

Morning Worship 2_27_2022

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SPEAKERS

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00:06

It's time for us to get a little more deeply into God's Word together. So as I invite you to do each week, I hope that you will have a copy of scripture out and open in front of you. If that's a personal Bible or a Bible app that you have, I encourage you to open that if you need something, there are red Bibles in the pews. And hope you have that out, we will once again be in the book of Romans, which is in the New Testament. So after the four Gospels and an X, you'll find the book of Romans will be in first half of chapter 14 this morning. I, I feel like I should apologize to you all upfront because this sermon may be a waste of your time. If you completely agree with everyone in your life about everything, then the sermon will be useless to you. If you and your neighbor view debated or divisive topics through the exact same lens, you bring the exact same assumptions to them, and you end up with the exact same conclusions. And this is going to be irrelevant to you. There if there are no conflicting convictions represented here this morning, and everyone is on the same exact page about every single thing. And this is going to be pointless. However, in the off chance, that you may have different opinions in somebody else about something or in the unlikely event that you may even disagree with someone else here this morning about something and perhaps Perhaps, you may find something in this sermon that is useful for helping you interact with other people who have different opinions than you do about certain things. Last fall, we started studying this letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the ancient city of Rome, the letter to the Romans is one of the most famous portions of Scripture with some of the most famous passages of scripture in it. It's powerful, it's provocative, it comforts, the distressed and it distresses the comfortable. We've been working through it over the last few months. We're going to get back into it here this morning. But before we do, let me invite you once more, to pray with me. Grace and grace, gracious God, we thank you for this time that we have here together today. Quiet are distracted minds, calm are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have to say. And let us respond and in ways that demonstrate our love for you and our love for others. And Lord, I pray that the words of my own mouth, and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in Your sight. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. I was reading recently about a congregation that had been working through some some pretty intense issues together. And they're they're not local, so don't worry. And I'd be shocked if anybody here had any personal connections. That's why I felt like I could use them as an example. But some of the things we're working through were how do our How do our diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds affect the way that we relate to God, and the way that we relate to one another. They had some different opinions about how Christians were supposed to relate to God's moral law. They had

different understandings about Christian perspective on government and the ways that Christians should live in the public sphere, they had different opinions about what it means to love your neighbor. And how do you balance that with the freedom to hold your own convictions about certain matters. So I don't know if any of these things sound familiar or not. But I mean, they're not unique in these struggles, obviously. But for this congregation, in the hopes of navigating some of these things, they brought in an outside consultant to try to give them some instruction on this. I mean, sometimes, you know, bringing in an objective, impartial expert can maybe help you see some things that you may have been a little blind to on your own. So they received some pretty helpful teaching. And they decided then that they were going to share this with a number of other congregations in the hopes that it could be helpful as well. And as I was reading through some of that, I did find it incredibly helpful. So I wanted to share some of that with you here this morning. The congregation was the Christians in the ancient city of Rome. And the instruction was a Paul gave them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we think that we're the first generation to wrestle with these kinds of things. But as Solomon famously said, there's nothing new under the sun. This is what Paul continued to say to them, beginning in chapter 14 verse one, picking up where we left off last week. Asked for the one who is weak in faith welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he made 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's 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 it seems one day is better than another, while another it seems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day observes 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 give thanks to God, for none of us live to himself, and none of us dies to himself, where 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 the 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. Here's where we're headed with this morning, I want to just remind you a little bit of the context for some of this content that's always important, especially when we are this far along, in a letter, and then I want to work backwards through this section. So we'll begin with that closing statement, Paul said, where he said, each of us will give an account of himself to God, because that helps us understand the model that he puts forward. There's a model for how to faithfully engage with one another when we differ on secondary matters. But let me remind you a little bit of the context for this content, you need to remember something about the city about the congregation about the concerns. And I want you to be impressed about how many see words I fit up on the same slide right there, right. It's wrong, right? We know this isn't the city of Rome, Rome was not only the heart of the Roman Empire was one of the biggest cities in the world at that time. It was a very diverse city, there were a lot of temples, there are a lot of temples devoted to Roman gods, a lot of temples devoted to the Emperor. There was a broad range of socioeconomic classes in the city of Rome to in the wealthy, lived very indulgently, and the poor were absolutely miserable. This congregation then had people coming from all kinds of different backgrounds, as best we can tell, there were probably actually about five separate house churches that would meet together to form this one larger congregation. And so some of them were coming from ethnically and culturally and religiously Jewish backgrounds. Some of them were coming from ethnically and culturally and religiously Gentile, that is non Jewish backgrounds. Paul had not been there. Personally, he had not been to this particular church, he wanted to go there, he was planning to go there. He was hoping even to use that as a launching point of carry on some further missionary work in Spain, but he was writing to them. And there were a lot of concerns that this congregation had all the ones that I mentioned to you earlier, all the things that we have seen over these first

chapters that they have been wrestling with. But there are two in particular that Paul uses in this section as examples. They were debating over dietary laws and over observing certain days, and I'll come back and say a bit more about what those were and explain that a little bit. But the dilemma that they had been facing in a lot of areas with a lot of topics, and in this section of Paul brings up then is what do we do when we disagree with one another? How are we supposed to approach that? That's a big topic. It's an important topic. The whole of chapter 14, and even the first few verses of chapter 15 are devoted to it. So we're gonna get into it today. But we'll spend a little bit more time with it next week as well. But to start, as I said, I want to begin backwards with the verse that ended this section that we read here this morning in verse 12. That was where Paul said, each of us will give an account of himself to God. This broader section on the letter beginning in chapter 12, really moving on the broader section is focused on how it is that the Christians were supposed to live together in community. And yet, even though Paul is talking a lot about their community life together, he routinely brings it back to the individual focus, to remind them that there is this individual element as well. Each one of us is accountable to God. Now, let's continue consistent testimony of Scripture. We find that all throughout the scriptures, Paul says that here in verses 10 and 11, when he says, 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. That's a quote from Isaiah, chapter 45. You may see that reference there in the footnotes. It's also Paul references that same passage, he changes the wording a little bit in the very famous section in Philippians. Two, when he's talking about Jesus, and he says that at the name of Jesus, every knee, in heaven on earth, and under the earth shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There's a consistent testimony from Scripture about this and even even the earliest Creed's of the Christian church all say something to the effect of Jesus Christ will come to judge the living in the dead. That comes from Second Corinthians 5:10. We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, I suppose, brings us back to that reminder, each one of them himself has to give an account to God. When I was growing up, my younger brother and I would often get into little arguments where get into fights about different things. And so if our parents would call us over to ask what was going on, and we would do what most siblings would do, right? They say, Why did you do that? We say, because he did. And when he started, they said, No, I'm going to talk to him next. Why did you do that? I'm talking to you right? Now. Why did you do what you did? We have this idea sometimes of getting called into account before God, a lot of us are going to engage I think reflexively, perhaps in that game, same kind of defensive deflective sort of behavior. We said, well, because they did this, because they said that, or at least I didn't do that. least I'm not as bad as that. And I suspect that God may say something to the effect of, I didn't ask you about them. ask you about you. Why did you do that? What response can we offer them? I mean, really, what response are we going to be able to offer to a God who sees right through our spiritual makeup? Who sees right through all of our religious facades who sees right into the deep things of our hearts? What response are we gonna be able to give? What hope would we have in a situation like that? Well, first part of the letter has been focused on that many of you have been here, as we studied that, particularly the first eight chapters are focused on that letting us know that on our own in our sin, we are without hope, when faced with that coming reality, it's not about how you stack up to your neighbor. It's about whether you are holy, and righteous, and just in the ways and to the degrees to which God has called us to be and none of us are. None of us are. We can only be those things if God provides them for us if God gives them to us, Paul had been getting into that in great, great depth all through the first part of this letter. Again, I want to just remind you of a couple of the passages that we looked at previously together. One of them is in Romans chapter three, one of the places Paul summarizes this, the good and the bad news, all right together at once. Romans three beginning verse 23, says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation, that is a pleasing, atoning sacrifice, by His blood to be received by faith. Also, at the end of verse six, he says, For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord, whole first part of the letter is letting us know that on

our own in our sin, we wouldn't have any reason to have hope, knowing that we are going to be a call to give account before God. But the very good news of the gospel is that in Christ, we do have that hope. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, a law of the Spirit of Life has set us free from the law of sin and death, who can bring any charge against those whom God has called this is all of Romans chapter eight. So there is good news. But we also have to remember that each of us will be called to give an account of himself to God. So if we understand that, and the reason I started there is that if we understand that, if we remember that, then we can understand why Paul says it's not our place to pass ultimate judgment on others. It's not our place to pass some ultimate final word of decisive judgment upon others, that's God's place, everyone's going to give it account to God. That's why he says in verse 10, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Why do you despise your brother? How do most of us respond when somebody around us holds different convictions? About whatever? A lot of times will pass judgment? Right will say they are I mean, they're wrong. Clearly. They're very misinformed. They're very misguided. I have done my research, I have reached my conclusions, they are irrefutable. They are wrong, pass judgment, or we despise we go past that to say not only are they wrong, but because of that opinion, they hold they themselves as a person are wicked and degenerate and hateful and dangerous. We despise move past pure judgment, to despise the impulses. Why do you do that? Why do you do that? The obvious implication is that we ought not to what Paul implies here through that rhetorical question, James, for example, states very clearly in his letter, it's James for chapter chapter four verses 11 and 12. When he says, Do not speak evil against one another brothers, there is only one law giver and judge the one who is able to save and destroy so who are you to judge your neighbor and you may know this James was the half brother of Jesus. So his letter in particular, if you read it, it's kind of like a remix of the Sermon on the Mount. Right so you didn't bring bring to mind the very famous statement from Jesus in Matthew chapter seven, when he says, Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye but not notice the log that's in your own eye? Paul's getting the same kind of sentiments here he's coming at them from a slightly different angle be saying, we are not the ones to place ultimate eternal divine judgment upon another. That's not our place. God's gonna do that. It's not our place though. Here's an important point of clarification. I want to make sure we can hear this and at least give some thought to this. This does not mean this does not mean that we are in to entirely refrain from identifying right or wrong good or evil? I mean the Scriptures speak regularly of encouraging exhorting, even rebuking one another in times that we are in sin or we have wandered from the truth. But there are two vital reminders here two things you have to remember. First, it has to be done out of love and not out of contempt. done out of love, not out of contempt. And the second one is what Paul is getting out here that we are not the ones to make an eternal judgment about someone's future that is in the Lord's hands. There's a quote I want to share with you from John Perkins in his book dream with me. There Perkin says this. As Christians, we must talk about evil, sin and darkness. I'm convinced that racism and all the other isms, tribalism, sexism, classism, ism, and others that keep people apart are evil. The first sin of Adam and Eve separating human beings from God and from one another, anything that widens that Divine is also sin. It contradicts God's will for humans, as a community, and for each of us individually, is total rebellion against the gospel, which bridges the gap between human beings and God, and between one human being and another. So we must talk about these things. But as we do so, we need to lower our hostile voices, we need to ask ourselves some hard questions. We need to ask is it judgment or love that brings light into dark places? Not just we don't just ignore them, right? Don't just pretend those things aren't there. He says, if we do this, it's done out of love, not out of contempt. And remember that you're not the one to pronounce the ultimate eternal verdict, by the way is little aside, if you don't know Perkin story, he's an author and a church leader. If you don't know his personal story and testimony, it's outstanding. So look it up and read it later. Not now put your phones away later, read about Perkins if you don't know him. Paul says each one of us is going to have to give account to God. And we are to proclaim the truth we are to live in light of the truth. But instead, Paul says there's a different model, though, for what we ought to embrace in those times when we see things differently. He talks about living for the Lord, and allowing for 80 of fora. This is

your theological vocabulary word for the day. 84. That's just a word that means secondary matters or indifferent things, secondary matters or in different things. They are the topics, the issues, the areas in which the heart of the gospel is not at stake in how you view them. There are areas where scripture can give you guidance can give you direction, but it doesn't give an explicit prohibition or prohibition or explicit permission. And so people will sometimes reach different conclusions. Now I want to come back to that because Paul gives two examples of those in this section, he mentions two things where the congregation in Rome was fully convinced he says they were fully convinced in their own minds about things and yet they saw them a little differently. The first example he talks about his some of the dietary practices that are there, this is what you see in verse two, when he says one person believes that he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. First, is the comment there what why are the ones who are abstain called weak. It's not that's not meant to be. That's not an insult. He's not trying to insult them. It's not meant in a pejorative sense or any way he's acknowledging that some people's consciences are more sensitive to some things and others. That's, that's all he's trying to get out with that. But what was happening there, it could have been two things actually, they're happening there. One thing that he could be referring to, are that some of the Christians who had come out of ethnically and culturally and religiously Jewish backgrounds still felt like they needed to follow all of the Old Testament Jewish dietary laws. They felt like they still needed to do that. Others said, Well, no, Jesus said that those are no longer in effect, the inspiration that His Holy Spirit and the teaching the apostles have said that those aren't in effect, so we don't need to, they saw it differently could also mean that emitted some of the believers in the congregation either from Jewish or Gentile backgrounds, felt like they could not eat some of the meat because it had originally been from an animal sacrificed at the pagan temple that specifically was happened in First Corinthians eight. So they could have said we just were not comfortable associating with that. For that reason, it could have been either one of those things, but the result was that some of the congregation some in the congregation thought that it was okay for them to eat anything they wanted. Some believe that they had to abstain from certain things, because of their convictions. The other example he brings up there is observing days, he says that in verse five there, he says one person, it seems one day is better than another while another esteems all days alike. Again, there are two possible references here. Perhaps some of the congregation felt like they did still need to honor and observe all of the Old Testament Jewish feast days and fast days, all the holy days could have been that. Or it could be that summer just had different opinions on what it meant to honor and observe the Sabbath. Maybe you do it on a Saturday, maybe you do it on a Sunday. Maybe you do it a different day. Either way. Again, the end result was that people were viewing the sacredness of certain days differently from one another. Those are the two examples in that particular congregation. They may not resonate totally with us here. We can understand them. But here's what I want you to see. Paul doesn't say that it's wrong that they have different convictions. He doesn't say it's wrong for you to have those different opinions. He said you just can't despise one another, because of those different opinions that you have on these secondary matters. He's using these as an example where Scripture gives a general framing, it gives us a direction, it shows us maybe how we could understand something, but there is not an explicit you shall do this, you shall not do that statement. Now these topics are important, right? They're important, I'm sure that the members of the congregation cared very, very deeply about them. Some of them probably cared passionately about these things. And yet the heart of the gospel, that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that was not at stake and how they chose to answer these things. These are what you can call in Scripture. That's where the term comes from the Bible that term ADEA for It's a Greek term used in the Bible, there are plenty of examples that fall into this category, right? We can think of all kinds of things that fall into this category. What does the Bible say explicitly about the time that you should attend to worship or the style of music and liturgy that you should use? Not much. I announced earlier next week, our three service worship lineup resumes, we're gonna have various times various styles, it's okay to disagree. It's okay for you to have a preference, but not to despise those who have a different one than you. What does the Bible explicitly say about the specific

procedural steps that community should take to mitigate transmission risks during a pandemic? Not much, I have looked a lot. So you can disagree. Do not despise those with whom you disagree. Now, I should also say that I mapped out this Roman series months ago, so I guess it's the Lord timing that we hit chapter 14 Today, I don't know in our denomination in the EPC. The motto for our denomination is a quote that's attributed to the North African theologian Augustine, it says, In essentials, unity in non essentials, Liberty in all things, charity, non essential does not mean not important. Again, it simply means that Christians can study scripture, follow Jesus and yet hold different convictions on things that are not explicitly revealed or taught. Now, there's a whole other sermon on what things are essential and what things are explicitly taught. In fact, it's a whole sermon series that I preached about a year and a half ago on the essential so go back and listen to that if you need to. Also want to say this, something is not non essential, just because you don't like what Scripture says about it. That doesn't make it non essential. This is only referring to the things that Scripture does give us framing guidance, and yet not explicit prohibitions or explicit permissions. So allowing for a do for means giving space for secondary matters. But when he says in verse one, they're welcome him, the one who is weak, he says, Welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. Don't invite them in so that you can prove to them that they're wrong. That's what he's saying right there. You can be convicted about something without being combative about it. He talks about living for the Lord, living for the Lord means being people who reflect Jesus Christ on our own. And together, this is verses seven and eight. And none of us lives to himself. None of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. That may sound like a simple statement. But that is an attitude that pushes back hard against the mindset of our culture, which has trained us to place ourselves and our opinions at the center of everything, and ends up leading us to neglect some of the things that really do matter. Andrew read a little bit ago from that passage and Zechariah maybe that's not a familiar passage to you. It's a really interesting one, though, if you listen to what he read there, the Lord said to people, why were you fasting and mourning? Were you doing that for me? Are we doing that for yourselves? Why are we doing that? And then he goes on after that to say this is what does matter render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, Do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, the poor, let none of you devise evil against one another. In your heart. God says that's what I want you to focus on. And how did they respond? Well, the final verse said they refuse to pay attention. They turned a stubborn shoulder, and they stomped up their ears so that they might not hear. I've reminded you a lot always remember the context that we are in for this part of letter, the flow of this, this is not Romans, chapter one. Paul, it's been 11 chapters talking about the gospel. This is what God has done for us. This is what it means for you to be a new creation in Jesus Christ. And then he goes into this is what it looks like to live. In light of that this is what it looks like to reflect that and he starts at the intimate personal level, when he says, offer up your bodies as living sacrifices be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And then he goes to the communal level. This is how you are to live when you are with one another. And then he moves on to talk about the inevitable thing that will come next. This is how you're to do this in times that you don't necessarily agree because too often we don't reflect this individually. Any every one of us all include myself in this every one of us and And together, we don't reflect this in the ways that we should at all the times that we should in all the places that we should. I was rereading this last week is really great little book. It's called plain theology for playing people. It's by Charles Octavius booth. Booth is another person if you don't know his story, you should look up later, after the service. Booth, he grew up in slavery and he when he was freed, later on, he had taught himself to read and write he became a pastor and an educator. He's a brilliant man, brilliant man. He knew the scriptures deeply. He loved Jesus intimately. And he wanted to introduce people to just the simple truths of scripture very clearly, very plainly in ways that they could understand. So this little book was published in 1890. It's a gem. And right near the end of it, he says this, what a power the believers in Christ will be in this world where such multitudes are hateful and hating one another, when they all come to a bound in deep, pure, fervent love to God and to their neighbors, how they will be stimulated to labor and give and pray for the gathering of every creature

in the world into the fold of Christ. When they love God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all their heart and soul in mind and strength, and really in truly love their neighbors as themselves. That's an understand that shows that we are to live to the Lord, none of us lives to himself, none of us dies to himself, we live to the Lord and that ought to show itself in our common life. I'm going to just close with an illustration that I've used with you before, but I like it, it's a good one. So I'm using it again. Right? This comes from traffic signs that you will see if you're ever over in England, some of the traffic signs that they use, there are detours or construction ahead there science a change priorities ahead, which is a great description of the Christian life. Changed priorities ahead. That's what it should be like our identity in Christ. And that's where it has to start. It has to start there. Our identity in Christ is the grounds for new ways of acting and interacting with others. Look, I know that some of the relationships in your life are probably very strained right now because some of the pressures and the stresses of our world divorce rates have risen sharply. Over the last two years. During this pandemic, friendships have ended because of lawn signs that have been planted. Family members have disowned one another because of competing convictions, and anyone who makes a public statement of anything on any topic gets exalted by some people and eviscerated by others. For part of the body of Christ, as this whole section is talking about back in chapter 12. That's where begins were part of by the Christ. And we need to understand that some of the most tragic diseases are those which cause the body to turn against itself, and mistakingly yet devastatingly attack its own organs and systems. So we can see every area of life as a potential ring of conflict, and be ruthlessly attentive to the ways we can criticize others. Or we can see every area of life as ripe with potential to be a place where we can bear witness to Jesus Christ and His gospel, to exhibit unshakable hope in the midst of storms, to participate in God's reconciling and restoring work and to experience the life transforming work of God, even alongside those with whom we disagree. Let's pray together. Almighty God, we thank you for what you have done for us in Jesus Christ. We thank you for the work you are doing in us through the Holy Spirit. Forgive us for the times we live with only ourselves in view. Remind us what it means to live for you and to embrace one another. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.