

Scripture Reading: Romans 14:10-13

<sup>10</sup> But you, why do you judge 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>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup> For it is written,

**As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God.**<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead, decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.

Intro: Good morning Church! Before I get into the sermon this morning can I ask a favor of everyone here? Not that you get a choice, but I like to ask anyways. Can you do me a favor and for the next 30 or so minutes; take God seriously but not yourself. Take God serious but not your self. We are going to get things wrong and usually don't have all the information, so lets take our selves with a grain of salt.

Why do I ask that? Well, who here has argued over a a pointless and insignificant things? I know every married couple here ought to be rasing your hand. One of my recent arguments or agitations... If you have attend a church for any significant period of time you probably should have raised your hand too. I have had my fair share of interesting points of contention. Whearing a sweater to preach, where I look when I preach.

Main Point: Do not argue about disputable matters but honor Christ as Lord in all things.

1. Welcome one another without arguing.

Welcome anyone who is weak in faith but don't argue about disputed matters. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while one who is weak eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat, and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls. And he will stand, because the Lord is able<sup>[a]</sup> to make him stand.

We are missing some information about what Paul addresses in these verses. He and his recipients know exactly the fiction taking place in the church, but we don't. We have to piece the story together with the bits of information we have. There are two camps in the Roman church. Remember, it is not a single church that meets in one building but a series of house churches that support one another. Two camps exist, one Paul considers weak, and we infer there is a strong one. Who are they?

The week camp has committed to being vegetarian and selected a specific day of the week as holy. The Strong camp, one that Paul seems to place himself into, eats freely and worships freely without concern.

- The Weak: Jewish Christians whose upbringing encompassed strict holiness codes to abide by. For them holiness and purity meant abstaining from certain foods and observing the Sabbath for most of their lives. Keeping these codes for Jews determined a person's standing/relationship with God. So how were they weak? They had a shaky grasp of the fundamental doctrines of Jesus's message. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In this sense, they are weak. Therefore, Paul defines the weak as any person who prescribes a belief or action as necessary for faithfulness that God himself has not clearly communicated.
- The Strong: By contrast, the strong are Gentile believers (though not exclusively given Paul includes himself) who do not have the same considerations or loyalty to a Jewish holiness code. Paul addresses them first, as they are the majority group in the Roman church. Here is what is key, strong are to initiate the welcoming of the week back into fellowship. In our context 6 years the Jews had been exiled from the city of Rome by Emperor Claudius, and their slow return meant the Gentile Christians were the ones doing the welcoming. Paul defines the strong as any person who truly knows the gospel and does not look down upon but welcomes those still figuring it out.

A warm welcome ought to be the hallmark of Christian fellowship. More than a "hello" or how are you, but a hospitable welcome like inviting someone into your home. What's mine is yours. Is that true of CCC? It is truer of us than it is not, but we have not perfected it, nor will we. As perfecting Christians, arguing amongst one another over what Paul calls "disputable matters" continues.

What are disputable matters? Clearly, Paul reveals the existence of things, activities, beliefs, or preferences that are neither good nor bad. They are neutral. Is everything a disputable matter according to God? No. Is the Christian life determined and ridged? No. How do we determine what is disputable or not?

A disputable matter is anything about which scripture is silent or under-determinative. The two examples Paul is adjudicating are diet and days for worship. Under the New Covenant's authority, both are no longer mandated codes to adhere to. A Christian can practice them freely or not. These are not the only disputable matters in existence. We tend to elevate tertiary beliefs and preferences to a position of centrality in a person's faithfulness, even salvation.

A disputable matter might be how often we practice communion, our dress code for church, what worship style we prefer, or even to what politician we vote for. The practice of elevating disputable matters does not lend itself to welcoming one another but to futile arguing.

The extent of their accusations reached an extreme. Verse 4 is Paul's communication to the weak, affirming the validity of the strong's salvation. Standing and falling language is a simple explanation of our salvation. Our ability to stand during judgment is solely a responsibility of God. We are not immune from taking our disputes to the extreme of doubting one another's salvation. What will keep us from becoming a church divided over disputable matters? What will ensure we are warmly welcoming one another? A commitment to humility and exhortation.

2. Whoever \_\_\_\_\_, does it for the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same. Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord.<sup>[b]</sup> Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives for himself, and no one dies for himself.

I intentionally left the point blank for you to fill in your disputable matter. The point presented like this reveals we have a lot in common with each other despite our differences.

The two groups have a tangible distinction on the surface but have more in common than they don't. First, they both believe in Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Paul addresses them as the body of Christ and insists on calling them brothers and sisters. Second, they both were critical of each other. Each group has transgressed a standard that should not be crossed within the church. Lastly, they both will be judged by the Lord. A frightening reality, yes, but a unifying one.

Our truest priority or loyalty is not to our preferences or pet doctrines but to Jesus Christ. The second person of the trinity who is both Messiah and Lord. As Lord, he receives everything our life produces and endures. What does he receive; honor, glory, praise, devotion as a result of how we live our life. In turn, we enjoy the satisfaction and fullness of life that we were created to know.

We can easily be a people 2000 years in the future looking back at a tense situation and saying, "trivial things to squabble about." Not to them, it wasn't. Our squabbles over disputable things are just as trivial. Styles of worship, choice of schooling, decisions during Covid, styles of teaching, Missionaries to support, or drinking beer or wine, what toilet paper to use. The list is exhaustive. The only metric Paul offers as a controlling condition for disputable matters is; whether it is done for the Lord. That is why I have intentionally placed a blank space in the point. What secondary issue has your attention?

Paul applies this metric first introspectively. The end of verse five stresses that "each one be fully convinced in his own mind." Is your conscience settled according to the clear principles taught in scripture? If it is, act according to the conviction the Lord has laid upon you.

Examples of a settled conscience... Paul was a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks.

Three things guard our hearts against prescribing our disputable position to others.

- Thankfulness for what God has called us to. In the text, Paul advocated gratitude for each camp's position. We thank God for salvation. What we have been saved from and for what we have been saved to. God uniquely allows us to honor him in a diverse community of believers. We are thankful for who God is choosing to lead us, that may or may not be like other believers. A grateful person is more likely not to hold a grudge.
- Exhort one another to honor Christ. Assist one another in developing a clear conscience. With scripture as our guide, invite yourself into a person's perspective and conviction. We have blind spots and mixed motivations; therefore, we need one another to sure up our hearts. (Hebrews 3:13) Instead of offering your prescription of what you think is right, invite the other person to describe how God is leading them.
- Trust Jesus as the judge. We don't have to trust our judgment or perspective concerning a person. We leave final judgment to Christ as long as we faithfully exhort another according to God's word. There is great freedom in not having to adjudicate on every matter. We are not omniscient, so we must concede God might be leading a person in a way that is different than mine.

If you are unsure of these principles' ability to guard your heart. Read Colossians 3:15-17 with me. Paul states these three points even more plainly than in Romans.

<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. (We are unified in the peace of Christ ruling our hearts) And be thankful. (The first of 3 admonishments to give thanks, but for what. That God has spoken to us by settling our mind on a course of action) <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,<sup>[a]</sup> (The word of God is an anchor for our exhortation and encouragement towards one another) singing to God with gratitude (Second time) in your hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,(Whatever we do, it is for the Lord because he is Lord and judge overall) giving thanks to God the Father through him. (It begins and ends with thankfulness!)

We are unified in the peace of Christ ruling our minds. A peace that begins with the belief that...

3. Christ is Lord over the living and the dead.

<sup>8</sup>If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Christ died and returned to life for this: that he might be Lord over both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup>But you, why do you judge 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>[c]</sup> <sup>11</sup>For it is written,

**As I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow to me, and every tongue will give praise to God.<sup>[d]</sup>**

<sup>12</sup>So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul expands our focus from disputable matters to something undisputable for the weak and the strong camps; Jesus is Lord over everything. All creation falls under the rule and authority of Jesus. Including those who have died. Why does Paul need to intensify the discussion drastically? To remove the confusion that we are not our own Lord, let alone lord over another person.

At the begging of Chapter 13, we highlighted God's ideal role for government. The government often, as Caesar did, assumes a sphere of authority that belongs to God alone. In our passage, we are just as guilty of taking authority that is not ours. We are guilty of being the authority over another person in place of God. When that happens our community ceases to have welcoming hospitality. It becomes cold, isolated, and threatening. Christ died on the cross and rose again for this authority. What have we done... nothing by comparison.

Ex. Only God can Judge me!. I had a friend growing up in High school whose brother went and got a tattoo. I can't remember if his parents knew, but that is beside the point now. The tattoo itself was not the problem. It was what he got tattooed. Across his shoulder. He put the endearing message of "Only God Can Judge Me." I think tattoo's are a disputable matter, so if you do get one, I would advise you not to get one that says, "Only God Can Judge Me." Why? Yes, only God can indeed judge you, but there is only one real reason why a person says that to another. It is a license to do what I want. Let alone inviting the judgment of God is not an admirable thing.

God being our judge is a humbling affirmation, not a boastful one. We will be judged by the same standard by which we judge. Despite our knowledge of this, why is it easy to assume the judge's authority in disputable matters? A better question might be, why does it feel like our secondary or tertiary positions are so important? We desire to be faithful and safeguard the sacred.

They are extensions of our primary desire to be faithful. Remember, two years ago, we rebuilt the stage. Moving the cross that is not in the grand hall from the wall behind me was a big point of contention. Our passion is understandable because we want affirmation about our perfection of faithfulness. However, what it means to be a faithful follower of Jesus is not cookie-cutter, or

one size fits all. Beyond the essential doctrines of the gospel and church health and practices, there is liberty in Christ for differences. That reveals two things baked into the cake of the family of God.

- Charity is essential for unity – Instead of despising one another as a threat to our faithfulness. Cherish one another as imagers who are called to the same faithful standard as you but not the exact path.
- Disagreements can glorify God – God is honored and glorified ultimately when we disagree about a disputable matter but continue warmly welcoming one another in the bonds of fellowship.

Paul's conclusion in verse 13 emphasizes our action point today:

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.

The cross should be the only stumbling block you or I experience on Sunday. Not our disagreeable matters. There is a time and place for them in edifying conversations. Here is a helpful resource for us from Dr. Gavin Ortlund's book: *Find the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*

1. Doctrines essential to the gospel Paul presents a hierarchy of doctrine in 1 Cor. 15 when he states, "We delivered to you what was of first importance." First doctrines are the Nature of God as Triune, the Divinity of Jesus, the Authority of Scripture, Justification, or anything that pertains to salvation and the final state of the individual.
2. Doctrines urgent for the health and practice of the church. Gender roles in ministry, the importance of specific gifts. Church governance structure, nature of man, view of baptism ...
3. Doctrines essential for one branch of theology or another that don't lead to division. End time positions, old earth or young earth...
4. Doctrines unimportant for ministry collaboration. Tattoos, head coverings,

Don't divide or non-essential matters, instead honor Christ as Lord in all things.

## Communion:

Brothers and sisters, we come now to the holy table of the Lord as Jesus instructed in saying, "do this in remembrance of me."

Coming to this table, we are to remember Christ and all he has done for us:

- He was sent into the world according to the promises made in the Old Testament
- He draped himself in humanity, becoming flesh and blood like us.
- He bore the wrath of God on our behalf, freeing us from everlasting death
- He lived in perfect obedience to divine law and imparted to us his righteousness resulting in the promise of
- everlasting life.
- He took the curse of sin upon himself so that we would inherit God's blessing apart from the demands of the law
- He confirmed the new and eternal covenant of gracious reconciliation by the shedding of his blood and the affirmation that "It is finished."

Though the invitation of this meal is to all who believe, we cannot approach this table frivolously. Jesus, Himself dismissed Judas from the table before instituting the ordinance. The Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians that some in their community were sick and had died because they partook in an unworthy manner. It is good and right to self-reflect and see if we have, by our sin and selfishness, divided the body of Christ. If we have, let us turn to confession, repentance, and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters before we partake in the meal.

As the symbol of our unity as the family of God, we hold on to the communion elements until all have received them, and then we take them together. If you need a gluten-free option, please hold your hand up, and an usher will bring one around to

you.