



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

## The Church of No Fighting

September 6, 2020

Romans 14:1-12

Clint Pressley

*<sup>14</sup> As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. <sup>2</sup> One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. <sup>4</sup> 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.*

*<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. 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. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

*<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written,*

*“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

*<sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

*(Pastor prays)*

We need to thank God for the church and the Lord of the church. There is not another more diverse organization on the face of the earth. Different sinners, redeemed by one savior, held in one body and singing one song that Jesus is Lord! And that's the glue that holds us together and makes us one in Christ.

We were all at one time dead and hopeless in sin and because of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, we all have been made alive together through faith in Christ. And although we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we are family but we aren't clones of each other. We are siblings, but we are not twins. We have our own thoughts and aspirations, our own feelings and opinions about the world we live in, and sometimes those different opinions can cause friction. And this passage is given to us to make sure those frictions, those differences, don't rise to the point of division.

Paul writes here about Christian unity, and the church in Rome was made up of all kinds of different people with different opinions. Paul identifies two different parties, the weak and the strong. They had opposing views on the literal view of Old Testament law as a part of their response to faith in Jesus. A Jewish minority and a Gentile majority, each called to minister to the heart of the other. Here the Jews and the Gentiles, brown, black or white, American by birth or not American by birth, single and married, we all take our place around the cross of Jesus. And as John Stott says, this reconciled multi-ethnic community is heard with one heart and one mouth in Gospel harmony worshipping the God and the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter 14, Paul addresses non-essential questions that can come up in their fellowship. There are questions about diet, days and drinking wine. And he warns us to not elevate non-essential issues of custom and opinion and make them the test of fellowship. The flip side is that we must not marginalize fundamental, theological or moral questions. The issues here, and I'm afraid many of the issues that threaten to divide us, are opinions or *dialogizmoi*. And in this passage, Paul is telling us how we handle differences without disrupting fellowship.

**Under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, We are One.**

To maintain that oneness we need the right posture.

**We need an open-handed posture**

This seems to be what Paul is saying in verse 1. *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.* This is not weak in the saving power of the Gospel but weak in conviction as to what the faith allows or doesn't allow. This is someone who is genuinely a Christian but has a difference of opinion on something that is not a top-level issue. Look what Paul says: welcome him. But not to quarrel over opinions. Do you see the open-handed posture there? Welcome him. Don't argue on Facebook with him. That word, *proslambano*, welcome, is important. In verse 3, it'll be used to describe how God receives us.

Welcome. It is to receive, accept, to bring into your circle, to invite into your home, to open up yourself. This is more than just putting up with someone or tolerating him. This word is filled with warmth and kindness and genuine love. This is the opposite of the church being a debating chamber. This is the word Jesus used in John 14: 3 when he said, *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* Take you, *proslambano*. That's how we treat each other, welcome. This is the word Luke used in Acts 28:2 to talk about the time Paul was shipwrecked on Malta. When he crawled out of the water like a drowned rat. <sup>2</sup> *The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold.* And this is Paul in Philemon 17, telling Philemon to welcome and receive the runaway slave just as if he were the Apostle Paul himself. This gives you some idea of the cross-centered posture we must assume, the uncomfortable cross-cultural reach of Christian affection. In the days ahead, with Christian brothers and sisters you disagree with, in the name of Jesus, I'm asking you to take an open-handed posture.

### **We Need a God-centered posture**

Let me show you what I mean as I read verses 1 through 3. *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.* <sup>2</sup> *One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.* <sup>3</sup> *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.* In this passage the "weak" and "strong" describes two different parties or sides who held opposing views on an opinion or how to express and live out their faith in the most responsible way. He addresses both sides in verse three: <sup>3</sup> *Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.*

Paul calls on each side to quit criticizing the other. And at the end of verse three he gives us the God centered reason why. For God has welcomed him. Some have said this is Paul's theological bottom line. We have no right ever to reject from our fellowship someone whom God has accepted. The best way to calibrate our attitude toward other believers is to determine what God's attitude is toward them. John Stott says this may be even better than the Golden rule. The Golden rule says, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It's a really good thing to treat others the way you want them to treat you, but it's safer still to treat others the way God does. How does God accept us? God's love is unconditional but His acceptance is not. God's acceptance is based on your repentance of sin and faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross, so that the cross of Jesus becomes the ground we stand on to accept brothers and sisters who are different from you. We need an open-handed posture. We need a God-centered posture.

### **We Need a grace-driven posture**

Verses 4 through 9 is one extended argument that sets forth several principles that should guide us as we relate to brothers and sisters in Christ who may live their Christianity a little differently than we do. Let's go through them quickly.

Every believer has a judge, and you're not it. Verse 4 says, who are you? It actually has the force of, who do you think you are? To judge the servant of Christ. Now this isn't calling out sin. We are responsible to do that and are accountable for living a holy life. This is something else. This isn't a matter of doctrine; this is a matter of opinion. And, in that regard, each believer is responsible to Christ. A servant of Christ, redeemed by Christ, and accountable to Christ, and, in that regard, we seek not to stand in criticism but to point them to Christ.

Every believer is living on grace. Let's read verse 4 again and catch the second half of it. *<sup>4</sup> 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.* This is speaking about the weak in faith. This is good news; he will be upheld. You ought to circle that. It's a promise that you are going to make it. Here's why. The Lord is able to make her stand. The power of the cross saved you and the power of the cross will sustain you. It is God's grace that matters. We live and stand by grace. Every believer has a judge, and every believer lives on grace.

Every believer has a conscience. Every person has a conscience, but once you are no longer dead in sin but are alive in Christ, that conscience is now being sanctified. And Paul addresses that in verse 5. <sup>5</sup>*One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.* Fully convinced. This is Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. To go against the word or conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand, I can do no other, so help me God. That internal mechanism in you that gives you the sense of right and wrong. It's not infallible, but it should be clear.

Every believer lives to honor Jesus. There is an emphasis in verse 6 that stands as a road sign for our lives. <sup>6</sup>*The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. 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.* When you see words repeated in pretty quick succession, there might be something going on there. Three times honoring the Lord is mentioned and two times giving thanks to God is mentioned. Stott says that this provides us with some practical test for discipleship. When you are wondering whether or not you should do something or say something, you should think can I do this and thank God for it? Can I do this unto the Lord in a Christ-honoring, Jesus-exalting way? We live our lives to honor Jesus and to be covered in gratitude.

Every believer lives and dies to Christ. You see that in verses 7 through 8. <sup>7</sup>*For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.* <sup>8</sup>*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.* Verse 7 starts out and sounds like the whole "no man is an island" thing, but this is something completely different. Here Paul gives the whole scope of life, living and dying and all points in between. We live to the Lord, we die to the Lord, we are the Lord's. This gives us two things. It gives us purpose when it feels like there is none and it gives us security when it feels like there is none. We live to the Lord and die to the Lord. We weep, suffer, enjoy, play, exercise, go to 5th grade, learn to drive. This gives purpose to every activity until we breathe our last. It's a comprehensive view of Christian living. And then verse 8 gives us security. We are the Lord's, we belong, we are His - purchased, forgiven, loved and sustained. See how Paul ties our lives to the cross in verse 9. Here is the Gospel of death and resurrection. <sup>9</sup>*For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*

And then Paul ends this passage with one last principle. I've given you several. Every believer has a judge, and you aren't it. Every believer is living on grace. Every believer has a conscience. Every Believer lives to honor Jesus. Every believer lives and dies to Christ. But here is one last principle: every believer is accountable to God.

*<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written,*

*“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall confess to God.”*

This applies to believers and unbelievers alike. This is you. We all give an account. This is what verse 12 tells us. *<sup>12</sup> So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.* So then, each person, universal judgment. Each one of us will give an account to God. My account is that all of my life and all that I have done is just filthy rags. I call on the righteousness of Christ who lived for me and died for me so I am covered with Christ. That's the account I give. What is the account you give?

Hebrews 10 tells us it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And that brings us back to the Gospel of grace. The Gospel of grace tells us that God is holy and man is a sinner, separated from God. God gives us Jesus to live perfectly like we couldn't. He died in the place of sinners on the cross so that any sinner who turns from their sin and believes in Jesus will be saved.

I'm asking you to commit yourself to Christ in repentance and faith. Or maybe you need to extend more grace to others. Maybe you need to seek genuine unity with brothers and sisters who are remarkably different from you.

Seek what God has planned for you. Maybe you've been called to ministry or mission. I'm asking you to commit your life to the goodness of God, to the grace of God found under the umbrella of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

*(Pastor prays)*

