

## Romans 14:1-12

Our Romans 14 text is bracketed by two beautiful texts about forgiveness. Joseph is wronged, deeply, sold as a slave by his brothers, and he now has all the authority, and his dad is “out of the picture” (but as we know not really, for our God is the God of the living and the dead). Nevertheless, Joseph could get such sweet revenge! But instead he forgives, yet again, and there is great joy. And a beautiful reminder that God can and will use evil for good.

Joseph is wronged deeply, he forgives. In our Gospel lesson Peter asks what if you are wronged repeatedly. Jesus responded, easy “forgive repeatedly.” And much can be said on how difficult forgiveness is, and how easy it is to hold a grudge, so may we be steadfast and bold enough to forgive one another our wrongdoings, even when the feelings of pain and hurt go so deep.

But what about when both sides haven't really done anything wrong, or sinful, so there isn't really anything to forgive, but you still aren't on the same page? What then? I'm a colts fan, you're a patriots fan, its pretty close to a sin, but not quite I guess. What do we do then? Or more seriously, Paul brings up food and festivals. Maybe in our day it would be worship style? Color of the carpet? Church polity?

Paul encourages us, in these situations to not pass judgment on those you think are wrong, or despise those who “don’t get it”, but to be convinced in your own mind as one who has to give an account to the Master, the King, to God.

We should clarify here. In the age where “Judge not lest you be judged” is the most well known verse – rivalling John 3:16, I bet - and quoted to excuse anything and everything, we might think this is another verse that tells the Christian not to judge ANYTHING. And That is not true. First of all “Judge not lest you be judged” is clearly a warning against judging hypocritically, with planks in our eyes, as it is also a reminder that we WILL be judged, so maybe we should lean on God’s truth as our guide and lean on the grace of Jesus when we fall short, offering it to others as they do. Secondly, in these particular verses from Romans 14 we are called to not judge or quarrel over OPINIONS. Opinions as opposed to commands from the Master.

There are a great many things we can do or not do in our Christian freedom. If you want to root for the patriots, ugh, fine- you have your opinion, I have mine. If you want to commit adultery, sorry, we must judge and rebuke that. But make no mistake we don’t judge and rebuke that because of our opinion, but because of God’s opinion, and his opinions happen to be right, all the time, because he is the arbiter of good and evil – and sociology has shown he may know a thing or two about how he set things up.

If you remain unconvinced, I offer just a few verses: Luke 17:3 “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.” James 5:19-20 “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” 2 Timothy 4:2 “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Galatians 6:1 “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” And of course, our text for last Sunday from Matthew 18, where our Lord tells us what to do when we judge someone to be in the wrong.

But then again, all those are to say: this isn't what our text is actually talking about. Our text from Romans is about human opinions. What time should the potluck be? What time should the service be? What should we drink, in moderation? What should we wear, in modesty? Real questions that real Christians ask and there are real opinions on the matters. Opinions worth sharing? No doubt. Opinions worth fracturing and dividing the body over? Paul is clear: No. But that means that someone's opinion doesn't get voted through! And what if it is yours! Oh no! Maybe we should panic, or throw a fit, or leave! Does that sound like Christian

maturity that Paul has been exhorting us toward in Romans 12 through 14? Not really.

Maybe that's a chance to cheer for another. A chance to learn. A chance to give someone the benefit of the doubt, and if it blows up in their face, like you expected it to, maybe then there is a chance not to cry "I told you so," but, "hey, what if we tried that other way?" And maybe then, they will give you the benefit of the doubt.

Maybe in these instances we have a chance to crucify our pride, and work together with the body of Christ which is here not so our opinions might be celebrated, but that our Master, who died and rose, to give eternal life to sinners like us, that He might be celebrated?

Don't miss Paul's argument. He goes from opinions to our deaths. Quite the change in tone. We have this cryptically beautiful line about how we are constantly with the Lord whether we live or die. What beautiful Gospel! What does that have to do with our opinions on food or festival? Everything!

That person you have a differing opinion on is One with you in the Lord and the resurrection and serves the same Master! You are more united than you can possibly imagine and will stand next to them in singing Alleluia's on the resurrection day! How amazing! Compared to that, what of a meal? What of a

festival on one day or another? It doesn't even come close to measuring up in importance. So why fight about it?

In a world of death, and tragedy, and violence and depression and cancer, our Lord has delivered us out of the icy cold dark waters onto the ship of the Holy Christian Church, bound for the shores of the Kingdom, and you are going to complain because the food is bad? You didn't get served first? Your opinion on the music wasn't followed?

Don't miss Paul's warning at the end of our text. We all belong to the same Master, we all will stand before the same Master. And on that day are you going to stand on your opinions? You going to give your opinions on the immutable law of God and why it shouldn't apply? Or are you going to stand, or maybe fall on, the mercy of God that is real and given in the blood of Jesus for you?

It was many people's opinion that an innocent man should die for the sake of the masses, and the crowds. It was one man's opinion that Jesus was worth 20 pieces of silver. And the Lord of all is handed over to die, for your sins, for your pride, for your lack of perspective. But it was that One God-Man's opinion, that you – when he looked at you with your sins and squabbling over meaningless, worldly opinions and preferences... it was his opinion that you were worth it. So he went to a cross to die, that you might be washed clean and made his own.

And he, in his power, rose victorious to deliver you, and us, remember Paul's point, WE are in this together. Celebrate, rejoice in that. And may that be our perspective as we get down into the nuts and bolts of how we live and serve and worship together. Some things aren't opinions, we lean on the truth of God's Word and the apostolic teaching. Some of it is opinion, may we not let that divide us. But may we use our gifts and differing perspectives and talents to share the gospel, and make known to each other and the world that there is Hope, hope in the Good Master, the merciful Master, who gave his life to save us that we might be in his uncontested opinion: pure, clean, righteous, and heirs of eternal life. In His name. Amen.