

## **Maintain Unity** **Romans 14:5-9**

<sup>5</sup> *One person values one day above another. Another person values every day the same. Let each person be fully convinced in his own mind.* <sup>6</sup> *The person who honors a certain day does this for the Lord, and the person who eats does this for the Lord, because he gives thanks to God. And the person who does not eat does this for the Lord and gives thanks to God.* <sup>7</sup> *In fact, not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself.* <sup>8</sup> *Indeed, if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.* <sup>9</sup> *For this reason he died, rose, and lived, to be Lord of both the dead and the living.*

You've heard the expression: no man is an island. People do not exist completely on their own. We're not isolated from others. We depend on one another. That's true about people in general. It is especially true about Christians. By the grace of God all of us Christians have been brought into one body. Christ is our head. Our Savior has given each one of us gifts to serve this body. If one of us uses his or her gifts, the whole body benefits. If one of us lacks in doing our part, the whole body suffers. The Scripture before us is from Romans chapter 14. Here the Apostle Paul helps us treasure the unity we possess as members of the body of believers. The differences that Paul speaks of in this text involve matters that God neither commands nor forbids. So our different opinions in these matters should not ruin our unity. Paul reminds us of what Christ has done to bring us unity. May this Scripture before us encourage all of us to maintain unity.

We maintain unity despite any differences we may have. The differences that Paul mentions involve issues that God does not speak about in his Word. Paul wanted his readers to understand that they should not let any of these differences effect the unity they had as Christians. No one should judge or condemn anyone for things they do in faith. God accepts anything done in faith that is not forbidden in his word. Paul mentions two things in particular. They involve eating certain foods and observing certain days as holy.

Before Christ came into the world, God told his chosen people to avoid certain foods. And they were to treat certain days as holy days. But when Christ Jesus came into the world and fulfilled every righteous requirement of God's law, people no longer needed to follow any rigid diet to remain God's special people. Nor did they have to observe certain holy days to find rest for their souls. Paul told the Colossian Christians, *"When you were dead in your sins, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away nailing it to the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ"* (Colossians 2:13,14,16,17). Christ Jesus made every necessary step to make us appear holy before God. He live a perfect life for us. He made the ultimate sacrifice for every sin with his death on a cross. Now God is completely pleased with us. Christ's resurrection on Easter proves that.

God no longer limits what foods people can eat. God gave the Apostle Peter a vision from heaven to clear that point. From a rooftop, Peter saw what seemed like an enormous sheet being lowered by its four corners. Contained in that sheet were all kinds of animals. Luke records that in the Book of Acts: *“A voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.’ The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’* (Acts 10:13-15). God no longer specified any particular food as clean or unclean. Nor did he set aside any particular days to worship him. The only thing that matters to God is what Christ did to make us holy.

But there still were some people in the early church that weren't comfortable eating some of those foods that God once labeled “unclean.” And there were still some who wanted to stick with the original Sabbath day to worship God. But there were other Christians who didn't follow such restrictions. They didn't put limits on the kinds of food they would eat. It didn't matter to them which day they would gather to worship God. Paul told those Christians not to look down on those who were weak in their understanding. Paul told the weak Christians not to judge others for things done in faith that God accepts. Each person was perfectly right to choose what food they ate. They could choose any day they wanted to worship God as well. The important thing was that they were doing everything in faith. Paul will end this chapter to the Romans with an important truth: *“Everything that does not come from faith is sin”* (Romans 14:23).

There are certain things that God makes no commands about. Which hymnal should we use for worship? Which translation of the Bible should we follow? Do I get the newest shot that prevents COVID or not? Should we get new windows for the parsonage or should we wait? In such matters we can expect different opinions. We may not agree. We may not even like what others think. But it's okay to have different opinions over things things God does not speak about. And we must respect each other. We must not let those differences divide us. Especially over matters that God has nothing to say.

We can agree to disagree when God does not command it nor forbid it. It's okay to dislike some of the things that others choose to do. But if God does not condemn someone's actions, then neither can we. It's also important that our use of Christian freedom does not cause others to sin. Paul told the Corinthians Christians, *“Be careful that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak”* (1 Corinthians 8:9). Better to not use your freedom at all if it's going to cause someone else to sin.

And instead of dwelling on those things that God says nothing about in his Word, Paul reminds us to treasure what God does say that unites us all. Paul writes, *“In fact, not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself. Indeed, if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”* That we even belong to the Lord should amaze us. Born in sin, there was nothing redeemable about

any of us. We could not live for our Lord. We could only live to please our sinful selves. Even after God has brought us to faith, we have not lived the lives that God expects from us. At times we've even judged other people in matters God has not. On occasion we may have exercised our freedom in ways that offend others. To think that we have turned people away from God and his saving Word. For not living to the Lord, we should die apart from him. When we breathe our last, should we not expect to be separated from our God forever?

Thankfully that's not going to happen to us. It's not going to happen to any Christian. And Paul tells us why: "*For this reason he died, rose, and lived, to be Lord of both the dead and the living.*" Our Lord did not want any of us to spend eternity away from him. So he entered this life, born of a woman, and born under law. He did this to keep God's law perfectly for us. By faith we get credit for his holiness. And for our sin he took the blame and the punishment from his heavenly Father. He endured it for every sinful thought, word, and deed of every sinful man, woman, and child. Jesus was punished to death on a cross. Struggling for every last breath, he suffered God's eternal wrath for every last sin that we committed. Following his death, God showed he was satisfied. He raised him back to life on Easter. Now there is no condemnation left for any of us. God has forgiven every sin. He's washed them all away in his Son's precious blood. Now you and I are innocent before God. You need more proof. Look to his tomb. It's empty. Now we have peace and unity with God that lasts all eternity.

And the unity that we have with God is shared by every Christian. We come from different walks of life. We enjoy different foods that others can hardly stomach. We may use different worship forms that others have difficulty following. But if it's all done in faith, it's all acceptable to God. We may choose to eat only certain foods, or we may choose anything from the menu. What's important is that you do it all to the glory of God. We may choose to worship on Thursday, on Sunday, or some another day of the week. What's important is that we worship God in spirit and in truth. If you're of legal drinking age, you may have a drink or you may abstain. It's important that your choices bring glory to God. You may vacation in Vegas this year or rent a cottage on a lake in the north woods. You may read a new version of the Bible that is faithful to the original, or you may read the Authorized Version from King James. What's important is that you are listening to your Good Shepherd who leads you to quiet waters and green pastures. There are so many things that our God gives us freedom to enjoy. He neither commands that we do them, nor does he tell us to abstain. What pleases God is that whether we do them or don't do them, all done in faith in Jesus our risen Lord and Savior.

We have different likes and dislikes. Don't condemn something that God does not. And don't use your freedom in ways that offend others whose understanding is weak. Put your differences aside. Instead enjoy the one thing that brings us all together. Treasure what unites all. We're united in Christ. Maintain that unity and live united all to the glory of God.