

Loving the Weak and Strong in Conscience

Guest Messages

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Bible Text: Romans 14:1-12

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0:01

I confess we've we've been in sheltering in place a little longer than you guys. So it's really nice actually to get out and about a little bit to this morning. Come to the Lord with me in prayer.

0:16

Heavenly Father, there is a message worth hearing and there is a word worth listening to. And God I confess it doesn't belong to me. It's not mine. So Father, I ask that you would help me to speak your word. ask that you would bless those listening, that they would hear your word. If I say something that is against your words, or it's not true, I ask that you would protect their minds and their hearts from it. We ask all of this in the name of your son Jesus. Amen.

0:56

Text I'm preaching from today. Romans chapter 14. Romans chapter 14, verses one through 12. Hear now, the word of the Lord.

1:22

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables, Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains and let that the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on your brother. It is before his own master that he stands for falls and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand One person esteems one day is better than another while another seems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats eats in honor of the Lord since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor, Lord and give thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. So then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's for to this end Christ died and lived again. He might be Lord, both of the dead and

living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you Why do you despise your brother, for we will all stand before the judgment seat of God for it is written, as I live declares the Lord. Every knee shall bow to me in every tongue confess to God. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

3:08

This is the word of the Lord. It's no surprise that we live in a very polarized and divided age. Just need to look at the news from two different news sources. New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN and Fox News. And you can see the very same event can have very different interpretations. But don't even need to go looking for news. You can just go onto social media. You find all sorts of opinions there. People around my age younger will clearly tell you what they think. We are in an era where we like to divide. We have distinctions lines in the sand between us And then if you add religion into that it gets even more complicated.

4:08

I've had a pastor in my life who told a very dark story about a man who was on a bridge contemplating ending his life. And another man was walking by. And he sees this man thinking about jumping and says, Well, wait, wait, whoa, hold on, there's got to be something in your life worth living for. Well, maybe you you're a religious man, are you? And he says, Yes, I am. And he says, me too. What kind of religion do you have? as well? I'm a Christian. And he says, Ah, me too. Well, are you a Catholic Christian? Are you a Protestant Christian man says, I'm Protestant Christian. The other man says, me too. Well, are you a Calvinist Protestant Christian or Armenian Protestant Christian? He says, I'm a Calvinist Protestant Christian man. It says, hmm, me too. And then he says, Are you a supralapsarian Calvinist Protestant Christian or are you an infralapsarian Calvinist Protestant Christian? man says I'm a supralapsarian Calvinist Protestant Christian, to which the other man replies, die, heretic scum and pushes him off the bridge.

5:22

Bit exaggerated I hope no one has killed them. killed anyone, let alone themselves over super lapse arianism. A lot of labels in theology we have by show of hands who actually knows what supralapsarianism means? All right, we got one. We got two Wow. Three. That's pretty good.

5:49

Don't be ashamed if you don't know what that means that it's not it's not the most important thing in the Bible. Christ can still have died for you without that. But it's not bad to have these things. was not bad to talk about all the different labels but if you dislike someone just because of their label, well, he's an Arminian, a dispensationalist. And you don't know what that means. Probably should figure it out before you take issue with your brother or sister in Christ. But at times, there's genuine disagreement in the family of God. We have brothers and sisters who aren't Calvinist. We have brothers and sisters, even who aren't Protestant. What do we do with that? What do we do with all those disagreements?

6:52

Paul's dealing with a similar a different but a similar issue and this letter to the church In Rome, he's dealing with a controversy about weak Christians against strong Christians. What do we do? Well, Paul's answer is pretty straightforward. We welcome them because we belong to God. Both the weak and the strong. Now what does that mean? First thing you might notice if you've read the book of Romans at all is that this is an oddly specific problem for Paul to be writing because he's never been to Rome before. How do you know there's weak and strong brothers there? might think well, there's weak and strong brothers everywhere but this vegetables the week brother only eats vegetables. I have vegan Brothers and sisters in the church and I don't think they're necessarily weak for it. So what's going on?

8:11

You've never been there. Paul, how would you know this is going on? Well, you don't have to look right now. But if you did, if you looked at Romans 16, you'd see all people, Paul writes a specific greeting to, there's about 50 names, there is a good relationship with all of them. He speaks to these people often so he knows what's going on in the church, even if he doesn't commonly go there, even if he's never been there before. So what's going on?

8:41

Well if you'll, permit me just for a little bit. A little bit of history will elaborate. This passage, illuminate it. 41 AD, the Roman Emperor whose name was Claudius at the time, expelled all of the Jews from Rome. The reason one historian who was alive at the time tells us it's because the Jews were rioting. They were rioting over a man named Chrestus. Most scholars looking back think, Well, it wasn't Chrestus, which is a normal slave name in that era. It was Christus, who they were rioting over, it was Christ. And so Claudius having no knowledge of theology in the inner workings of the church just looks into the Jews rioting and says, Oh, those people are trouble, get them out of Rome. So the Christian and the non Christian Jews were banished from the city of Rome. But the Christian Gentiles remained.

9:49

So you have on one hand, your Christian brothers and sisters who were raised in a Jewish tradition, they have the law. And these people are now living with Jews who aren't Christians. So They're being enmeshed with those people and those traditions. And you have the Gentile Christians on the other hand, who have no food loss, who have no Introduction to the Old Testament. They live very differently than before this letter was written the emperor who succeeded after Claudius, kind of famous or infamous, his name is Nero let the Jews back into the city. And so the Christian Jews come back to the Christian Gentiles.

10:40

So who's weak? Is it the Jews, or is it the Gentiles? Well, it's the Jewish Christian. Ironically, it's the one who has the Old Testament law Why? Do we think that well

look at what Paul specifies in this passage? "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables." Now, if you know a little bit about the Old Testament, you'll know that some sorts of meat were forbidden. They couldn't eat pigs. They couldn't eat shellfish of any sort. So why no meat though? It's probably because of the preparation that would be used in Rome. You see, Gentiles would often sacrifice meat before they sold it to a false god. That's not kosher for the Jews. But probably even more than that. It has to do with blood. As we heard earlier today, Jews weren't allowed to eat any meat with blood in so when you prepared the meat, you had to drain it, completely but the Gentiles didn't have that practice. They weren't worried about it. In Rome of all places, can't buy meat, you can't. It's just better to abstain from it altogether. So you can see probably how these two traditions, this Gentile Christianity and this Jewish Christianity would butt heads a little bit.

12:27

People who have been raised in that tradition suddenly coming up to another person calling himself a Christian. And they're, they're eating meat, eating meat with blood in there eating meat sacrificed to a false god. What? That's clearly wrong. Have you not read the Old Testament? Don't you see this? It said right there. God says not to do it. Why are you sinning your way to hell?

12:58

And the Gentile Christian, of course, who's only heard what the missionaries have told him, He knows everything's clean. He's perfectly convinced that it doesn't matter if I blood doesn't matter if I eat pig, it doesn't matter if it's sacrificed to an idol. And it's not real. There's only one real God. And so when he sees a Jew, getting upset or what he's eating, asks him Why? He says because it's unclean. The Gentile would say it's not unclean, how stupid are you? God doesn't care what I eat.

13:35

So you can see this would be a problem for the church. Now, Paul, he's not just some mediator coming up and saying, alright, let's have these two parties deliberate. He picks a side.

13:51

Look at the first verse in chapter 15. We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves, Paul saying, I'm a strong Christian, I'm convinced nothing's unclean, and he's Jewish. It would make sense then for Paul to walk up and just say, well, the week needs to become strong enough to be like me. I mean, this is the Apostle Paul talking.

14:29

This is the guy who wrote so many books of the Bible, who started the church in the Mediterranean area. The growth of the church that we see today is only because of his work. He could probably say, be like me, he even says in First Corinthians, I urge you to imitate me. You can say that, but he doesn't. Why? Why

is it just time to get a move on become stronger? fact he doesn't say that he says welcome them. His reason is because they belong to God. strong and weak belong to God. I think it's important to realize, when Paul says weak he doesn't mean weak in conscience doesn't mean someone going around being flip flopping. You can have a very strong conscience be weak in this way.

15:41

One of my favorite preachers, Sinclair Ferguson, said about this particular passage: "To be a weak brother is to have a strong conscience. But to be a strong brother, its to have an instructed one." We heard in Mark Jesus said, there's nothing that can go into you. I can make all you unclean. It's what comes out of you that makes you unclean. It's sin is the stain. It's not the food. And yet Paul says, Welcome the one who disagrees with that. Now, you might instantly think, wait a second, I've read Galatians I know what Paul thinks of judaizers. I know what Paul thinks for those people who think the law is still in effect.

16:40

In Galatians, that's the issue that's going on. are people saying, well, you need to be circumcised to be saved, you need to do the Old Testament food laws to be saved. They're adding to the gospel. And Paul gets really mad at those people. He's so angry. He says the most interesting things. One of my favorite quotes from Galatians, If nothing else than the humor of it, is Paul says I wish the people who were bothering you would just emasculate themselves. If you don't know what that means, ask your parents. So that's the Paul we know. He's okay, dividing. So what's going on here?

17:26

Well the difference is, Paul's utterly convinced that those people in Galatia were saying the gospel that Paul shared isn't true. This is the real way to salvation. But these Jewish Christians in Rome, they don't mind that Gentiles are Christians. They're not saying oh, no, no, no, you don't. You don't know the gospel. They're just grieved by what they do. Which says there is a difference between understanding our faith and its salvation and having some difference in practice. Some things aren't permitted true. sexual immorality and covetousness. But overly conservative isn't one of them. Let me walk you through Paul's argument here.

18:22

It has three parts, like any good sermon. First is they belong to their master, not you. look at verse three of chapter 14 let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, but not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eat for God has welcomed him. So he's saying if you eat you can't look at the one who's abstaining and hate him for it.

19:00

Know how easy that is? I did that when I was growing up all the time. What do you think you're better than me? What if they are? They're not accountable to

me. It says so in verse four, who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?

19:22

That's not how we should think. You shouldn't think, Oh, of course. You think you're better than me so clearly you're inferior. No. They're doing what they're doing out of a service to God. God is the one who will judge whether that service is good. And then Paul takes it a step further, he's completely convinced of their salvation. Look at the rest of verse four and he will be upheld for Lord is able to make him stand.

20:05

So how does a weak Christian get into heaven? Same way a strong one does. The saving death of Jesus Christ. That's how you get to heaven. It's not about the strength or weakness of your faith. It's what you put your faith in. That saves you. So, don't worry too much about those little things, Paul saying because they're accountable for God. And God is able to make them stand by the death of his only son. That's pretty good argument.

20:46

Paul's got another one. Verses five through nine lay this out pretty well. He says not only are they still saved, but they're acting in faith. Really, people don't talk about this way about people they disagree with. But here he is, brings up another controversy here, the one who observes the day, serves in honor of the Lord. It's in verse five, actually, I misread that I'm sorry,

21:26

The one who esteems one day as better than another. While one esteems all days like each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

21:34

Now this could be talking about the Sabbath. I tend to think not because the rest of the Bible speaks about the Sabbath is pretty clear. It's a good thing and Christians still worship on the Sabbath. More likely he's talking about the feast days, it's talking about the Passover, talking about the Feast of Booths. Some Christians from a Jewish background will definitely say celebrate those. Is that wrong? and the Gentile doesn't care doesn't celebrate them. That's not wrong either.

22:10

Paul says each should be convinced in his own mind, the strong and the weak, shouldn't the weak move No.

22:20

Because the one who observes that day observes it in the honor of the Lord. In verse six, the one who eats eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God,

they're all acting in faith. They're not abstaining from this food because they just want to be mean to Gentiles. And the Gentiles aren't eating this food because they just want to be mean to the Jewish believers. So that's what's happening. Both of them are doing it and giving thanks to God. There's two things in this passage we should take away from it.

23:16

Firstly, there is a conviction. If you don't act in faith, you're probably in sin. You could actually see this in the text. And the next section down in chapter 14 in the second half. Actually, it's in the very last part of it. Verse 23, whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. a scary thought. What if you're not acting in faith? What if you're acting out of something else? And believe me, there are so many motivations that go through my head every day that aren't faith. I like to please people. I like to have comfort in my life. I like to avoid pain when I can. None of those things are bad. But if it's not done in faith, and what's it done in? It's not done thinking about God is done thinking about something else. That's frightening, isn't it?

24:41

Maybe not for all of you, but it definitely is for me. I look at my own life and think, Oh, my, I'm in trouble. But Paul being the brilliant writer that he has, he doesn't leave us there. starts, verse seven.

25:06

For none of us lives to himself, none of us dies to himself. For 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again. that he might be Lord, both of the dead and of the living.

25:28

So Paul has already given us that warning, do everything in faith. Now there's something else. Now there's hope. We're not gonna be perfect on the side of heaven. Paul probably knows that better than anyone. But if we do have faith, even a little, even if we're weak in our Christianity, it's not the strength of your belief. It's not the strength of what you do in any sense that saves you. That's your response to what saves you or gets you to heaven, is belonging to the Lord is being bought with a price. Having blood shed, and none of your sins will be counted against you.

26:12

That's what saves. Paul wants to be clear that whether you're weak or you're strong, that doesn't matter. It's the death of Jesus Christ. Again, Paul could have stopped here. He's given us they belong to God. They act in faith. But then it gives a whammy.

26:36

Verses 10 to 12. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or you? Why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. Or it is written as I live says the Lord every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess to God. So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

26:59

First glance, this Seems like the same thing as that first paragraph, right? Well, yeah, everyone's accountable to God and He will make them stand. That's not what he's saying at all. We already know that Paul knows his New Testament pretty well, which is remarkable considering the fact that it hadn't even been written yet. But he knew all the stories of Jesus. He knew that everything was clean.

27:23

He probably knew another one. One where the sheep and the goats were separated before the judgment seat of God. Jesus looks the sheep and he says, "Welcome, come into my presence, For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty. And you gave me something drink. I was naked and you clothed me." And all the sheep are like when did we see you? when did this happen? His response is. Truly, truly I tell you what you did to the least of these, my brothers, you did to me. And then he turns to the goats and he says the exact opposite. Depart from me, you lawless workers of evil, I was hungry and you didn't give me something to eat I was thirsty, you didn't give me something to drink I was naked and you did not clothe me. And they say the same thing, Lord, when did this happen? Where were we rejecting you? And he says, what you did to the least of these you do to me? passage is talking about Christians, or God's people.

28:44

That's probably what Paul had in mind when he wrote this. So why do you despise your brother? Why do you bring judge on your brother because what you do to your brother, even to a weak one to the least of these you're doing to Christ Because that's what their identity is. That's what saves them. Are you passing judgment on the one who saved you? If they're saved, that's his decision. You really don't get to speak too much into that.

29:24

Of course, the thing probably on your minds as well. Yeah, but we can't just let anyone in. There's rules, right? Yes, there are. And they're important ones I've already seen Paul in his letter to the Galatians is not above calling people out. He says at one point, if anyone preaches the gospel, even an angel does not this one let him be a cursed.

29:56

Then just to do it justice. He says the same thing again. Paul will not compromise on the gospel and neither should we. Paul will not compromise on sin in the church and neither should we. First Corinthians seven case of sexual immorality

is brought before the church, a man who slept with his father's wife and Paul can't believe that they're okay with it. He says, Put that man out of the assembly don't even eat with him. Hand him over to Satan in hopes that maybe he'll come back maybe he'll be saved at the last day. Paul's not above church discipline Paul thinks it's necessary. But when it comes to little things we do. Little decisions we make whether or not to wear masks. Whether or not we open the church whether you're a supralapsarian or an infralapsarian. That's not something- that's not a hill to die on. That's not something that Christ will look at and say, You're clearly a lawless doer of evil.

31:26

Now, I thought, as I was writing my sermon, maybe I should list off a couple other things that divide us. Then someone else convinced me that if I did, I'd just be dividing. And I'd just be partaking in that same judgment of looking down people, I'd just be looking down on both sides. That's not a good place to be. Because that's not what Christ did. Instead, I thought I'd close by reading the first few verses in chapter 15.

32:07

We who are strong, have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbors for his good to build him up. Christ did not please himself. Because as it is written, the approaches of those who were approached to you fell on me. For what was written in the former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope. Or the God of endurance and encouragement granted to you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together, you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you For the glory of God.

33:03

Please pray with me. Heavenly Father, we thank you that even while we were still sinners, bearing no love for you, you died for us. God I ask that you would protect us from becoming too entrenched in opinions and the little things that in the next life won't really matter. God, I ask you would give us wisdom to tell the difference between what is something that we need to care about what is the hill to die on what is something that might challenge the gospel? And what is something that can be let go? God you have made both the important things and the unimportant ones. We should care about them all. But we ask that you would give us righteousness and how we care about them. We ask all this the name of your son Jesus. Amen.