

## **"We are the Lord's"**

Romans 14:1-12

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The Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)

### **Romans 14:1-12**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 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, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? 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 give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Prayer.

One of the natural gifts  
Humans possess  
Is the God given ability to recognize  
Patterns, sequences, and  
combinations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For much of this section, I am indebted to the work of E.D. Beinhocker in his book *The Origin of Wealth* (Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA (2006) ISBN 1-57851-777-X 544 pp.). This is an excellent

Our mind works to organize,  
Establish priorities,  
And to make critical judgments,  
Sometimes in the fraction of a second,  
To save our life,  
and to live to see another day.  
Some of this is related to memory  
... last time I touched the hot stove  
I was burnt ...  
Some is cognitive  
... if A equals B and B equals C,

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graduate text on complex economic, which I thoroughly enjoyed reading.

then A equals C ...  
Other is behavioral, social, emotional,  
And some is just plain biological:  
It does matter how your brain is  
wired!

The human mind likes to prioritize  
information.  
For example  
A frog sitting on a lily pad  
Recognizes movement.  
If the movement is something large  
(like a predator),  
It knows to move ... hop and swim  
away quickly!  
If the movement is something small  
(like a fly),  
It knows to stick out it's tongue  
quickly,  
And enjoy a little lunch!  
Values are in the frog's brain,  
And self-preservation always wins out.  
After all, a successful escape  
Means the frog will live to eat another  
day.  
But an unsuccessful escape  
And the frog is someone else's lunch.  
Self-preservation is a priority over  
appetite.

The human mind works the same way,  
Abet, with a little more sophistication.  
We prioritize our actions and reactions  
And tend to apply the values and  
beliefs  
We develop from our genes or  
experience  
Onto others.  
Sometimes this works out well.  
Sometimes it doesn't.  
For example:  
I believe stealing is wrong.

I've elected a number of like-minded  
politicians  
To make this law and to fund its  
enforcement.  
On the other hand,  
consider this example of bias violence:  
There were some who did not want to  
give the vote  
To African Americans, women, or  
Jews.  
They gathered a sufficient number  
of like-minded politicians,  
made it law, and paid for its  
enforcement.  
(With sarcasm) That worked out well,  
didn't it?

Priorities become bias,  
Bias  
left unbalanced  
becomes prejudice.  
We tend to judge others  
Based on the values and beliefs  
We've grown to hold.

This was happening within Paul's  
church in Rome,  
And he addresses the unbalanced bias  
in these closing scripture passages  
from the Epistle today.

Simply put,  
On the one hand,  
There were former Jews,  
Who grew up learning, living, and  
strictly following  
The Law of Moses.  
This was righteous behavior before  
God.  
Now,  
Along comes Christ,  
Whose message kindles their hearts  
And they find themselves in a

Christ-centered religious community.

On the other hand,  
There were former Gentiles,  
Who grew up in a secular household.  
Religion was the state,  
And Caesar was god.  
According to their Jewish neighbors,  
They weren't living a righteous  
lifestyle,  
Not righteous before God, anyways.  
Their life was nationalism  
and patriotism,  
and militarism;  
Not Law and Yahweh.  
Along comes Christ,  
Who redeems them from their sin  
And they are freed by their first taste  
of grace.  
Likewise, the message kindles their  
heart  
And they, too, join the Christ-centered  
community.

Gentiles,  
Weak in faith  
Come to Christ by grace.  
Jews,  
Strong in faith  
Come to Christ by Law.

So now they are feuding with one  
another.  
Quarreling, the apostle calls it.  
"Welcome those who are weak in faith,  
... for God has welcomed them" Paul  
writes.  
Don't quarrel or despise, Paul lectures.  
Who are you to judge? He asks.  
Who are we to judge any other man or  
woman?  
(Point) Who died and made you judge?

Today,  
Grace may be seen by some  
As the religious expression of the  
liberal left.  
(Sarcastically) "You're soft on crime,  
too lenient on drug users,  
too pro choice,  
supportive of gay marriage,  
and too wimpy when it comes to  
keeping a strong military.  
The biased priorities  
Of this, and every, political election  
season  
Is what divides us into two opposing  
camps,  
Just as it did to the church in Rome,  
And it inflicts un-necessary violence  
On everyone who is different than us.

"Paul's flexibility is rooted in his vision  
of Christ,"<sup>2</sup>  
William Loader correctly observes.  
It isn't rooted in politics.  
It isn't found in the evangelical right,  
Nor is it found in the social-gospel  
liberalism  
Of the main-line Church, on the left.  
It is Paul's vision of Christ,  
And of Christ alone.

Christ came to save sinners.  
What's so hard about that?  
Christ is the judge;  
Everyone will have their time before  
Him.  
It isn't our role to judge -  
Who is saved and who isn't,  
Who is in and who is out.

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<sup>2</sup> William Loader, "First Thoughts on  
Year A Epistle Passages in the  
Lectionary"

Thank God, that is why we have a  
Savior,  
Jesus Christ our Lord!

So, whether you are weak or strong,  
Paul tells his people,  
Whether you are formerly Gentile or  
Jew,  
We only need to concern ourselves  
With the underlying fact  
That we are the Lord's.

If we live,  
We live to be the Lord's.  
When we die,  
We die being the Lord's.  
We live and die being the Lord's own;  
Redeemed, called, commissioned, and  
sent.

"With these words,  
Paul redirects our focus:  
Cease from judging your brother,  
and concentrate on examining  
yourself."<sup>3</sup>  
Ah, the responsibility now shifts.  
We can no longer play the blame  
game.  
We can no longer  
blame the unemployed for being  
homeless.  
We can't blame the president for  
leading us into war  
Or wrecking the economy.  
We can't even curse the driver  
Who cuts us off on the morning  
commute.  
The responsibility, Paul clearly  
articulates,  
Begins with the self.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh, "Love and  
Liberty: Liberties Love Won't Take"

This question is a good place to start:  
"What am I doing in private,  
that would shame me,  
and bring shame to Christ,  
if made public?"  
Shame can be an effective teacher.  
Painful, perhaps, but effective.  
Philosophers for centuries have been  
telling us  
The unexamined life just isn't worth  
living.  
The self-examination Paul is seeking  
Is what provides insight and correction  
To unbridled biases.  
Too much, mind you,  
Can lead to chronic self-absorption.  
Too little,  
Makes one angry and judgmental  
In opposition to the world.

Paul's flexibility  
Brings us back to the nature of Christ.  
Law convicts.  
Grace saves.  
The judge before whom we stand  
Is not terribly interested in  
improving His conviction rate.  
We've already convicted ourselves,  
haven't we?  
Jesus is far more interested in  
our redemption and our salvation.  
And that is something we can't do  
ourselves.

Jesus was sent to live and die  
So that He is the Lord of both  
The living and the dead.  
Such that whether we live,  
Or whether we die,  
Jesus is Lord of all.  
Jesus is the missing puzzle piece ...  
The necessary key ...

That unlocks the door  
So one can pass from this life  
Into the next,  
Safely and without fear.

I conclude this day,  
With words from the old evangelical  
hymn,  
"We are the Lord's":

*"We are the Lord's; His all sufficient merit,  
Sealed on the cross, to us this grace accords.  
We are the Lord's and all things shall inherit;  
Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

*We are the Lord's; then let us gladly tender  
Our souls to Him in deeds, not empty words.  
Let heart and tongue and life combine to render  
No doubtful witness that we are the Lord's.*

*We are the Lord's; no darkness brooding o'er us  
Can make us tremble while this star affords  
A steady light along the path before us—  
Faith's full assurance that we are the Lord's.*

*We are the Lord's; no evil can befall us  
In the dread hour of life's fast loosening cords;  
No pangs of death shall even then appall us.  
Death we shall vanquish, for we are the Lord's."<sup>1</sup>*

Amen.