

“Let God Be the Judge”
(Romans 14:1-12)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Paul reminded us last week salvation is drawing near.
 - a. The end of our lives will shortly be on us.
 - b. The eternal day of His grace will soon be here.
 - c. It's time to wake up to the spiritual aspects of life.
2. There is more going on than meets the eye.
 - a. There is a battle raging between two kingdoms – light and darkness.
 - b. If Satan can't have our soul, he'll keep us from reaching others.
 - c. It's time to set aside our sins, the things that weigh us down.
 - d. It's time to push forward, equipped with God's full armor.
 - e. It's time to become what God predestined us to be in Christ and to make an end of sin.

B. Preview.

1. Now this is what we are to do individually: but what about corporately?
 - a. We need to make sure as we sharpen our swords that we don't turn them on each other.
 - (i) As we arm for battle, we tend to take things more seriously.
 - (ii) The more seriously we take them, the more offended we'll be at those who differ.
 - (iii) Remember, Paul said love is something we always owe. It is the perfect bond of unity (Col. 3:14).
 - (iv) Without it, we'll bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15).
 - (v) With it, we'll hold together even if we differ.
 - b. Paul begins to give us a blueprint on how to deal with differences of opinion, especially those that will injure our brothers and sisters.
 - (i) We'll see he first warns against a judgmental and critical spirit.
 - (ii) Then next week, to use our greater faith to help the weaker.
2. Now we need to be careful here.
 - a. Many have used this passage to undermine God's authority.
 - (i) Verses 5-6 speak of regarding days the same or differently.
 - (ii) Some believe this applies to the Sabbath, but it can't.
 - b. We need to remember there are many things we can't disagree on.
 - (i) *E.g.*, the things foundational to Christianity: Trinity, deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone, the necessity of sanctification, *etc.*
 - (ii) *E.g.*, God's moral absolutes: 10 Commandments.

- (iii) Paul isn't telling us here that we are free to have other gods, free to worship as we want, free to misuse His name, any more than He is saying we may set aside the Sabbath if we wish (cf. v. 5).
 - (iv) He is not addressing the non-negotiables of Christianity.
- c. Neither does he appear to directly address the things believers disagree on.
 - (i) The in-house debates: postmill/amill, infant/believer baptism, mode of baptism – sprinkling, pouring, immersion, three times forward or backward, *etc.*
 - (ii) These issues are important, but many sincere believers disagree on them.
 - (iii) They are not as clear as we would like them to be.
 - (iv) But what Paul says here will help in our attitudes.
- d. Rather, he is addressing differences of opinion.
 - (i) Things not specified in the Bible: what style of clothing to wear, what kind of food to eat, *etc.*
 - (ii) Things that are spelled out, but that are hard for some to accept – such as Christian Liberty (wine, cards, meat sacrificed to idols, OT dietary laws, *etc.*).
 - (iii) Questions perhaps even of traditions that don't necessarily stand in the way of God's truth – whether a Jew should observe the OT feasts or whether American Christians should celebrate Christmas.
 - (iv) These are things we differ on but are things indifferent, at least in the sense that they don't violate any principle of Scripture.
- e. This morning, let's consider again the principle of love applied to differences of opinion.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we are to accept our brethren who are weak in faith.
 - 1. Who are those who are weaker in faith?
 - a. Paul describes them as those unable to apprehend their full liberty in Christ.
 - b. They don't understand it, don't feel right about certain things.
 - (i) Ex.: Wine:
 - (a) Perhaps they think it's a sin to drink it – an invention of the devil.
 - (b) Perhaps they know it isn't, but still are not fully convinced.
 - (c) Sometimes, these are hard convictions to overcome.
 - (d) If they drink while doubting, they sin and destroy their conscience.
 - (e) Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom. 14:23).
 - (ii) Ex.: Games with cards:
 - (a) Maybe gambling background.
 - (b) See cards as evil.
 - (c) Maybe object because they object to all games of chance.
 - (d) As long as they believe there's something wrong with that thing – whatever it may be – they can't do it without sinning.

- (iii) On the other hand, there are cases where something commanded is thought of as wrong.
 - (a) Ex.: Worshiping on first day, instead of seventh.
 - (b) Perhaps former Jew, or 7th Day Adventist.
 - (c) If the Lord commands, we need to overcome our phobia.
 - (d) If wine is commanded in communion, then we must overcome our objections to wine.
- c. We need to understand that the weaker brother is not necessarily someone who merely has a conviction different than our own.
 - (i) There is what some call the tyranny of the weaker brother – the one who has strong convictions, who is offended by what others do.
 - (ii) That is not the weaker brother, but merely one with different convictions.
 - (iii) The weaker brother is the one who is in danger of sinning by doing things he is convinced are wrong.
- 2. Having said that, God calls us to accept the weaker brethren (v. 1).
 - a. To welcome and embrace them as brethren.
 - b. But not to tear them down – not to pass judgment on their opinions.
 - (i) Sometimes we can be so insensitive.
 - (ii) We walk all over their convictions because they seem ridiculous to us.
 - (iii) Paul says that is wrong – not to discuss matters of difference with mature Christians, but to try and impose our convictions against the opinions of a weak Christian.
 - (iv) We may well destroy them – making them do what they don't believe they have the freedom to do.
 - (v) Next week, Paul exhorts us to just the opposite behavior (vv. 13-23).
 - c. He gives us two examples:
 - (i) Eating all things or only vegetables (v. 2).
 - (ii) Regarding one day above another or every day alike (v. 5).
 - (iii) Notice again these are *opinions*, not moral or doctrinal absolutes.
 - (iv) We may eat meat, but it's alright to be a strict vegetarian.
 - (v) Some may eat meat offered to idols, others may not be able (1 Cor. 10:25).
 - (vi) Some former Jews may want to celebrate the Jewish Calendar, but others may not.
 - d. What are we to do if we differ in our opinions?
 - (i) The one who eats meat must not despise his vegetarian brother.
 - (ii) The one who is a vegetarian must not condemn his carnivorous brother.
 - (iii) We are not to condemn each other, but accept one another, in spite of our differences.

B. Why are we to do this?

1. First, God commands it (v. 1).
2. Second, because God accepts us both (v. 3). How can we reject what God accepts?
 - a. We are brethren, members of one family, one body, partakers of one Spirit, we're going to spend eternity together.
 - b. God hates division in His church.
 - c. But He loves unity: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1).
3. Third, because each is doing what his own heart tells him is right before the Lord.
 - a. "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God" (v. 6).
 - b. If our hearts don't condemn us in what we practice as good, we are true Christians.
 - c. If our brothers or sisters believe something is important enough to observe, we shouldn't condemn them for it.
 - d. They're doing it for God's glory: that's what matters.
 - e. "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" (vv. 7-8).
 - f. If they acknowledge the Lord in these things, they're doing well.
 - g. Even in cases where it may be wrong – such as Christians who bring the traditional Christmas into the church – if they do it believing they're really honoring God – they are still brethren, even if they need to be corrected.
4. Fourth, because we all belong to the Lord and must give an account to Him, and not to one another.
 - a. Christ lived and died to redeem us, that He might be Lord of us while alive and after we die that we might be careful how we live in this life, knowing that we shall be with Him after this life (v. 9).
 - b. We are not to judge what another does in their service to God.
 - c. God will do that – to his own master he stands or falls in his obedience, and he will stand for the Lord will make sure that he does (v. 4).
 - d. We should not judge our brother or condemn him for what he does (v. 10).
 - e. Each one of us will stand before God and give an account for our own lives (vv. 11-12).
 - f. That gives us enough to concern ourselves with – we need to look to ourselves and not to others – in this regard.
 - g. If you look to yourself and see the sin that's there, the inconsistency, and you know it hasn't been dealt with righteously, then look to Christ.
 - h. But let's learn to take the log out of our own eyes, instead of always trying to find the speck in each others.
 - i. That will keep us busy enough. Amen.