

Romans 14:1-12

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[0:00] End of chapter 11, his great treatise on the Christian faith, to the application. Romans 12, verses 1-2, there he says, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.

That's the summary of everything he said, is what he's referring to there, the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

And so he's encouraging at the outset of chapter 12 that our whole selves are to be given to God. You may recall that I shared with you that the structure of the following chapters is chiasmatic.

That means that it mirrors on top of itself. You could fold it over and it's reflective in that way. So, if you've been around and you know as we talk through these things, we usually give it an A, B, C, and then a C', B', A', to kind of show you how that reflects.

[1:10] So, chapter 12, verses 3-8, Paul talks there about humble service. Then chapter 12, verses 9-16, he talks about love in the church.

Verses 17-21, relation with the world. And then he goes into, at the beginning of chapter 13, relation with the political authorities of the world.

And then we see the reflection. Chapter 13, verses 8-14. Again, love in the church. And we're going to see in chapter 14, right, this continuing outworking of the idea of humble service.

So, this whole health service to God that expresses itself in the church through humble, sacrificial love. So, Romans 14, verses 1-12.

Before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good. And so, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

[2:19] 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. 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.

[3:27] 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.

Now there is a lot found in these twelve verses. And so as is typical of our time in the Word together, I have a simple outline to help us unpack this text.

And it is as follows. Number one, the exhortations. Number two, the examples. And number three, the foundational reasons. And if you wish that started with an E, I also do.

The exhortations, the examples, the foundational reasons. Tell me later if you come up with a good one. Number one, the exhortations. So we find this first point to be the most straightforward for us this morning.

[4:34] I say exhortations, but they are perhaps so closely related that I could just say exhortation. Note in verses one and three, that first we are to welcome the weak in faith.

We are not to quarrel over opinions. And we are not to despise or pass judgment. Now these are all cries for Christian unity.

So you could sum all those up and have Paul say, be unified. Christian unity or Christian harmony exalts the Lord Jesus Christ.

In just a bit in Romans chapter 15, verse 5 and 6, Paul is going to ask God to give the Roman Christians grace for this very purpose. He writes there, May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christian, one whose soul has been saved by the work of Christ on their behalf, one who has been justified by grace through faith in Christ alone, the highest aim of their life ought to be the exaltation of Christ.

[5:59] We have to desire as Christians to make much of Jesus and what he has done for us. Paul hopes here that the Roman Christ followers and you and I would be given grace for Christian unity so that the Lord Jesus Christ would receive glory.

Today's text helps us understand how. The answer is not always agree. Because we're going to find that we don't always agree.

In verse 1 of chapter 14, Paul recognizes that there will be some who will be weak in faith. He does not say without faith.

The end of verse 3 tells us that God has welcomed him, this one who is weak in faith. And verse 10 calls him our brother. So Paul is speaking of a Christian who just doesn't understand something of his faith.

And we'll look at this further as we look at the examples. But the point is that the one who has been saved by Christ should be welcomed and not welcomed in order to quarrel over opinions.

[7:15] Isn't that what he says? Welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. Just welcome him. He is in Christ.

Just welcome him. There's a pastor by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I would encourage you to look into his life.

And he wrote a little book called Life Together. And the entire book is worth a read for the first chapter. And in there he talks about how we tend to destroy Christian community and neglect the fact that it is a divine reality that Christ has called people to himself and to one another.

He says the following in that work. Quote, Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive.

So here let me pause for a second. What he's saying is the thing you think that should exist as community, the particular agenda that you have, he's saying should have no part in Christian community.

[8:28] Go back to his quote. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates wish dreaming. It makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself.

He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the

circle of brethren.

He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure.

When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

[9:38] Because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship. Because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ.

Long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life, not as demanders, but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what he has done for us.

We thank God for giving us brethren who live by his call, by his forgiveness, and his promise. Christ himself, his person and his work, is the reason that we are a community.

It's a divine reality that we exist as Christians called together. And this is the place that we must begin.

As for the one who is weak in faith, not without faith. Weak in faith. Welcome him. And he goes on. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains.

[10:42] Let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats. For God has welcomed him. So it goes both ways. The strong in faith, by implication, are not to despise.

And the weak in faith are not to pass judgment. The difference here between these two phrases is negligible. The first is a strong Greek word that means to think a person is less than nothing.

And the second, another strong Greek word that means to isolate. So to put them outside. They are both quite the opposite of welcoming.

Paul is telling us that if a person makes a credible profession of faith in Christ and doesn't see eye to eye with you concerning an opinion, they ought not be treated with disregard.

They should not be dismissed or considered unfaithful simply because their faith is expressing a varied opinion from your own.

[11:43] This, of course, raises all sorts of questions about acceptable disagreements. And I am thankful that Paul did not leave off his argument here.

But notice, we are meant to welcome one another because we are in Christ and not to destroy unity over opinions. So he gives us two examples, perhaps to help us understand what he means by opinions.

The first is a person who believes he may eat anything, while a weak person eats only vegetables. The second, found in verse 5, is one person esteeming one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

So, we see here two examples of what Paul is calling in verse 1, opinions. Now, before we consider them, let's be clear about what Paul is not saying.

He is not saying that people can believe whatever they want to, and the church is not to defend the truth. That's not at all what he is expressing here.

[12:59] You may be familiar with what Jude wrote in Jude verses 3 and 4. Beloved, I was eager to write to you about our common salvation, but I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Contend for it. Fight for that faith. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, and ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God and its sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Error has and error will creep in to the life of the church. And the church is to be the pillar and buttress of the truth. Paul warned the Roman believers in Romans 16 verses 17 and 18.

We'll get to in a couple of weeks. I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught. Avoid them.

For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. And by smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive. In other parts of the New Testament, false prophets or teachers are spoken of as deceitful spirits who advocate doctrines of demons.

[14:23] That's 1 Timothy 4.1. And as those who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them. 2 Peter 2.1.

They're called false brothers. 2 Corinthians 11.26. False apostles. 2 Corinthians 11.13. False teachers. 2 Peter 2.1. False speakers.

That is, liars. 1 Timothy 4.2. And false Christs. Matthew 24.24. The Apostle John tells us, therefore, Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4.1. Paul's last words to the Ephesian elders when he met with them for a farewell on the beach near Miletus included a somber warning about inevitable false teachers.

He said, I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

[15:31] Therefore, be on the alert. That's in Acts chapter 20. So, in today's text, Paul is not saying that it is okay to entertain varying opinions about the doctrines that are essential to the faith.

He is saying that working out the implications are going to yield disagreements, and these are not reasons for disunity. So, let's look at these two examples, right?

Which would have been readily understood by the Roman believers. They would have said, oh yeah, yeah, we've been having those disagreements. First, we have this person believing he may eat anything, while the weak person, Paul calls him, eats only vegetables.

So, vegetarians are weak, I think is the lesson for today. It's not at all, right? Now, there are two possibilities why an early Roman Christian may have abstained from the eating of meat.

In either case, it is most probable that they were Jewish. So, these are Jewish converts to Christ.

They may have been strictly vegetarian either to, first, avoid eating any meat that had been offered to an idol, or, secondly, to avoid any meat that was considered unclean under Old Testament law.

[16:55] Either way, these were permissive things. And the Gentile believers would have had no issue eating meat in any case. Either way, you might imagine that there was a rub when these Roman Christians had a meal together, which they regularly did.

Some wanted nothing to do with meat. They wanted to be extra cautious. Paul is not arguing that these people thought that this would earn their salvation. He would have been hard against that.

These are people who know that they're Christians, but they want to be so careful. They're just not sure. Their faith is weak. So, they're going to avoid meat altogether at the potluck.

And others in that fellowship were eating bacon-wrapped shrimp. And it could have caused problems between them, disunity between them.

Paul says, this variance in opinion is no reason not to welcome one another. Notice that Paul calls the eating of anything an act of faith or trust in God.

[18:08] The first part of verse 2 says, one person believes, has faith that he may eat anything. And the other is simply an act. He does not use the word believes of the weak person.

Now, you may think then, well, then it is my job to convince the weak person that they are weak and that they should change their ways. However, at the end of the chapter, Paul says, whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because the eating is not from faith.

For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. And note that at the end of verse 5, Paul says, each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

So this is not an unimportant example. He's saying, you should know what you think. He's also saying, there's a proper way to think about this.

But even if somebody doesn't agree, we're not going to not welcome them. Just because their faith is weak. And hear me, beloved. But the best place for a person's faith to be strengthened is where?

[19:23] It's in the life of the church. Where the truth is expounded. And we encourage one another to love and good works each day. His second example, perhaps is a little more vague than the first.

There it says, one person, verse 5, esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. We may find that the first example has little to no bearing for us today.

But there is disagreement amongst faithful, sound believers as to what Paul is even referencing in his second example.

It's fascinating to read commentaries. I've got a collection of works on the book of Romans and how kind of split down the middle they are about what he's even talking about in this verse.

And I find it especially fascinating how matter-of-fact some of those commentators are about it. Some say that he is speaking about the Sabbath, and others say that he is speaking about other Jewish holidays.

[20:28] How you read this example will depend on what you think is true of modern-day Sabbath observance. A lot of Bible thinking has to go into understanding what could be meant by verse 5.

And guess what? I do not intend to work any of that out for you today because that is not the point here that Paul is making. In fact, if you were really hoping, first time we read through that, that I would draw up some battle lines for you this morning, then the exhortations of this text need to land especially hard for you.

So, how are we to know when and possibly how to disagree agreeably?

And when and possibly how to disagree disagreeably? Because there are some times for that as well. There is a time to be clear for unity, and there is a time to stand firm and to not be moved.

There are cries in our day for Christians to have spines of steel over matters of comparative minor importance.

[21:44] These cries are most often made by people on social media. And I'm concerned that the pressure to turn our focus from primary doctrine will be used by the enemy to erode the very foundation of that doctrine.

It grieves me to see so many Reformed thinkers become what seems to be at times enemies over lesser matters.

Oh, we have this great big God theology that we hold together. We believe in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone.

We have so much to be unified on. And yet, how we ought to think about particular matters of politics are ripping us apart.

Now, if you've been with us for very long, you have heard me speak of the need to become well-versed in the practice of theological triage. Some of you probably heard me read the text and went, Oh boy, here we go again.

[22:55] Well, here we go again. Triage is the process of assigning urgency or importance to a matter. If a bus that is full of people were in an accident and that number of people were brought into an emergency room, those patients would be ranked for treatment from most severe need to least severe need.

A charge nurse or a doctor would do that very quickly. Who needs urgent attention and who can sit in the waiting room for hours and hours waiting to be attended to?

This can, and I will tirelessly argue, should also be done theologically. Theological triage helps us to determine those matters that we must stand firm on.

That faith, once for all delivered to the saints that Jude is talking about in verse 3 and 4, and those that Paul is addressing in today's text.

There's things that we must contend for. We must fight for. We're not even going to associate with the person who would teach such a thing. And those we're going to welcome, even though we may not agree.

[24:05] Now, at this point, I want to be clear. This term was coined, as far as I can tell, by Albert Muller, the current president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. So the term is fairly new.

However, this concept can be seen historically in the creation of confessions and creeds. Christians carefully pinning doctrinal standards for the sake of agreement, saying these are the things that we believe that we should agree on, and then there's stuff outside of it, and we may disagree on some of those things.

So theological triage breaks down into four orders, four matters of importance. And I'll take them in reverse order and lay them out for you quickly.

If you've heard this before, I have no new examples. I am sorry. Fourth order doctrine, or quaternary doctrine, can't say you didn't learn something today, are matters that are just unimportant.

We could talk about them. It could be fun. But they do not matter. An example, when I get asked this question from time to time, is there life on other planets? Do I think there's life on other planets? [25:15] And if somebody asks me this question, I say, I don't know, and I don't care. It has no bearing on my life at all. When they land the ship, we'll start the conversation over again, right?

But right now, it just doesn't matter at all to me, right? It's a fourth order doctrine. We can talk about it, but not with me. Third order doctrine, or tertiary doctrines, are things that are not unimportant, but things that are important for the individual.

And here we see that example in our text today. Paul says that each one should be convinced in his own mind, right? He ought to know what he thinks about these things.

Should he eat meat or not eat meat? What days should or shouldn't be observed? Not unimportant, important, but for you.

And if it's important for you, you're probably going to want to share that conviction with others, right? Take them to the scripture, show them why you think it's important, why you think it's good, and honoring to God why it may serve others.

[26:27] But you won't break unity over such a thing. Someone says, I don't know if I see it the way you see it. And you say, well, that's okay. I'll keep working on you. I'll be in relationship with you.

We'll walk together, and perhaps we'll both be wrong in the end. Examples. Alcohol. Is it okay to drink in moderation? Should we not drink at all?

There's some arguments to be made both ways. What kind of television should we watch? Or movies, right? Is there a rating that's too high? There are whole churches that are formed over these issues.

These are their things. Schooling choices. To homeschool or to not homeschool. I have a view on every one of these things, and I'd be happy to share it with you.

But if you disagree with me, within some parameters, I'm not going to call you unfaithful. I'm not going to want to have nothing to do with you anymore.

[27:26] But I'm going to want to walk along with you. Perhaps I learned something from you, and you from me. I think this is the category that Paul is addressing in today's text.

After third order doctrines, our second order, our secondary doctrines, which are important for church and maybe some broader ministry partnerships, fellowships.

These doctrines are going to define our practice and possibly define sin. Maybe there's some things that we just find untenable. We couldn't possibly agree that that's not a sin, that this is a sin.

So, these are things that we probably need to be agreeing on as a church. View on divorce and or remarriage. Our church has a position paper on this because we think it's important.

How are we going to counsel people as they walk through these kinds of difficulties in life? What might we call sin? What we may not call sin in those matters?

[28:31] The regulative principle of worship. Our church has agreed that this has in it everything we need for how we ought to conduct ourselves when we gather.

So, if you come asking for things to happen when the church is gathered that we don't find in this text or by necessary consequence, you're going to say, no, this is the text.

This is where we're going. And it's good that we agree on that, right? So we're not constantly in arguments about whether or not somebody can ribbon dance on the stage on Sunday morning. No.

If you're a guest today, nobody's going to do that. Our view on baptism. We are Baptists. That's an important distinction about who we are and it's good that we agree together on that.

Who should be baptized? What is the nature of the church? It's an important thing for us to understand together. So those are second order doctrines. And then finally, first order doctrines, primary doctrines, those things we should contend for.

[29:34] They're important for Christian unity at the essence of Christian unity. We must agree on these things like the deity of Jesus Christ,

justification by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Beloved, let me say to you, these are the things, the hills that we need to die on. This is the foundation, I'm worried, gets eroded by all of this gray area application that goes on out there. We should be so clear as a people about what those things are. We must agree on these things. The second order stuff, yep, yep, it's really good that we hold this stuff together. And then outside of that are things that we should try to faithfully work out together. Welcome one another as we walk through the complication of living the Christian life. So this is the examples that are given to us. We've got to work that out in a lot of different ways in our day today.

[30:43] And then Paul takes us to some foundational reasons. We see this all picked up beginning in verse 3 all the way through the end of our text, through verse 12.

And I'm probably going to bring these into next week, Lord willing, as we turn our attention to the rest of chapter 14. But for the sake of time, let's just note them quickly and then we'll bring them forward into next week.

So a couple of foundational reasons. Number one, we, if you've made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, He has saved your soul, He's delivered you from darkness to light. You were not a people, you are now His people. Your heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh. The Spirit of God indwells you. If this is true of you, we are gods. We belong to Him. Verse 3, it says, God has welcomed Him. What a statement. God has welcomed Him.

[31:47] God has forgiven His sin. He is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God has brought Him in to His family along with you.

We belong to God. Verse 8 says, whether we live or whether we die, that Christ died and lived again. Verse 9, dead, buried, resurrected.

That He would be the Lord both of the dead and the living. We belong to God because of the work of Christ on our behalf.

Great foundational reason for there to be unity in Him. Secondly, our eternal position is secured by God.

Notice verse 4, right? Whatever you're doing with the eating or the not eating, vegetarian or rational, He will be upheld for the Lord is able to make Him stand.

[32:54] In the day of judgment, we will stand before God and we will remain standing not because we did or didn't get the particulars exactly right, but because of what He has done on our behalf.

This will be our plea before Him in the day of judgment. Why do you get to enter into my glory? Not because I abstain from eating meat. That'll be a poor reason to stand before God.

We will only be able to plea the perfect sacrifice of Christ. That's it. The Lord is able to make Him stand. Our eternal position, if you're in Christ, is secured by God.

number three. Paul's examples, the way these believers are acting, are heartfelt. These people are convinced in their own mind.

They believe it's the proper thing for them to do. You should welcome people who are acting that way. These are not people who are being licentious. They're not casting off.

[33:56] They're not trying to live without the law. They're trying to honor the Lord. Verse six says this, 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. People genuinely trying to pursue and genuinely trying to do the right thing before their God, even if it's not the particular way you might do it, should be welcomed.

Fourthly, God will judge our temporal works. Verse 10 says, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Verse 12 says, each of us will give an account of himself to God. It's all going to get worked out in the end. We're trying to navigate these difficult matters, all of these intricacies.

If we are in Christ, it's going to get sorted in the end. And we don't have to judge each other in those minor particulars because God will. We have great reason for unity.

[35:12] God is going to sort the details in the end. If we have been justified by grace through faith in Christ, then we are securely God's and belong not only to Him, but to each other.

As we seek to follow Him faithfully in all the minutiae of our lives, we need not miss that Christian unity is a work of faithfulness. It's part of that.

It's part of that pursuit of how God would have us live our lives, that He would have us do it. The focus of our effort, however, is not the unity, but rather the focus of our effort is the truth of who each of us are in Christ.

I know I blew through those reasons, but note the major portion of that text. Paul is declaring who it is that we are because of the work of Christ on our behalf.

And so I want to close with a quote from A.W. Tozer, and this is on your bulletin if you'd like to read it along with me. He said this quote, Has it ever occurred to you that 100 pianos all tuned to the same fork, because I'm not a tuning fork, are automatically tuned to each other?

[36:31] They are of one accord by being tuned not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So 100 worshipers together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart, nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become unity conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.

So let's pray together to that end that we would be fixed on Christ and be drawn together in unity. as we call it