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Sermon Notes

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Maintaining Sweet Fellowship Over Disputable Matters, Part 2

Romans 14:5-12

Romans 14:5-12 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. ¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Legalistic Sabbath regulations

According to a 1987 Associated Press story, here is how an ultra Orthodox Jew observes the Sabbath: Before the Jerusalem Sabbath siren wails at sundown Friday night, Orthodox Jews unscrew the light bulbs in their refrigerators so as not to inadvertently turn them on and violate the Sabbath. They turn off their water heaters. They hide money because it is a reminder of daily labor instead of divine rest. They cut their toilet paper in advance because ripping it would violate religious regulations. They light tall white candles moments before sundown because striking a match is banned during the Sabbath. These are some of the acts prohibited during the Sabbath: taking a bath, opening an umbrella, touching a pen (because they feel writing is work). Strict but complicated "carrying laws" govern what objects may be lifted and how far they may be moved.

Much of the Sabbath is spent in three long ritual meals, usually shared with friends who arrive on foot and interrupted frequently by blessings and ancient Hebrew songs. Each meal begins with bread seasoned heavily with salt, which all must eat to remind them of coming out of Egypt with Moses. Cooking is forbidden. Pre-cooked food is kept warm by turning a burner on low before the Sabbath and covering it with a copper plate that stays hot.

Games are permitted during the Sabbath but restricted. "Fish" a card game of making pairs, is preferable to "Monopoly" which requires use of play money. Even conversation is regulated. Topics of work, politics or commerce are banned. Yitzhak Wexler, a Orthodox Jew, says, "The Sabbath celebration following six days of work is an inalterable contract with God. Either we keep the contract as God commands, or we lose the Jerusalem He gave us."

Orthodox Jews strictly limit travel on the Sabbath. Unless one lives within the prescribed allowed walking distance, he cannot attend synagogue services.

I. Context: Full Acceptance Even When Disagreeing

- A. Test Case #1: Eating Regulations
- B. Paul's Command: Accept As God Has Accepted
- C. Strong Words to Both the Weak and the Strong

II. Test Case #2: Sacred Days

- A. Much Debate on this Verse
 1. Straightforward translation: esteeming one day "above" others
 2. Issue is religious observance
 3. Similar to eating issue in verse 2... religious rules and regulation
 4. Almost certainly this has to do with Old Covenant regulations about sacred days
- B. Old Covenant Sacred Days
 1. Old Covenant had three sacred days in the yearly calendar

Exodus 23:14-17 "Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.

2. Furthermore, the Jews were required to appear before God in Jerusalem

Deuteronomy 16:16 "Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

3. Before the exile: Jews easily and joyfully made the pilgrimage up to Jerusalem three times a year

- a. Song of ascents... Psalms written for the Jews making this pilgrimage up to Mount Zion

Psalm 122:1 A song of ascents. Of David. I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

- b. This was a major part of the rhythm of the Jews' year
 - c. It would be unthinkable for a Jew not to celebrate the Passover
4. After the exile: much more difficult, but many Jews still made the pilgrimage back to Jerusalem
- a. This was probably also the origin of the church in Rome... Pentecost pilgrims from Rome

Acts 2:1-5 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. ⁵ Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.

Acts 2:9-11 Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs)

These were the people who heard Peter's powerful Pentecost sermon

- b. Paul himself hurried to get back to Jerusalem for the feasts

C. Ceremonial Days Now Fulfilled

Colossians 2:16-17 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. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

1. These thrice annual feasts pointed to Christ's work on the Cross
2. Passover was fulfilled with the death of Christ
3. Pentecost was fulfilled with the great harvest of firstfruits: 3000 added to the number in one day
4. Ingathering will be fulfilled on the final day... but its focus is also on Christ

5. Paul's message in Colossians: these were part of the ceremonial law that was fulfilled in Christ
6. Christ Himself pointed to the day when these physical pilgrimages would stop

John 4:21-24 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.... Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

D. Paul's Message Here: Freedom and Conviction

1. Like the eating laws, the time for these has been fulfilled
2. In Galatians, Paul is adamant that the Gentile believers there understand their freedom in Christ

Galatians 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 4:9-11 But now that you know God-- or rather are known by God-- how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ¹⁰ You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

There, it would have been wrong for them to continue to observe these special days because it showed they were acting like slaves not sons... the time of ceremonial requirement is OVER

3. BUT... can someone still observe these days? Can they still keep the old feasts... Paul would say yes, as long as you understand the grace of God in the blood of Christ and the liberation of the New Covenant
4. Believers are free in this matter: as long as their conscience is clear
5. There is no legal requirement for believers in Christ to make these pilgrimages to Jerusalem, or to honor sacred days
6. However, one may still choose to do so if it helps their personal walk with Christ

E. What About the Sabbath?

1. Key point of disagreement: is this referring to the Sabbath?
 - a. This question may be the most controversial of all in this passage

- b. Note that the Sabbath is not mentioned here at all... however, it could very well be the Sabbath he is referring to

Romans 14:5-6 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.

- c. If Paul is referring to the Sabbath, it would settle the question of Sabbath-legalism forever
- d. John Murray put it this way:

[If Paul is referring to the Sabbath in Romans 14:5], this would mean the Sabbath regulation in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) does not continue to have any binding obligation upon believers in the New Testament economy. The Sabbath regulation would be no different than any of Moses' ceremonial laws.

Secondly, the observance of the first day of the week (the Lord's Day) would have no sacred significance either, since Paul is freeing the Roman Christians from any special observances.

Thirdly, the one who continued to observe a weekly Sabbath or Lord's Day would be seen in Romans 14 to be the weaker brother, because he had not yet attained to a fully mature view of the Lord's work of salvation. Just like the weak brother who can't eat certain foods because of his conscience, so also the one who observes a weekly day of rest and sacred worship would be seen to be weak in faith.

To John Murray, who taught a very strong and strict Sabbatarianism, these conclusions are unthinkable

- e. In general, Christians who have a HIGH view of the Sabbath, and who feel that Christians should be very dedicated to setting apart one day in seven as a holy day to the Lord, and who feel that it is a great sin not to do so will UTTERLY REJECT any idea that Romans 14:5 is talking about the Sabbath

2. But, I do feel that Romans 14:5 is talking about the Sabbath!

- a. Why? Because Colossians 2 addresses the Sabbath directly
- b. And because the word "Sabbath" does not appear in Genesis 2, but only comes in during the Exodus when God is giving the Jews the Ten Commandments
- c. And because Hebrews 4 says we have come into our Sabbath rest if we believe in Christ

3. What is Romans 14 saying about the Sabbath?

- a. Basically the time of legalistically determining what it means to “keep the Sabbath holy”, of deciding whether or not we can go for a one mile walk with our families or if two miles is the limit for the Sabbath day journey, of determining whether it is permissible to do this or that or the other is part of the Old Covenant religion that has been abolished in Christ
- b. HOWEVER... I do believe that we must still assemble ourselves together for the purpose of worship and being instructed in the word

F. Six Facts for Saturday Sabbatarians (and their legalistic Christian cousins who allow the same mentality to affect Sundays) (Dan Corner)

1. All of the Ten Commandments were re-stated in the New Testament with only one exception, the one dealing with the Saturday Sabbath

- The First Commandment, “I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods except me” was restated in Matthew 22:37 and 1 Corinthians 8:5-6
- The Second Commandment, “You shall not make any idols or worship any idols” was restated in 1 John 5:21, while Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5 broadens our understanding of idolatry to include covetousness
- The Third Commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain” was restated in Colossians 3:8 in the commandment against blasphemy
- The Fifth Commandment, “Honor your father and mother” is restated in Ephesians 6:1-3
- The Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments were restated in various places:

Romans 13:9 The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 19:18-19 Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

There is no clear commandment concerning the Sabbath for Christians. Hebrews 4 nowhere commands Christians to keep the Sabbath, but rather teaches that all who have faith in Christ have entered their Sabbath rest.

<http://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/sabbath.htm>

- 2. The Sabbath observance was a memorial directly connected to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt

3. Christians are permitted to make up their own minds about how to observe a special day.
4. The Gentile Christians were NOT informed to keep the Saturday Sabbath (or the rite of circumcision) when practices and commands were officially passed on to them from the original church council.
5. Paul tells us the real purpose of the entire Ten Commandments (law) in Gal. 3:24 and Rom. 3:20
6. If the Saturday Sabbath command as given to Israel is still in effect, then the Lord Jesus commanded a person to sin by breaking it in John 5
7. aa
- 8.

G.

III. Paul's Command Concerning Ourselves: Live for the Lord Alone

A. Be Fully Convinced

Romans 14:5 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

1. The act of setting aside a special day for spiritual purposes should be between you and God
2. You must be completely persuaded in your own mind that it is what God wants you to do
3. If your conscience is bothering you, you are not acting in faith
4. Later Paul will make very clear that we must act in faith

Romans 14:23 But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

5. If you believe the Sabbath regulation is still binding on the conscience of a Christian and you violate that, then for you it is sin

B. Live for the Lord

Romans 14:6-8 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

1. Paul's call here is to live a life directly to the Lord... with the sense of the pleasure of Christ in everything you are doing
2. This is a far more powerful compulsion than any legal requirements ever were
3. Christ has redeemed us from the law and called us up into a higher relationship with Him
4. Regarding one day as sacred is perfectly fine, beneficial even
 - a. If you want to do all your cooking on Saturday night so you can have more time for rest and worship on Sunday, fine
 - b. If you want to abstain from watching spectator sports on Sunday so that you can concentrate on prayer and Bible reading, that's great
 - c. If you desire to abstain from going to restaurants or any businesses on Sundays fine
 - d. BUT if you are doing so out of guilt rather than by faith, you are sinning
 - e. AND if you are forcefully persuading others to do the same or judging people who don't do what you do, you are sinning
5. Paul's call here is a life lived in passionate, direct relationship with Christ, rather than a life of regulations, long lists of dos and don'ts

C. The Danger of People Pleasing

1. It's so easy to begin to live a life to please others
2. We know we are being constantly observed, constantly judged, constantly assessed
3. It's easy to slip into a pattern of caring more what others think about your decisions than the Lord
4. Paul wants us to live and die for the Lord here

IV. Paul's Command Concerning Others: Let the Lord Alone Judge

A. Christ Earned the Honor of Being Lord and Judge of the Conscience

Romans 14:9 For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

1. Christ alone has earned the right to judge human consciences

2. Christ's whole purpose in dying and rising was to bring us back into the Kingdom, into a love relationship with Him
3. He desired to walk with us through every detail of our lives, through all matters of conscience
4. Christ's title is clear: "Lord of all"... He rules the entire universe

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

5. Christ alone has won the right to claim allegiance over the hearts of His people
6. This is especially true when it comes to judging... this is Christ's special glory

John 5:22-23 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

John 5:26-27 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

7. A true Christian life is lived in moment by moment realization of Christ's authority, and in moment by moment desire to please Him

B. Human Judges Show Arrogance

1. This will be obvious when Christ takes His glorious throne

Matthew 25:31-32 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

2. Paul establishes the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ over the personal conscience here
3. This is a right he alone has earned
4. What right, therefore, do we have to judge our brother or look down on our brother?

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

Romans 14:10 You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

5. Christians judging others on disputable matters of the conscience is really quite arrogant

V. Christ's Exalted Role: Lord and Judge of Heaven and Earth

Romans 14:11-12 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

A. Our Future: A Full Account to Christ

1. This is the unique glory of Christ... but it is personally relevant to us
2. Every moment of every day stands under His scrutiny
3. Christians are no longer under the law, and will not be condemned for any sin
4. But that doesn't mean that we are free from accountability
5. We will bow before Christ, giving Him honor and glory as Lord of all the earth

Philippians 2:9-11 God exalted [Christ] to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

6. Then, we will give Him an account of everything we have done

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

B. Protection Both from Legalism and License

1. This thought should be enough to check both legalism and license
2. If we must all give Christ an account, then we should live moment by moment in readiness for that day
3. Legalists are constantly afraid that if they don't enforce all their minute regulations the church will slide into wickedness
4. But it is the personal nature of the direct accountability we will all have before Christ that is the greatest inducement to daily holiness
5. The greatest remedy to a life of license is knowing that you must account for it all directly to Christ's face

6. The greatest remedy to legalism and judgmentalism is knowing that there will be a judge, but it is Christ, not us!

C. Judgment of Works Different Than Judgment of Souls

1. Each of us is a sinner, and apart from the grace of God in Christ we will have no hope of salvation
2. We stand free forever from all guilt by the blood of Christ
3. Yet this does not free us from the need to give an account of our works
4. We should eat, drink, celebrate the Lord's Day, and make every decision of strictness and liberality based on what will most prepare us for that great and final day of accountability
5. Whatever will most help us to bring glory to God on that day, let us do it now

VI. Application

A. Stop Judging Others

B. Determine What You Believe About the Sabbath

1. On the one hand, the Ten Commandments seem timeless and cross-cultural
2. On the other hand, the Sabbath seems singled out for special consideration in the New Testament
3. Labor to become fully convinced in your own mind

C. Assess the Benefits of Some Sabbath Rest

1. Parallel #1: not required to fast... but fasting is still beneficial
2. Parallel #2: all foods are clean, but there may be health reasons for abstaining from certain kinds of foods
3. So also God in His wisdom gave man a day for physical rest and refreshment, for consecrating ourselves to Him, for extended meditation and prayer, for fellowship
 - a. As long as we are bound by space and time, the people of God will need to choose a day to meet, and it is reasonable for it to be a universally recognized day (so if you are traveling, you can fellowship)
 - b. As long as we live in these weak needy bodies, it is reasonable to rest and be refreshed

- c. As long as we forget so easily the words of God, it is reasonable to set aside specific times to hear the word preached and to meditate on it
- 4. Not required to stop working, but the Sabbath could be a delight and a refreshment, which will make you maximally fruitful in your earthly lives
- 5. Freed from meticulous questions about whether or not starting a car constitutes lighting a fire on the Sabbath, thus incurring God's wrath and punishment, we now can act like sons and daughters of the King and seek refreshment in Him
- 6. We end up doing much the same thing, but without the feeling of defilement that comes from setting up rules and regulations... or the feeling of judgmentalism toward those in our community who do not follow them

D. Live Every Moment for the Lord

- 1. The issue of the Sunday ballgame or the Sunday lawnmowing begins to fade into a deeper question: how can I live every moment for the Lord who gave His life for me?
- 2. How can I make the most of every opportunity?
- 3. Is a four hour football game the best investment of my time on Saturday or Sunday? Not just one day a week but any day of the week?
- 4. Sometimes, the answer will be yes... the Lord gives you this desire and fulfills it
- 5. Other times the answer will be no... the Lord gives you another desire and fulfills it
- 6. The mentality Paul is giving here is learn how to live every moment and make every decision concerning what would most please the Lord who died for me and rose for me and who will assess my whole life
- 7. NOT "If I break this rule, He'll punish me"

Illus. Imagine a young family, and tomorrow is mommy's birthday. The father sits down with his six year old son and says "You need to make mommy a birthday card; she loves you and works hard every day to give you everything you need. Son, you're a very good colorer and she loves it when you make those pretty pictures of mountains and trees and a lake, and you and mommy riding horses. Here is everything you need to make mommy a picture. Now do whatever you want to do for her!" Imagine instead of drawing a beautiful picture over the next hour, the little boy wastes his time watching VeggieTales videos and playing computer games to please himself. The next day, when the family gathers to give mommy her cards and gifts, the boy cries because he has nothing to offer. The mommy will hug the boy, love the boy, not scold the boy... but feel sad that the boy chose to please himself rather than give her a gift.

This is a better way for a Christian to think of a Christian Sabbath... and EVERY DAY, to be truthful. You're not kicked out of the Family of God if you break a list of rules and regulations of Sabbath observance. But the higher question is, "How can I best use every moment of every day to bring Him pleasure and glory?" and it is in knowing that you will fill your highest delight in drawing close to Christ, that a Lord's Day observance takes on its richest fulfillment.

For, as John Piper put it in *Desiring God*,

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."

If a sports fanatic chooses not to watch the big game, but rather spends that time in spiritual pursuits, reading the Bible, praying, singing, leading his family spiritually, talking with his Christian brothers and sisters about the sermon... and does so specifically because he is convinced it will make him happier and spiritually healthier,

God is greatly glorified