

# **“WHY DO YOU PASS JUDGMENT?”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Romans 14:5-12**

## **Introduction.**

We continue under Paul’s instruction on how to show genuine love toward one another, how to outdo one another in showing honor and how to not think too highly of ourselves.

Romans 14 is about loving each other through our differences. Every church is a house divided over opinions and preferences and principles, our likes and dislikes and favorites.

It is staggering what people can find on the internet to become champions of, forming opinions that become dogmas. Vitamins, food allergies, what poisons you are consuming, what causes cancer, the benefits of aroma therapy or going green, or the dangers of plastic or fluoride in water or fossil fuels or conspiracy theories . And let’s not even start on politics, local, state or national.

We all know how small things have become big things, and led to bitter feelings, broken relationships, split churches and have brought terrible disrepute on the name of Christ.

Paul has an interesting way of dealing with this problem. He says the opposite of what I would say. And in fact, I have said the opposite.

When dealing with non-essentials, with disputable issues and personal opinions, my tendency is to say chill out or as one of my sons likes to say chillax. Lighten up, dude. Don’t get wrapped around the axle. A daughter-in-law is often saying to her kids, take a breath, breathe, relax.

But Paul doesn’t say that and what he does say seems like it could make the problem worse.

Instead of saying, “Lighten up, these things are minor and don’t merit strong convictions,” he says, “Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.” Instead of saying don’t be so intense, he says have firm convictions about minor matters. How will this help?

We need to understand what having firm convictions means. In means first I am fully convinced it is not sinful, immoral, unethical, contrary to God’s Word and will. Second, it means that I am able to honor Christ with gratitude and glorify God in my conviction. Third, that my conscience is clean and clear on this matter, that this is the best thing for me. Fourth, I understand this is not an essential matter, it is not something over which I will judge or look down on others over. And fifth, my highest priority is love. I don’t want to break fellowship with family and friends and church members over this. Be fully convinced in your own mind in this way.

Last week we heard Paul say those who have greater maturity and faith are to accommodate themselves and make allowances for those less experienced or weaker in the faith or more tender in conscience. Even if they are wrong.

The strength, faith and maturity God gives us are gifts that ought not to be used to oppress or abuse or hurt others. Rather we are under a greater obligation to love and help our neighbor.

This week we hear more of how Paul would have us deal with disputable things. He does it by giving us much bigger things to focus on. Instead of majoring on the minors, he wants us to major on the majors.

Last week’s major was we don’t pass judgment because God has already welcomed them and if God has, then who are we to not welcome them as well. They are our brothers and sisters.

This week Paul brings up a new minor issue and gives us some new major things to remember.

Let each one be fully convinced in their own minds, honoring Jesus as Lord and God as Judge.

**Vss. 5-6, Clarity and thanksgiving.**

Vs. 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

In the OT Law of Moses God appointed many feasts and festivals, ceremonial observances and solemn days. The Jews were raised in them since childhood. Their reverence for days was not easily set aside. Old habits and ways are hard to break. Give them grace and space.

We all have our days and how we have been raised to keep and honor them. Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, Halloween, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and of course the Lord's Day.

There are Christians with strong opinions and consciences about all of these days. Some churches observe Advent and Lent, Ascension and Pentecost, and others don't. We did not observe Halloween at all until we moved to Lynden. I changed my mind about it. Some have strong feelings about Easter and all the added pagan Easter egg hunts and chocolate bunnies.

The Lord's Day or Sunday has been especially controversial all through Church history. Our own church has been diverse in our practices. All of us here have stories to tell about growing up in Lynden and the practices of previous generations compared to how it is now. Some never went to restaurants or stores or made purchases. Some would not get a newspaper on Sunday. Kids were not allowed to play, and certainly no organized sports.

Some of you grew up with very strict rules, and some churches in town still keep those rules. Others had looser rules or maybe even no rules.

In our house we took a middle path, and limited certain choices or practices. We told our boys these were our choices for how to honor the Lord's Day. They didn't make us better or more righteous than others, they were just our way, according to our conscience. What others did or didn't do was their choice according to their conscience. We are not to judge or look down on.

Whatever we do and however we do it, we should do it fully convinced in our own mind. And we should do it in a way that honors and glorifies God.

The Lord's Day is a gift of God's grace to give rest to His people. Don't deny His gift. Don't neglect it. Find ways to receive it with gratitude and honor the Lord in it, and remember His resurrection every week. Seek God first, pray, ask for wisdom and discernment, and then act accordingly.

Being fully convinced in our own mind means that none of us should do anything that we are not fully convinced and certain is pleasing to God.

Is what I am about to do, pleasing to God? Is this good and acceptable and pleasing according to the will of God? If you doubt, if you are wavering, then don't do it? Do not go beyond your convictions guided by the Word of God.

If someone comes to you with a sincere question about something and asks if this is wrong, your response should not be what your opinion is or what you do. Rather in that moment you should pause and ask "Are you asking because God is dealing with you about this, is the Holy Spirit stirring up something in your heart or mind?" If they are having doubts, there is a reason, point them back to God and to obeying their conscience, not your conscience.

If there is something in your life that you are doing that God has convicted you about, even if it is something everyone else might be doing, for you it is wrong. Obey your conscience before the Lord. Paul will say at the end of this chapter, "whatever is not of faith is sin."

Let each man decide for himself and each family decide for themselves and, then, get this, wait for it, are you ready. Don't judge, don't condemn, let each one have their conscience before God.

**Vs. 6, True Christians on both sides of these issues glorify God in what they do.**

6 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.

They can eat and they can abstain to the glory of God. They can eat with thanksgiving to God for what they are eating. They can abstain from eating with thanksgiving that God is able to satisfy them, even though they don't eat.

This is what praying at meals is about. When I say grace over what I eat and you say grace over what you eat, we are honoring the Lord. So don't judge or look down on or despise or criticize what is grace for another person.

In Christ's church believers can be on opposite sides of an issue and both honor God and be welcomed and received by God and therefore by us.

### **Vss. 7-9, Jesus is Lord.**

Vs. 8 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.

We are not masters over others, nor are we servants under others. Jesus is Lord. We are not lord. We are all equally under the Lordship of Jesus. He is Lord of them and their conscience.

I have a friend in another state who is convinced in his own mind the earth is flat. He engaged me in the issue, and after some back and forth I realized I was going to get nowhere trying to convince him he was wrong. So I backed off, let him have his conscience. And I don't think any less of him, he is a brother.

He is the Lord's. Both the weak and the strong belong to the Lord, it would be arrogance on my part to judge him. Christ's death and resurrection makes Him Lord of everything. That's what living and dying means. Living and dying and everything in between is the Lords.

We should live as unto the Lord acknowledging God is sovereign over life and death, and has power and control over all things.

**II Corinthians 5:15** He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

## HC Q.1. WHAT IS YOUR ONLY COMFORT, IN LIFE AND IN DEATH?

A. That I am not my own, but belong - body and soul, in life and in death - to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. ... Because I belong to him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Put Christ over and above everything, over believers and their consciences. Christ is more important than my being right or winning the debate.

### **Vss. 10-12, God is Judge.**

Vs. 4 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.

Paul repeats himself from verse 4. Why do you dare pass judgment on a brother?

First of all, he is a brother, he is your equal, you are not over him to judge in matters of freedom.

Second, there is only one true judge.

Because all life and death belong to Christ, all judgment belongs to Him. It is pride and presumption if we put ourselves in the judgment seat against a fellow brother or sister. And we ought not to usurp God's rightful authority and take upon ourselves what belongs to God.

When we do that we are robbing from Christ what has been given to Christ by the Father.

Let everyone know the reason why they do what they do, because they will have to give an account for it before the judgment seat of God. We don't need to judge, God will.

By the way, the point Paul is making here is not a threat or warning about the coming judgment. If we are in Christ, then we are justified and atoned for by His blood and reconciled to the Father.

Rather his point is we are not going to be judged by others, and they are not going to be judged by us. And that is good news, because God will judge according to love and grace and truth. I will not be at the judgment seat in your place and you will not be at the judgment seat in my place.

I will give an account whether I have done what I have done fully convinced in my mind and to the honor of Christ, that's it. You will do the same.

We will all give an account for our petty judgments and how much we looked down on others over insignificant issues. Imagine having to stand before for the throne and answer for why we judged Joe's eating or drinking, or Sally's wardrobe choices, or the Smith's raising their kids. Or the evils of gluten or fossil fuels, or those three articles on the Internet that proved my point.

Paul concludes by saying we each should show humility and meekness by not judging one another, by not taking God's job away from Him, by remembering that we will be under the same judgment. There is one God and one Lord and it is not me, and there is one Judgment Seat and it is not mine.

### **Implications and application.**

Paul commands us to accept one another and not pass judgment on disputable matters. Each individual Christian must live for Christ alone and give an account to Christ alone ultimately, and we have no right to judge Christ's servants.

Have your opinions, share your convictions, discuss your differences, make your arguments, but do not yield to the temptation to despise or judge those who differ with us on these sorts of issues. Don't stop loving and welcoming them as brothers and sisters, as family in Christ.

Help the weaker believer understand the freedom he has in Christ and the joy that comes with it. But don't look down your nose at him/her, for they are seeking to honor God with their lives as much as the strong are.

Are you divided from a brother or sister whom Christ has welcomed? Is there someone you have hurt or offended in your pride or stubbornness?

Have you posted some things online you need to delete? Have you let your opinions or preferences or politics push Christ aside?

We all have freedom to follow our conscience. And we also have freedom to let go of our rights and freedoms for the sake of love for another person. Our freedoms are not rights, they are freedoms, we can exercise them or not.

And if you see somebody in the church not heeding these exhortation, don't you despise them.

Stand in awe of the risen Christ who will get His glory from the living and from the dead, and from the eaters and the abstainers, and from the day-keepers and the non-day-keepers. Stand in awe of Jesus Christ who accepts you in your weakness and sin and in the folly of your own opinions. And whatever you do, whether you eat or whether you drink, do all to the glory of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Let's be a church that truly glorifies God in all we say and do with each other.