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Romans 14:5-9

DESPITE OUR DIFFERENCES, WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST!

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The Christian Church is made up of all kinds of people. Some of us are white-collar workers, some blue-collar workers, some are students and others are retired. Some of us have been blessed very much financially, others not so much. Some people have large families, others one or two children. Some people love to exercise, running miles every day. Others get their exercise by walking to and from the dinner table. Some of us might be Republicans, others Democrats and still others consider themselves independents. You might be a baseball, football or NASCAR fan. You might not. You might enjoy shopping, you might not. It really doesn't matter. None of those things separates us from one another or should.

We are all one body under Christ. He is what unites us. All of us are sinners who have had our sins washed away by the holy, precious blood of our Lord Jesus. We have all been baptized into his name and we receive everything that he has done. His life, his death and his resurrection become ours. We listen to the Word together. We receive Christ's body and blood together. We rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins together. We pray with and for one another.

A couple of weeks ago the Apostle Paul spoke to us: "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices...which is your spiritual worship." Paul then summarizes this worship with the word love. He tells us how to show that love in our everyday lives in our dealings with the government, society and the church.

We know that little problems can often become big problems. Paul dealt with both Jew and Gentile. His congregations were usually made up of both. Some may have been predominantly Jewish, others predominantly Gentile. It wasn't always easy because their religious backgrounds were so different. There was a major problem with the churches in Galatia. There were people who came to the churches and told the members that they had to observe the Old Testament regulations, specifically circumcision. They told the members that unless they observed these customs, they were sinning against God. Paul addressed the Galatians very strongly.

It does not appear that the congregation in Rome faced the problem to such a degree, but there still was an issue. Jewish Christians faced thousands of years of customs and traditions that were not easy to change. Did Old Testament regulations still apply? And if so, which ones? The Gentiles, on the other hand, could not see why the Jews were so sensitive to things like worshiping on Sunday or eating a ham sandwich.

We may not deal with these specific issues, but there have been issues which have divided Christians here in the United States as well. Perhaps these issues don't come up as much as they did in the last century but they have been a point of contention. When I was in high school there was an issue with dancing. With dance style changing, could a Christian boy or girl attend a dance? Some people were troubled by drinking beer on Sunday, others with playing cards with their relatives for nickels. Every school had to decide what proper and improper wear was for students. That would change over the years, but the battle still rages on.

Who is right and who is wrong? That is what people want settled. They hope that the issue is always settled by saying that their view of such things is right and others' views of such things are wrong. It's not quite that simple. There

are things that are neither forbidden nor commanded by God. They are neither right nor wrong in and of themselves. One would have to look at the motivation involved. The Greek word for such things was *adiaphora*. The Germans called them *Mittledinge*, things in the middle.

Let's look at the situation in Rome. Paul starts out this chapter by saying: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." Whose faith was weak? What are the disputable matters? There were a couple of things that stood out. First of all there was the matter of the Sabbath Day.

God commanded the observance of the Sabbath Day when he gave the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. It was a day of rest to be set aside for God's glory. No work was to be done on the Sabbath. But human logic had corrupted God's intent. The Pharisees in particular, of which Paul was one, would spend hours upon hours every day arguing about what constituted a violation of God's Law. You might remember that they tried to arrest and even kill our Lord Jesus because he had the audacity to heal people on the Sabbath.

Even today Jewish people argue about such things. When my wife and I were in Israel a number of years ago, we encountered Sabbath elevator. Orthodox Jews believed that it was work to push the elevator button to go to their individual floor. Therefore there was a Sabbath elevator that automatically stopped on each and every floor. It could take a long time on a forty floor hotel. Fortunately for Gentiles such as us, we could take the other elevator and go directly to our floor.

We know that when the early Christians worshiped, they chose Sunday as their day of worship. The primary reason was because Sunday was the day of our Lord's resurrection. You could also say that it was the first day of creation honoring God the Father and it was also the day of Pentecost honoring the Holy Spirit. The New Testament gives us no command on which day we must worship. That is because it is not Law. It is Gospel. We are free to choose. Most of our people worship on Sunday morning. We are also free to choose another day. Some congregations have year round services on Monday, Thursday, or Saturday nights in addition to Sunday morning. Most of our congregations have midweek Advent and Lenten services on Wednesday evenings. We have Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Christmas may fall upon any day of the week.

But you do understand that it would be difficult for anyone who had worshipped on Saturday for their entire lives to now go to another day. It wasn't wrong to do so, but it bothered them. Deep inside they felt that they might be doing something wrong and contrary to God's will. It was the same way with certain foods. Throughout their lives they had been taught that it was wrong, a sin to eat pork or shrimp. Now all of a sudden it was all right? There was also the matter of the fact that in heathen cities, meat had been sacrificed to idols, false gods. The meat was then removed from the heathen altars and sold at the public marketplace. Could you eat such meat in good conscience? Some were troubled. Others weren't.

Can you understand the dilemma? These Christians knew that they were free in Christ to worship on Sunday and to eat pork chops. Their heads told them that. Their hearts weren't quite there yet. It might take some time. The one thing that they didn't need would be other Christians saying, "What's the matter with you? Are you some sort of spiritual wimp? There's nothing wrong with what we're doing. You are the problem!" That would be something that would then burden their consciences.

Paul said, "The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant?" Each of us is to respect the conscience of the other. No one is to consider himself the judge of the other.

There are many matters in congregations today where such things might apply. One congregation might use the organ as the primary musical instrument; others might in their Christian freedom choose a piano or other instruments. One pastor might wear a black gown; another might wear an alb or other vestments. One congregation might sing three hymns, others four. Some might have songs that aren't really hymns. Some people might worship in a beautiful church building with stained glass windows and carved altars. Some people might worship in a gymnasium or other building. Some may use hymnals; others put the words on the wall or ceiling. We may feel that some of our ideas are better than others and we have good reasons for feeling so, but we cannot tell those who do something other than we are comfortable with that they are sinning against God.

“For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” That’s the bottom line, isn’t it? We are our brother’s keeper. We care about one another and we love one another. We all belong to the Lord. We are all souls bought with the blood of Christ. We are concerned about the salvation of everyone.

“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he could be the Lord of both the dead and the living.” Satan had destroyed the relationship which existed between man and God in the Garden of Eden. We had possessed the image of God and that was lost. Sin and death entered the world. Jesus, the very Son of God, became one of us to reverse the condemnation of death. He took our place and by his death and resurrection secured and sealed our salvation.

“All this he did so that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” Yes, we strive to live and serve our King. We do so by loving and serving our fellow man. It is not always easy. It calls for love, patience, toleration, understanding and even sacrifice. But isn’t that exactly what Jesus showed for you?

What unites us as Christian brothers and sisters is far more than anything that divides us. We may be different in many ways, but we have a common goal, a common faith and a common Savior. May we always strive to show our unity by not abusing our freedom! AMEN.