Romans 14:1-9 Sermon Manuscript

“Accepting One Another”

 There was a story long ago about a certain bishop named bishop Potter who came from New York. He decided to be on a ship sailing to Europe and he had to share a cabin with a passenger with whom he did not know. After bishop Potter met the passenger, he went to the ship’s purser (the guy who was responsible for handling money and valuables) and requested if he could leave his gold watch and other valuables with him. He explained to the ship’s purser that normally he wouldn’t do that, but when he met his cabin mate, judging from his appearance he didn’t look trustworthy. And so the purser agreed and said to Mr. Potter, “*I’ll be glad to take care of them for you, bishop. The other man has already been up here and left his valuables for the same reason*.” Well I wanted to begin with that story because it shows how easy it is for us to judge one another. People today love to use the out of context phrase “Judge not, lest you be judged by another.” But the irony of the sinful human heart is that while we don’t like to be judged by others, at the same time, we find delight in judging others.

 And this passage in part has to do with judging others. The apostle Paul has spent the first eleven chapters to build up the foundation for the application we see starting in chapter 12. The gospel of God, the gospel of righteousness where God makes unrighteous sinners righteous is the foundation for why we should offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, holy, and acceptable to Him. The rest of Romans following dishes out what living as living sacrifices looks like in our individual lives, the church, government, and the rest of society. And we saw that the love of Christ is the center or the glue which binds all Christian virtues together…that in the same way that Christ loved us and forgave us of our sins, we should do the same towards our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and with our neighbors in general. And anything that contradicts that love of Christ that God has poured out into our hearts is sin and wickedness that we must reject. There are clear sin issues that need to be addressed and eradicated in our lives as we progressively are set apart to look more and more like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

 However, when we come to chapter 14, Paul is going to deal with something a bit different. It is not clear-cut sin issues or a sinful lifestyle that need to be opposed. It is not you can say clear black and white issues, but the grey areas issues that he’s going to address in the church…God is going to address the area that is not explicitly talked about in the Scriptures, issues that are up to your individual conscience, and I would argue it is not only those areas that are not explicitly addressed in Scripture, but even areas that are also not implicitly addressed in the Scriptures as well. What do I mean about that? Well when preachers come to Romans 14, I have heard them list specific areas that because the Bible doesn’t address those issues, they are non-sin issues and are therefore left up to each individual conscience whether to do them or not. While I agree to a certain extent, what I disagree with them is that I believe certain things they think the Bible does not address I do believe the Bible addresses, though not directly. I believe there are biblical principles and patterns that can help inform how we are to think about certain issues. Not all issues, but certain ones.

 Now the elephant in the room that many of you are probably wondering about is the elephant of what are exactly the subjects or categories that fall into issues of conscience or liberty. I want to hear pastor Teru’s convictions about alcohol and smoking or watching R rated movies, etc. Well sorry, you’re not really going to get that because that’s not really the point of the sermon. I will give some examples of what I think fit this category of conscience or Christian liberty but from what I see in the Scriptures, but there has to be two conditions that need to be met for me to even mention them 1) It has to be an issue that of course is not explicitly stated in the Scriptures 2) It has to be an issue that is also not implicitly addressed in Scripture. For example, let’s take recreational marijuana is not addressed in the Scriptures, I’m not talking about medical marijuana that hospitals sometimes use for medicinal purposes. I’m talking about the marijuana that has THC inside of it that makes you “high” marijuana. It's true that there is not explicit command that says “thou shall not smoke marijuana.” So it meets the first criteria. But I would argue it doesn’t meet the second criteria to be in the category of “individual conscience or freedom.” Implicitly the biblical principle that we see in Scripture is that one has to take care of their own body to the glory of the Lord. We see in 1 Corinthians that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We see also that if you get high on marijuana, it can lead to reckless sinful activity or sinful sloth that wastes your life and time, which is not honoring to the Lord. Therefore, I would say recreational marijuana is not an issue of conscience or Christian liberty where it’s up to your individual conscience whether you should smoke marijuana or not, but it becomes a sin issue.

 Now with all that being said, let’s get into the text. Chapter 14, verse 1: “*Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on opinions*.” What does Paul mean? What is he talking about? Well verse 2 says: “*One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only*.” What we got to keep in mind is the context surrounding the book of Romans. Romans was written to unify the Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches of Rome with the gospel. There were probably some Jewish believers that refused to eat certain types of meat or even forgoed eating all meats all together because of its association with paganism and ate a strictly vegetable diet. There were probably also some Gentile believers that prior to coming to be saved by Jesus were steeped in paganism and idolatry which involved offering meat to the pagan gods of Rome and whatever was left over was sold in the meat market. And so because they were involved in that kind of life where meat was associated with idolatry, there were Gentiles that still thought that eating meat sacrificed to an idol after salvation was still sinful. So this is not speaking to vegetarians or vegans per say, but about the association of idolatry with meat eating.

 But there was a group of Gentiles and maybe some Jews who didn’t believe that eating meat sacrificed to idols was sinful and they were totally fine with it. It didn’t bother their conscience. And so those whom Paul implies are the “strong” in faith have the temptation to view those who find it sinful to eat meat sacrificed to idols, the “weak” in faith, as legalistic, ritualistic, too sensitive, too restrictive. And the temptation of those who from the “weak” side, see the other Christians are being too liberal, too free, and testing the borders of what is right and wrong. They see them as risk takers who are borderline presuming on God’s grace whereas they see themselves as erring on the side of caution, believing that refraining from it is better than partaking of it. The weak believe in their conscience that they are honoring the Lord by not partaking of what is “sinful food.” The strong believe in their conscience that they are honoring the Lord by partaking of what God has approved and confirmed as “good.” In this particular case of eating meat sacrificed to idols, we know from the Word of God that God has declared all foods as clean and that we can partake of it with thankfulness and joy! Praise the Lord for cows! There is no secular or sacred when it comes to food. All food is sacred, clean by God. But if it’s not a clear sin issue then, but a conscience issue, how are the Jewish and Gentile believers supposed to get along? Verse 3 “*The one who eats must not view the one who does not eat with contempt, and the one who does not eat must not judge the one who eats, for God accepted him*.”

 We must not look with contempt at each other look at each other in a condescending way simply because God has accepted each and every believer. In other words, if someone eating meat freely or not eating meat freely was not a condition for them to be saved, it didn’t contribute at all to their salvation, then who are we to make a big deal out of it and make that the focus of our relationship with those who differ from us? And that’s why verse 4 essentially says, “*who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand*.” In other words, we are not the master of the person we are judging. They are not accountable to us but to God alone! They alone will answer to God. And the Lord is not only able but willing to make him stand through the test of faith into eternity. Then Paul points out another issue that the Jews and Gentiles were squabbling over: which was most likely the Sabbath. Verse 5 “*One person judges one day above another, another judges every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind*.”

 The immediate group that comes to mind when I read this passage in our present day context are the Seventh Day Adventists who worship on a Saturday…which is fine…as long as they don’t push that on others and Sunday worshippers shouldn’t push that on Saturday worshippers. Now, if you ask why they believe they believe they should worship on a Saturday, then that’s a different story for a different time. I remember Les telling me that one of his Adventist friends made the focus of their devotional during the prayer time all about the Sabbath so much to the point that Les got the impression that the Sabbath seemed more important to the Adventist than Christ. When it comes to arguing over the Sabbath, we must remember the words of our Lord when He said that man was not made for the Sabbath but rather the Sabbath was made for man. The pattern of 6 days of work and 1 day of resting from work is for our blessing and benefit. For most of the church, we worship on a Sunday because it is the day the Lord arose from the dead and the resurrection of Christ is a good way to start every week. Because we worship on a Sunday, people typically who worship on a Sunday don’t work as well which makes Sunday their day of rest as well as their day of congregational worship. But for some their day of rest might be Saturday or even Wednesday. Whatever day it is, there is a biblical pattern and principle that at least one day of our week should be to rest from our work. But there are some hardline Adventists that believe that if you don’t worship on a Saturday, you are going to hell. Or there are some believers who hold that you literally should not do anything on a Sunday like any recreational activity but wholly focus on the Lord and like reading your Bible. There are some who believe we are must follow the Sabbath like the Jews and others who hold we are no longer under the Sabbath and we don’t have to follow it.

 But here’s the key, whichever day you think your Sabbath is, make that your conviction. The key is “*you must be fully convinced in your own mind*.” If you able to come to the point of judging another position as wrong, you better be convinced in your own mind that your position is for you the best way you can follow and honor the Lord. If you are on the fence about it, and you’re saying to yourself, “well I could see my position of worshipping on Saturday could be the correct position, but what if I’m wrong? What if worshipping on a Sunday is the correct position?” And you kind of vacillate between the two, then your conscience is not clear and that’s not how you should live your life as a believer. Verse 6 “*He who regards the day, regards it for the Lord, and he who eats, eats for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks to God*.” But Paul didn’t Jesus Himself say and declare that all foods were clean? Yes. Didn’t God say to Peter in the book of Acts in the vision of all the different animals, rise up Peter kill and eat? Yes. So isn’t refusing to eat meat sacrificed to idols not a conscience issue because it is pretty clear from the Word of God that there is nothing unclean in of itself? Well not exactly. We have to remember that an issue of food is a choice and there is not a direct command from God to eat meat as opposed to veggies. So we enjoy and are privileged with the liberty to eat whatever we want. True, but isn’t that very thinking that eating meat sacrificed to idols is wrong in your view Paul? Yes, but he isn’t you. You don’t believe eating meat sacrificed to idols is wrong because you understand that there is nothing unclean that can enter a man and defile him, but it is only what comes out of man that defiles him as Jesus said. But they haven’t arrived at that scriptural maturity yet. But then if he is not mature in that understanding, shouldn’t we just hammer him and fix his thinking!!?? Well you see there’s the issue, it’s an issue of priority as well as unity. We need to be unified with each other in the church. And the only thing that is going to keep us unified and representing Jesus is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the one common denominator we must all have. If the basis of our unity is conformity in all of the convictions of areas that the Bible does not explicitly address, then we are not going to get very far and most likely we will have a church split.

 Now, what this passage is not saying is that we can never bring up or talk about our differences and opinions or convictions about certain things and even attempt to get the other person to see what you think is a correct understanding. I think there is room for that to sharpen one another in conservation and even challenging our understanding of why we believe the way we believe…because you can have a conviction about something, but be wrong about that. Paul is not saying that every single grey area issue where person A says this way is the true way and person B says the opposite is truth are both true at the same time. I’m sure there are cases like that, for example what color of a suit you should wear on Sunday. One person says wearing a blue colored suit on Sunday is more godly, the other says wearing a grey colored suit on Sunday is more godly. Which is more pleasing to the Lord? Which is right? Well they are both right and I think God is pleased with both! What I don’t think this passage has in mind is differences over doctrine and Scripture interpretation. While it is true that we need to be careful in matters of doctrine to not make certain doctrinal views a dividing point for fellowship or association with other churches or believers, I don’t think that’s primarily what’s in view here in this passage.

 I think the whole point that God is making in His Word today is “don’t make an issue that is not directly addressed and especially if it’s not at least implicitly addressed in the Bible a gospel issue.” So for example, tattoos and piercings, I have my convictions on those things, but if some lady comes to our church with a ring through her nostrils (ouch)…and she’s wearing dark, black gothic style clothing…essentially she looks emo, but she loves Jesus Christ and she is saved by grace through faith alone…then I’m not going to focus on the way she is dressing but on our common ground that we both believe in the gospel. Now if she came in, dressing very immodestly, with very revealing clothes and half her chest is exposed and that was distracting to everyone, then we have an issue that needs to be addressed eventually (do you get where I am going with this?). Then someone should probably go up to her and say, “hey lady, you might want to cover up for the sake of the brothers here.”

 So what is the punchline in all of this? The punchline is in verses 7-9 “*For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living*.” What is Paul bringing up life and death here? Well his point is to show that Christ is glorified whether we live or die, because we live or die for the Lord and that is shown through Christ’s death and resurrection. He died so that we wouldn’t have to spiritually die and suffer the eternal penalty of our sins. And Christ rose from the grave so that we would be able walk in the joy of His life in His resurrection life. So if life and death, as radically opposite as it is can both display the glory of Christ, then how much more will Christ get the glory among our petty differences like eating meat versus not eating meat, or over certain days, or what clothes to wear, and so forth? And that’s good news for you my friends, because that means there is nothing outside of Jesus’ lordship that He can’t be lord over. If Jesus is not only the Lord of the living but also of the dead, then there is hope for you after you die. Jesus as the risen Lord has defeated sin and death. He has defeated the grave and He can save you from your sins if you come to Him, turning from your sins and turning towards Jesus in full, complete trust in His finished work on the cross. You don’t have to clean up your act to receive His grace, or be perfect, or be anything other than a sinner that recognizes his sin and his need for a Savior. So call on Jesus as your Savior to save you from your sins, and surrender your life to Christ as your Lord so that you can live and die for the Lord.

Benediction:

Jude 1:24-25

*“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*