



## Warnings Against Judging Brothers

Romans 14:1-12

Rev. Fred Greco

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Good morning. If you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you to turn to the book of Romans. We're going to begin this morning the fourteenth chapter as we continue our journey through Paul's letter to the church at Rome. This morning we're going to be looking at the first 12 verses of chapter 14 in which Paul speaks to the church at Rome and to us about judgment, about how we are not to judge other believers.

Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. Romans, chapter 14:

*“As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 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. 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.*

*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. 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. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. 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. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 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; for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.”*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would open up your Word to us, that as we hear it expounded and read the work of Jesus Christ might become more and more real to us, that by the power of the Holy Spirit our eyes might be opened, our ears might be swift to hear, and that we, O Lord, might know in a greater way who you are and what duty you require of us. This we pray in Christ's precious name, amen.

What causes tension in the church? What makes it difficult for the church to present a united front to the world? We might think it would be difficulties related to theology, especially difficulties in crucial, primary matters such

as salvation. We might expect the church to quarrel and divide over the most important things like the nature of salvation, but in truth, it is actually usually the minor things. It is the practice by believers of the application of the gospel that causes tension in the church.

Far too often, we fail to build community and to witness to the world because we are distracted by things of secondary importance. There is a word for such things: *adiaphora*, which means things indifferent. They're called things indifferent because they are things upon which the Bible does not directly speak, but they are not unimportant things. They are not indifferent to you and me, because they are often the cause of strife and conflict in the church.

Now, this should not surprise us. The same thing happened in Paul's day, and Paul thought it was important enough of an issue to address it here in Romans 14. The church can be crippled by Christians judging each other. Paul warns us against this. So in this passage this morning, I would like to ask and seek to answer from the text these three questions.

First, *what is the issue?* That is, what is the issue that is before the church at Rome and you and me? Second, *what is the problem?* The issue brings about difficulties. What is the problem Paul points out? Then thirdly, *what is the solution?* What solution does Paul provide to this problem he points out? What is the issue, what is the problem, and what is the solution?

## **What Is the Issue?**

We start here taking up chapter 14, and this is a new section of this letter. We might more precisely say it is a new subsection of the letter. It is important for us to remember the structure of Paul's letter to the church at Rome. You will recall that the first 11 chapters are his masterful exposition of the gospel of grace. He talks about man's need, of God's provision in Christ, and how salvation comes to us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then, starting in chapter 12, Paul makes his appeal to you to live out the gospel. "Because of what God has done, *this* is how you are to live." In chapters 12 and 13, Paul has tackled the major problems and relationships that result from life in the gospel. He has written about gifts in the church, about relating to people outside the church, about relating to government, and finally, about fulfilling the law of love. Now here in chapter 14, Paul comes to a particular matter. He comes to some specific instances in the life of the church.

So, what is the issue now that takes his attention? The issue that takes his attention is the situation at Rome. It is differences in practices by Christians that are causing disagreements. This is what is happening in the church at Rome. Now, these differences, these disagreements, may not be as important as Christ's atoning work, they may not be as important as the work of the Holy Spirit or the sovereignty of God, but they are much more immediate to the church. These are the things that rub people against each other. In the day-to-day, it is these sorts of things that cause friction and hard feelings.

Think about this from the perspective of a married couple. What causes day-to-day friction with a married couple? Are you constantly arguing about how many children to have or what city to live in or what occupation to be in? I don't think so, at least not on a daily basis. The friction on a daily basis are things like, "Why didn't you put that

dish in the dishwasher? Why did you leave the top off the toothpaste? Why can't you ever pick up your socks?" These are the sorts of things that rub us against each other. They are small things, but they are prevalent, they are immediate, they are everyday things.

That's what Paul is talking about here in the church, because the church at Rome was made up of very different people. You recall we took up the subject about the makeup of the church at Rome earlier in the epistle. Some of the church were Jews. They'd come from Jewish background and ancestry. They would have been well versed in the Old Testament, in its laws, in its commandments. They knew God's Word. They had grown up with the ceremonies. They had grown up with the feast days. They had grown up with a Jewish culture. This is who they were.

Now they were Christians and a part of the church, but we have to understand that our background and our upbringing is not something we can just switch off. You can't live a certain way for 50 years and then all of a sudden immediately stop. We understand this, even in the differences we see in America. America is relatively homogenous compared to other nations and continents. We all speak the same language, we have the same institutions, etcetera, but there are a great deal of differences.

It has taken an awful lot of work for this Buffalo boy to act at least somewhat Texan. I've gotten to the point now where occasionally someone will compliment me on using the proper form of plural, "Y'all." But that doesn't happen overnight. We are a product of our upbringing. So, you have the Jews and their upbringing, but you also have Gentiles. They would have been new to the Bible. They would not have understood the feast days or why they were celebrated or what they meant. It would have been confusing.

They wouldn't have understood any of the dietary restrictions or the restrictions on clothing or how you would cut a beard or any of these other ceremonial laws. They wouldn't have understood them at all. They would have had a completely different upbringing. Their upbringing would have been steeped in paganism, and they would have been trying... If the Jews would have been tempted to hold *on* to their upbringing, the Gentiles would have been tempted to run away as far as possible from their upbringing because it was so obviously different.

Now, each of these groups had things they needed to cast off. Each of them had things they were holding on to, but even beyond these two basic divisions, Rome was a very cosmopolitan and diverse city. There were people living at Rome from all over the known world. Rome was a center of the entire empire, and people came from as far as Egypt and Spain and Turkey and what is now France and Britain. They came and brought their ethnicity with them, people from all over the world.

So differences brought about disagreements as to how the gospel was to be lived out in the personal lives and the Christian community, because they would have just assumed they could continue to live in some fashion the way they'd lived. They would eat the foods they were used to, they would wear the clothing they were used to wearing, and this would bring about conflict and disagreement, because the church wouldn't be able to agree.

Some would insist that certain things could not be done by believers, and then others would say that such things were unimportant and *could* be done by believers. We see some very real examples cited by Paul here. We know

they are real examples and things that cause problems because Paul brings them up not only *here*, but he brings them up in letters to other churches. We see a similar passage in 1 Corinthians 8, in 1 Corinthians 10, in 1 Timothy 4, in Galatians 1 and 2, and in Colossians 2.

We see this is a theme Paul keeps bringing up: the kind of conflict that comes from disagreements as to how to apply the gospel in everyday living. Things like, "What can a Christian eat? Can he eat foods the Old Testament dietary laws restrict?" You're going to have some in the church who are going to say, "There's no way you can eat a ham sandwich, and don't bring me that shrimp cocktail, and don't even get started with me on crawfish."

The other question would be, "Could you eat foods associated with pagan rituals?" There would be Gentiles who would say, "I can't eat that food. That's the kind of steak my father would offer to the gods," and you have Jews saying, "Come over to the barbecue. There will be no ham, there will be no bacon, but there will be plenty of steak." You can see that kind of conflict being very raw and very immediate.

What about certain feast days? Must a Christian celebrate a feast of the Old Testament? *Can* he? Paul brings that up in verse 5. What about alcohol? You may think the controversy over alcohol in the church began in twentieth-century America. It did not, because beyond our text, later in chapter 14, Paul makes explicit that one of the things he's talking about is the drinking of wine. Some would have thought it would have been fine to drink wine. Others would have been scandalized by it.

I want you to hear one very important point: All of this is not a matter of the gospel. Now what do I mean by that? I mean there is no indication in what Paul is writing here that some at Rome viewed certain practices as being necessary for salvation. There is no argument here the way we see it in other places. For example, in Colossae there were some telling people in the church that if you wanted to be a Christian and you wanted to be saved you could not do certain things. You could not touch certain things. You could not handle certain things. You could not eat certain things. They made it a gospel issue.

In Galatia, there was a deep-seated difference in practices such that groups avoided each other, and they thought each other perhaps unsaved because of the way they lived. Now, in *those* places, Paul is very blunt. "Do not let anyone disqualify you over this, do not lead others astray, and do not nullify the grace of God." But here, we see none of that. Paul is concerned about these disagreements, he's concerned about the harm they may cause, but there is no indication that any of the Christians did not understand the gospel. They all could say, "Amen!" to what Paul had written in the first 11 chapters.

Secondly, it is important for us to see that this is not just a Roman phenomenon. The issue here is not just at Rome; it is also before *us* even here today. Similar and even more serious conditions were found in other churches, and Paul addressed them. We've talked about Colossae. We've talked about at Corinth. We've talked about in Ephesus, as Paul writes to Timothy. This is a common occurrence in churches and with Christians. Such disagreements and judgments have been with the church throughout the centuries.

So we need to listen to Paul here. There is an important principle for you to apply with the Scriptures. The Bible is not just written as an historical record to inform us of the deeds God has done. It *is* that, but it's *more* than that.

It is also written *to us* to help us to live the Christian life. So as we think about this, we actually live today in a world much like the Romans did. Houston is also one of the most diverse cities in the world. That means people in our church have all different kinds of backgrounds. They've grown up all over the country, literally all over the world.

There are many of you here who were not born in the United States. You come from all walks of life at all different geographic places. Just like at Rome, the world outside the church was pushing against the church a worldview that was unbiblical, a way of thinking about life, people, and the world that was contrary to God's Word. So the church has to rightly resist that worldview and stand up for what God has declared in his Word.

Here in our church, some of you are new to the faith. Some of you don't have a cultural familiarity with the things of the church. You may not have grown up with anything like VBS. I remember when I first came here as the senior pastor of Christ Church and we were getting set to put on a vacation Bible school. I had to ask my wife, "What's a VBS? What do you do at a VBS? What's the point of a VBS? What does it look like?" and I had to talk to others, because I had no acquaintance with that aspect of church culture. That may be true of you.

Some of you did not grow up singing hymns. You don't understand how hymns work. You open a hymnal, and things that are designed in the hymnal to be an aid to singing are like reading Swahili or Greek to you. They're no help at all. It's because of your upbringing and your background. Some of you don't know what to do at a Bible study. You know you're supposed to study the Bible, but "Am I supposed to talk or am I supposed to listen? Do I take notes? Where do I sit? How do I do this?" because it's new to you.

For some of you, even the word *Presbyterian* is weird and odd. You didn't grow up with that. Others of you, however, have much more experience with the church. You may have grown up in the PCA. There are a few of you here who may be third-generation PCA members, so you're very familiar with the culture of the church. You are quick to know what Christians should wear, what Christians should drink or not drink, what Christians should sing, and what Christians should say, because it's a part of your culture and your upbringing.

Paul tells us that we need to be careful. We must remember that we are to submit to God and to his Word, not to each other and to our preferences. Now, there's a wonderful thing about what Paul does in this passage. Paul is not looking in at the church or at us and saying, "*You're right; you're wrong. You're wrong; you're right.*" If we're honest, that's what we want. Right? We want Paul to vindicate our practice. We want him to side with *us* even more than we want to side with *him*, but Paul doesn't do that.

He says there are two problems and that, actually, both sides of this issue need to repent and to look to the Lord. The problem was over the application of the gospel to life. Paul refers to two groups here. He explicitly names in chapter 14, verse 1, those who are weak in the faith. Of course, that makes us think the other group is going to be the strong. Well, Paul doesn't leave us in suspense. At the beginning of chapter 15, he says, "We who are strong..."

He talks about both of these groups, and the issue that presents itself does so as dozens of questions about practices of eating, drinking, days, etcetera, but really, it's a much simpler issue than all of these individual questions. It is an issue of gospel welcome. That's what Paul starts with in verse 1. "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him,

but not to quarrel over opinions." We must ask ourselves, "Are we accepting one another or are we trying to be wiser than God, saying, 'I can only accept you if you live the way I think the gospel needs to be lived out?'"

### **What Is the Problem?**

Well, the issue Paul describes here creates two inherent and opposite dangers. The first is one of passing judgment. The second is one of looking down on others. These are really two sides of the same coin, two different ways of looking at the same issue. The issue really is the same. The gospel is to be worked out in practice, we say, in a certain way; namely, *my* way. That's how we look at this issue. If not, if you *don't* live out the gospel in *my* way, one of two problems will occur. Either someone thinks another is sinning in the way they are acting or someone else thinks that other person is a fool for even thinking it's a sin.

One man criticizes another's actions, and another despises the critic because he's criticizing. Let's take each in turn, starting with passing judgment. The problem can be summarized as a problem of conscience. We've talked about this before. Conscience is that little internal voice that speaks to us, either excusing or accusing what we do. Have you ever had an argument with yourself? Have you ever thought about just how crazy that is that you would argue with yourself? There are not two of you; there's one.

How do you argue with yourself? Well, the vast majority of the time it is because your conscience is at work. You *want* to do something, but you don't think you should. You think you *should* do something, but you don't want to. You argue with your conscience. Your conscience is that internal monologue, that internal voice that gives voice to whether or not something is proper for you.

The conscience is actually very powerful. We saw in chapter 2, verse 15, that the conscience is what God uses to convict unbelievers of their sin. Conscience is a very powerful tool for the Lord. Paul refers to it in chapter 9 as what drives him to evangelize the Jews. He wants a clear conscience, so it drives him to evangelize. In verse 13, Paul tells you, "This is why you submit to government." We talked about this before. That's one of the most difficult things to do. How do you do it? Your conscience drives you to it.

So conscience is powerful. There are two types of conscience here, but it can get confusing, because we can speak of a strong conscience, but that doesn't mean someone who has a strong conscience is a strong person or a strong believer. Actually, it's the reverse. The two types of conscience are a *strong* conscience and an *informed* conscience; that is, a conscience that is informed by the Word of God.

So to have a strong conscience does not mean you are strong in the faith. It's actually the reverse, often. The opposite is true. If someone has a strong conscience, it prevents them from doing things that are otherwise permissible under God's Word, but their conscience prohibits them. So they become, to use Paul's terminology, weak in the faith. So don't think, "I'm going to be strong. I'm going to have the best conscience on the face of the earth. That's going to make me the strongest believer." Actually not.

Often what happens is the stronger your conscience is the weaker in the faith you are, the more restricted you are. To have this conscience that is informed by the Bible makes you stronger in the faith, because you are more aware of what the Bible says, what God says. You don't just have a feeling you shouldn't do something. You don't just

have a preference not to do something. You look and you say, "God's Word says, 'Thou shalt not.' God's Word says, 'Thou shalt,' and I'm going to follow that. My conscience is bound by the Word of God."

Some people have strong consciences. They are convinced they may not do certain things. Here at Rome, there would have been some who grew up with kosher diet laws, and there would have been some who expected separation from all things pagan, including that they could not bring themselves to eat certain foods that would have been associated with pagan worship. Paul goes into this in great detail in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10.

In these instances, they would be sure that because the gospel had changed them they were not to indulge in such things. To do so was wrong in their minds. In other instances, there would be those who would be for the obligation of certain days, the observance of certain days. They had lived celebrating the various Jewish feast days, commemorating God's acts of mercy and grace, so they had commemorated the Feast of the Booths or Pentecost or Passover, and they felt compelled to observe them.

Well, that's not the problem. *This* is the problem. The problem came when they saw others *not* doing what they felt compelled to do or not do. Their immediate thought was that others were sinning, that they were not living the Christian life. Now, Paul does not imply at all that they would have thought others were unsaved because of this. There is no thought given that certain practices were required in addition to the blood of Christ. This is crucial and important for us to understand. Why? Because it reminds us that even if our theology is correct, we can be wrong in our view of others' practices in their personal lives.

These folks are weak in the faith. Their conscience is strong, but it is uninformed. It is not informed by the Bible, which does not expressly forbid certain foods. It does not expressly forbid certain drinks. It does not expressly command the keeping of certain days by Christians. So Paul tells them directly what their problem is. He says in verse 4, "Who are you to pass judgment...?" It's one thing for you to follow your own conscience, but don't burden someone else apart from God's Word. Other believers do not have to submit to you, but they have to submit to God.

Paul puts it this way: "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls." Let's put that in our context. Could you imagine trying to walk up to an engineer who works for Shell and tell them what they have to do at work or to speak to someone who works at the Apple Store and tell them how they're supposed to interact with customers? I would think what that person would probably say is one of the most famous lines that kids just love, when they look at someone and say, "You are not the boss of me." And it would be true.

What Paul is saying here is you have no authority over other believers. In the same way that you can't tell another employee what they should be doing when you are not their employer, you can't tell other Christians what their consciences need to say. Think about *this* for a moment. Is your first reaction to a fellow believer to see the area in which you differ from them and to draw attention to that area? Are you the sort of person who absolutely knows no woman should ever wear pants...ever...or that no Christian would ever drink alcohol or that there's only one proper, legitimate Bible translation?

Do you assume that Christian worship only has certain instruments or that it only can contain certain types of songs or that there's only one certain way to pray? Perhaps you think there's only one possible way for a Christian to think about economics. The answers to these questions may be fine for you to follow *your* conscience, but Paul is saying you cannot bind the conscience of others. Such matters are of Christian liberty. We are going to look at that more next week. We are not to pass judgment.

Now let me be very clear about something. This is where the Bible is silent. It's where the Bible does not speak. Where the Bible does not bind the conscience, our preferences cannot. We're not to pass judgment. Now you may be sitting there right now being very happy. You say, "That's not me. I'm not judging others by what they're doing. As a matter of fact, I believe in liberty. I know the Bible doesn't impose certain specific practices in food or in drink or in days. I am with Paul. I am strong." Be careful. Paul has a word for you as well.

The second part of the problem is looking down on others who *have* such scruples of conscience, whose consciences are stronger and who restrict them. Paul uses very strong language to warn us against *this* problem. He is not afraid to call a spade a spade. He says, "Don't despise your brother." This is a very strong word. This word *despise* means to show by your attitude that someone has no merit or worth at all. To do so is to mock others, to look down on them, to say they have no place in the church.

This same word is used in 1 Corinthians, chapter 6, when Paul describes unbelievers who are outside the church when he's speaking about lawsuits. He says they have no standing in the church. How could you possibly look at another believer and say, "You have no standing in the church"? It's how Paul says the Corinthian super apostles, so-called, treated his letters. They were of no account to them. They were worthless. How can you look at your brother or sister and say they're of no account, they're worthless?

You may say, "My first reaction on meeting a fellow believer is not to try to find out where we differ." Good! But is your first reaction instead to see yourself as being superior to them, superior in understanding, and to look down on them for what they do not know? Do you back away from fellow believers because their consciences are not as informed as yours, and do you feel it is your job to fix other people? Must you impose your freedom of conscience on them even if their conscience accuses them?

Paul gives us an important principle here that we'll look at in more detail next week. We see it in verse 5. Each person must be fully convinced in their own mind. What Paul is saying here, the short version, is even if you compel someone to your point of view, you've lost, because they're not fully convinced in their own mind. This is, I think, a problem for many in the Reformed world. We often flaunt our freedom in front of others who do not feel so free.

For example, we say, "Listen. We're not Independent Fundamental Baptist. No sermons on demon rum here. No vows that not a drop of alcohol will ever pass my lips." But we tend to have craft brew ministries in our churches that we raise to a level of spiritual importance and we flaunt, we put on our websites, and we make sure everyone knows we're not like the Independent Fundamental Baptists, thank you very much. We're so much superior to them.

We understand that movies in and of themselves are not forbidden. There is nothing wicked about what used to be celluloid, what is now digital, but we use that as an excuse to go look at any movie we might possibly want, including ones that are directly violative of God's law, violative of the seventh commandment, violative of the sixth commandment, violative of the eighth commandment. We flaunt it.

We feel no compunction about telling others that they are foolish because they won't wear certain kinds of clothing. Judgment comes in two forms. It *is* true that a Christian can judge others because they do certain things, but they can also judge other believers for *not* doing certain things. Paul is warning us against both of these problems.

### **What Is the Solution?**

What, then, is the solution? Is the church condemned to have perpetual conflict and judgment? No. That's the reason Paul is writing to the church at Rome right here and now. It's the reason he's writing to *us* now. This chapter follows all of the other chapters Paul has written. I know that's a leap of logic, but stay with me here. Paul has not forgotten chapters 1-13. He has told us about the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and he has told us that the grace of God is greater than all our sin, and that includes the sin of judging others.

His solution is so simple, yet so profound. We see it in verse 1. We are to welcome each other as brothers and sisters. Now let me give one caveat here. Paul is talking to believers here. He is telling believers not to judge one another. He is not saying there is no right or wrong. He is not saying there are no actions that are sinful. No. The church is to be open to all, but it does not mean everyone is a brother or a sister. For that to be true, someone has to understand and believe the truth of the gospel, that Jesus died for their sins and they are trusting Jesus Christ for their salvation. Paul has already covered that in spades.

This welcome is commanded, but it's for fellow believers, brothers and sisters. The word here for *welcome* is profound. It means to accept and to take aside to yourself. It means we take brothers and sisters into fellowship with us. That's a challenge, beloved. It means you do not stop at sitting in the same worship service with a brother or sister. It doesn't mean you go the extra, extra mile by letting them sit in the same pew. It doesn't mean you go phenomenally beyond by not putting the Bible down in the seat between you and them to get a buffer zone. It means much more than that.

It means bringing them into your community, into your fellowship, into your life. That's what it means. It describes how Priscilla and Aquila dealt with Apollos. It's the same word in Acts 18. They were concerned about Apollos' good, not their own. They were not afraid to be associated with Apollos, even though he didn't know everything, even though he made some theological blunders. They pulled him aside, and they poured their life into him so he would benefit.

If we had any doubt about how important this is to welcome each other, Paul answers that in verse 3. "Let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him." Same word. We are not to think we are wiser than God, as if someone could be welcome with God but not with me. There's an important point here. There is no *but*. "I'll welcome them, *but...*" "Oh, I'll let them into my fellowship, *but...*" Paul deals with that explicitly. There is no allowance for an ulterior motive.

He says, "Welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions." You do not welcome them to quarrel. You do not welcome them so you can fix them, so you can have an opportunity to debate with them, to show how biblically literate you are. Paul uses language here that warns us against having ulterior motives that show where our hearts really are. So search your heart and think about how you welcome others.

Are you ready to take people in but you still keep them at a distance until they figure things out and are more like you? Is it your passion to have others have the right views about movies, food, music, or dress? Paul is telling you today not to be limited in your welcome. If someone is good enough for Jesus, you can be sure they are good enough for you.

Now, if the solution when faced with weaker brothers is to welcome them, the solution when faced with strong brothers is not to judge them. This is also extremely difficult, because when you see someone doing something you think is wrong, that your conscience won't allow *you* to do, you don't think of them as being strong; you think of them as being weak. They need to be straightened out. We want to be strong. Who wants to be weak? Right? We want to be with Paul, don't we? Yay! Team Paul! We're with Paul. But as we've seen, it is those with a strong conscience whom Paul describes as being weak.

Do not assume that when someone does not live out the gospel in the same way *you* do that they are wrong and to be judged. Again, remember the boundaries here. If something is commanded or prohibited in God's Word, it is not a matter of liberty of conscience. If someone thinks they can live out the gospel by stealing or by lying or by committing sexual immorality, they are wrong, and there is no liberty in such, because God has spoken in his Word, but if there is no biblical law or apostolic command, then we have no right to judge.

Again, the root of this problem is that you are saying you are wiser than God. If God has accepted them, Paul says, why don't *you*? More than that, Paul says, "How dare you judge another? Who are you to do this?" Both in verse 4 and in verse 10, Paul's language is very emphatic. It's an oddity of Greek in that you don't need to use personal pronouns. Personal pronouns are built into the verb. When you look at the verb, you can tell if it's a *you* or a *he* or an *I* speaking. But Greek *does* have personal pronouns, and it uses them for emphasis.

Paul uses the pronoun here, and he makes it the very first word of his sentence. It's Paul's way of saying, "You! Yeah, you! Hey, you, listen up!" He's getting our attention. He's being very emphatic. He says, "That other believer is not your servant. You are not in charge of him; God is. Jesus died for him or her just as much as he died for you." So, while we are to think through the gospel clearly, we *can* honor the kind of devotion to God that might restrict the conscience of other believers.

In conclusion, we face a challenge in our church. I am certain of that, because *every* church faces it. They faced it in Rome. They faced it in Corinth. They faced it in Colossae. They face it now in Houston. They face it in Nashville. They face it in Los Angeles, in Beijing, in Kampala, in Buenos Aires. Everywhere there is a church, the challenge is to live with each other committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ while realizing, at the same time, that not everyone will practice the Christian life just like I do.

Not everyone knows or *should* know the right food or drink, the right music, the right clothing. Ultimately, that's not important anyway. What is important is that Jesus died for sinners. If Jesus has died for you, if you know him by faith as your Savior, then you know just how messed up you were. You know the work Jesus is doing to change you.

Trust him to do that work in other people's lives too. Jesus doesn't need you to do his job for him. He doesn't need you to fix your brothers and sisters. Recognize the problem of judgment, and trust the Lord to fix *that* problem too. May God give us the grace to welcome our brothers and sisters and to serve *them* rather than expecting them to serve *us*.