

And They'll Know We Are Christians By...

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[0 : 00] Well, I am excited today. Lord willing, this will be my last time filming my message in front of a camera in an empty sanctuary.

Starting next Sunday, June 21st, we will be resuming our worship together in person. We're going to be having an outdoor service. And if you haven't got the details or information for that and would like to come, please get in contact.

And I'll be happy to get those details to you. We're going to be meeting outside, so we'll have lots of space. We'll be able to keep the required distance. And we're really looking forward to that.

On the 28th, we'll be back here in the building. And services will resume here at 11 a.m. And so I'm excited to get back to worshipping together in person on Sundays.

Today, as we look into God's Word, we're going to continue on the theme that we began on last Sunday of how can we make this transition well.

[1 : 10] The province has given us quite a number of guidelines that we must follow in order to resume gatherings for worship. And we want to make this transition well.

Last Sunday, we looked at how we are to submit to the governing authorities. God has instituted government. And it's his desire that we follow the laws, the orders that they have given.

And so we are going to do that to the best of our ability as a church in the weeks ahead. But this is a significant transition. And so we want to do this well as a church.

And so this message today is aimed at helping us do that. Not just understanding what we should do, but mainly to our hearts.

Helping us in our hearts with this transition. So today's message, in some ways, will be continuing where we left off. We're going to start reading in Romans chapter 13.

[2 : 16] If you have a Bible, please open it up to Romans chapter 13, verse 8. And before we dig in, let's just pray. Father in heaven, thank you for your word.

Thank you that you speak to us powerfully through these pages, even today in our generation, in our day and age. We ask that you would speak to our hearts and give us understanding as we read these words.

And that you would show us how you would have us live in the days ahead as we come back together again as a church. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, I'm going to start reading in verse 8. And I encourage you to follow along in your Bible. These are the words of the Lord. Let no debt remain outstanding.

Accept the continuing debt to love one another. For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery.

[3 : 23] You shall not murder. You shall not steal. You shall not covet. And whatever other command there may be are summed up in this one command. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And from here, Paul will go on to give some specific instructions about how he longs for the church there in Rome to love one another.

And I'm not going to read the whole of chapter 14 and 15. But this is the main passage that my message comes from. If you'd like, I encourage you to pause the video and take some time to just read through chapters 14 and 15.

This is the main text for our passage. We'll just kind of read portions of it. But the church in Rome has been arguing.

There has been fighting, disagreements. We see this in verse 1. Paul says, So there's been quarreling.

[4 : 34] There's been fighting. There's been arguing over disputable matters. Paul goes on to tell us what kind of matters those are.

Matters of eating and drinking. Some people believe that it's a sin to eat certain foods. Those foods are unclean. Others believe that it's not a sin. We can eat those foods.

They're not unclean. And there's disagreements over sacred days. Paul goes on to say here in chapter 14. Which days are holy and should be set apart and observed carefully in certain ways and which are not.

And out of all of these, there are differences of opinion. But there has been some attitudes which have arisen that Paul puts his finger on.

In verse 3 he says, The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not. And the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does.

[5 : 42] So there has been some people treating others who see things differently or do things differently with contempt.

Passing judgment on them. Looking down on them. Treating them negatively. Because of these differences over these disputable matters.

It's an ugly thing. In verse 10 Paul says, You then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? We may wonder, well, what does this have to do with us and COVID?

We're in a different situation today. This doesn't directly apply in the same way. We don't have differences over food and drink and sacred days like the church in Rome did.

But there are some similarities if we go beneath the surface here. There's a lot of differences of opinion over all of this COVID-19 stuff.

[6 : 48] And I think as we gather together as a church, some of those differences may arise. And we may see, oh, how come we have to be doing this? Well, we should be doing this.

This is good. Others may feel that this is not necessary. You think of even the simple thing of wearing a mask. Do we need to wear a mask?

Some people feel we should and we do. Others, not so much. And so, in a different sense, there's some similarities here. There are differences of opinion.

And we want to see from the Lord, what does he have to say to us in our day with what we're facing with all this COVID stuff about how to handle differences of opinion?

So, what does Paul say? Well, first of all, he acknowledges that the differences are there. He doesn't sweep them under the rug and minimize them.

[7 : 49] He acknowledges that they're there. They're real. One person's faith, verse 2, allows them to eat anything. But another whose faith is weak eats only vegetables. Verse 5, one person considers one day more sacred than another.

Another considers every day alike. So, these differences are real. And probably when we get together, we'll see that there are differences in how we think and feel.

I know there's at least a couple people in our church who feel that wearing a mask is not necessary. And this is all an overreaction. And there's at least a couple people in our church who feel quite the opposite.

It's really good that we're wearing masks. We want to do everything we can to protect those in our community who are vulnerable. So, how should we handle these differences?

Well, the first thing Paul does is remind these people here in the church in Rome just who they are in Christ. Verse 3, That person who thinks or does a little differently than you and your family in the midst of all of this COVID stuff, God has accepted them.

[9 : 17] Because of their relationship with Jesus, they are on the same level, the same ground as you are. In fact, Paul will go on to take up the language of family.

He says in verse 10, Those people who see it differently than you in these disputable matters, they're your brother, your sister, their family in the Lord.

Let's not forget that. From there, Paul goes on to give some instruction. He says that we should not treat those who see things differently with contempt.

This is verse 3 and verse 10. We should not judge them. Verse 13, We should not pass judgment on them. Play the judge. Look down on them.

Because they see things differently than we do. We shouldn't assume that that person that feels like they should go the extra mile in doing these guidelines and wearing a mask even in public is a legalist, is just doing it to appear self-righteous.

[10 : 39] We shouldn't assume that that person that feels they don't need to wear a mask in public is doing it because they're reckless and they're selfish and they don't care about anyone else.

In fact, Paul encourages the people in the church there to assume positive intention for their different ways of doing things.

In verse 6, Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God.

And whoever abstains from eating meat does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone. Verse 8, If we live, we live for the Lord.

And so we may have different ideas about what we should do and how we should handle this and what your family will do and how you will manage your kids in the midst of all of this, especially as we gather again as a church.

[11 : 40] But as Christians, Paul is saying, everything we do, we should be doing for the Lord as unto Him. And you may decide to do something different than I may decide to do.

And that's okay. These are disputable matters. And let's be clear, we're talking about disputable matters. We're not talking about things that God has made clear, like we talked about last Sunday.

It is clear that we are to submit to the governing authorities that He has placed in our lives, Romans 13.1. And so we will, as a church, follow the guidelines and the requirements that the government has given us.

But some may wish to go beyond that. Others may have a different attitude about things that are disputable, whether we need to wear masks for the whole service, as opposed to just during the singing.

Paul's encouragement is, don't pass judgment on one another when it comes to these things. Don't think that you're better, that you see it the right way.

[12 : 49] They're wrong and, you know, they're just off. You've got the superior view here and look down on them. Don't do that, he says.

In verse 13, let us stop passing judgment on one another. And throughout this section, he reminds them that each of us, when it comes to these disputable matters, these things that may be a little bit gray, we will have to answer to God for how we conduct ourselves.

And so let Him be the judge. Don't play the judge over your brother or your sister in these kinds of things. So what is to be the guiding principle as we seek to gather together again for this church in Rome with their particular issues?

Well, it has to do with love. And Paul will explain that starting in verse 13. He says, Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

He goes on to give a bit of an example of what he means by this. I think mainly to do with the food stuff. He says, I'm convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.

[14 : 11] But, if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person, it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed, because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.

He continues on to flesh this out a little more in verse 20. He says, Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean. But it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. Now, what is Paul talking about here?

Again, it may be difficult for us to relate to the food and drink thing. We tend not to see food as, well, it is a sin to eat this and not this.

At least, not in our culture or in our church. But the gist of what Paul is saying is that there are times when we may need to lay aside good things, our rights or our freedoms for the sake of others and would do it out of love for a brother or sister.

[15 : 32] And in this case, it has to do with that brother or sister in this example having a weak conscience. For them, they see that activity or that partaking in that thing as sinful.

And so, when you, knowing that it isn't truly sinful, come along and in front of them just do it, right in front of them. It can cause them to stumble or cause them to fall.

And Paul's speaking of almost harming that brother or sister not in a physical sense but in a spiritual sense. In 1 Corinthians 8, verse 4, Paul goes on to give another clear example of this talking about food that's been sacrificed to idols.

And he talks about how, you know, if one brother or sister sees eating that food as a sin, I mean, that's the false god I used to worship and I turned away from that when I came to faith in Christ.

And you, even, you have no issues eating it. You know that an idol's nothing, that it's not a true god, it's just food. But you, you know that your brother has an issue with it but you go and you eat it in front of them.

[16 : 44] Paul says, you wound his conscience and you sin against Christ. He says, you cause them to stumble and you should not do that.

In that case, he says, you should lay aside your freedom to eat this kind of food and not eat it. He says, if what I eat causes my brother to stumble, if eating meat causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again.

Now that's an example of love. I am a carnivore through and through and I love a good hamburger. I love a good barbecued piece of chicken. But there are times when for love, out of love for our brother or sister in Christ or our neighbor, we must lay aside good things, our freedoms, our rights, our privileges.

That's what love does and that's the principle that Paul is getting at here in Romans chapter 14. This is the solution.

This is the key. towards peace, which is what he's trying to encourage and restore and strengthen here in the church in Rome.

[18 : 07] He says in chapter 15, verse 1, we who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good to build them up.

For even Christ did not please himself. It's easy with all of this COVID restrictions that have been put on us in the past weeks and months to be thinking about ourselves and pleasing ourselves and what we want to do but are unable to, especially as we come to gather for worship again.

What we would like to do, we would like to draw close, we would like to give hugs, we would like to shake hands, we would like to sing as loudly as we want without a mask, we'd like to hang out in the building just like we did before.

But there are times when out of love for others who may be harmed by our actions or who are weaker, we must lay aside some of our freedom, some of our rights, some of our privileges.

And in this case with the COVID stuff that's going on, it's not weakness of conscience, but it's weakness physically. Some people are more vulnerable to this virus that when it should come into our community, it may take them out because they have underlying health issues already.

[19 : 42] So that's why our province has given us these guidelines and requirements to follow. This is the way of love. love will sacrifice oneself, lay down oneself, one's rights, freedoms, privileges, out of concern for the other.

Love is concerned for the other, not mainly for oneself. I think to those words that are famous in the passage on love, 1 Corinthians 13, love does not seek its own or it is not self seeking.

Paul reminds us that this is the very way that Jesus himself has loved us. He says for even Christ did not please himself.

He came into our world and he said not what I want, what I will be done. And he suffered, he went to the cross, he laid down his life for us, for his friends, love's sake, because he loved us.

He gave up that which was rightfully his. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, though he was rich, yet for our sake, he became poor.

[21 : 01] He let go of that which was rightfully his, his rights, his privilege, and he did it for love's sake, for us, to save us.

Paul says, encourages the church in Rome and us to have that same mindset and attitude. We see this in chapter 15 verse 5, may the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.

We could think of those words in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He says, do nothing out of selfish ambition, or vain conceit. Rather, value others above yourselves.

Don't merely look to your own interests, but look also to the interests of others. Again, he says there, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And it goes on from there. This is the way that Jesus has loved us.

[22 : 23] And Paul is saying, have the same attitude attitude, of being willing, if necessary, to lay down your life for your brother, for your sister, for your neighbor.

And we have opportunity to do that in this COVID situation. The virus is not here in Davidson yet, but it may yet get here. And when it does, there are people who are weaker neighbors in our community, not necessarily weakness in conscience, but who have physical weakness.

I think of the people over at the lodge. I think of some of the people in the manor. I think of many elderly people living still in their own houses here in town, who have underlying health issues.

There are times when we must lay aside our rights, our freedoms, our privileges, for the sake of love for others. And that's really what the province has called us to do with all of this.

And so as we come together in the weeks ahead, I hope and I pray that that can be our mindset. That we're not just doing all these things because we have to.

[23 : 43] As we heard last Sunday, we're doing these things because we love the Lord Jesus and we want to honor him and obey the government as he's asked us to. But we're also doing these things out of love for one another and out of love for our neighbors because we care about them.

We will joyfully lay down some of our freedom, some of our privileges. We will adhere to these restrictions.

At the end of all of this, we can still meet together. We can still worship God. We can still sing despite these things and we will.

And I hope that we can all do that together with joy in our hearts and that those watching will see us as an example, a living, breathing example of the kind of love that Jesus has for them.

Let's close with a word of prayer. Lord Jesus, thank you for these words. we know that the church in Rome was different. We know that we're in a different situation here today and we know that many other churches are in different situations than our own church here in Davidson, but we pray and ask that you would work in our hearts that by your spirit you would pour your love into us and that it would overflow from us to others.

[25 : 15] We don't want anything to be a dampener on our joy or to spoil our worship in the weeks ahead. And so we ask that you would give us grace and help to accept what has been given for this time and to proceed with care and with concern, with love, with faith, and with white-hot worship for you.

You are our God, you are our Savior, and we love you. we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.