

For the Lord

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Date: 03 September 2018

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[0 : 0 0] In Romans chapter 14, we read at verses 7 and 8, For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.

Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's. The close context of these particular verses is that the apostle is encouraging believers not to fall out amongst themselves over things that are less than of the essence of the faith, less than of the substance of the faith.

What do we mean by of the substance of the faith? Well, clearly they are not something by which one is saved or not saved. We are saved by our faith in Christ. By his deliverance and the work of his salvation, and our faith is the instrument of our laying hold upon Christ.

It is all about what he has done. And we are saved or not saved depending on our relationship to Christ. But of course, that relationship to Christ will then cause there to be certain outworkings of that relationship.

Our obedience to Christ should follow on from that. But of course, what happens when Christians differ as to what is required of that? Well, clearly, in this context here, Paul is talking about things that some people might consider to be important and others might not.

[1 : 3 0] He is talking about particular days as the old Jewish church in the Old Testament observed, whether you know, Feast of Tabernacles or Passover or other things and so on, that some who may have been Jewish Christians still wanted to maintain and keep.

And so far as all these things were pointing on to Christ, they are in a sense fulfilled now in Christ. There's not a need for them anymore. It's not wrong to keep them as long as you still know that Christ is the one who saved.

Likewise, there were those who were concerned that if they partook of meat offered to idols, it might appear to refile them. And we know from elsewhere in the New Testament that is not in fact the case.

But some people might feel either that they were spiritually defiled or even that it was a bad witness to do it. But it wasn't of the essence, the substance of the faith.

This is the close context, we might say, of this particular chapter. That it is of the things which really the Lord has revealed, what God has commanded, of course.

[2 : 4 0] No Christian is at liberty to say, well, we can ignore that. We can forget that. It's just a matter of personal choice of preference. No, it's not. If God has commanded it, then we are obliged to obey it. That which God has not commanded, we are not really authorized to command that which God has not commanded.

We can't add to his word. There may be some things which it is helpful for us to do or to observe or to keep, but it is not necessarily commanded by the Lord.

When Paul talks about different days and so on and regarding them as, you know, one day as a night, as another, others regard all days alike. We can think of things like how different branches of the church might regard particular days which are not, you know, commanded or not commanded in the Lord's word.

So I'm thinking of an instance which I may have cited this instance in the past. Friends of my parents, when their daughter was getting married, and at the time when she was getting married, it was in the springtime when she was getting married, but she had an aunt who was a very devout Episcopalian.

And the time that the niece had chosen for her wedding happened to fall that year in what the Episcopalians regarded as what they call Holy Week. That is the week leading up to what they regard as Easter Day, the resurrection of our Lord.

[4 : 03] And the Friday was Good Friday, the day when especially you would commemorate Christ's crucifixion. It was a day of great solemnity of services and people maybe abstaining from things, maybe fasting, maybe not, but it was the most serious, solemn, somber day in the Episcopal church calendar.

And the niece had chosen this day for her wedding. Probably planned so far in advance than, you know, they didn't necessarily know it was that day, that Holy Week as the Anglicans saw it.

And the aunt considered this to be wrong, that they shouldn't have, you know, the festivities of a wedding, feasting and dancing and all this sort of thing and all the celebration aspect on such a day which was meant to be devoted to remembering the Lord's death upon the cross.

And for that reason, she did not go to the wedding. She kept the day as she saw it, holy to the Lord. Now, of course, Good Friday in terms of a church calendar or a Holy Week in that sense, or even the commemoration of Easter Day as a particular day in the calendar is not commanded in God's work.

But it's all very well for us Presbyterians to turn around and say, look at you, Anglicans, you're adding these things in. Because they would then turn around to us and say, yeah, but when you remember the Lord's death, you have all these communion seasons, you add Thursday, Friday and Saturday and then Monday, you know.

[5 : 22] And there's no scripture to warrant for that either, is there? So, who's kidding who here? And in a sense, they're right. These things are not commanded in scripture. We cannot say, oh, we must have, Thursday right through to Monday, because it's there in the Bible, because it's not.

Nevertheless, it is helpful to us to prepare ourselves before we come to the Lord's table. We are taught that we should prepare ourselves. Let a man examine himself.

It is not a bad thing to do these things. It's not a bad thing to have thanksgiving afterwards. It's not a bad thing to commemorate the week leading up to the remembrance of the Lord's death, as maybe the Anglicans do.

The point is that whether or not we keep these days or this particular week, we keep it unto the Lord. That is the thing that Paul wants to emphasize.

He says, you know, he that eateth, eateth unto the Lord, and give God thanks. And he that doesn't eat, well, to the Lord, he doesn't eat, and he gives God thanks. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord.

[6 : 28] And he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord, he doth not regard it. You see, Presbyterians might say, well, of course we don't have Holy Week, and we don't especially commemorate Easter Day, because, you know, we're trying to be scriptural.

We're trying to not go add to God's word. But then the Anglicans turn around and say, well, why have you got these extra communion seasons? That's not what the Bible says. So whether we're keeping a particular season or whether a particular week or a particular day in the calendar, it's not of the essence of the faith, but it is that which we must do unto the Lord.

Both devout, you know, Calvaryists, you might say, or Episcopalians, on the other hand, would both equally regard the secularised commemoration, so-called Easter, of with, you know, just chocolate eggs and bunnies and so on, as being completely worldly and non-Christian and not honouring to the Lord.

They would no doubt regard, for example, the commercialisation into which Christmas, for example, is descending, whether or not you regard Christmas as something that a Christian should be observing.

If it is to be observed, let it be observed to the Lord. If it is being abstained from, let it be because it is for the Lord. You see the point here that Paul is seeking to make.

[7 : 47] These things are not of the essence and substance of the faith, but the Christians may disagree about them. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not.

So, pathetic, have you grown up yet? You know, come on, you should be a more mature Christian than that. You've got to recognise it. Here, let it eat whatever you want. You know, which technically, of course, that's true. And in the New Testament, we remember, of course, what the Lord revealed to Peter in Acts 10, verse 13, there came to him a voice, Rise, Peter, kill and eat.

But Peter said, Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

This was done thrice, and the vessel was received up again into heaven. And of course, the Lord wasn't just talking to Peter there about what he should and shouldn't eat.

He was talking about regarding the Gentiles now as clean and brought within the covenant relationship to God. Because if we read at verse 28, he said, You know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or to come unto one of another nation?

[9 : 00] But God hath assured me that I should not call any man common or unclean. The Lord is using the issue of the previously forbidden foods, but now pronouncing them as clean for whoever might choose to make use of them, to illustrate the point that those who may have been regarded as unclean by the Jews, because they were a pagan nations, are now welcome within God's covenant of grace.

The food issue points to a greater issue. But there were some, of course, who with due consideration of conscience thought, Yes, but if I eat meat that's offered to idols, then some people will think that I'm giving countenance to the idol, that I'm saying that it's a proper God, that they might be made to stumble.

So, for that reason, we're just not going to eat any meat at all. We'll just be vegetarian. And that's fine. Now, if that's your reason for doing it, then Paul says, Well, okay, you might have a bit weaker faith.

You're not strong enough to recognize that you can eat whatever you like. But, you know, if that's what you choose to do, that's fine. You know, one eats anything that he likes. The other, who is weaker in the faith, eats only herbs.

But don't try and say the other one's wrong. Thy brother be grieved with thy meat. Now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not them with thy meat for whom Christ died.

[10 : 23] Let not then your good be evil spoken of. Because at the end of the day, whatever we observe and keep to do, it should and ought to be done to the Lord.

This is the thing about coming to Christ and being saved and converted and changed by him, is that everything becomes his. Everything then should be devoted to him.

What I do, I should do as unto the Lord. And that means that if there's something that I'm doing, can I truthfully say I'm doing this for the Lord, or am I just doing it for myself? Am I doing this just to please me?

Has God given clear guidance on this? And I'm doing something different. Because I say, oh, I've got Christian liberty. I can do whatever I like. Yeah, but are we doing it as unto the Lord? Or are we doing it just for me?

You know, Paul writes to the Colossians when everybody says, you know, you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

[11 : 22] For you are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with them in glory. But as far as this world is concerned, we should be dead to the things that we may have, you know, said, oh, I want to do this, I want to do that, I want to do the next thing.

Okay, but can you do it as unto the Lord? For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. It's no longer about me.

If I have taken Christ as my Savior, if I have received him as my deliverer, my redeemer, then my life is no longer my own. I am bought with a price. None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord. Everything we do should be dedicated, devoted to the Lord. Whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

Now, if we think in terms of many a thing in the world that people might say, oh, well, you know, a Christian shouldn't be doing that. You know, they might say, for example, if you're a Christian now, you shouldn't be playing football, for example.

[12 : 31] Now, there's nothing spiritually prohibited about football. But there might be, for example, in the actual outworking of it, there might be a lot of, say, swearing that goes on in the pitch, or maybe a drinking culture afterwards.

Or it might be, you know, the day for training interferes with going to the prayer meeting. Or perhaps if there's James on the Lord's Day, or whatever, you know. If these things clash, fair enough, that's, you know, you have to choose the Lord every time.

But the game itself is not wrong necessarily for a Christian to do. It's not prohibited in Scripture. The question is, can you serve the Lord with doing it?

And if by doing that, which doesn't break any of God's commands, you're able to be a witness there, and you're able perhaps to be, you know, to witness with your conversation, with your example, with your life, and so on, then that can be used for the Lord.

Just like, you know, athletes can use their sportsmanlike prowess in order to draw others perhaps to their own witness and example, as long as they're not violating any of God's particular commands.

[13 : 38] There's nothing in itself against these sporting events. But a lot of the stuff that goes with it may be, are we doing it to the Lord?

There's nothing wrong, for example, that a Christian dances at a wedding. It's not prohibited in Scripture. There's a time to dance. The Scripture says, but it could be that it might lead others to it.

Oh, so he's a dance boy. He shouldn't have been, you know, he's meant to be a Christian. It's not prohibited. But it may cause some other brethren to stumble. The same is true of the use of alcohol and so on.

You know, better not to eat meat or to drink wine if it's going to cause anyone to stumble. There is nothing by way of Christian virtue in teetotalism itself.

You know, we shouldn't get kind of it. It's a good thing to be. But it's not a virtue in itself. It's not something that gives you an extra ground. Hitler was a teetotaler. You know, the ISIS terrorists are teetotalers.

[14 : 38] It's not something which in and of itself makes you a better Christian just because you are that. But it will avoid an awful lot of problems. Avoid an awful lot of temptations and difficulties.

It's not a bad thing to be. It's a good thing to be. But we can't say, well, that makes me a better Christian now. Because it's not of the substance of the faith. None of us liveth to himself.

And no man dieth to himself. Whatever you are choosing to use your life for. Whatever you're choosing to engage in or to refrain from.

The rule of thumb must always be. Is this serving, honouring to the Lord? Because we're not alone. None of us liveth to himself. And no man dieth to himself.

Whether we live, we live unto the Lord. That is our calling. That is not just our duty. It is our privilege. And whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die.

[15 : 34] We are the Lord's. Now, this chapter 14, of course, is following on. The continuation of 13 and 12 and so on in Romans. And if we turn back briefly to chapter 12.

See what Paul writes in the opening verses there. I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.

Holy. Acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Your life, your strength, your physical. Life and work and so on.

Is to be given to the Lord. It's meant to be a living sacrifice. This is reasonable. It's not unreasonable. It's good. It's positive. It's the least that we should do. And be not conformed to this world.

But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. That ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Now, as Paul says elsewhere, you know, that we're to be in this world.

[16 : 36] Using the world as not abusing it. We're going to sit lightly to it. But anything we can use for the furtherance of God's kingdom, use it, rather. If you're a slave but you can be made free and serve the Lord better with your freedom, use that.

If you can be legitimately without breaking any of God's commands, if you can be involved in the football team or coaching, whatever, and witness there, use that. Wherever God places you and you can do it with a clear conscience in obedience to his commands, use that.

No Christian, of course, should, on the pretext of being able to supposedly witness amongst these worldly things, just go along with the flow and just accept all the negative things that are there.

Accept me, you know, that bad language or there's a drinking culture or we've been in an inappropriate conversation or training on the night of the prayer meeting, go there instead of to the Lord's house or games on the Sabbath or whatever it might be.

No Christian should be compromising on these things. But if it is possible to be there and witness and use it for the Lord in whatever the context, in our workplace, in our leisure place, in our home life, then we should be giving all to the Lord.

[17 : 51] Our bodies are living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. For I say, through the grace given unto me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.

According as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members are not the same of us, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Now turn back to chapter 14, and you see where this fits in. We, being one body, were not to denigrate other members of the body. He's not like me.

So, he should be like me. He should be abstaining from the things I abstain from. And he should be doing the things that I do, even though they're not scripturally commanded, or not scripturally forbidden. Because, he should be like me.

She should be like me. They should be more like me. And so, I'm going to regard them as not a proper Christian. I'm going to say, well, they can't join with me. I'm not allowing them into my fellowship there. It pleases ourselves to create more narrow restrictions than God himself may have required.

[19 : 03] Obviously, if God has commanded something, we're obliged to do it. It's not unnegotiable. If God has forgotten something, we are not to allow it. That's not negotiable. But within these tramlines, there's an awful lot of leeway for the Christian.

As Paul himself says, you know, in chapter 10 of 1 Corinthians, verse 23, All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Now, the word wealth is in italics. It means it's not part of the original. So, in other words, he's to seek what is good for the other.

He's to see what works for the other. If I might be quite happy to eat meat or meat offered to idols or whatever, but somebody else is going to be offended, just abstain on that occasion.

It's not going to hurt you. It's not going to do you any harm. It's going to save any kind of offense. Just abstain. If you may be quite happy with a moderate or occasional consumption of alcohol, but somebody's there who's got a problem, and who might be a former addict or alcoholic, then you're not acting in love if you keep swigging it down in their presence.

[20 : 14] Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died. You know, Duster, if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, or drink, or whatever, now walkest thou not charitably.

Because every aspect of what you do should put Christ first, and your brethren, brothers and sisters, then second, and ourselves way down the line.

And this is simply the outworking of what Jesus says are the two greatest commandments of all. And love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And that's what the Ten Commandments break down into, isn't it, of course? You look at chapter 13 of Romans, where it says from verse 9, For this thou shalt not commit adultery, O no man any but to love one another, he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

For this thou shalt not commit adultery, not kill, not steal, not bear false witness, not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

[21 : 16] Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. But these verses 8 to 10 in Romans 13, they're only talking about what we might call the second table of the law.

In other words, that from commandment number 5 onwards, the second six of the commandments, which is dealing with our relationship with our neighbors. We're meant to love our neighbors.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship to God. And we are to fulfill these commands in love. None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord. Whether we die, we die unto the Lord. If we are going to live our lives, our, as Romans 12 verse 1 says, to be a living sacrifice.

That's our reasonable service. Eventually, unless the Lord comes back, all of us, sooner or later, are going to die. When we die, then it is our lives, as it were, that we offer up to the Lord.

[22 : 18] When we come to leave this world, we will leave it with the track record of all that our lives have been. Now, I realize, of course, that an unbeliever, a worldling, is going to think, ah, the best thing you could have if there really is a God, is to live up to a good old age and live in the world, unbelieving, enjoying yourself right up to the last minute of the wire, and then convert at the last minute.

And then, then you get into heaven too because you converted on your deathbed. And it's great, you get the best of both worlds. But anybody who is genuinely converted will find that a heartbreaking experience because, yes, they will be saved by the blood of Christ.

Yes, they will be redeemed by what he has done, by Christ alone. But they will have, as it were, nothing to lay at his feet, nothing to bring with them, nothing to offer as that living sacrifice, that reasonable service to say, here's my life, Lord, it is all yours.

Now, of course, even if it's only the last half hour of your life that belongs to Christ because you've been converted in your last hour, that is acceptable to God like the people on the cross were not redeemed by what we've done, but by what Christ has done.

You know, the laborers in the vineyard, those who only labored one hour got the same pay as those who bore in the heat and burden of the day. So it's not that we purchase our salvation at all, but don't we want to have something to give to the Lord, something to bring to the Lord, something we can say, Lord, my life may not have amounted too much, but everything I have and everything I've done, it's all yours.

[23 : 59] It's all devoted to you. It all belongs to you. None of us liveth to himself and no man died for himself. We live, we live to the Lord. We don't know whether we're going to be given another 50 years or 50 minutes.

We don't know how long we have. We don't know how many years are before us. The point is, it must be the Lord's. Everything we do must be the Lord's in our workplace, in our own life, in the witness that we give either by what we speak or how we live or what we abstain from.

It is all part of the witness, the sacrifice, the living sacrifice, the reasonable service of our lives. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord and eventually, unless the Lord comes back, we will die.

And let our deaths also be that which will testify to the Lord. we all know the difference. We've all seen whether in bereavements over the years, we've seen the difference both to comfort to the families and to the witness and the fragrance they leave behind between those who have been the Lord's and loved the Lord and been designed to be with Him.

The fragrance they leave behind compared to those who sadly have had no thought or knowledge of the Lord. because the one leaves that witness, that testimony, that delight, that encouragement, that hope for their loved ones that they are indeed in a better place to depart and be with Christ which is far better.

[25 : 32] And for the rest there is that unspoken doom and gloom and sorrow that we just don't speak about. We just don't mention where it is that they are more likely to be.

Because a life that is given to the Lord, a life that is a living, reasonable service, that living sacrifice, we live it unto the Lord.

No man who is in Christ lives to himself. We live, we live unto the Lord. Whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.

For to this end, Christ both died and rose and revived or lived again, we might translate that as, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and of the living. That is in the sense of the dead, those who have gone before us and those who are here still with us just now.

What we can't do is get distracted by lesser things which are neither God's commands on the one hand nor expressly forbidden by the Lord on the other.

[26 : 36] Christians will disagree. Christians will take different views. Some Christians believe that you shouldn't baptize an infant because it cannot profess for itself.

Others believe that no, you don't, well should because it is by God's free grace that we redeem them not to any profession we make of our own and so on. So it is how we interpret God's covenant but we shouldn't be falling out over these things.

We shouldn't be divided in the gospel covenant because of these things. Other believers will take different attitudes to different aspects of church government or whatever.

It's not something over which we should be separated one from another. None of us live to himself. No man died to himself. Whether we live, we live to the Lord.

It is to Christ that we live. Whether we die, we die to the Lord. It is in Christ that we die. Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord. As Paul says to the Philippians, you know, I'm in a street that works too.

[27 : 36] Have I a desire to be part of and be with Christ which is far better or staying and serving the Lord in the church here? Of course, for as long as we are here, we are to be the Lord.

We are to serve the Lord. But the time will come when we can be here no longer. What do we bring? What do we give? What do we offer up to the Lord then?

We are to be, as Paul writes to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 10, always bearing about the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. We can't judge others.

We can't say what they should or shouldn't be doing if it's not commanded, expressed in by God, because we will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. 10 Corinthians 5, verse 10, it's not our judgment seat, it's not my judgment seat, it's his judgment seat.

[28 : 42] We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. That's the truth of it. The love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge if one died for all, all were dead.

And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again. If we live, let all our life be given to them.

Let every aspect of what we do be dedicated to furthering his kingdom, be living as we would live in the sight of God, because we do live in the sight of God.

Let everything we do be done as to honour the Lord. And if we cannot with a clear conscience honour the Lord with it, or know that it is in line with his teaching or his commands, then we ought not to be doing it.

We have liberty as Christians. We do have this freedom in respect of what God has not expressly commanded or forbidden. But outside of that, of course, we are bound by what he has commanded.

[29 : 47] Whether we live, we live to the Lord. Whether we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. We are always the Lord's. He has given us that liberty.

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient. He expects us to use our wisdom, knowledge, understanding of what in this context, what in this place, what in this particular situation, will best serve and further the interests of Christ and his kingdom.

That is what we are to live for. Not to ourselves, but to him. Let every day be given completely to him. Let every day be serving him. Let every action, every positive action and everything that is an abstention, everything we abstain for, let it be for the Lord that we do it or let it be for the Lord that we abstain from it.

Let it be the Lord that guides our judgment. Let it be the Lord that accepts the reasonable service of our living sacrifice, of our lives, our bodies, our souls, given completely to them.

We don't live to ourselves. And when we die, we don't die to ourselves. But whether we live, therefore, or die, we are to be the Lord's now and all the days of our lives that we may be his for all the days of eternity.