians insist on Saturday worship, while others insist on only Sunday worship.

For hundreds of years, the core beliefs of many Christians sanctioned the institution of slavery.

Therefore, maybe we should hesitate a moment before saying that to compromise a core belief is akin to making a pact with the devil. Our fundamental, essential beliefs must always be available for scrutiny, open to criticism and amenable to reason.

But then, what about issues that are not so fundamental? Paul addresses this question about non-essentials in these verses.

The problem was, in short, that what Paul deemed to be non-essential, some conscientious Roman Christians believed to be fundamental, non-negotiable core values.

Unfortunately, these Christians are described as “weak,” whereas Paul identifies himself and those of his camp as “strong” believers. “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak” (15:1). In writing in this way, he immediately sets up a rivalry: the strong vs. the weak; us vs. them. Strong is a positive word; weak is a negative word. And you have to wonder if Paul was aware that the “weak” were in the room. “Um, Paul, we’re right here! We can hear everything you’re saying.”

It’s not likely that the so-called weak were very happy with that classification. But they probably found some consolation by believing that although they might be weak, they were most decidedly *right*. *And they would take orthodoxy any day of the week. Call us whatever name you want, they say, but we happen to have the Bible on our side.*

Paul, of course, disagrees. What makes strong Christians strong, in his view, is their willingness not to patronize their weaker siblings, but rather to work with them to achieve goals they have in common — thus allowing for cooperation in the spreading of the gospel.

Still, Paul is concerned about these strong Christians, not the weak ones. The weak ones are entrenched. Nothing can be done about them. But strong Christians need to be mature to reach out to the weak and maintain a connection with them. They should be neighborly: “Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor” (15

The strong should also be welcoming. They should choose their battles and remember that most things are nonessential issues: “Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions”.

It Is Not About Us

The strong rightly remember that in all the theological fussing that so often dominates our disputes, it is not about us. It is about God. “We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 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” (vv. 7-8).

Paul hopes that the strong will remember not to sit in judgment of their weaker siblings. He asks: Who are we to judge? “Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall” (v. 4). And, in case the strong miss the point, he repeats it a few verses later: “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” (v. 10). Clearly, the apostle is more irritated with these strong Christians than the weak ones. They must learn not to “pass judgment” or to “despise” their siblings in the faith.

Compromise Is Not a Dirty Word

Unfortunately, in some compromises, the satisfaction of compromise is often missing. There’s often a sour aftertaste that makes both parties in the crisis leery of future negotiations.

- Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

—John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961*.

- “Compromise” is so often used in a bad sense that it is difficult to remember that properly it merely describes the process of reaching an agreement. Naturally there are certain subjects on which no man can compromise. For instance, there must be no compromise under any circumstances with official corruption, and of course no man should hesitate to say as much.

—Theodore Roosevelt, *The Outlook, July 28, 1900*.

There are pastors and congregations who have left the denomination rather than “compromise” their opinion on one issue. There are politicians that we have elected who seem currently unable to arrive at any decision to benefit the greater good.

Compromise includes the root “com,” which means together, and “promise.” The idea is that we learn to make promises based upon agreement or coming together.

One must decide if this is okay. If it is not, then reconciliation may not be possible. If it is, the whole thing might be messy and chaotic, but glorious!

AFFIRMATION

[I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light](#)

Joys & Concerns

Please Pray for Teri White's newest granddaughter Colbie (Alyssa's baby). Colbie is not gaining weight and if she has gained any weight by Thursday the doctor will send her to a children's hospital to run tests. Alice Reille fell and injured her back. She is in a rehabilitation facility.

Continuing Prayers

Continued prayers for Rochelle. Prayers for our country and elected ones. All people, law enforcement & civilians, affected by current violence in this country. Lynn Rodisch - healing. Pete - healing. Kofi - prayer. Loren Nelson - continued prayer.

Please Pray During Week of September 13, 2020 for the families of:

- ◆ Judie Deupree
- ◆ Gerald & Ryan Marie Gonzalez



if you have a prayer request or joy to share, contact any session member, Pastor Henry, the prayer chain at mom4tc@sbcglobal.net, or judy@fpc-corona.org.

During this time of being apart,
remember that your Deacons are
available if you are in need of help.

PRAYER

As we enter this time of prayer, O God, we offer our gratitude that you are always present to us. Instill in us a desire to listen to others. Help us listen with open hearts and open minds, that people might feel safe in our presence. Instill in us a spirit of serenity that others might feel accepted in your nonjudgmental grace. Free us from the tendency to label people and ideas and allow us instead to lean into mercy and kindness. In the stillness of these moments, we acknowledge the times when we have been less than kind, merciful and open. Thank you for never banning us from your presence, loving God; help us so to love and accept others. Amen.

HYMN

[We Are Called](#)

BENEDICTION

Pardoned by God's abounding grace, empowered by God's constant love and protected by God's peace, let us go forth to serve God and others, always humbly aware of our own shortcomings, but always encouraged by the faithful and loving presence of God in Christ Jesus, to whom be glory and power, now and forever. Amen.

RESPONSE

[City of God](#)

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