

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 14:1-12

"The Non-Essentials, or the Christians' Favorite Indoor Sport"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is Romans chapter 14, verse 1 through verse 12, and if you have your New Testaments, turn with me to these 12 verses. Romans chapter 14, verse 1 through verse 12, and our subject for this morning in a few moments will be "The Non-Essentials, or the Christians' Favorite Indoor Sport." So listen carefully as we read these verses.

"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs (that means something like vegetables). Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him who eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be held up (or holden): for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks (and evidently that last means he gives God thanks for the fact that he does not eat meat, but rather vegetables, so he gives thanks for the vegetables). For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. (This text has often been used to suggest that we have a relationship to one another. We don't live to ourselves; we live to our neighbors, regardless of the truthfulness of that. As you can see, the Apostle is not speaking of that here. He is saying rather that we live to the Lord, not to ourselves. Verse 8): For whether 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 came to life, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living (and again, I've made a slight change in the 9th verse of the Authorized Version, which reads both died and rose and revived. That's based on a probably inferior reading in the Greek text and have simply translated it Christ both died, and lived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and the living. That translation agreeing with probably the text that Paul wrote. The 10th verse): But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ (and again, in the more ancient manuscripts, and I think they're better, we should read this before the judgement seat of God). For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess (or give thanks) to God. So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God."

F. F. Bruce, who has written a very nice little commentary on the Epistle to the Romans has said, "Paul enjoyed his Christian liberty to the full." Never was a Christian more thoroughly emancipated from unchristian inhibitions and taboos. And Professor Bruce goes on to say, "And he was not even in bondage to his emancipation." That is no doubt true. The Apostle Paul probably has understood the doctrine of the grace of God, as well as any man since the time of our Lord. And guided by the Holy Spirit, he has

given us a most remarkable presentation of the grace of God and also a most remarkable presentation of the application of that grace of God to the nonessentials of life, as well. He writes in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, and verse 19,

"For though I am free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, not being myself under the law that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker of it with you."

The apostle was a free man. Luther said a Christian man is the most free Lord of all, subject to none. I think Paul would have agreed with that. What Paul is concerned about in Romans chapter 14 touches food and festivals.

Now the things that touch the Apostle Paul are not usually the things that touch us today because the apostle lived in a culture in which the relationship of the Christian believers to the Jewish ritual of the Old Testament was very, very present and close. We, of course, are not nearly so much concerned about eating certain types of foods, or certain festival days, or certain fast days as we are with such things as tobacco, whisky, playing cards, movies, TV, work on Sunday, dancing, going to football games on Sunday afternoon. In other words, we're concerned with the no-nos of the Christian life, the taboos that have been erected generally by the modern church. But we are better able to understand the problems of the day if we understand precisely the problem that the Apostle Paul dealt with and the message by which he dealt with it. It's true. As someone has said, the favorite sport of Christians, the favorite indoor sport is trying to change one another. That's what we like to do. We like to have our own particular scruples and then we like to apply them to others. And if they don't follow our particular scruples, then we say they are not as spiritual as we are. So we're constantly trying to change one another.

My first exposure to this was shortly after I became a Christian in Birmingham, Alabama. And I came into contact with some mature Christians in many ways, and I remember walking up to one of the couples who were rather mature. And in fact, the husband was one of the more influential men in the city of Birmingham, and his wife was with him and she had a reputation of being a very spiritual woman. And as I walked up with my wife by my side, and I was just a new Christian, she reached out and pinched the cheeks of my wife, which had a little powder on them and a little bit of makeup. And then also, since she was wearing earrings, she reached up and pulled on the earrings and said, "Sodom." [Laughter] And so I found out that at least in that environment that it was regarded as being extremely worldly to have any kind of makeup and to wear any kind of pendent like an earring. And so I was exposed to the nonessentials and the significance that some people place upon them.

Now this section in which the apostle deals with the principles that pertain to such things is a section that is bound closely together with that which precedes. It is the application of the righteousness of God to doubtful things that the apostle brings before us here. And of course, true application we again say is only possible if we've offered the

Christian offering. Chapter 12 verse 1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." And it is impossible for us to carry out these requirements set forth in the word of God if we have not fundamentally offered our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. But having done that, we are faced with doubtful things, morally indifferent things, things about which the bible does not speak specifically as right or wrong, but which are problems to us. And these are the questions that the apostle brings before us here.

The heading in the Bible that I'm reading from says the Christian and debatable things, debatable in the sense that the Bible doesn't speak specifically on these points. One thing that is interesting about the Roman church is this. The Roman church was quite a bit different from the modern church. For in the church at Rome, they were sure of the plan of salvation. They were not sure of these nonessentials evidently. They had difficulty with them and they had disagreements over them. But they were sure of the plan of salvation. The modern church is quite different from the church in Rome. The modern church is uncertain over the essentials of the faith.

We have one large, great, professing Christian body, which has a great deal of difficulty over the place of the Virgin Mary in their faith. And in fact, the tendency in this body is to give increasing authority and dignity to the Virgin Mary, a holy woman in the Lord. But it has come to the place where it is almost essential that one have a certain relationship to her in order to be saved.

And then in the Protestant church, there is a great deal of uncertainty over the person of Jesus Christ. In the Protestant church, there is still argument going on over the dignity of the Lord Jesus. Is he truly God or is he not? And is he the single alone sufficient savior of men?

So they're quite different from the early church, which was sure about the plan of salvation, but unsure about the nonessentials. Today, the Christian church is unsure about the essentials, and of course, naturally, unsure about the nonessentials, as well.

Now the thing that brought this to the attention of Paul and also to the church at Rome, the things that were involved were the questions of food, and fasts, and festivals. You will notice that in verse 2, we read, "For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth vegetables." And then in verse 21 we read, "It is good neither to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor anything by which thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." And then we have in verse 5, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike."

So Paul was concerned about things that we eat. Should we eat certain flesh? Or should we be vegetarians? He was concerned about certain dates. Should we observe the festivals that the Old Testament saints observed? And then he was also concerned about wine. Now that's rather interesting because the Jews have no scruples whatsoever about drinking wine.

So it is probable that what Paul is speaking about here is not something related only to Judaism, but also to Gentile scruples, as well. Therefore, to sum up without going into detail, it's likely that what Paul is dealing with here are disparagements from both Jews and Gentiles. And he is speaking specifically to them. He is speaking to the question of whether we should eat certain meats or not, whether we should drink wine, whether we should observe days or festivals. Now he calls the class of people about whom he is discussing here on the one hand weak and then on the other hand strong.

Now we might be inclined to think that the weak person is the person who doesn't observe the scruples. That is the weak person is the person who eats freely, who drinks freely, and who also does not observe the feast or festival. And the strong person is the person who only eats certain things, and who does not drink wine, and also who does observe the feasts or festivals. Let's say he's the strong person because he appears to understand more about the requirements of God. Well for Paul it's just the opposite. The weak person is the person who has the scruples and the strong person is the person who understands the freedom and liberty that he has in Christ. Listen, verse 2 says, "For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth vegetables." So the person who has the scruples is the weak person. The person who has freedom is the strong person.

Now of course, if Paul were standing here, you would do to him what you would do to me in a theological classroom. If I were teaching a class like this and hesitated for a moment, I know that someone would raise their hand and say, "Well, what are you? What do you believe about this?" I've had very few theological classrooms in which that does not take place. Recently, teaching at Trinity Seminary in Chicago, I taught the rapture question. And I taught it this way. I devoted one hour to the post-tribulation rapture viewpoint arguing for it with the arguments that are used by them, and then in the next hour I taught it from the pretribulationist viewpoint using the arguments that a pretribulationist would use. And the first question I got was, "Well what are you?" They were not so much interested in those arguments; they were interested in what I believed about it. That's the way we are.

So I think if we heard Paul say this, we would probably raise our hands and say, but what are you? Are you weak or are you strong? Do you follow the weak or do you follow the strong? Well, Paul lets us know. He says in chapter 15, verse 1, "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." So it's evident that the apostle's instruction, and as well as his own confession lies on the side of the strong. But at the same time, because the weak are our brethren and our sisters, we should remember that because they are weak, we have certain responsibilities to them. And he will later on point out, and we will consider this in our next study, he'll point out certain considerations that make it important for us not to use our liberty in such a way that we overthrow the weaker brother.

Well now with that as a background, we look at chapter 14, verse 1 through verse 4, in which the apostle speaks of food and the reception of the weak. The strong, remember, are basically right, but other considerations are important. He says first of all, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations." So the person who is weak, he's the person who has the scruples, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye."

Now the apostle does not mean acknowledge that they are saved because he says they are weak in the faith and they're already recognized as being Christians. What he means when he says "receive them" is to welcome them into communion in the fullness of a relationship with one another in the church that the strong have. Welcome them. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye," because God has received him, but not for doubtful disputations. I still kind of like that rendering of the Authorized Version because it makes you say, "What are doubtful disputations?" And then as you think about it, and think about it finally you come to realize that what he is talking about is

disputes over doubtful things. It's literally disputes of doubt. Or as one of the lexicographers has rendered it, quarrels about opinions. What Paul is saying is accept these weaker brethren who have these scruples and don't accept them simply because you're able to get an argument out of them. There are people like that, you know, they approach you. You can tell by the way they ask the question. They're not really asking for you to give them information, they're asking in order to open up a possibility of theological debate with you. I have lots of people that approach me that way and I can always tell those questions. I say, "This fellow's not interested in what I'm saying, he wants to debate." And he probably knows I like to debate, [Laughter] and so I just say, "Good, I'm glad you asked me that question because," and then we fly at one another. [Laughter] I want to have a good time, hope we have a good time. Well Paul says, "Accept these weaker brethren and don't accept them with the idea of settling all the doubtful points or engaging in theological debate with them. Welcome them into the communion."

In the final analysis, it is God, the Holy Spirit, who teaches us truth. And it is only if we have revelation or illumination, a better term, illumination from him that we're able to understand anything about the Bible. You cannot pound truth into believers' heads. It's impossible to force them to respond to the teaching of the grace of God. The Holy Spirit is the teacher of the word. The problem that Paul dealt with is expressed in verse 2, "For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs," or eats vegetables.

Now he's talking here about scruples about meat. For example, according to the Mosaic law it was not right, it was wrong for the Jewish people to eat pork. Furthermore, they could not eat beef and lamb, except the beef and the lamb were prepared properly. They had to be kosher. So the apostle evidently has these things in mind. I think I would have liked to have been around, as one of my friends said, when someone first handed the Apostle Paul a ham sandwich. [Laughter] As a Christian, I'd like to see just exactly the emotions that went over his face when someone handed him a ham sandwich after having been this Pharisee of the Pharisees for so many years and observing the Mosaic law.

There was a well-known Bible teacher, who is now with the Lord, who has constructed in one of his books a little discussion that may have taken place, a little incident. He's put it in his own way, but he's trying to set out exactly what might have happened. He says that the matter of God even now is not a dead issue and relative to it the strong brother's in danger of despising the weak and the weak brother's in danger of judging the strong. So then he says, A, first man, A invites B to dinner and puts before him a good joint of pork. He invites B to ask the blessing. And B says something like this: "O Lord, if Thou canst bless in this dispensation what Thou didst curse in the last, bless this pig." Well but then, of course B will not have any of the pig while A, who invited him to dinner, is a grace Christian and so A smiles contemptuously at B who has the scruples, but B having given the blessing against his will then turns to A and says Leviticus says, "And the swine, he is unclean to you." And therefore, he judges A's loyalty to the word of God and having this joint of pork to eat. Well, A says, "B, you ought to read 1 Timothy, chapter 4, verse 4 and 5." There it says, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."

And so here we have two viewpoints. You know, there are some people who say they don't like dispensationalism. Well there are a few things about dispensationalism I don't like. There are a few things about it that I don't think are scriptural, but there are some things about it that are very good. And this is the application of one of them. For in the Old Testament it does say, "And the swine, he is unclean to you," and in the New Testament it says, "Every creation of God is good and nothing to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving." And if we don't understand the age of the Mosaic law and the age of the church and the principles that govern our lives now, we will be in hopeless contradiction. The only reason that some people manage to get along not understanding those principles is that they don't know what the Old Testament says in the light of what the New Testament says.

But anyway, they hurled these texts at each other and engaged in a very heated argument in which some words that both of them are sorry they have spoken are uttered: extremist, liberal, rightest, etc. Meanwhile, the Bible teacher says the pork gets cold, the cook is annoyed, the brethren are rattled, each sticks to his point, instead of to his joint. [Laughter] And fellowship is broken, and A doesn't invite B to dinner again. Well, that's pathetic and tragic, all over a bit of pork for which A thanks God, as well he may if he can get it. Now B, of course, should thank God for his vegetables and pass the pork by, not judging his brother, as A should not contemptuously despise B for having what he thinks still a rather legalistic attitude toward the eating of the food. Both are wrong in spirit, one for despising, the other for judging. But both are right in what they do conscientiously. If they are conscientious, and have studied the Scriptures and this is their conviction, then they should follow their convictions and they are right in doing it, Paul says. They are wrong in fighting each other.

As for the observance of days, well, we all know that it was not long ago in places like Scotland and also in the United States in which on Sunday Sabbatarianism was the customary thing. When I grew up in Alabama, in the little town in which my grandmother lived, the drugstore was only open on Sunday afternoon from 3:00 to 4:00 and then for the purchase of medicines. Over in South Carolina, where I also grew up, that was bluestocking country and in fact, Presbyterian College's football team was known as the Bluestockings in honor of the blue laws, which presented many of the things that are characteristic of our society today. In Scotland, they would pull down the window shades and lock the piano, and on the Lord's day, you kept quiet.

Twenty years ago when I visited Scotland, I was preaching in a church in the Glasgow area. There was a young man and his wife who were rather important young business people in Glasgow. They're in the London area now and he has a very, very fine position with a large company in the London area. And when I walked in their house after preaching in their church on Sunday morning, they had invited me home for dinner, he said to me as we came in, he said, "Do you mind reading the newspapers on Sunday?" I know I must have looked surprised, [Laughter] but I said, "No, not at all." And so with that, he walked over to one of the chairs in his living room, it was a large, stuffed chair and he pulled up the cushions and pulled out from under it the newspaper for Sunday. [Laughter] And he said, "Now a number of the brethren in our church do not believe that you should read the newspapers on Sunday, and so when it arrives in the morning, I stick it under the chair in case they come home for dinner with us and that way after they've gone, I read my newspaper, but I don't want to offend them."

So there are people with scruples. We do have scruples. Now we must remember that the reason for these scruples ultimately if the strong are right, is that the individual has not yet discovered the meaning of Christian freedom. He is at heart still a legalist. He sees Christianity as a thing of rules and regulations.

Now it does not necessarily mean he's a legalist in the sense that he feels that these things give him certain merits before God by which he's justified, but nevertheless, he does believe that we are under rules and regulations. And those rules and regulations are frequently related to the Levitical cultus. He has not yet liberated himself from some remainders of a belief in the efficacy of work.

Now let me be very plain here, there are some things that are always wrong; we are not talking about things like that. When the Bible speaks about drinking, it speaks very strongly against drunkenness. There is no time at which it is permissible to be drunk. So even if we believe the Bible says that it is perfectly all right for us to take a drink or to have a glass of wine, the Scriptures speak very strongly against drunkenness. They speak very strongly against uncleanness. They speak very strongly against fornication and adultery. Those things are always wrong. Everything that the Scripture specifically speaks upon is always wrong. That's not the doubtful thing. The doubtful thing is the morally indifferent thing, the thing about which the Scripture does not specifically speak. And these are the questions that troubled individuals at this time.

Now Paul tells us what the rule is. He says in verse 3, and the first part of that verse, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him." So the broad are not to despise the narrow and the narrow are not to condemn immorally indifferent things the broad, remembering at the same time that some things are always wrong. That means that we should not approach people constantly and say, "I don't see how you can be a Christian and do such and such," if it's something that is not specifically set forth in the word of God. In other words, we should remember that there are possibilities of different convictions on morally indifferent things.

Someone has defined a legalist as someone who lives in mortal terror that someone somewhere is enjoying himself [Laughter]. Well, there is some truth in that in the sense that a legalist is usually a very negative kind of person who is always looking for something for which he can condemn a person. But strictly speaking, a legalist is an individual who believes that through the merits of our works we are acceptable to God. But it's possible for us to put ourselves under some of these scruples and in effect, have a similar failure to understand thoroughly the grace of God.

Many years ago, over twenty now, at Dallas Theological Seminary, when I was serving on the faculty, we had a faculty discussion on the code. Now the code is not specifically spoken like that and I haven't looked at this in a long time so the details of the requirements there I'm not familiar with now, but in those days the code involved this: the faculty members were expressly said to be under the requirements of not smoking, not using tobacco, nor using any alcohol in any way. And a discussion came up in the faculty over, perhaps it was some student who had not responded properly to this code or one of the faculty I don't remember, but anyway there was a discussion in the faculty meeting over this and we had several brethren on the faculty who had certain scruples that others didn't have. That always happens in any group of Christian men or women. And so we began to discuss these things and then there were some there who

wanted to add to these two things, as I remember them. They wanted to add other things, things that you could not do and at the same time serve on the faculty or attend the theological institution. The idea back of most of these was that it was not something that would recommend the institution to the world at large or to the Christian church. And so as they began to talk about adding things, I saw that, to me, this was going to be rather difficult because I had always come at this very much as I thought the Apostle Paul came at it, and so the adding of other things just seemed to me to be an endless thing. And so knowing that some of my brethren loved opera, and I don't dislike opera, I like opera all right, but knowing that they loved opera, but at the same time didn't like things that I liked, I said I saw where this was coming, I said this has got to be stopped. Otherwise, we're going to have a long list and there will be no way to tell when we should stop. So I said, "Yes, this is what I think we ought to do too and we ought to add to that that we are not allowed to listen or go to opera." [Laughter] And there was a silence over the faculty meeting [laughter]. And that was the end of the discussion. That was the end of the discussion. I had really touched on some of the desires of some of the members of the faculty and there were enough of them that that stopped the discussion. It was left as it was. I don't know how it is now, but then I think that was one of the few things I accomplished in my theological seminary life [laughter]. But at any rate, it illustrates the fact that we do have scruples.

Now the apostle says the reason that we should not despise the weak person, nor judge the strong is first of all "for God hath received him" in verse 3. And then in verse 4, he says, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be held up: for God is able to make him stand." So Christ has received the strong person and the master alone is the one who is to judge.

Now having then spoken of the food, the apostle turns to the consideration of days, fasts, festivals and the Jewish ceremonies of the Old Testament. And here is the second point of difference that existed among the Roman Christians. In verse 5 we read, "One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." They had differences of opinion in the early church over whether they were still to observe the Old Testament feasts and fasts. The apostle writing to the Galatians says, "Ye observe times and days and months and years." So it was a temptation to carry over into the New Testament age the observance of things from the Mosaic law. And evidently that was true in the Romans. The Sabbath day, for he must have been speaking at least inclusively of that, the Sabbath day was regarded as different from other days. But then there are others who said no since Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. The Old Testament legal system has been done away with and everyday is alike now. Everyday is the Lord's day. Not simply the first day, but everyday is the Lord's day for Jesus Christ lives. And so they had differences of opinion over that and the apostle's principle is, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Now this is on matters that are not essential for salvation. We cannot say with reference to salvation, here is a man who believes in salvation by work; here's a man who believes in salvation by grace. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." That's an essential, the plan of salvation. But on the morally indifferent matters, the observance of a day, then Paul says, "Let every man be persuaded in his own mind." And if convinced in his own mind through the study of the Scriptures and through what he

feels is the teaching of the Holy Spirit, if that is true, then verse 6 through verse 9 follows:

"He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks (for what's left, the vegetables). For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live to the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we belong to the Lord's and For to this end Christ both died, and came to life (or lived) that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

Both serve the Lord. Both served the Lord in their own particular way. Both are responsible to him. One gives thanks for his meat; the other gives thanks for his vegetables. We all live in this slave-Lord relationship. And that's why Christ died, that we might be slaves of him.

So Paul says in the morally indifferent matters, those who are strong don't despise those brethren that you think are more legalistic. And for those legalistic brethren who look at the strong and say, ah, he has more freedom than the Bible gives him; don't condemn him for his freedom. Now finally apostle applies this in verse 10 through verse 12. You know there is no sin for which we are more prone than the sin of criticizing other believers. And very frequently, and this is a remarkable thing, it puzzles me, very frequently it is those who've been Christians the longest who are the most critical. That's rather strange. But nevertheless, it's true. Paul's point here is simply this: Christ alone is the one who is the judge. And if we judge, then we're medaling with God's government. Listen to what he says, "Why dost thou judge thy brother? (you weak individuals) or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? (you strong individuals) for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God." It's not our responsibility if we're strong to judge the weak, or if we're weak to condemn the strong. It's Christ's job to do that and that interrogation of the apostle, "why dost thou judge thy brother, why dost thou set at nought thy brother" is designed to speak to both of these groups. And the substantiation is "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God."

Now, as I mentioned in the Scripture reading, many of the manuscripts read instead of "the judgment seat of Christ," "the judgment seat of God." And in the light of the principles of textual criticism that I'm more inclined to follow, I think that the reading "the judgment seat of God" is correct. I believe that some scribe very early in the tradition knowing that in 2 Corinthians 5:10, the apostle said, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," took Christ out of that text and in his mind, and inserted it over here. But it's really simply "we must all appear before the judgment seat of God." But now the fact that we say we must all appear before the judgment seat of God does not mean that we don't appear before the judgment seat of Christ. For Christ is God.

And he is the God of whom the apostle speaks here. So when he says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of God," he's saying we all, we all, that is we Christians, all of us who are Christians. All does not always mean everyone; it's limited by the context and here, this "we shall stand before the judgment seat of God" is a reference to we Christians. In 2 Corinthians 5 "that we all" is a reference to the believers. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of God." Now the apostle says that's just

like the Scripture says. The Old Testament says, as it is written, "As I live saith the Lord every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess or give thanks to God." Now that is a citation from Isaiah chapter 45 and in that passage the reference is to Yahweh the Second Person of the Trinity. It's a reference to Jesus Christ there. And if you remember in Philippians chapter 2, the apostle applies that very text to Jesus Christ. He is talking about our Lord. He said,

"Wherefore because Christ has offered himself a sacrifice even such a sacrifice as death on the cross, God has highly exalted him, given him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus Yahweh every knee should bow of things in heaven, things on the earth, things under the earth, and that every tongue shall confess or give thanks for the fact that Jesus Christ is God."

Now the apostle applies it again here to Jesus Christ. He says, "As I live saeth the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall confess or give thanks to God the son. He is the one into whose hands judgment has been committed." We read concerning the Lord Jesus that he will say with reference to certain people, "I never knew you depart from me, you work as of iniquities." We read in Matthew chapter 25, "When the nations are gathered before the throne of God, it is the Lord Jesus who sits on the throne." That's what Paul means here. He says, "We must up stand before the judgment seat of God and every tongue shall give thanks to God then so then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God." In other words, we all have an account that we owe. You may have all of your debts paid down here. I hope you have. But there is one account that you owe and that's the account he refers to here. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." That means no man is to judge. God is the judge of his servants.

So may I sum up by saying this? The favorite indoor sport of Christians is out. We are not to despise the weaker brother who has his scruples. We are not to condemn the stronger brother who feels more freedom. We are to be persuaded in our own minds. We are responsible for our own guidance and we're responsible to follow it. In fact, in the 4th verse, the apostle says, "Yea, he shall be made to stand." The reference is to the judgment time. "He shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." That is the one who stands or falls to his master. "He is able to make us stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and in the meantime he's able to hold us," Paul says.

Oh about six or eight years ago, I was in North Carolina. We used to have a summer home in Hendersonville and when I got over there, I frequently would sit on the porch and vacation and listen to the Black Mountain radio station, which has a lot of religious programs on it. And it comes out of about where Montreat is, and I remember listening one day and Ruth Graham, Billy Graham's wife, was on the radio and she was giving some kind of testimony, I don't remember exactly what it was. She was not teaching the Bible, but she was commenting on the fact that as she was riding on the road from Black Mountain over to Asheville, she noticed that there was a sign that said road under construction. And she said, "I see this sign almost everyday as I go back and forth to Asheville, just nine or ten miles away." And then she made the comment, "That reminds me of us Christians, for we are like that road. We are under construction. We

have not yet been builded." In other words, God is still doing a work of sanctification in us.

Last Sunday I traveled down to Nacogdoches, Texas and I have a good friend down there, Bobby Murphy, who is known as sort of an east Texas sage or humorist. He speaks all over the country telling stories about east Texas life, a very funny man; a fine Christian man. And his mother I know real well and have known for many years and have known Bobby for 25 years I guess. And he came by to see us on Monday and while he was there he told us a few of his stories. One of them I'm going to tell next week and the message is kind of good, but it applies to something next week rather than this week, but in the course of our discussion, his mother said, "You know, Bobby spoke to a group in Dallas," and I don't remember which group it was, whether it was the Kiwanis or the Rotarians. He speaks to groups like this all over the country and he said but anyway he stood up and as he stood up the Dallas city fathers were all around and he said, "You know this is a nice city you have here in Dallas." He said, "It's really a great place and I just am looking forward to the time when you finish it." [Laughter] And that's the way us, who are citizens, feel down here. This city is under construction. It's being built. It's not built; it's being built. Well that's the way we are too as Christians and consequently, we are not to despise those who don't have the understanding of the grace of God that we think we have. Nor are we to condemn those who have more freedom than we think they ought to have; we are to leave the question of judgment to the Lord God on the nonessentials.

But now when it comes to the essentials, that's something else. This only applies to those who are weak or strong in the faith; that's the way the apostle begins this 14th chapter. "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." One must be "in the faith" fundamentally, and that means that there must be a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know him as your savior? Have you placed your faith and trust in him? Do you recognize him as the one who has come from heaven as the Son of God who died and who came to life? That he might be Lord, both of the living and of the dead, offering up in his blood sacrifice? A sacrifice sufficient for the sins of the whole world. And have you by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit been brought to faith and trust in him, that faith and trust, a gift of God itself, which has brought you to the place where you rely upon him and upon him alone for your salvation? Do you have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins? Of justification of life? What a terrible thing it would be to come into a meeting like this and hear this discourse, a lengthy discourse, and not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We invite you to come to him. Place your faith by the grace of God, by the enabling of God in the Lord Jesus who offered himself for sinners. And we are sinners. May God give you grace to come.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the instruction the Apostle Paul gives us in his word. We thank Thee for the wonderful taking of us back to the principles of Holy Scripture and O Father, enable us to respond properly. If we are strong, may we not despise the weak; if we are weak, may we not condemn the strong. May we remember that we are all to appear before...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]