Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Receiving One Another with Understanding, Part 2
Scripture: Romans 14:1-12
Code: 45-109

We want to spend some time tonight in the Word of God as always. And what a happy privilege it is to return to Romans chapter 14. We began last Lord's day evening an examination of this great, great section from chapter 14 verse 1 through chapter 15 verse 13, a section which we've entitled "The unity of strong and weak believers...the unity of strong and weak believers."

Let me say by way of introduction that we're very much aware as we study the Bible that the Lord is concerned how Christians treat one another. He's very concerned about that. In fact, if we go back to Matthew 18 we might find a good starting point even for our message tonight. In Matthew 18, Jesus said this to His disciples, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in Me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Now Jesus is not talking about babies. He's not talking about infants. He's not even talking about little children in a physical sense. He tells us who He's talking about when He says, "Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones who believe in Me." He's talking about believers. And He likens believers to little children. And He says, "Before you would ever offend a believer, you would be better off drowned." It's a very serious thing with the Lord how we treat one another as Christians.

Now in verse 7 He follows up by saying, "Woe unto the world because of offenses." In other words, we expect the unregenerate world to offend believers. But we certainly don't expect believers to offend believers. In fact, in verses 8 and 9, our Lord uses some rather familiar sort of proverbial statements to emphasize His point. He says if your right eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off. The idea being that if you're offensive in any sense, if you're led into sin by any of those members, you'd be better off to cut them off. The issue is to deal with sin drastically. So we must be careful not to offend another believer. We would be better off dead. We expect it from the world. And if we find ourselves offending, we should take drastic measures to cease from doing that.

And then in verse 10 He wraps up the thought by saying, "You had better not look down on one of these little ones, the same little ones, believers who believe in Him, because the Father in heaven and the angels in heaven are very concerned about them." And you don't want to be at odds with the holy angels and God the Father Himself.

So, our Lord established there a very important truth, and that is that we must take great care not to offend or look down on any other believer. Now I believe that Paul picks this theme up and it brings us now to Romans chapter 14. And Paul's great concern here is that we learn as believers in the church how to get along. Now last Lord's day evening, I mentioned to you that we're all aware of the fact that sin causes a rift in the fellowship. Sin fractures the fellowship of the church. But there is another area that can create great chaos and confusion and struggle and strife and conflict in the church and that's not so much in the area of overt sin as it is in the area of strong and weak believers being in conflict over preferential issues. Not issues that are moral issues or biblical issues that are clear cut, but preferential issues. And we talked about the fact that in the church you have people who prefer certain things and other people who prefer different things. And the potential for clashing is very great. The church is a mixture of Christians at all levels of spiritual growth, from brand new babies to very, very mature men and women in Christ. People from all kinds of backgrounds, people who come from a wild kind of licentious lawless background and people who come from a very traditional, very rigid, very ritualistic legalistic background, and we all come to Christ and we all wind up in the church and there's a potential clash when our preferences for say external forms of worship, preferential styles of life vary and can create some problems. And we went into that in detail last time.

So, what Paul is bringing to our attention here in this matter of Christian living which he began in chapter 12 is the need to develop a loving compatibility among all believers in the church.

Now let me just remind you that there are two believers that he sort of focuses on: the weak and the strong. And we define a weak Christian as a believer who because of some preference, maybe because of his past experience or orientation, but a believer who because of some preference cannot understand and fully enjoy his freedom in Christ. He tends to be narrow. He tends to be somewhat legalistic. He tends to be rather intolerant of spiritual liberty. He's confined because of some preferences that have been bound to him through some past experience.

On the other hand, a strong believer is one who does understand his freedom. Does enjoy his freedom, is not constrained by ceremonies or traditions or rituals, or any kind of non-moral externals. And so, the strong believer tends to just live his liberty to the fullest. And the weak believer tends to be extremely confined. And the potential problem comes when the weak believer looks at the strong believer and accuses him of being abusive of freedom. And the strong believer looks at the weak believer and accuses him of being too narrow and not understanding what Christ has really provided. And so there is conflict potentiated. The disharmony then comes when the strong despise the weak as being small minded, untaught and narrow. And the weak condemn the strong for abusing their liberty.

Now the church at Rome obviously faced this problem because it had in it many Jews. The Jews who had come out of a very tight, very strict Judaistic background with laws that touched on every

area of life, what you ate, how you cooked it, what you wore, the kind of clothing, the days you celebrated certain festivals and feasts, myriads of rules and laws and rituals and routines had been built into their culture to the extent that they were almost an involuntary behavior. And they came to Christ, and of course, in Christ all of those external ceremonies, rituals from the Old Testament and tradition were wiped away. And it may not have been a problem for the Gentiles so they might have celebrated their liberty and greatly offended the Jews who though having faith in Christ were unable to understand their freedom from the laws of ceremony that were so much a part of their heritage. And after all, as we said last week, those laws were ordained originally by God.

And so, it was very common. In fact, it was the norm for converted Jews to hold on to Mosaic tradition. And in some cases to want to bind that externalism to the Gentiles as well.

On the other hand, there were some Gentiles who came out of a wild pagan religious background and there were certain things that were a part of their background such as feasts and festivals to the various gods and idols. And we said that in those feasts they would offer food to their idol. What food wasn't consumed in a feast or eaten by the priests would show up in a marketplace and be sold for money to support the temple operation. So it is possible that you might buy meat that had once been offered to an idol. And if you served that to a Gentile who used to worship that idol, it would offend him greatly because he would see it as having been desecrated. And so it's possible that even Gentiles were very narrow in some areas of their Christian experience and unable to enjoy the fullness of their liberty in Christ. An idol is nothing, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8, don't worry about it. But at the same time, we don't want to be offensive to one another.

Now remember, the issues Paul is dealing with are not sin issues, they're preference issues. Issues of tradition, non- moral issues. In order to help us to understand how strong and weak are to get along, he gives us four main thrusts from verse 1 of 14 through 13 in chapter 15. I mentioned those to you last time, I'll just briefly mention them now. First, in verses 1 to 12 he says you have to receive each other. You have to receive each other, open your arms and take each other in.

Secondly, from verse 13 through 23 he says you must build up each other without offending. Be concerned to build up each other without offending.

In chapter 15 verses 1 to 7 he says please each other as Christ set the example by pleasing the Father. Please each other.

And finally, from verse 8 to 13 in chapter 15, rejoice with each other in the plan of God. So, receive, build up, please and rejoice with each other.

Now, we're looking at that first category of truth that Paul teaches, the matter of receiving each other. The strong are to receive the weak and the weak are to receive the strong. Now let's go back to

verse 1 and pick up where we left off. Him, that is a fellow believer, that is weak, that is not weak in saving faith but weak in the sense that he's unable to believe that he really has the freedoms he has, the one that is weak in the faith, that is who is holding on to some old religious taboos, who is holding on to some external behavior patterns from a former religious experience, that one you are to receive, proslambano, a strong word, a preposition added to the front to make it even stronger. And in the middle imperative, it's reflexive, take to yourself, embrace intimately into your own love and communion and fellowship, embrace the unemancipated, Paul says, into your fellowship, into your communion, into your love.

Now remember, these are not Judaizers, these are not people who are making Mosaic ritual and ceremony a matter of salvation, these are people who know salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. But they're just hanging on to some old patterns that are external. And that's why he doesn't condemn them here as he does in Galatians and Colossians where they make the Mosaic ceremony the means of salvation. They're not doing that here, they're just holding on to some old tradition.

So, the Apostle says you that are strong, implied obviously, receive the weak. And then he says, "Not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions, not to doubtful disputations, not to receive him just so you can argue with him, just so you can condemn him for what he believes or look down on him." In fact, in Galatians chapter 5 verses 13 to 16 where Paul deals with some of the same things, he says whatever we do in dealing with each other, we never want to do anything that in any way would injure one another or offend one another. And that certainly is implied here. We embrace the weak not for the sake of arguing with them, not for the sake of passing judgment on them, but for the sake of unity and love within the fellowship.

Now why are we to do this? Paul in his typical wonderful systematic way gives us four reasons. Four reasons we are to receive one another. And this is marvelous, so clear, so practical, follow along.

Reason number one, reason number one for the strong to receive the weak and for that matter for the weak to receive the strong is that God receives them. Did you get that? The Lord receives them. That's reason number one. Let's follow it in verse 2. "For one believes that he may eat all things." Who would that be? That would be the what? The strong, he believes he can eat all things. Another, for example, and he's not necessarily describing every strong or every weak person by these particular issues but this is an illustration. One person, for example, believes he can eat anything. He doesn't have any dietary constraints. He's not bound by the old Mosaic ceremony, dietary laws. On the other hand, there are others who being weak eat only vegetables. They're vegetarian.

Now the one who believes he can eat everything is strong. Is he right? Is that right? Can he eat everything? Yes, he's right. First Timothy 4 says, "For every creature," verse 4, "of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of God and

prayer." And that's in response to those who are forbidding people from eating certain foods. No, everything is to be received with thanksgiving. And in Acts 10 the Lord cleansed all things and said to Peter, "Don't you call unclean what I have cleansed." So the strong is right. You can eat anything...anything, of course, that is not injurious to your body. But there are no dietary restrictions. We are not under the laws of Moses. And every once in a while I hear this being propounded around in churches saying you shouldn't eat pork and you shouldn't eat anything that is considered unclean in the old covenant. That is not so. The one who believes he may eat anything right here is right, you can eat anything. There are no ceremonial dietary restraints in the new covenant.

And this particular person may be a Jew. He may be a Jew who is not burdened by eating pork. He may be a Jew who's not concerned that it be cooked a certain way. He's free. He understands his liberty. On the other hand, it could refer to a Gentile. It could refer to a Gentile who doesn't think an idol is anything, who now understands that things that ought...that are offered to idols are offered to nothing because an idol is a nothing. And he's not hung up by that either. So it could be a Jew, it could be a Gentile.

Then you look at the weak one. He's weak and he eats only vegetables. Now this is kind of an interesting illustration because it is reasonable to believe because of what we know in history that neither Jews were particularly circumscribed to vegetables or Gentiles. Vegetables, by the way, could just as well be offered to idols as meat could be and vegetables were offered to idols. So just eating vegetables didn't necessarily mean that you wouldn't be eating something offered to an idol. Vegetables could be offered to idols. So it seems that this might best be seen as a sort of a Jewish perspective. Although some say that those who were known as the Pethagarians(?) were vegetarian and had some kind of unique twist. But I think perhaps this is best seen as some Jewish group who were fearful of eating either meat offered to idols or meat that was unclean by their Jewish standards and so they opted out for nothing but vegetables. They have good company among the Essenes and some segments of the Essenes in Judaism appear to be vegetarian.

In verse 17, would you notice, it talks about food and drink. Apparently, there may have been some as well who abstained from drink all together. And abstaining from drink would not be a Jewish issue because the Jews drank a wine diluted with water as a part of their culture and may well have reflected a Gentile who had been converted out of a Baachanalian orientation where he was in a drunken stupor throughout his worship. And because of that wanted to abstain. It is true again, and I mention this from historical viewpoint, that some of the Essenes practiced total abstinence as well.

But Paul isn't even trying to identify every label here and tell us exactly who everybody is. All he's saying is whether they're Gentile or Jew and for whatever reason in their tradition, there are those who aren't hung up on what they eat and there are those who are. And they don't need to be but they are. They don't need to be restrained by some old dietary law. So in that sense his...his description in verse 2 is generic. It's just a general perspective on the fact that some are free to enjoy their liberty

and some are bound and cannot enjoy it.

Then comes the injunction of verse 3 that I want you to see. "Let not him that eats," that's the strong, "despise him that doesn't eat." Don't despise the one who doesn't eat. The word "despise" here is a very interesting word. It means to treat someone as nothing, to treat someone as nothing, to belittle them, to disregard them, to scorn them, to look at them with contempt, disdainful contempt might be the summation of it. Don't have contempt for one who doesn't fully understand his freedom just because you do. This is so important in the church because there are always those liberated brethren who want to condemn the people who are much more confined in their thinking. And there's always that danger. "Well, look at those legalists over there." I mean, I see that tendency in the church. I sense that tendency in myself. When you see someone who wants to lay a whole pile of rules on you that are really not moral at all, they're just extraneous external rules that have come out of their own orientation and tradition and your tendency is to look at them with a certain sense of contempt because they don't understand their true liberty in Christ.

But on the other hand, he says in verse 3, "And let not him who eats not," that's the weak who won't eat because he's afraid he'll violate some tradition, "let him not judge, krino," means to condemn, "the one that eats." So don't you strong look with contempt on the weak and don't you weak look with condemnation on the strong. It's a tendency on the part of the weak to condemn the liberty of the strong because they do not understand that freedom.

There are people, for example, who are so afraid to get outside the bounds of legalism, they're so afraid not to have...not to operate in an economy of rigid rules for fear everybody will go amuck. I mean, I was in an environment in college for a while where I heard that all the time. You have to be confined. I remember a man who was in charge of the school saying to us, "If we let you alone, you dogs would go back and lick up your own vomit." See. Well, he was under the idea that if you ever let anybody have any freedom, they'll go completely off their...off their rocker and off the deep end. And so you've got to build huge walls around everybody and close them all in. And when they would look at someone who had liberty and wasn't confined by that, even though they couldn't locate sin in their life they assumed it was there because they didn't abide by the external principles that they saw as true spirituality. And so it is a factor that within the church of Jesus Christ, there are those who do not understand their freedom in Christ and they condemn those who do and they're are those who do understand and they tend to despise those who don't. And that is the potential problem with which Paul wants to deal for the sake of unity in the church which is such a burden to him. That's why in chapter 15 verse 6 he says, "I want you to have one mind and one mouth glorifying God."

Now here's the reason. Reason number one why we're to receive each other at the end of verse 3, "For God has received him." I mean, who are you not to receive them, God received them? That's pretty straightforward stuff, isn't it? Now though the word "him" obviously in the verse is nearer to the final phrase where the weak condemns the strong and some commentators would say "him" refers to

the strong, I don't think you need to limit it to that. It may refer to the strong in a primary sense in the order of the way the verse is laid out. But it seems very unnecessary to limit the antecedent of "him" simply to the strong when it is true that God receives them both. So in a sense what he is saying is let not him that eats despise him that eats not for God has received him and let not him who eats not judge him that eats for God has received him. Certainly each is received by the Lord, not just the strong. There's no need to restrict the pronoun just to the strong.

So, remember this, beloved. When you tend, if you're free and you understand your liberty in Christ, when you tend to condemn someone else for being narrow minded and legalistic and rigid and ritualistic and ceremonial oriented and hung up on some tradition and overly preoccupied with the way they cut their hair and wear their clothes and how they carry out their little religious routine, remember this, that in spite of all of that God has received him by faith in Christ. And you that may be are a little bit like that and you see someone who doesn't have all those rules and all those bindings on his life, don't condemn that person because God has received him, too. You see, we're dealing with non-moral issues. These aren't even matters of sin.

Now if God has not made this a point of communion, if God has not made this a point of fellowship, should we? Well, of course not. If the Lord receives the weak, then we ought to receive the weak. And if the Lord receives the strong, then we ought to receive the strong. And we have to learn to work together.

There's a second reason, marvelous...a second reason why we are to receive one another. Reason number one is God receives each of us. Reason number two, and I love this, is the Lord sustains each believer...the Lord sustains each believer. Now let me tell you how this point works. It's really a tremendous truth here in verse 4, follow this thinking, now listen. The strong tend to despise the weak. The weak tend to condemn the strong. And in order to justify our concern, this would be sort of a typical scenario. We sort of feel that the other person is in danger of falling away. Boy, we that are strong say look at that poor legalistic narrow-minded person, poor person can't enjoy freedom in Christ, they're going to sour up, they're going to despair of the Christian life with all of its rigidity. They just may fall away because of the lack of joy, and a lack of freedom and a lack of ability to enter into all the things that God has provided. They're constrained by all this stuff. And so we may say, you know, they're just...they might just fall away. They're going to drift off and they're going to be useless to God and they'll never make it.

On the other hand, the weak person looks at the strong and says, boy, they're going right out the other end. They're going so far away from what God wants. They don't have any rules in their life. They're breaking all the ceremonies. Boy, they're going to fall. I can see it, big sin coming, they're going to hit hard when they fall. They're going to fall because of license and liberty. And the strong are saying they're going to fall because of unbelief and weak faith and narrow-mindedness. And they're not going to really discover the riches in the power of God. And so the tendency is to want to

justify our concern because we're afraid that it's going to lead to a spiritual disaster.

And we often say that...I've caught myself saying that. Well, you know, those legalists, if they stay in that long enough they'll shrivel up to a prune. They'll dry up. They're no good to God. Da-dit-da-dit...you know the lines. And I've heard the opposite as well. But notice what verse 4 says, this is pretty straight stuff. "Who are you that judges another man's servant?" Which being interpreted means "mind your own business." Who do you think you are? This isn't your problem. Who are you to evaluate another man's servant...oiketes, a household slave? I mean, to his own master he what? He stands or falls. No, who are you to sit in evaluation and say, "Ohh, that brother, look at that liberated brother, I can see it coming...big sin, big fall, it's coming." Or, "Look at that narrow-minded bigoted person, boy, they're going to shrivel up, no use to God...big sin, big fall." Who do you think you are? What right do you have to evaluate somebody else's servant? You...you have no right to evaluate someone else's servant. Your opinion of someone else's servant doesn't improve or impair that servant's position before his own master. You're not in the position to make the evaluation, neither am I.

Judgment by an outsider is utterly irrelevant. That's why Paul in 1 Corinthians 4 says, "When you consider me, consider me a servant, a steward of the mysteries of God, a huperetes, an underrower, a servant of Christ." And he says it's a small thing to me that men may judge me. Remember that? It's a small thing to me. It is even inconsequential to me that I judge myself because I...when I know nothing against myself am not thereby justified but it is the Lord who will judge me when the day comes when He searches the heart. So we can't judge somebody else.

He says here and there's an emphatic use of the word idios, his own, to his own master he stands or falls. Now who is the master of the weak brother? Who is it? It's the Lord. Who is the master of the strong brother? It's the Lord. So it is going to be Christ's own evaluation of a believer that matters and He will see whether that believer stands or falls, whether that believer succeeds or fails.

And what will be the result? Look at it in verse 4. "Yes, he shall be held up for the Lord is able to make him...what?...stand." Now if he belongs to the Lord, you don't need to worry about him. Isn't that wonderful?

You mean to say I don't need...I'm liberated and I worry about these legalists.... Don't worry about them. You see, their master knows how to keep them up. You say, "You mean you could actually stand and be useful to God with all these constraints?" Yes. I mean, you may not enjoy the fullness of your liberty but the Lord's able to make you stand. Why? That's part of salvation. Nobody is going to be redeemed and then lose that redemption either because of being strong or being weak. His own master is able to hold him up and make him stand.

By the way, in the textual variance that we look at, the best rendering in verse 4 is "He shall be held up for the Lord is able to make him stand." He will be held up. He will be made to stand. So, back off. You don't need to be so concerned and be so sort of spiritual about your concern worrying about the collapse of this individual. That's a promise. God will make him stand. God will hold him up. Mind your own business. They'll be okay.

He uses the word here when it says the word "is able," uses a form of dunamis, God is powerful to cause him to stand. And we don't need to take the time tonight to go into all of those great passages in the Scripture that talk about how God makes His own to stand, how He holds them. I mean, you can read them for yourself. You could start out in John 10 and read about how the fact is that we have been placed in Christ and in Christ we are kept and no one is able to take us away from Him. He has placed it, as it were, in the Father's hand and no one can remove us. You're familiar with Romans chapter 8 verses 31 to 39, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Why? Because whom He predestined, He will bring to glory. And nobody gets lost in the cracks. And all that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, John 6, and I have lost none of them. The Lord will make them stand.

Think of Jude, that marvelous statement in verse 24, "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from...what?...falling." And who is that? The only wise God, our Savior...that's who it is. God is able to make them stand. First Peter 1:5, we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, and in this we greatly rejoice.

So, we don't need to look on the legalists and have some ultimate fear that he's going to fall out. We don't need to look upon the person who's free and have some ultimate fear that the same could happen. So, it's a marvelous, marvelous and simple principle.

May I just footnote something by reminding you that in verse 3 the word is God, for God hath received him? And in verse 4, the Lord is able to make him stand. And in verse 6, he regards the day, regards it unto the Lord. He eats, eats to the Lord. He gives God thanks. He eats not to the Lord, He gives God thanks. Verse 8, the Lord...the Lord...the Lord. The interchange of the Lord, the name of Christ and God are one of the great evidences, subtle but right there, of the deity of Jesus Christ who is spoken of interchangeable with God through this passage.

So, we are to receive one another for two reasons. Reason number one, the Lord receives them and reason number two, the Lord sustains them. He'll hold them up. Reason number three, and this is marvelous, the Lord is sovereign to each...the Lord is sovereign to each. Now I'm going to take you into some things that I'm confident I have never in my life seen with such clarity as we look at these verses, tremendous truth here. Now follow along.

Paul's point in verses 5 to 9 and it's a very brief passage though it covers those verses because its message is very concise, his point is that even though the practice in these non- moral areas of ceremony and custom and tradition and scruples, if you will, and taboos may vary, even though the practice may vary, watch this...the goal and motive is the same. Now think of it. Why does a weak brother keep the law and the tradition and the ritual and the taboos and all the things that he keeps? Because he believes in his heart he is pleasing whom? The Lord..the Lord. And why does a strong brother enjoy the freedoms that he's given in Christ to the full? Because in his heart he believes that pleases the Lord. So the motive is the same in both cases.

You see, now listen to this, weakness being weak in the faith, that doesn't mean weak faith in terms of saving faith as I said, but being too weak to believe that you really have the freedom you have, being weak in the faith is not synonymous with being carnal. Did you get that? It is not the same as being carnal, or fleshy, or disobedient or sinful. A weak believer can be spiritual, can't he? Spirituality is an absolute. At any moment in your life you're either spiritual or you're fleshy. The moment you were saved, if you walk in the Spirit, your spiritual minded. If you decide to disobey, you're operating in your flesh. That has nothing to do with maturity. Maturity is a relative thing. Maturity is the end product of the times of spirituality because carnality is no growth. But spirituality or being fleshy--which is its opposite--is not synonymous with weakness. There are weak Christians just coming out of some religious past tradition who are spiritually minded, who want to serve God with all their heart and soul. They just don't understand yet.

And on the other hand, there are very strong believers who fully understand their freedom who can be very fleshy because that's an absolute that can be and is a reality at any given point in your life. So we don't want to say that just because someone is weak in the faith and just because they tend to be a bit legalistic or a lot legalistic they are necessarily then not desiring to please the Lord.

Let me show you this now, verse 5. "One man esteems one day above another. Another esteems every day the same." In other words, if you came out of Judaism, you might think that there were some days more important than other days. Which days, for example? Sabbath and feast days and festivals and holy days. And by the way, if you study the history of the sabbath in the Old Testament, it is important for you to know that the sabbath did not always fall on a Saturday. It did not always fall on a Saturday. There were all kinds of sabbath configurations. But they were set apart as holy days, festival days, feast days and the veneration of those days was a part of Judaism. And it may well have been a part of paganism as well. And there may have been some pagans who were hanging on to vestiges of some old special days.

Now the veneration of these days is a weakness. It is a weakness. That's why in Colossians Paul says don't let anybody bind you to new moons and sabbaths and feastdays, right? That's why he says the same thing in Galatians 4:9 and 10, in fact he says the sabbath is a beggarly element. It is a part of a dead system. And he's not here talking about the Lord's day, he's talking about the vestiges

of days before the Lord.

So, some people are concerned about days. Some people want to sanctify certain days, they want to hold on to those. Other people look at every day the same. I can remember as a little boy, we couldn't move off the couch on Sunday. I mean it. I had this little Lord Fauntleroy suit that I wore when we were in Philadelphia, I had this little collar thing and these little pants and we would come home and we would eat a big dinner, gluttony was not an issue. We would eat a huge meal. And then we would sit, desperately in need of motion...right? And we couldn't read the paper and we couldn't play catch and we couldn't read...look at a funny book or read a magazine or watch television or listen to the radio. That was a set day.

Well, that's...that's part of somebody's culture. And there are some people today who still feel that way. If you were to go over to England, you would find there are many wonderful godly Christians who would never ever want to do anything to violate the Lord's day. And there are other ones out playing football. Some people regard the day. Some people don't. It's so now, it was so then.

But look what he says in verse 5, this is interesting. How do we respond to this? "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Just do whatever you think you ought to do. You say, "Well, how could he say that?" Because it's not a moral issue. The sabbath is nothing. That's a dead issue. Paul doesn't care about it. His concern is not at all related to that. He has no concern at all with sabbaths and feast days and festivals and all of that.

But, what he doesn't want to do, and you've got to grab this one, what he doesn't want to do is train people to violate their conscience. You understand that? So if their conscience says, "Boy, you better keep that day," he says then keep it. Because if you train yourself to ignore your conscience, you're going to have a problem, you're going to have a lot of problems. Because the Spirit of God leads subjectively and the Word of God moves its way in the power of the Spirit through your subconscious mind which is, in effect, your conscience. And Paul does not want for a moment to train people to ignore their conscience. He doesn't want what 1 Timothy 4 verse 2 calls a conscience seared with a hot iron, a cauterized scarred conscience that is insensitive to truth and the prodding of the Spirit of God. He doesn't want any scar tissue over your conscience because then when it is time for God to prompt you, you're not going to be responsive, right? So don't train your conscience to do wrong. Listen, if your conscience tells you that you need to abide by certain preferential traditions and taboos and scruples, then do it. If it's in your heart to do it, and you believe it pleases the Lord, then do it and don't let us come along and tell you that you shouldn't do it and despise you for doing it. This is a strong witness right here, beloved, to the importance of the conscience.

I read a book, Decision Making in the Will of God,and the substance of the view of the author in the book is that everything God wants you to know is in the Bible and that all you need is the Bible and anything else is sort of a grab-bag deal. I don't believe that. I believe he's ignoring a whole lot of

things in the Scripture that teach how important it is for you to keep a clear, a pure conscience so that the Spirit of God can subjectively move you by His power. In 1 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 7, we remember this from last time, there is not in every man that knowledge...not everybody has the understanding that they're free to eat anything...for some with conscience of an idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered to an idol and their conscience being weak is defiled. So then Paul says don't do that. If it defiles their conscience to eat that, don't make them eat that. Don't use your liberty, verse 9, to cause them to stumble. They don't have a conscience yet free to enjoy that. If it bothers your conscience to do something, don't do it.

I mean, I often hear Christians arguing about that. "Well, why are you hung up on that, man? Why don't you get with the program? Why don't you open up a little bit?" And you can actually force someone to do something that will wound their conscience. It will defile their conscience. It will bring guilt on them and frankly, it will drive them deeper into their legalism because it will accuse them when they do it. We have to be patient to allow the Spirit of God through the conscience, through the Word of God, through the community of believers to bring the person to maturity where they can fully understand. And he says in 1 Corinthians 8:11, are you going to let your knowledge be the cause of a weaker brother perishing for whom Christ died? Are you going to destroy some weaker brother, pushing him deeper into his weakness because you force him to abuse his conscience? Of course not...of course not. Conscience is a very very important tool. And we could do a Bible study just on conscience sometime.

Acts 23:1 comes to mind, "Paul earnestly beholding the council said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God." Isn't that great? What does he mean? I not only obeyed the Word, but I did what I felt the Spirit of God was prompting me in my conscience.

Now follow verse 6, tremendous, so he says, "He that regards the day," the guy who wants to hold on the day, "regards it to the Lord." If he's concerned about maintaining this day, it's for the Lord. The next phrase in the Authorized does not appear in any of the good manuscripts, Vaticanus(?), Sinaiticus(?), Alexandrina(?), if you're into that stuff. It was probably added by a scribe later but the point is the same. The verse reads, "He that regards the day, regards it unto the Lord." And then skip down, "He that eats, eats to the Lord for he gives God thanks. And he that eats not to the Lord, he eats not and he gives God thanks."

Isn't that something? The strong brother has eaten everything in sight and he's saying, "Thank You, Lord, thank You for this freedom, man, am I enjoying this. Thank You, Lord, for this." And the weak brother is eating his little ceremonial diet and he's saying, "Thank You, Lord, that I can sacrifice on Your behalf. Thank You, Lord, that You've given me at least this much to keep me alive." But in either case, he's thanking the Lord. He that eats says thanks, he that doesn't eat says thanks and so the motive in both cases is the same, is it not?

So, verse 7, "For none of us believers lives to himself. We don't live to ourselves and no man dies to himself." Well what he's saying...what is he saying? It's a beautiful thing. He's saying whether we're weak or whether we're strong, we don't do what we do for our own sake, we do what we do because we believe it pleases whom? The Lord...that's what he says. By the way, that's a wonderful statement to make about a true believer. What every true believer does is as a pattern of life is that which pleases his Lord. And so some people who want to hold on to the sabbath laws and these various things, they do what they do to please the Lord. Some people who enjoy freedom do what they do to please the Lord. And that's the way it is with Christians. We don't do what we do for ourselves, we do what we do for Him. We live to Him and some day we'll die to Him. That's how it is. We've submitted to His Lordship. When we became Christians, we left the self-centered life. Is that true? And we confessed Jesus as what? As Lord. We live to Him and we die to Him. Our most basic truest desire is to serve Him.

And he reiterates it in verse 8, look at it. "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord. And whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are...what?...the Lord's." Wow...to the Lord we live, the Greek says, to the Lord we die. Hmm, we live for Him, someday we die for Him, whether we're weak or whether we're strong, whether we're new-born Christian infants or whether we're very mature, we live for Him, we die for Him. And then this statement, beloved, I think is the single greatest injunction to holy living in all the Bible, the single greatest injunction to holy living in all the Bible at the end of verse 8, "We are...what?...the Lord's." Boy, what a statement....wow...do you belong to you? Who do you belong to? Him.

That tells me that every Christian is involved in a situation of unconditional sovereignty. I don't think there are any other terms for salvation. That may be the greatest statement in the Bible on the Lordship of Christ and His relation to the believer. We are the Lord's. We are His possession. And you can track that one back to 1 Corinthians, "For we have been bought with a price." We are His. I'm not my own, so I don't live to myself, and I don't die to myself, I'm His so I live to Him and I'll die to Him. And so what Paul is saying is, "Hey, we're all in the same relationship to the Lord, we're all concerned to serve the sovereign Lord we have embraced as Redeemer and so if we're weak and we conscribe(?) ourselves to certain lives, it is because down in our hearts we believe it is living to Him that we're doing. And if we're free to enjoy, we enjoy because we believe we're living to Him as well." So, in a sense, we both have the same motive.

And since these matters are simply matters of preference and not sin, let's not make a rift in the church over them. I believe what Paul is saying here implies some tremendous things in this issue of the Lordship of Christ. For all believers, self-interest, he says, is not the concern. You show me a true Christian and I'll show you somebody who in his deepest truest self longs to submit to the Lordship of Christ. Even though we fail, when we fail we hate the failure, right? When Christians do what conscience tells them with a desire to serve and honor Christ, we shouldn't condemn that. We

shouldn't condemn that.

Can I add a little footnote? This verse also, in my mind, affirms the deity of Christ. If He is the supreme object of the Christian's life, then He must be God. If we live to the Lord and we die to the Lord, and whether we live or die we're the Lord's, then He's got to be the supreme one Himself.

The conclusion is in this portion that every Christian lives in light of the sovereign Lordship of Christ's...every one of us. That's why 1 Corinthians 15:23 says this little phrase, "They that are Christ's," I love that. The single greatest injunction to holy living, we are the Lord's. You don't belong to you. You belong to Him. Weak or strong...did you get that? There are some people who'd want to tell us that weak believers have a Savior but not a Lord. No, no...even a weak believer knows that he lives and dies to the Lord and belongs to the Lord, right? That's the whole point. He may not be able to get a grip on all that that means but he knows that's the substance of his life. It's not only a fact but it's a matter of the believer's conscience. I know who rules my life. Do you know who? Nobody's going to come along and say to me, "Well, you know, you can have Him as Savior but not as Lord." Don't you tell me that, I know better than that. I have never had Jesus Christ when He was not giving me orders...never. And I have never believed in Jesus Christ when I didn't sense a tremendous weight of responsibility to obey Him. He's Lord...He is Lord.

And just to ram that one home so it's absolutely incontrovertible, look at verse 9, "For to this end," look at this, "for this reason," here was the very reason Christ died and lived again. Why? "That He might be the Savior of the world," is that what it says? Nope. "That He might be Lord both of the dead and living." He didn't die to be the Savior, period, paragraph. He died to be what? Lord...Lord

People say, "Why did Jesus die on the cross?" To be the Savior. That's...that's too short. To be the Savior and Lord and that's what Paul says and powerfully. "Hey," he says, "every Christian weak and strong knows who's Lord and conscience tells him he's doing what he's doing to please his Lord. So don't sit in judgment on him because all of us know, even weak and strong together, we know that we live to the Lord, we die to the Lord and that is the very reason Christ died and lived again that He might be Lord."

I cannot conceive of how people come up with the fact that someone can have a Savior and not have the sense of submission to His Lordship. That's why He died. That's why He rose, that He might be Lord. And by the way, that's a verb, that He might be Lord, kurieuo, from which we get the noun kurioswhich is used so commonly and translated Lord. He died and rose to be Lord, not only Lord of the dead but Lord of the living. Not only Lord of the living but Lord of the dead. The dead refers to saints already in glory. He died to be Lord. He died to reign over believers in His presence and still on earth. And here we have in this passage, I think, as strongly as anywhere in all the Bible the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ over everything affirmed. He is Lord here and He is Lord beyond the grave and He has dominion over all creation and has a special mediating dominion over His own

believers.

Now, beloved, let me tell you something. You cannot deny the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the life of the believer without denying the work of the cross and the grave. You mess around with the Lordship of Jesus Christ and strip Him of that and you have...you have disinfranchised Christ's work on the cross and in the resurrection.

So, we receive each other. Why? God receives us. The Lord sustains each. And the Lord is sovereign over each. And one last brief point, the Lord alone will be judge over every believer. Now before you go judging, remember this one, will you? The Lord alone will be the judge. This is a strong rebuke. Verse 10, "Why are you judging your brother? Why are you condemning that strong believer for what you think is an abuse of his freedom and why are you despising that weak believer for what you think is a narrow-minded state of unbelief. Why are you judging your brother? Why are you strong ones...you weak ones judging your strong brother?" Then the second question, "Or why do you set at naught," that is to say to the weak one, "why...or rather the strong one...why are you despising?" And he uses the same terms. So the weak first...why are you condemning your strong brother? The strong brother...why are you despising your weak brother?

And then this, "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God," the best translation is God. We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. It is in 2 Corinthians 5:10 called the judgment seat of Christ. And another of the evidences of the deity of Christ where He is spoken of interchangeably with God. When we are there, 1 Corinthians 3 says, our works will be measured whether they're gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay stubble. It says our secrets will be revealed, the secrets of our heart, 1 Corinthians 4, and then we'll receive praise from God. We're all going to stand before the judgment seat of God.

And to reinforce this he says "It is written," and he quotes Isaiah 45:23. Paul says, "As I live," Isaiah actually says, "By Myself I have sword," but the two statements mean the same thing, referring to God's eternal nature. He's swearing by Himself. "As I live," or as Isaiah put it, "By Myself, or on Myself I have sworn, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me and every tongue shall confess to God."

Does that sound familiar? Sure, Philippians chapter 2, Paul uses it there but it's taken from Isaiah. And what it means to say is that every one of us at one point in the future is going to bow the knee in the judgment of God. So, beloved, when we get prone to judge people, we are really playing God, aren't we? We're playing God. And that's a blasphemous thing.

So, then verse 12 says, "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." There's going to be an accounting time. We're all going to have to come before Him and our works are going to be examined and then we'll receive the praise and the reward that God has planned to give us.

Now listen. Why do we open our arms and receive each other? Because God receives us. Because the Lord can hold us up and does. Because the Lord is the sovereign over each of us and because ultimately He is the only one who has the right to what? To judge. Now we're not talking about sin, we're talking about these preferential areas. And so we want to receive each other. Many conflicts in the church can arise over non-moral, non- essential things and they can be stopped if we'll open our lives and our hearts to receive each other. Drop the criticism. Let the Lord be the judge. Better that we should love one another.

Our Father, we thank You for our time tonight in Your Word. What a wonderful time. Thank You for the singing and the wonderful weekend we've shared. Father, we pray that we might have learned from the Spirit of God the truth herein in this great passage. Confirm it to our hearts. May we be so sensitive to those around us wherever they may be on the continuum from weak to strong, fill our hearts with love. And may we know that all of us have been received by You, all of us are being sustained by You. All of us out of the depth of our heart see You as sovereign and long to serve You. And all of us someday will be judged and really only judged by You. So, Lord, help us to leave those things that belong to You to You and take care of the things that belong to us like loving each other and embracing each other whatever our differences might be on the outside, for Christ's sake...amen.

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