

Putting God First

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[0 : 00] He is altogether worthy, isn't He? That's not a question. But is He wonderful to you?

! He's a wonderful God. That's not a question either. But is He wonderful to you? In your mind, in your heart, in your eyes, do you worship Him as the wonderful God that He is?

That is the question. And I hope we understand this morning what a wonderful and amazing God He is because He gives us so much that we haven't earned, have we? You know, I love the response that some of you that some of you give sometimes when I ask how you're doing and you'll say, well, more blessed than I deserve.

That's a great response, isn't it? Because it's true, isn't it? We are more blessed than what we deserve because we don't deserve any of it. And yet the Bible says all the good things we have in our life, every good and every perfect gift, it says in the Bible, comes down from above, from the Father of lights.

Every good thing we have comes from Him. We haven't earned it. We don't deserve it. But He gives it to us anyway. And I hope we praise Him for that. All right, this morning, we have been in Romans for quite some time and we're kind of concluding, wrapping up, kind of walking through Romans together.

[1 : 20] And this morning, we are in Romans chapter 14. And all throughout, we've been talking about, Paul has been talking about and sharing about the kingdom of God. The priority that the kingdom of God needs to be in our hearts, in our lives, what the kingdom of God brings to us.

It went right along with Christmas as we've talked about, the joy, the peace, the hope, the love, that the kingdom of God, that God's kingdom, that God brings all those things into our life. And if you remember way back when we were in the first chapter of Romans, Paul started with a thought where he says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Sharing that it was a priority in his life that he was not ashamed of, meaning that if he's not ashamed, that means he's going to share it. He's not going to try to hide it. And then as we walk through Romans, we looked at a lot of different things.

And now as we kind of conclude Romans, we're still talking about the kingdom of God. But this morning, we're going to look at it as the kingdom of God includes us, right?

It includes the body here, the body, the family that's gathered here at Bethel and Arthur. And Paul starts talking about the church family because that's a part of the kingdom of God.

[2 : 36] And the obstacles, the struggles that can happen in a group of believers. Because we also have to understand that as a group of believers, does that make us immune to struggles and trials?

Does it make us immune to conflict? Does it make us immune to disagreements? Can we have disagreements in the body, in the family of God? Why? Why?

Because we're human. Why else? Why do disagreements happen? Choice? Your choice is different than my choice. But why is your choice, Susan, different than my choice?

My choice is obviously better. So why? What's the difference? Somebody said, free will. Free will.

We're going to look at this morning a little bit of the obstacles that we face in the kingdom of God, in the family of God.

Because Paul talks about these and he brings them up. Because they're real. And we're going to talk a little bit about challenges in our own lives. Because those also reflect on the family.

[3 : 40] So, if you have your Bibles, Romans 14, we're going to begin in verse 7. If you're able, I'm going to ask you to stand as we read God's Word together this morning. Romans chapter 14, beginning in verse 7.

And this is what God's Word shares with us today. For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live to the Lord.

And whether we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ both died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you set at nothing your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 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 every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

[4 : 48] I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteems anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if your brother be grieved with your meat, now walk you not charitably.

Destroy not him with your meat for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace and things wherewith one may edify another. Let's pray together. Lord God, once again, we thank you for this day that you've given us, for this year that you've given us, for this chance we have to be in your house, to be with our family, to hear your word, to be in your presence.

So many things to be thankful for this morning. But Lord, in the midst of that, I pray that you would remind each one of us that you have a message for us this morning. And I pray, Lord, that we would be willing to listen to that message, that we would be willing to accept that message, to incorporate it into our thoughts, into our lives, into the way that we think, into the way that we act, that we would have a desire in our heart to be more and more the people that you want us to be.

[6 : 12] So speak to us this morning, Lord. Mold us, make us, change us, shape us, whatever you need to do, Lord. I pray that we have hearts that are willing to accept that. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

You can be seated this morning. So as we're in chapter 14, Paul is talking about the family of God, the body of Christ as it comes together.

So he's talking here to believers. He's talking to Christians. He's not talking to the world out there that doesn't know anything about Jesus. He's talking to people like you and I. And he begins in this chapter, he's talking about some things that there were some challenges in the family.

Again, like we shared, the church body can have challenges sometimes over big things, sometimes over little things, and anything in between can become challenges, can it?

And Paul was saying that there are some things that shouldn't be. Challenges and disagreements in the life of the church. The issue that he was specifically talking about in some of the verses in verses 15 and 16 and 40, he's talking about meat that you can eat and meat that you can't eat because that was the topic of the day.

[7 : 26] Because there were certain ones that had been Jewish before they became Christians, before they accepted Christ, and there were certain things that they were supposed to eat or not supposed to eat, food that was considered clean or unclean, and then there were Gentiles that accepted Christ that never had those laws to follow.

But when they all became part of the family, they had disagreements about that. Is it okay to eat this? Is it okay to eat that as a believer? What is Paul saying here?

He says it's all clean. It's all okay to eat. But, what does he also say along with that? Don't cause your brother to stumble.

Don't judge your brother. Whatever his opinion is on that, the most important thing is that you don't cause him to stumble. That there are some things in being part of the family that you just have to say, all right, this is not an issue that's worth making into a big thing.

And I know in our church today, we don't have an issue over what's okay to eat and what's not okay to eat. But as far as the church, the modern church today, not just here, but what are some things that become big issues that really don't need to be?

[8 : 41] Can you think of any? There are some things that either God's word says, this is sin or this is not sin. That's not what it's talking about here. Sin is sin. We need to call sin, sin, and that is something that is worth standing up for and sometimes even having disagreements over because we need to follow the truth.

But what kind of things is he talking about here then? Can you think of any examples? How many times a year you have communion? That's a good issue.

Some churches have it every week. Some churches have it once a year. Some churches have it quarterly. It's what we try to do. What do you think about that? Can we argue about that for a while? If we argue about that, what do you think God thinks?

Stop it. Stop it. The important thing is when you do it, you do it with all your heart and you do it in a desire to serve Him. There's other things in the life of the church that can become issues.

What about music? Oh yeah, all these things. Yeah, that one can become an issue. Why? Okay, maybe he's not singing the old stuff.

[9 : 51] What else? Not singing the new stuff. Annabelle? Annabelle? Annabelle? I don't know. Who you worship through? Okay, as long as we understand.

Again, there are some things that are big that we need to take a stand on. We worship through Jesus Christ. He's our intercessor with God, correct? And that is something we can't bend on. That is a fact that the Bible talks about.

But again, he's saying that the things like music, those things that in the grand scheme of things, it is silly that we argue over them and it breaks God's heart because those things are meant to bring us closer to Him.

But when we have conflict over those, you know what they're doing? They're taking us further from Him. I don't care, and I'll be honest with you, I don't care if you like the older music and the old hymns.

I don't care. I don't say that in a mean way. I like the old hymns. But is that central to our faith? I don't care if you like the new music either. I like some of the contemporary songs.

[10 : 54] Is that okay? Everybody say yes, that's okay. It is okay. Whether you like the old hymns, whether you like the new contemporary songs, as long as they're lifting up the name of Jesus Christ, pointing people to Him and drawing people to Him, is that not a good thing?

And what these verses are talking about is we need to be concerned about also what lifts up our brother, not just our self. And that is why in the verses that I read, it starts with talking about that. Look at verse 7, the first verse we read. For none of us lives to Him what? Self. And no man dies to Him.

Self. It's talking about self. And really, that is such a key thing. Really, in the life of the church, because again, this is written to believers. If we start and want to talk about, as we go into this new year, what will be the biggest struggle in your life, in your spiritual relationship with God, what will be the biggest struggle?

What will be the biggest obstacle in your journey of faith? Look throughout the Bible, what is the biggest obstacle to people's journey of faith in their lives?

[12 : 10] Pride, pride, but it comes from self. We are our greatest obstacle. Do we understand that? Our biggest roadblock is our self.

All through the Bible, self is the thing that people struggle to overcome. Think of all the sins that we can become involved in. Don't they all come back to self, our own desire?

Our own desire to please ourselves, to do what we want, to make ourselves happy, to make ourselves feel good. All of it comes back to self. Right?

Isn't that true? All the way back to, you know, sometimes, what do we blame when we sin? Who do we blame it on? The devil. We ever blame sin on the devil?

Have you ever heard this expression? Well, the devil made me do it. You've never heard that? How many of you have heard that? Annabelle's never heard it. All right. All right. It is a thing. The devil made me do it.

[13 : 11] What do you think about that statement? I'm seriously asking you. What do you think about when you hear somebody say, well, the devil made me do it? An excuse?

You make your choice. He can't make you do it. I agree with that. The devil can't make you do anything.

He encourages. He may influence. But who is making the choice? We are. Self. We are making the choice.

God gave us that free will. And you know, it's interesting. You can blame it all on Satan, but you know what? He had the same problem we do. Apparently, God gave the angels free will too, didn't He?

Because Satan chose. And when he chose, what was he focusing on? Self. What he could get for himself, the power that he could get, the glory that he could get, the pride that he had in himself.

[14:14] It was about self for him too. And he fell and was kicked out of heaven along with a third of the angels. But what was that from? It was from self. Putting self first.

So really, we can blame it on Satan, but he was just the first one to fall for the same thing we fall for. Trying to please ourselves. And we can go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and the temptations that Adam and Eve have was really all about self, wasn't it?

What they could get out of it. All through the Bible, you can look at people that made bad mistakes and sinned, and it was all due to what? Self. What they could get.

You can go down through the Bible. You think of the story of Jonah, and we know Jonah. God asked him to go to Nineveh and witness to the people, and what did he do? He went the other direction. Why? Selfish.

Because he said, I don't want to go that way. I want to go that way. That's self, isn't it? You can look at ones like even David.

[15:15] You know, he wrote most of the Psalms, and he says he was a man after God's own heart, but was he a perfect man? No. And the times that he struggled, the times that he failed, why was it? It was because of self.

He saw Bathsheba bathing on the roof over there, and he said, oh, that looks nice. I want that. And what did that cause him to do? Sin.

He sent her husband to the front line. He was killed. He sinned because of self. All through the Bible, starting with Satan, all the way to us, when self gets involved, and we think more about self than we do about serving God, that becomes the biggest issue.

And folks, we have to understand that that also bleeds into our opinion and what we think, because so often that's what causes disagreements in the church.

That comes from self. I think this is the best thing to do. I think this is the best music. I like this. And that is more important than what you like.

[16:28] Do we ever fall into that trap? Or my opinion is right and your opinion is wrong. Do we ever struggle with that? Do you have opinions on things?

Too many times. Too many times. Whose opinion is right, yours or other people's? Travis had the right answer.

God's opinion. You know, we have to understand that that's what it comes down to. The only opinion that really matters is God's. Look in verse 8.

For whether we live, this is for a Christian, this should be our understanding and our mentality. For whether we live, we live to the Lord. And whether we die, we die to the Lord.

Whether we live or die, and whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. That we're not living for self. That we're not interested in just getting what we want.

[17:25] We're interested in doing what God wants. And folks, that is the difference that we need to focus on in our lives. As we go into this new year to strive to say, it's not about what I want, but God, what do you want?

When we have that mentality in our lives, when we strive to have that thought, amazing things can happen. You look at, I know we talked about the people that failed in the Bible, but if you look at people that did amazing things in the Bible, what we call miracles and those stories of faith that we read, what do they all have in common?

Yeah. They were able to say, it's not about what I want, but it's about what God wants. It's about what God wants me to be doing.

You look at amazing miracles of the faith that we teach even to young children, but it all boils down to that. You think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were thrown into the fiery furnace.

What did they have to do to get to that? We know the outcome of that. It was miraculous, wasn't it? But what got it to that point? Their faith, they got to the point that they were willing to say, it's about what God wants, not what I want.

[18:42] Because do you think they wanted to be thrown into a fiery furnace? Of course not. They didn't want that, but they were willing to say, it's not about me. It's not about what I want.

It's about what God wants me to be doing. And it's not just Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego. It's throughout the Bible when they were willing to say, all right God, whatever you want.

That's when amazing things happen. When Jonah finally got to the point of saying, all right God, you want me to go to Nineveh? I'll go to Nineveh. He kind of did it grudgingly, but when he finally got to the point of saying, it's not about me, it's about what you want.

What happened? He went to Nineveh. He preached and told them to repent. What did they do? They repented. But again, an amazing story, but it happened when Jonah finally said, it's not about me.

It's about others. And folks, as a church body, that is truly what we need to come to understand. It is not about us. As we come together as a church body, and I'm only using music.

[19 : 51] I praise God. Music's not a big issue. It's not a big argument here. I'm just using that as an example. But as we come, and we worship together, as you sit, and you look at the people around you, if you see something that is drawing them to God, and what should your response to that be?

Should you be happy about that? What if we are, and again, I'm just using music as an example. Say you love the old hymns, and we're singing a modern chorus, and you see somebody that that's just, you can tell it's just drawing them to God.

What should your response to that be? Praise God. But is it ever, well, I don't really like that song. Or the other way around. We're singing an old hymn, and you don't really like old hymns, and you're like, but you see that it's drawing someone to God.

What should your response be? Praise God. You know, it all comes down to our priorities, and where we put self in that list of priorities.

Where do you put yourself in that list of priorities in life? In the way that you think, in the way that you act, where do you put self? Where does it truly belong? Let's look at a couple more verses.

[21 : 08] Let's look at verse 17. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

So it's again talking about the kingdom of God. For he that in these things serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. Who is it that it says we're supposed to serve?

Christ. Serving God. It's not about serving self. It's not about doing what we want. And then the last verse we read, verse 19, let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace.

And things wherewith one may edify another. So it's talking about, we need to be concerned about lifting up each other. That's what it's talking about. Encouraging each other. So folks, here's the thing that it boils down to, and I'm sure you've heard this before, but we need reminded of it.

In our lives, who or what needs to come first in the priority list? God. We've got that one. I think we understand that. We may struggle to do it at times, but at least we acknowledge that, right?

[22 : 12] Who comes second in the priority list? I've heard a lot of responses there. I heard spouse.

That's good. Family. Family. Family. That's good. What was the other? Your sobriety.

Here's the thing. What it's talking about here, it talks about all kinds of things, not putting a stumbling block in front of others, not offending others. It's God.

It's others. Then it's us. Yeah. You didn't hear Travis. He said the bottom of the barrel. It's that easy. Putting others in front of our own selves, in front of our own desires, in front of our own opinions.

But you know, the Bible makes it very clear that Jesus is our example to follow, right?

[23 : 18] It says that we are to follow in His footsteps. And as Christ lived, who did He put first?

The will of His Father. Didn't He? He said that many, many times while He was here on this earth.

I am here to do My Father's will. Same true for every one of us. We are here to do our Father's will.

That's why we're here. If you're a believer, that's why you're here. So He put His Father first.

Who did He put second? Himself? Others. When He died on the cross, who was He putting in front of Himself? Everybody else, wasn't He?

From the worst sinner to the whole gamut, He put in front of Himself. He put others first. And Himself? Who's after that?

That's the example for us, folks. God first, others second, or third. That kind of flies in the face of what the world teaches, isn't it? The world really does try to tell us it's about getting what we want in life.

[24 : 25] It's about getting, you know, financially what we want in life. It's about being happy in life.

Anything we do, we need to do. You need to be happy. Isn't that what the world tells you? And that's why there's so many people chasing after happiness.

Folks, the Bible doesn't tell us to chase after happiness. It doesn't. We think that, oh, that's got to be a good thing, chasing after happiness. No, it's not. The Bible does not say chase after happiness. It says chase after God. And when you chase after God, then you will have that peace, that contentment, that joy that comes from serving Him. But again, you've got to give up yourself. You've got to stop chasing after things that you think will bring you pleasure and chase after things that God wants you to be chasing after. You want to know peace. You want to know happiness in your life.

Put God first. Put others second. Put yourself third. It will lead to that. But we're scared sometimes of putting ourselves third. Well, if I put myself third, then who's going to watch out for me?

[25 : 23] If I don't watch out for myself, who's going to watch out for me? Who's going to watch out for you if you do that? God. Is there anybody better to watch out for you than that? Do not follow.

Do not fall for what the world tries to teach that you need to chase happiness. Do not follow. Do not follow. Do not follow. Do not follow. Do not follow. Do not follow. Do not follow.

Do not follow. Chase after God. Put Him first. Put others' needs in front of your own. And when you do that, you'll find that peace and that happiness.

As we look through Romans, that's what it boils down to. God first, others second, then us. That's the example Christ left us.

And as you go into this new year, I hope that challenges you. Because I'll be honest, it challenges me. Because sometimes there's some people I'm good at putting in front of myself. And then there's others that I struggle to do that.

[26 : 28] Is that just me? All right. Thank you for some of you agreeing with that. It's not always easy. People that we love and get along with, they're sometimes easy to put in front of our own needs to a degree.

What about those people that have opinions that are different than ours? Are we able to put them in front of ourselves? It's a challenge.

But I pray as we go into this new year that we are challenged by the Word. We need to be challenged by God's Word, don't we? God first, others second. Put yourself third and God will take care of you.

And you'll find the peace and happiness that comes from serving Him. Let's pray. Lord God, I thank You again for this morning that You've given us. And I thank You for Your Word. And Lord, it is full of so many challenges.

Lord, I pray that You would remind us that the biggest stumbling block we have to our faith is ourselves. Wanting our own desires, wanting our own way, wanting to do what makes us happy.

[27 : 35] But I pray, Lord, that we would be able to overcome that and not put ourselves first or second, but put ourselves third behind You and behind others around us. Help us to do as we concluded with there in verse 19, to lift up, to encourage others.

Lord, I pray that that would be our goal, serving You and encouraging others, guiding them to You. Help us to focus on that and to find the peace and joy that comes from serving You in that way.

And we ask and pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning as we close, the altar's open. Face it, folks, we all have struggles.

We all have different things we struggle with. And yet there are some things that I think we all struggle with. And I believe with all my heart this is one of them. Putting myself not first, not second, but third.

But this morning, if you just want to pray that God helps you with that, the altar's open. If you have any other need, the altar's open for that as well. But if the Lord's tugging on your heart this morning, don't just ignore it.

[28 : 41] Don't just ignore it. Talk with Him. Come to the altar and talk with Him. If you want me to pray with you, I'd love to. If you just want to talk with the Lord here, that's fine too. But if God's tugging on your heart, if you feel that pull, don't just ignore it and think, well, in a few minutes we'll all be over and I can leave.

If God is tugging on your heart, please respond this morning. You know, as we sing that song, that really is about giving up self. Because every verse we sang, it starts with, take.

Take my life, take my hands, take my voice, take my silver and gold, take my love, take my will. You know, we're asking God to take that. Not saying, I want it for myself, but giving it up to God.

And I pray in our lives that we are willing to do that. Everything we have, everything we are, everything we own, to give it up for God. Not to make it about us, but to make it about Him and about His kingdom.

Let's bow our heads as we pray together. Lord God, thank You again for this morning and I thank You for the challenge of Your Word. But Lord, also remind us that even though it's a great challenge, even though we sometimes fail, that Lord, when we're able to do that, that it leads to such miraculous and wonderful things that Your power is shown when we do that, that You work in that, You use us to accomplish far more than we could ever do on our own.

[29 : 53] So I pray, Lord, for each one of us that we are able to, just to be willing to say, Lord, take these things. It's not about what I can get in this life, but it's about what I can give for You and to You.

So Lord, help us to have that attitude in our hearts. Give us the strength to do that and the wisdom to do that. And it's in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray and all God's family said, Amen.

God bless you. Have a wonderful week. Again, if you're able to stay and help take down some of the Christmas decorations, that would be great. But have a wonderful week. Thank you.

Thank you.