

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

#### Leaving Judging to the Judge

(Romans 14:5-12)

Study #24

#### Introduction: To die for...

When it comes to matters of faith, *on a good day* there are a few things I’d be willing to **DIE FOR**. I say, “*On a good day*” because I hope that I would rise to the occasion. Only the acid test will reveal if I am up to the challenge that thousands and thousands of Christians face every year around the globe.

But I’d like to believe that I’d be willing to take a bullet for the truth that God is good, for the idea that all people everywhere need to hear about Jesus, for the truth that faith alone in Christ alone saves, and for the life-changing power of Jesus’ Gospel. If I was pressed, I could probably make the list a bit longer, but the list of things I would die for would not be a terribly long list.

With respect to matters of faith, on a few more days, I’m pretty confident that there are a few more things I’d be willing to **FIGHT FOR**.

I would (and have!) fought for the authority and inspiration of Scripture. I’d fight - or at least argue - for a few biblical interpretations of which I have become pretty convinced. And I would be willing to go to the mat for a couple of ideas about how people operate and how people develop, spiritually.

And beyond matters for which I would die or fight, there are dozens of matters about which I have a **PREFERENCE**.

For most of us, life consists of a short list of “to die fors”, a few “to fight fors” and lots and lots of preferred methods of doing things.

I’ve come to believe that a good bit of maturity is recognizing the difference between these three. Maturity recognizes that we don’t start World War III over EVERYTHING!

And this morning we are thinking together, from Scripture, about preferences.

The issues we’re grappling with are important and may even revolve around moral choices. But these are life scenarios where there is no **“Thus saith the Lord.”**

And what makes our time together today potentially dicey is that while we are called to love each other, we will, at times, have different preferences.

#### *Orienting to our theme...*

We began thinking about this stuff last week. We started dealing with challenging themes like weaker and stronger Christians, stumbling blocks, legalists and Pharisees.<sup>1</sup> The Apostle Paul introduced us to the idea that it can be perfectly all right when we Christians are not in lock step with each other about how to behave in a given situation.

And the first century Roman example Paul gave had to do with food.

Should a Christian eat meat that has been sacrificed to pagan idols? Should a converted Jew eat pork? The answer Paul gave was a rock-solid, **“Maybe. It depends...”**

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<sup>1</sup> This (14:1-15:7) is a major section of Romans. The other major sections of the epistle are: Introduction - 1:1-18; The universality of sin - 1:19-3:31; The way of salvation - 4-5; Life in the Spirit - 6-8; The question of Israel - 9-11; The Christian, and relationships - 12:1-13:14. There are points of contact between this section and 1 Cor. 8:1-13 and 10:23-33; Gal. 4:10-11; Col. 2:16-17, 20-23.

Some - the Weak - will avoid eating meat sacrificed to pagan idols because they're not confident that they are free to do so. Scripture doesn't say they can't. But they're not sure. So they don't eat.

Others - the Strong - understand that they are permitted to do whatever Scripture doesn't prohibit. So they will go ahead and eat.

Paul (maddeningly?) says that both are perfectly fine decisions. Neither is necessarily more moral or spiritual than the other.

This morning, Paul provides a new "for instance" and switches from talking about food, to talking about days. The topic at issue now is, "*What days should a Christian recognize as holy to the Lord?*"<sup>2</sup>

### **Diversity of Opinion, Under the Lordship of Christ (vv. 5-9)**

#### **The Importance of Inner Conviction (v. 5)**

*The issue: To observe a day or not (v. 5a)*

***[5a] One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike.***

And here again is an issue about which Christians might have disagreement. The mention of "special days" brings to mind the Jewish teaching about the Sabbath.

You'll remember that the fourth of the Ten Commandments said that the people of God were to work for six days and then rest on the seventh day.<sup>3</sup>

The Sabbath law was God's gracious gift to His people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to Sabbath concerns, Paul's concern about days here also would have had to do with the observance, or not, of special days of the Old Testament ceremonial law.

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, in Exodus (chapter 20) the rationale given for the Sabbath is that God rested on the seventh day of creation. When Moses repeats the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy the reason given for taking a Sabbath rest is that the people of God had not had a rest during the whole time they were in Egypt. (Deuteronomy 5). It is interesting that the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in some form in the New is the commandment to keep the Sabbath.

Well, when Paul wrote to the church at Rome, lots of Jewish Christians there still felt that honoring the Sabbath - which begins with sundown on Friday and ends with sundown on Saturday - was important. So, they worshiped Jesus on the Sabbath, just as the Jews had always worshipped on the Sabbath.

Other Christians, remembering that Jesus was raised on the first day of the week, began gathering for worship on that day. They believed that Sunday was the holy day for the church of Jesus, just as the Sabbath was the holy day for Israel.

And then Paul brings up another way to look at things. Some people viewed every day as special to the Lord. For them, it didn't matter when you gathered for worship.<sup>5</sup>

Today in San Antonio, most churches meet on Sunday. But there are lots of churches that hold services on Saturday. I know of Hebrew Christian fellowships that meet on Friday evening. At least one church I know of holds services on Monday night.

So who's right? The Sabbath worshippers? The Sunday worshippers? The any-old-time worshippers?

It can be confusing when there are so many differing opinions. Paul wants us to know that the issue - on which day should we worship? - is really not the issue.

And if the issue is not the issue, then what is the issue? What are the essential guiding truths we need to keep in mind when it comes to these "grey areas", these real life scenarios where Scripture doesn't make things crystal clear?

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<sup>4</sup> Sadly, by the time of Jesus, the Jews had made a tyrant of the day of rest. In particular, the Pharisees were well-known for excesses that made the Sabbath more of a burden than the other days of work. And of course, Jesus would have none of that. While He never violated the biblical command to not work on the Sabbath, Jesus was famous for violating the Pharisees' nit-picky Sabbath add-on rules.

<sup>5</sup> Paul would never have said what he says here about days or food, had he been living the life of a righteous Jew under the Mosaic Law. This is a uniquely Christian discussion.

In what follows we discover that there are two key ideas that are to govern both our decision-making process AND our dealings with each other, when we are dealing with grey areas.

First, when we are confronted with a lifestyle issue where Scripture is silent or vague we are each to develop personal convictions before God.

*The issues behind the issue (v. 5b)*

***[5b]...Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.***

#### Personal conviction

Whatever conclusion you arrive at about a questionable practice or about a scripturally unaddressed theme, it must be arrived at because of conviction, not because of convention.

It's interesting to know what everybody else thinks, but that's not the essential thing. It can be helpful to know how things are usually done, but it's not essential. The essential thing is that we each prayerfully think things through and reach a personal conviction.

So far we've looked at a couple of 1<sup>st</sup> century examples. What are some of the 2013 "for instances" that we might be talking about?

Well, if you are of legal age, we are talking about stuff like playing the lottery, and, more broadly, gambling. We're talking about the types and styles of movies you watch or the music you listen to, or the use of alcohol.

(By the way, if you are not of a legal age, then these aren't decisions you have to make. The Bible says to obey the governing authorities. And if you are child living at home and your parents have set limits for you, it is also not a decision, because the Bible tells you to obey your parents.)

You have to make decisions about your exposure to social media (Facebook and Twitter), the kind of food (junk-y) that you eat, the way you will parent or the schooling options you choose for your kids.

You also have to make decisions about the amount or percentage of money you are going to give to support the Lord's work. (And the Bible is not specific about this. Really. It isn't. ☺)

As a steward of your finances, you have to decide what kind of car you'll drive - how fancy?, how new?, all the bells and whistles? - and in what kind of house or apartment you will live - how big?, how nice?, how new?

As well, aside from prohibiting the act of sex, the Bible is not real specific about what level of physical contact you should allow with the opposite sex outside of marriage, the style of clothing you should or shouldn't wear, and on and on and on we could go.

While seeking to come to a place of conviction, you'll take several factors into consideration.

You'll look at your own tastes and preferences, your personality, your personal history, your current associations, and your station of life.

You'll also want to look for over-arching biblical principles that might be brought to bear on your decision. You'll want to get wise counsel from people you respect.

In the end, though, it's your decision.

You might end up deciding to make use of your freedom in Jesus and take part in the questionable practice (a Strong position). Or you might choose to restrict yourself (a Weak position - unless you are doing so out of love for others who are Weak - and we'll get to that next Sunday ☺).

But this, being convinced in your own mind that "A" is the wisest and most God-honoring course for you to follow in this or that thing, sets you free to a courageous, joy-filled life before God.

So, when it comes to decision-making in the grey zone there is the need to develop a personal conviction that "A" is right for you. The parallel idea is that I may decide that "B" is the wisest course for me to follow - and you are to graciously accept that.

#### Loving acceptance

I am not to hold up my own convictions on matters where the Bible is not clear as the universal standard for all Christians. Neither are you to hold up your preferences as the norm for all believers.

I am duty-bound to develop, before God, my own convictions. So are you. But we are not to force our convictions on each other. Instead, we are to give each other freedom to think, process, and come to our own personal convictions before the Lord.

And we may very well end up coming to different convictions about matters where Scripture is not explicit.

The hope was that Christians in Rome would live together and love each other as some of them ate meat, and others didn't. The hope was that those who worshipped on the Sabbath would respect those who worshipped on Sunday.

And the hope is that we will accept each other despite our diverse convictions about matters where there is no clear, *“Thus saith the Lord.”*

We are different. But it is really helpful when we understand that, very often, the issue is really not the issue. The issues are **personal conviction** and **loving acceptance**.

Loving acceptance of people who see things differently. Loving acceptance of people who disagree. Loving acceptance of those whose convictions are opposite your own.

You might say that “loving acceptance” is to be our default setting in the Body of Christ.

When you buy a piece of software or your computer or download an app and install it on your mobile device, that program will come with certain default settings. You'll keep those default settings unless there is a reason to modify them.

The default order of service at Northwest on the first Sunday of the month is that we take communion - and we will continue to do so unless something comes up that demands we deviate from that pattern.

Among my life default settings would be cheering for the Spurs, being delighted with cool, rainy weather, and eating dinner with Kathy as many nights out of week as possible.

Listen to Paul describe his default setting when it comes to how he views the behavior of his brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **Living under the Lordship of Christ (vv. 6-9)**

*A “default position” of acceptance (vv. 6-8)*

*[6] He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. [7] For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; [8] for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

We will choose to believe the best

Notice. Paul assumes that both the strong and the weak are doing what they are doing because of their love for and commitment to Jesus.

His confidence is striking. He seems to take for granted that the strong and weak alike are living for the Lord. They are making informed choices about life issues in light of the Lordship of Jesus. This was evidently his default setting.

As I was thinking about Paul's confidence, my mind drifted over to another passage he wrote, a passage that contains a phrase that has been troubling to me, from time to time, over the years.

In 1 Corinthians 13, he writes, *“love....bears all things, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, hopes all things, endures all things...”*

Have you ever thought much about what Paul meant when he said that love *“believes all things”*?

Surely he didn't mean that the one who loves is the ultimate simpleton, trusting everyone, believing everything he reads in The Onion, falling for every scam that comes down the pike.

(By the way, did you know that they removed the word “gullible” from the dictionary...? ☺ )

Well, if “gullible” is not what is meant by, “*Love believes all things,*” then what does it mean?

I think “*believes all things*” is perfectly illustrated by what we just read (Romans 14:6-8) about Paul’s optimistic description about why believers do the things they do.

We choose hope over cynicism

Try this on for size: Unless you get direct evidence to the contrary, assume that your brother and your sister are walking with the Lord. Your default setting is that those around you who name the name of Jesus are following Him into deeper and deeper discipleship.

Fight the temptation to think that someone’s different-from-yours conviction means that they don’t really love Jesus.

I’m going to argue that this default position of optimism doesn’t make us naïve. It simply requires of us the exercise of the dangerous grace of HOPE. We dare to hope the best when we see differences.

Now, will our hopes sometimes be dashed? Yep. Sadly, we will sometimes be disappointed. To choose to hope the best, to “*believe all things*” opens us up to the possibility of grave disappointment. But I believe that it is infinitely better to hope and be disappointed than to cynically expect the worst.

Nor does hoping for the best mean that we don’t talk with each other. Oh, we need to talk with each other!

We will agree to talk with each other

Imagine approaching someone who has a different conviction than you on some grey area with this: “*Hey brother, I’ve noticed that you and I have come to different convictions about ‘x’. Your conviction shows that you are obviously not submitting to Jesus’ Lordship!*” (or just as bad, to think it and not say it, or even worse, to say it to someone else!)

As brothers and sisters in Jesus we are to engage with each other.

At Northwest we refer to the “*passionate pursuit of life-changing relationships.*” And, true, the way of approach I just suggested would likely inflame some passionate response!

But, what if, instead, you approached your friend with this: “*Your conviction on such-and-such an issue is completely different from mine. I would love to hear how you arrived at this conviction in submission to the Lordship of Christ. Tell me about it. Let’s talk about it.*”

What a great, baggage-free way to engage in provocative, edifying conversation!

When we talk with each other, we learn from each other. When I hear how you have arrived at your convictions, I’ll understand you better.

When we talk with each other one of us might even become aware of blind spots we hadn’t previously thought about. I might even re-think my convictions in light of our talk. I might see that another way would be more honoring to God.

There can be tremendous benefit when we actually speak with one another about our differences of opinion and conviction.

The Bible calls us to loving acceptance and it calls us to arrive at our own personal convictions. When we go there, we are relieved of the pressure to raise the stakes on every issue to the level of spiritual witch-hunting.

We can agree to disagree, love and serve together, accept one another - all in submission to the One who is Lord of all.

*Our Lord - The one and only Lord of all! (v. 9)*

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

One day, when He returns to the earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, everyone will see that Jesus is Lord. That hasn’t happened yet. Until then, His Lordship is exercised over those of us who call Him Savior.

And His Lordship will be most evident when we, His subjects, love each other *despite* our differences.

What is really important is that we are able to identify what is a biblical mandate and what is our preference.

What is really important is that we have come to convictions before God that what we are doing is right for us at this time in light of Scripture.

What is really important is that we not try to press each other into a particular mold. That's moldier than Jesus wants us to be!

What is really important is that we lovingly accept those who approach things differently from the way we approach things. After all, it is not our place to judge.

However, judging is the place for Someone...

And in the final section of this passage, Paul draws special attention to a time when we Christians will stand face to face before Jesus, the Judge.

### **Leaving Judgment with the JUDGE! (vv. 10-12)**

#### **Judgment? For Christians? (vv. 10-11)**

*[10] But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother<sup>6</sup> with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.<sup>7</sup> [11] For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."*

Only the Lord Jesus knows the secret motives of the heart.

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<sup>6</sup> Highlighting the sobriety of this meeting with the Lord at the end of time, Paul mentions the brotherly relationships that we sustain here in the Body of Christ by writing "brother" twice.

<sup>7</sup> In other places referred to as the Judgment Seat of Christ. (2 Corinthians 5, for instance)

I don't know what's motivating you to do what you do. You don't know what's driving me or anyone else to do what they do. Therefore, you and I have no business passing judgment on each other.

The strong are not to regard the weak as insignificant or trivial. The weak are not to judge the strong as spiritually lax.

Go downtown to the County Courthouse and you will find judges dispensing judgments all day long. Men and women leave Bexar County courtrooms having heard, "Guilty" or "Not guilty" either from the jury foreman or the judge himself.

The same thing happened in Rome in Paul's day. And the Roman citizens to whom Paul was writing knew very well the sight of a man standing before a judge awaiting his verdict.

That reality is going to be played out in the experience of every saved-by-the-blood Christian after this life is over.

### **The Judge will Judge (v. 12)**

*[12] So then each one of us will give account of himself to God.*

I won't be asked to give an account or an explanation for someone else. I won't be asked my opinion about anyone else. Nobody else will stand in my place.

You and I will each sing solo before God.

At this Judgment, the issue will not be Heaven or Hell. If you have trusted Jesus for salvation, you are saved. Period.

But at this Judgment Seat, the Lord Jesus will evaluate the lives of believers. And the reason He will conduct this searching evaluation is to determine rewards that we will receive, or rewards that will be withheld that might have been ours.

He won't condemn because there is no condemnation for those who are His (Rom. 8:1). However, He will reveal and reward us (or not!) for the deeds we have done in this life.

Sinful deeds, or deeds sinfully motivated, will be burnt up (see 1 Corinthians 3) and will result in no reward. Righteous deeds, faithful deeds done to the glory of God by the power of God will result in rich reward.

All very interesting, of course... But what is the point of wrapping up today's focus on grey areas and personal convictions by focusing on the Judgment Seat of Christ? Just this:

Since the Judge of ALL is going to Judge us all, we have no business judging each other for the decisions we make about matters where the Bible is not clear.

### **Conclusion:**

So...

You and your wife have watched as your children have grown. You have been diligent students of your kids and you have seen their strengths and weaknesses. You have placed them in the public school system because before God that is where you believe they will have the best opportunity to grow, to mature, and to shine for Jesus. You will shepherd them through the unavoidable challenges and the delights of public school.

At the same time, your good friends have chosen the home-schooling route for their kids. They have decided before God that the home environment will be best for their kids to learn and to grow. They value the flexibility that the home-schooling option provides and believe that this track will best equip them with character, with spiritual nurture, and for a lifetime of service to Christ.

And neither one of you judge the other. You have come to your own personal conviction and you lovingly accept your friends and their decision. You have chosen to believe the best.

Then, you determine before God that you are going to see a movie that has a stricter rating than those you normally view. It looks like the film has a fascinating plot. Based on research you have done, this movie doesn't cross the line that you have drawn about movies that are, for you, off-limits.

Your good friends have decided that they will not see that movie because of the rating it received.

No judging. You're still friends. You still serve Jesus together.

You enjoy a glass of wine with dinner. You know that the Bible condemns drunkenness, so you limit your consumption. But you also know that the Bible doesn't prohibit drinking alcohol. So, you partake.

You have brothers and sisters in Christ who have decided that they will not drink alcohol. Before God they have decided that abstinence is the best, most God-honoring path for them.

And again, you don't look with contempt on your friend who doesn't drink and your friend doesn't judge you who drink.

You both are doing what you are doing to bring honor to Jesus. You are doing all to the glory of God.

Our world rightly hears "*Blah, blah, blah,*" when we speak about Jesus out of one side of our mouth while we judge each other for our differing convictions.

But people will sit up and take notice when they see us who have come to different convictions loving each other and serving each other.

Lord, help us to learn to love!