

Romans 14:7-12 (NKJV)

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

8 For 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.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10 But 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.

11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Do you remember our topic?

Paul is telling us how to get along when we have differences of opinion. These are sincere differences in what we believe. And you know what? We have reasons for those differences. We have used our minds, some better than others, to come to some conclusion on a matter. And we think we are right about it.

We had a very good question in Sunday School about this matter.

The question was asked in my paraphrase, since everyone can have a different opinion about **everything**, how do you know when it is a disputable matter and how do you know when it is an absolute?

I think we need to know the answer to that. The example of homosexuality was brought up. There are many people claiming to be believers in Christ and at the same time they claim to believe that homosexual practice is allowed by God. Is this one of those disputable topics? How do we know? How can we be sure?

I believe that the answer to this issue and all issues is determined by a **proper approach** to reading, studying and understanding scripture. There are **rules of interpretation** that many of us have learned for determining what scriptures says, regardless of what we wish it would say. As we apply those rules to our study, it will become obvious where two people could see the scriptures differently and where what scripture says is so plain it cannot be misunderstood. I think the prohibition of homosexual practice is one of those things that is so clearly stated that one must violate interpretive rules to come up with a different conclusion. I believe I could prove that to anyone willing to agree on the rules of interpretation. Every sincere debate about what scripture says needs to begin with agreeing on the rules of interpretation and about agreeing that the Bible is

the inspired Word of God. If we agree on those things, we are agreeing on the ground rules of how to proceed.

Paul is not encouraging us here to go soft on doctrine. The whole New Testament warns of error that the elders are responsible to guard against. So it isn't like suddenly every opinion is as good as any other opinion.

I was reading R.C. Sproul's commentary and he was talking about the issue of alcohol. And as I was reading I chuckled aloud at this gem. It is one of those "Ruth" funnies. They are things I read and I think Ruth would laugh.

He was talking about those who try to prove that alcohol is forbidden. His quote is- I am not going to get into that side issue except to say that it involves EXEGESIS OF DESPAIR in order to try and demonstrate that the word *oinos* in the New Testament does not mean real wine. A lot of people practice Exegesis of despair. They are desperate to have the Bible **say something** so they will twist it until it does. Paul is not encouraging us to become a victim to exegesis of despair. But he is showing us how not to be dogmatic about that which scripture is not clear, or where it can easily be viewed in two ways.

Now, on the surface you might think, oh there may be a few of those things, but I doubt there are very many. I was thinking about that this week. You know what? There are a lot! Keep in mind these should all be things that would not stop us from warmly welcoming another believer into our fellowship.

Think about these:

Mode of baptism, whether sprinkling or immersion.

Giving and receiving of wedding rings

Use of cosmetics

Consumption of alcohol

Armenian beliefs as opposed to Sovereign Grace beliefs

Keeping the Sabbath verses believing it is fulfilled in Christ

Church governance- should the ultimate authority be the local church or a hierarchy?

Liberal political views or Conservative political views

Views on how much we should give in our service to the civil government

How to carry out proper worship expression in church

The use of spiritual gifts in the church

How OT prophecy has been or will be fulfilled

When and how the millennium will be established

How do history and end times studies fit together

The precise nature of heaven and hell

How the trinity fits together
How to best use church funds.

And this just skims the surface.

Do you get the importance of this? **We** tend to have a comfortable existence because on **most things** we see eye to eye. We are small and don't have widely varying opinions on most things. I said last week that we may have a few differences that are substantial. But suppose you have a church of 5 thousand people instead of 30 people. Dealing with these issues becomes vital at that point. The leadership would need to be very adept at **judging** (that bad word) what is disputable and what is not, who should be **warmly welcomed** into the church and who should not.

Both judging and dogma are good words, but they are only good when they are applied properly. We can never allow our dogma, our firm conviction on the right of a cause, to divide, unless that which we are dogmatic about God is dogmatic about. We have to judge and discern properly. I know I keep saying this. But I think it is that important. How many churches do you know of that you would be kicked out of because of what you believe? If you are a believer, Paul would have none of that. I hope that not a single one of us leaves this passage without doing business with what Paul is saying. **Opinions about disputable things, even errant ones, should not be allowed to create division.**

Just one more example of the dangers of not doing this.

Here is what I found in the statement of faith in just one church. Remember these are things you must believe to be welcomed into that fellowship.

The King James Version of the Bible shall be the official and only translation used by the church or any of its ministries.

We believe in the bodily, personal, premillennial return of Jesus Christ; that He will come before the seven year tribulation period to catch away His church, coming only into the air, and that He will come this His church at the close of the tribulation to judge the living nations and to set up His kingdom on earth.

We believe that God is sovereign in the bestowment of all His gifts; and, that the gifts of evangelist, pastors, and teachers are sufficient for the perfecting of the saints today; and, that speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles

(such as healings, restoration of hearing, sight, etc., and raising from the dead) gradually ceased as the New Testament Scriptures were completed and their authority became established.

Do you see the danger? There is a great danger of rejecting those whom God has accepted. This type of thing doesn't come from Paul's teaching. And we have got to be careful not to do things like this.

Now on to our text this morning.

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

8 For 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.

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

We talked last week about being the Lord's and how Paul dealt with that. We talked about our need of perspective. We need to see ourselves as living to the Lord. We are not here for us. We are alive for Him. His purposes **far exceed** ours in importance. We have been bought. We are not our own. And as we get our heads wrapped around that a lot of our gripes and discontentments fly right out the window. They are groundless. They are based on a wrong view of life.

Here Paul goes on. He takes three verses to emphasize this point. So we must believe it is important.

In verse 7 he tells us that this life is not primarily about us. It is not primarily focused around us. We are not in it **just by myself**.

Verse 8 gives us the real picture, the full picture, the picture we often need to see. If we are believers and we are breathing, we are living for the purposes of One greater than us. We live to the Lord. We live for His purposes. So if you are breathing this morning, and it looks like most of you are, you are still living for one reason. The Lord has a purpose for your life. And that is the most important thing you can do with your time.

But what if you die? Are we then released from our obligation? Are we then released from our Lord's loving care? Have we escaped his purpose at that point? No. If we die, we die to the Lord. We are still His. We are still in His purpose. He still has a plan for us. How do we know that is true?

9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

This is one of those things that scripture repeats over and over and over again. And what does that tell us? It is important. Christ came with an end in mind. It

was not purposeless. It was **full of** purpose. And it was for this end that He came. He came to die. Now that was not wonderful for Him. But it is truly wonderful for us. He came to take upon himself the full wrath of God for every believer's sin. Have you committed sins that you know you deserve punishment for? Maybe there are things in your memory that you keep carefully hidden because you really don't think they **can be** forgiven. But that is the point of Christ's death. If you come to faith in Him, His death was because of sins like yours. Your sins and mine demanded justice from the hand of God. They deserved death. And that is exactly the price that God demanded of Christ. Make no mistake, Christ died because of God. Christ died because our sin demanded death in God's scope of justice. And only **He** could satisfy God's **demand** for justice while allowing us to **escape** that judgment. That is what His death was all about.

But then we are told He arose. That was God's **endorsement** on what His Son had done. God raised up His Son to life so that all who would ever believe on Christ would know that what Christ did **worked**. And while we can **follow Him** in life, we can now be saved from death and **follow Him in an afterlife**. He truly is the God of the living and the dead. And that is not just true about you. That is true of every believer. Do you see the implication that Paul is making?

You know that person who has political views that really get under your skin, but he truly believes in Christ? He is in exactly the same state you are. He is in the Lord. You are in the Lord. The Lord loved him every bit as much as he loved you. He spent for him every bit as much as he spent for you. And it didn't take any more to save him than it took to save you. That is the point. We have Christ's death, burial and resurrection in common.

So how are you going to treat that person with whom you have all kinds of differences of opinions? Will you judge him or despise him? Or will you love him like Christ loved you?

OK, now let's move on to verse 10. Notice what he says.

10 But 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.

Here Paul jumps right back to 3. It was there he warned the better informed brother not to despise the less informed brother. He also warned the less informed brother not to judge the more informed brother.

Another way of putting this is that the brother with the stronger position should not give the smile of disdainful contempt. The brother with the weaker position should not give the frown of condemnatory judgment.

But notice the word **brother** used here.

Up until now we have been given a few reasons to receive each other.

The **first** reason was because God has received us.

The **second** reason was that Christ is the Lord and Master of both of us.

Here is the **third** reason. That person is family. Both people, both positions are brothers. We are related because of big brother Christ. We are spiritual kin. So why would you do anything to mar that relationship? It is like they are **one of you**.

When I was in college I had a few heartbreaks. Some would say they were predictable enough to be regarded as self inflicted. But they were heartbreaks none the less. And they left me in despair. I found an odd response well up in me. I wanted to call home. Now my family wasn't real lovey dovey. And in reality, we didn't talk a lot about things that mattered. But when I needed support I still called home. They were my storge family. I knew instinctively they were for me. They may have had a funny way of showing it, but I knew they were in my corner.

Well if that is true of many storge families, shouldn't it be even more true of our spiritual families? We have the perfect Father- a heavenly Sovereign omniscient, omnipresent Dad that our hearts are welcomed to cry out to. We have big brother Jesus who has gone through everything we have gone through, yet without sin. And then we have our pesky little brothers, the ones that have wacky opinions that get under our skin. Or the bigger brothers who think they know it all. Given the light of everything, do we really think we can break up this family over something so stupid? Do we really think that we are so important that what happens **to them** really doesn't matter? If we understand family we would never say anything so stupid. That person is our brother or sister after all. They are a significant part of our lives. And if we forget, brother Jesus is going to let us know. And Father God will intervene as well. We cannot lose perspective of the bigger picture when we are dealing with those who are different from us.

So that was the third reason to love those with different opinions. They are related.

And now for the **fourth** reason.

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

11 For it is written: "As I live, says the LORD, Every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

The fourth reason we should not judge is because we will stand before a greater judge. There is accountability. We will answer to a Judge.

Now you might think- ah that isn't for me. I am a Christian. My sins have been removed as far as the east is from the west. I am good. I have a legal technicality. I will not be judged.

Well that is not exactly what scripture says. It does say that all the sins that a believer will commit have already been forgiven by the work of Christ. His blood covered that debt. That is true. But that does not mean that God has been rendered stupid. There still is objective truth that God will act upon.

Let's look at what other passages say about the judgment of Christians.

1 Corinthians 3:7-15 (NKJV)

7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is.

14 If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward.

15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

This judgment that believers will face is frequently called the judgment of works.

This is not to determine whether a person will enter God's kingdom. That has already been determined and it will not be undone. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. There are many promises to that end.

But we see here what is expected of us.

Ephesians tells us:

Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

If you are a believer, God saved you for good works. He has in mind how you are to live to Him. And there is work that is to be done His way. And guess what it has to do with? People! That is what God loves.

Now look at our I Cor text.

First Paul uses the field metaphor. The spiritual work is one of planting and watering. We find in other places that the work we should be doing is spreading the gospel wherever we go. We are to plant the seed. And where others have already planted the seed, we are to aid its growth. We should minister to people in a way that helps that word of God grip their lives.

Then Paul uses the building metaphor and he says that the church is the building. And that building needs to be built properly and carefully. There is a right way to do it and a wrong way. Scripture gives us guidance in all of that. So we can easily know if we are doing it right or wrong.

But there are plenty who appear to be building like crazy, but they are using the wrong building materials. They are using cheap stuff. They are appealing to flesh to build the church of God. They are using the power of positive thinking. They don't mention sin. They don't mention blood. They don't mention wrath. They don't mention judgment. They talk about happiness. They sell good feelings. Or maybe they build a building using the tools of human guilt and human pride. There are all kinds of bad builders. And it looks like these structures are legit. They look solid. They look like they will stand.

But there is a test coming. It is judgment day. And on that day the quality of the work will be laid bare. Those ministries of evangelism we did that God used to bring about real life in Christ, those will be shown to be true by the believers that stand as a testimony to that work. Then the ministry to the church. After the fire, the real aid that we provided people spiritually will stand. Those ways that God used us to help other people grow stronger in Christ will show up as being true. And we will be rewarded for those things.

But the fluff, all the stuff that was of the flesh, all the stuff that was mere self help, that will burn up. There will be no reward for that.

So what happens then? Suppose we find that we were just spinning our wheels. Suppose we weren't careful to know what the gospel is. And what we shared we shared while trying to avoid paying any cost for the gospel? Suppose we were just providing psychological help but never gave the truth that the souls of our listeners needed? Maybe we were even obsessed with looking impressive and being liked.

What happens at the end of the day if our ministry was a wash? Well that person will not be lost. Such a thing could not happen. But it does say that person will suffer loss. There is no promise that there will be no shame at this judgment of works.

Here is another passage-

2 Corinthians 5:9-11 (NKJV)

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

I think this is a combination of judgment of both believers and non believers. But it is clear that that which was hidden will become known. There will be a judgment for how we used our time while on this earth.

Let's look at another passage:

1 John 2:28-29 (NKJV)

28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.

I don't pretend to know exactly how this judgment will work. I don't know what will be shouted from the housetops that was done in secret. I know for certain that a Christian will never be punished for their sins because Christ has already suffered that penalty.

It seems there is a possibility for shame present in this judgment of believers. And we are told in our Romans text that the believer's judgment is one more reason not to **mistreat** people with opinions we don't like. So I've got to believe there could be things unpleasant about that judgment if we do not live faithful lives.

That struck me as I was studying it. It is the old point of "would I want my life broadcasted for all to see? And if not, why not?"

Christ **is worthy** of all faithfulness. Christ **is worthy** of a life that could be broadcasted and that broadcast would only prove **the changes** He has made in our lives. He is worthy of that kind of living.

But what would be seen if all were shown. What scenes would we do anything to have it erased from our behavior? Those are the places we should look at.

We have enough incentive to live to please Christ. Just the reward He promises is worth it. But then when we look at all He has done for us. That is even more encouragement. But there may also be a negative incentive. Do we really want to shame ourselves and our Lord that we have been busy about everything but those things that are most important to Him?

I really believe that no matter what, we are all going to show up at judgment day and feel the feeling that we get when we give someone a \$5 Christmas gift and they give us a \$100 gift. Only it will be a million times more so. We have been given so much. What will we be found to have given back?

So what are the reasons we should receive brothers with differences of opinion?

The **first** reason was because God has received us.

The **second** reason was that Christ is the Lord and Master of both of us.

The **third** reason is that this person is family.

And the **fourth** reason is that we will all stand before God in judgment of our works, of how well our lives were spent.

How do you want to show up at that judgment day? You determine that on days just like today.

Next week, Lord willing, we will go further with the implication of the judgment of works.