

Romans 14:1-13

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[0 : 00] The reasonable act of worship, the thing we ought to do in response to this, is offer ourselves completely, wholly, as a living sacrifice. All of us given to his service. It's the obvious response to such a thing. The fact that he died and spent his life for us. We ought to also then turn and spend our lives for him.

And he then begins to expound through chapter 12. The way this looks is that our love is genuine. We abhor evil. We hold fast to what is good.

That's verse 9. And he goes on to talk about how then this works out in our living. And he comes back around in chapter 13, verse 8, to say that this is a continuing debt of love. We don't ever fulfill it in the loving of others, but we continually love.

It's what that sacrifice looks like, that living sacrifice. We love, and we love, and we love, and we love. Besides this, verse 11, we know the time. We live between these two times, right?

And we're meant to be those who walk in the light, because we are light. We're children of light. We're meant to be those who love. And he gives us some more specific example, beginning in verse 14. And I'll ask that you read along with me Romans chapter 14.

[1 : 16] We're going to read the first 12 verses, and look at those today. 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 not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems 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 of the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

[2 : 19] 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.

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, 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. Let's pray. God, we thank you this morning for your word.

It is the bread of life for us. It is our sustenance. It gives us all direction necessary for godly living.

And we come to a text like this that I think is so applicable to the church today.

A work that must be done amongst us to maintain unity. And Father, I pray that you will show all of us how we fail in this regard.

[3 : 26] How we are not welcoming. How we pass judgment on others. That we might be better knit together to honor and glorify you in greater and greater ways.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So we see in this text, and we work typically on a real verse by verse. We're going to work through things today. Because we're covering 12, there's going to be a few phrases I'm going to have to jump over that lend themselves to the argument.

But they do just that. So note that I'm going to do that a bit today. And we're going to hop around just a tad to help us wrap our minds around these 12 verses together. But notice first that there are three exhortations, which can be summed up.

And they are, welcome one another, do not despise one another, and do not pass judgment on one another. You see that in verses 1 through 3, the first part of 3, and then the first part of verse 5. Right? Welcome one another, do not despise one another, and do not pass judgment on one another. Now remember that Paul has already been making an argument up to this point.

[4 : 34] Right? So to remind you of where he's brought us, that's why we started off by saying, here we are in the book of Romans, and here's what he has said so far. But we left out some details, right? He's also talked about how we have life by the Spirit, and how we've been set free from the law.

So we could sum up these three exhortations with another word that Paul gave in Ephesians 4, verse 3. When he says, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

So you see, as Christians, we already have unity. It's not something that we have to fabricate, that we have to create unity, but it's something that we already have, because we have the Spirit. It's been given to us. So our work, then, is to maintain the unity that we already have. So as we think about these three exhortations, we could think about it as maintaining the unity, a maintenance of the unity that we already possess.

But note here what he's directing these exhortations to, right? In verse 1, he says, Welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

[5 : 46] Not to quarrel over opinions. He's not talking about doctrine. He's not talking about the Scriptures themselves. There are certainly reasons to draw lines between us and others.

We are Baptists. Credo Baptism. Baptism of the believer is a line I'm willing to draw. There are some that we can't fellowship in this way with, because they just don't see eye to eye with us on this clear scriptural teaching.

He's not talking about that kind of stuff, though. What are the examples that he uses? He's talking about eating. And later we can see in verse 17, he says, For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking.

So eating and drinking is what he's talking about here. And culturally, there were a number of things going on. Recognize that the Jewish believers had very clear restrictions on food as Jews.

You recall that this was very culturally ingrained. Peter had to have three visions before he finally said, Okay, I get it. I get it. Things are permissible to me now. I understand that I've been set free from the law, and I now can live to Christ.

[6 : 58] I can now eat hooved animals and such. That's been permissible now to me. But some Jews still didn't feel comfortable with that. The gospel hadn't quite worked all the culture out of them.

It wasn't blatant sin to abstain from food. You see here he says that some are eating only vegetables. But they just hadn't quite grasped hold yet of what the gospel meant for them. That it set them free from the law. Also, lots of food was sacrificed in these days to pagan idols. And the Jews didn't eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols.

And the Gentiles that were then being converted also didn't want to do so. Many of them became vegetarians. Right? So, I think it's kind of funny that he calls the wheat people vegetarians in this case.

But that's not what he's driving at. Right? But they were so abstaining. They were so afraid that they might eat something that had been sacrificed to an idol, to a pagan idol, that they just didn't eat meat at all.

[8 : 03] Right? And here, Paul calls them the weak brother. But says, don't quarrel with them. Don't pass judgment over them. Right? Maintain the unity. It's their opinion on the matter.

Right? We're all growing in grace. The other one he uses is an observance of particular days. Right? Things like the Sabbath. Right?

Was given as a commandment to the Jewish people. And many of them still held it at this time. Our Saturday would have been their day of rest. They would have done no work on that day. And there were other traditional days.

Right? There were pagan festivals that were observed as well. And many Gentile believers would still have set those days aside as special days. Days for family, for example. We do that.

Do we not? We take the kids trick-or-treating. Not because we're dishonoring God. But because it's just fun to do those types of things. Right? So this is the kind of stuff that was going on that he's speaking to.

[8 : 59] He kind of sums that up in Colossians chapter 2. It says, Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink. Or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

So we see the same kind of language being used. These are the types of things he's speaking of. Now there are certainly things though that we ought to be working on together.

So again, Matthew chapter 7. Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. He gives us that parable of taking the log out of our own eye that we may see clearly to remove the speck from a brother's eye. Right before that, he says, Do not judge lest you be judged.

And so many Christians stop at that point. Right? Got it. Do not judge lest I be judged. I'm there with you. Everybody's fine. Right? I'm going to look to myself.

I'm never going to look to my neighbor. Never going to look to my brothers in Christ. I'm never going to try to hold them to a holy standard. Because if I do, I might be held to a holy standard. Right?

[9 : 58] You already are. That's not what he's saying in this case. He's saying be careful in the way that you bring correction. Right? Be sure that you're living a holy life that you might clearly be able to expose others' sin.

That's the driving point of what he's saying there. He's not saying never hold people accountable. He's just saying be cautious about how you do it. And what we end up with in a lot of our churches is a false unity.

Right? It looks. There's a veneer of happiness and joy. And you may have been there before or experienced somebody who tolerates situations. Until the breaking point.

And then what do they do at that point? They disappear. Right? It's time to go look for a new church family. Because I can't meet this person anymore. This person who's sinned against me. This person who lives in blatant sin.

This person who says one thing and does another. I just can no longer tolerate it. So I'm just going to slip away. Right? That's false unity. Right? We're to be eager.

[11 : 00] We're to work at the unity that we already have. Right? Firstly, to maintain the purity of the church.

Beloved, we need one another. I am often blind to my own sin. It so captivates me at times that I do not see my own sinfulness.

And I need you to come alongside me and show me where I err. Matthew 18, 15 through 17. We're given a process for this.

Jesus himself says, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. This is the process for church discipline.

[12 : 02] Some of you may not know this, but that's something we have done here before. And it pains us to do it. But the point is restoration. The point is that we say to somebody, You cannot call yourself Christian.

You cannot say that you're a disciple and follower of Christ if you're willing to live in blatant and open, disregarded sin. You can't do it. And it's not healthy for us to go on telling you that you can. If you're not willing to repent and return to Christ, you're not a Christian. We can't associate with you in this way. So we're intended to work this way together, to hold each other accountable, to press each other towards holiness, to maintain the purity of the church.

We are the visible evidence of Christ on earth. That should mean something. Our purity matters. Secondly, we're meant to maintain the purity of the gospel.

There were Galatians 1, 6-9. Paul writes to the Galatian church, I am astonished that you're so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

[13 : 11] Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. So in matters of doctrine, we're meant to hold each other accountable as well.

We're not meant to let doctrine flit around. We're meant to be growing up in Christ so that we're not tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. We're meant to press each other in this way.

You recall here, he's referring particularly to the Judaizers, those who said, Christ is good. We're on board with Christ, but you still must observe the Old Testament law. And what they wanted was for Gentiles to be circumcised.

That was the thing they were doing. They were saying, Christ plus something else is what brings you salvation. And Paul was saying, no, in Christ alone are we saved.

[14:15] These things are periphery things. And those are the types of things he's now talking about. The periphery things. The opinions. So we're to work at this maintaining by welcoming one another, by not despising one another, and by not passing judgment on one another in matters of opinion.

For four reasons. For four reasons. All of these are rooted in God's character. In who he is.

As I would venture to say, all things are. Our proper living comes out of who God is, and therefore who he's created us to be.

So we're to maintain the unity of the spirit, because, number one, God has welcomed us. You see this in the second half of verse three. God has welcomed us.

Both the strong and the weak. Those who have grasped hold of the gospel. This liberty that we have now in Christ. And are taking advantage of those things.

[15:23] Right? Which doesn't necessarily mean you do all things. Right? Some people drink. They say, I'm practicing my liberty. Good for you. Some people don't.

And in that, I also practice my liberty. Right? Because neither makes me holy before God. Christ makes me holy before God. Right? And I am liberated to do either then, in this case.

Because God has welcomed us. And because God has accepted your brothers and your sisters, it is sinful arrogance not to do the same. You set yourself up as a God.

With your opinions. And you say to your brothers and sisters, when you don't welcome them, when you disagree on matters of opinion, I am my own God.

And I'm not going to accept you. But God has accepted them. Secondly, God sustains us. Verse four.

[16:25] And he will be upheld. The Lord is able to make him stand. It is God who sustains us. Previously, in this letter, Romans 8, 33, Paul wrote, Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. John 10, 27, 28. Jesus said, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

In the hand. Jude's short letter, verse 24, the very end, he says, Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory, with great joy, namely, Jesus Christ.

And Paul writes again in Philippians chapter 1, verse 6, And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion, at the day of Jesus Christ.

God has welcomed us, redeemed us in Christ, and he sustains us, and will sustain us, to the end. We don't see eye to eye, on some matter of opinion.

[17:32] Guess what? Someday, we're all going to get it right. Right now, we're all wrong. God is right. And in the end of all things, when we're glorified, we'll have it all figured out together.

But in the meantime, recognize that it is our Lord, that sustains us, that is able to make us stand. In these matters of opinion, it's not up to you.

Encourage. Come alongside. But do not pass judgment. Welcome. Do not despise. That's secondly. Thirdly, God is our Lord.

We see this in the second half of verse 5 through verse 8. God is our Lord. God has redeemed us and made us his own. That's the point of what Paul is beginning to say in the beginning of verse 12. Brothers, I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as living sacrifices. You are his now. You belong to him. He reigns over you. And as such, those of us who are truly regenerate, those of us who are God's children, will love him, and we will serve him, even in matters

of opinion.

[18 : 54] We ought to be convinced in our own mind. Our conscience is clear before our God because he is our Lord. John Bunyan, we this last Friday read not quite all of the first half of Bunyan's book together here.

And we talked a little bit about Bunyan. What we didn't talk about, when he wrote Pilgrim's Progress, he was in a dungeon. He had been put down in the deep, dark part of a jail because he was there originally for preaching without a license to preach.

And he continued to preach in the courtyard and people would come and gather around the walls of the prison. So they put him in a hole. And he was down there with some other believers for the same reason, for preaching without a license.

A group that were called the Anabaptists. Some of our roots are actually with the Anabaptists, although not all of them in this case. Bunyan would constantly preach about God's love.

Constantly. What a great thing to preach about, right? If you're going to preach the scriptures, you have to talk about God's love for people. His grace, His immeasurable grace for those that are His. And they said to him, they said, Bunyan, if you keep telling people how much God loves them, they're going to do whatever they want.

[20 : 02] They thought that He was giving them a license to sin. God's grace is just going to cover those things, right? God loves you that much. He's forgiven all of your sin. They thought that He was giving them a license to just go out and be crazy with their lives.

Bunyan's very poignant response was, no. If I teach God's people about God's love for them, they'll do whatever God wants. God is our Lord.

If you are a Christian, the Spirit of God abides within you. You will serve Him as such. Perfectly all the time?

No. Will we get it wrong? Absolutely. Without a doubt. But we ought to work at this unity together and recognize that we all serve our sovereign King.

Romans chapter 6, 17 through 18, in verse 22, Paul writes this, But thanks be to God that you were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you are committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

[21 : 12] But now that you have been set free from sin and become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. Set free from the bondage of sin, but we're now all enslaved by the Spirit to serve Christ.

Fourthly, we have to work to maintain this unity of the Spirit because God alone will administer final judgment.

God alone will administer final judgment. We see this here in verse 10 through 12, a quotation from Isaiah on Paul's part. The day will come when all of us will stand before God.

And in this case, Paul's particular reference is that those of us who are found in Him will also stand. Our works are going to be sifted.

We will be found righteous in Christ, but our works, the things that we're doing now, will also be judged. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 13 through 15, Each one's work will become manifest for the day, this day of judgment, will disclose it because it will be revealed by fire and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

[22 : 30] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved.

Fully and finally, one day, God will judge all of those things. I find it better to eat only vegetables, you find it better to eat only meat.

One day, God's going to sort it. Because God alone will administer the final judgment. Now there's a truth on which all of these exhortations hang.

It's the hinge. It's the thing that it all swings upon. And it's found in verse 9. Turn your attention to verse 9. For to this end, Christ died and lived again.

And recall that we've been talking about the life of Christ. So we could even say, for to this end, Christ lived and died and lived again. That he might be Lord, both of the dead and of the living.

[23 : 37] Christ is our sovereign king. Right? At the end of all things, when he finally stands up from his place in heaven and returns, he will be universally acknowledged as sovereign Lord.

Everyone will know that Jesus Christ reigns ultimately over all things. Right? At that time, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Philippians 2, 11. Right? But he doesn't become Lord at that time. It's not that he becomes it. It's just that everybody universally acknowledges that he is Lord.

Right? He already is the supreme and sovereign Lord. He already holds everything in the sway of his power. The very beginning of Hebrews.

Providence is by God's word. Jesus Christ speaks and it happens. Right? This universe spins on its axis because Jesus Christ holds it by his word because he is already Lord.

[24 : 37] and he earned that with his sinless life. His death and his resurrection. Right? So that he can be Lord over both the dead and of the living.

This is the Christ we serve. This is the Christ that holds the church in his hands. This church that's supposed to be this beautiful picture of unity by the Spirit.

Spirit. This is the Christ that has made any of this possible. Right? You know that all of you are insane for being here if you don't have the Spirit of God within you?

Like why would you come here? It's beautiful outside right now. Right? Go camping or canoeing. Go rock climbing. Do something to get some adrenaline pumping through your system because this is a huge waste of time if you don't know the living God.

God. This Jesus Christ that we serve. Why do we screw this up? Why is our time together as a church not more precious to us?

[25 : 42] We get to come together with those who have been redeemed. I think we've worked church into our culture. It's the thing you do. You're going to feel a little bit better about yourself because you did this today.

It's a discipline for you. It's so much more. It's so much more. It's immensely more. We deserve so much more credit than we give it. God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we come together Sunday, pick another day. It doesn't really matter, right? Which day it is. That's the point being made here. We do it on Sunday morning to celebrate that together.

Why do we tear it apart in squabbles out of stupid opinions? And that's what they are. I'll say to you, as a Southern Baptist pastor, this is a major indictment on Southern Baptists.

None of us, but there are some that need to read this and let it soak into them that they might work to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

[26 : 53] 1 Timothy 6.15, Paul says, He being Christ who is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Revelation 17.14, they will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them for He is, not will become, but He is Lord of lords and King of kings and those with Him are called and chosen and faithful.

This is our sovereign Lord and we make non-issues into issues. Rather than celebrating the goodness of God to us in Christ, we piss and moan over things that are silly, how the pastor dresses, what kind of music, does the church have a choir or not, what programs are taking place, your particular view on drums.

Who cares? The creator of the universe loves you, came to earth, suffered as a man, ultimately to his death, rose again and reigns over our lives.

Why do we make non-issues into issues? Christ. The great high calling is Christ. I read to you before from, oh gosh, I'm not going to be able to find it now.

I'm going to find it. Hang on. Because it's too good not to read the rest of it. I really lost it. Okay. No, I said I'm going to find it.

[28 : 38] I have to find it. Oh, here we are. Okay, good. From Colossians, chapter 2. Okay.

Remember I said, therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

I stopped there. Verse 17. Paul doesn't discredit these things. He doesn't say they have no value. Here's their value. Verse 17. These are a shadow of the things to come.

They're a shadow. Right? Shadows have very little, little ability to reflect the majesty, the reality of what's casting the shadow. These are just a shadow of the things to come.

But the substance belongs to Christ. The great unifying factor in all of our lives.

I've told this story on a number of occasions, but Clay and I now have been friends for a very long time, and I think most of you know Clay. Clay's kind of a cowboy at heart.

[29 : 38] He has big belt buckles and wears boots most of the time. And Clay, when Clay first came to North Georgia, he came to the BSU, it's now called BCM at the time, and he walked across the front lawn, and I say providentially, I was standing at the edge of the crowd, and he walked

straight up to me, and we met, and we've been really, really thick friends ever since that day.

Clay and I have very little in common as far as activity is concerned. I just recently started hunting so we can connect on that level now. But we have always been able to connect in Christ.

This is why our churches should be multicultural. This is why we should have people from every ethnicity in our congregations. Why does it matter what type of music we do?

It doesn't. We have Christ. Why do we make non-issues into issues? Christ is the substance of all these things.

And so I say to you, beloved, let us work, let us strive together for the sake of our Lord, for His honor and glory, to maintain the unity of the Spirit, this unity that we already have.

[30 : 59] Let's pray together.