

**We Survived**  
***Ain't Nobody Stupid***  
**May 24, 2020**

Hey everyone. I'm so glad you're here today or watching online.

And thank you, band, for such a great reminder of the great gift we have been given by our great savior, Jesus, through what He did for us in His death on the cross.

*He who knew no sin ...*

- He who was perfect in every way
- He who lived the perfect life you and I should have lived and should be living ...

He who knew no sin ...

*Became sin for us ...*

Somehow, in a way I don't completely understand, every sin we have ever committed, are committing and will commit ...

- Was transferred to His "account" (so to speak)
- And then judged and condemned when *He* was judged and condemned
- Our sin was nailed to that cross when He was nailed to it.

He who knew no sin became sin for us ...

*So that, in him, we might become the righteousness of God ...*

- That we might be as we have never been: *totally and completely without the stain of*

*sin, holy and righteous in God's sight as God Himself is holy and righteous.*

- So that we might be what we long to be: *totally and completely forgiven* for every wrong thing, for every sin past, present, future, known and unknown.

*He who knew no sin ...*

*Became sin for us ...*

*So that, in Him ...*

*We might become the righteousness of God.*

Friends, that's what forgiveness from God is all about.

And that's what is ours ...

- By our faith in Jesus and what He did.

- And by God’s grace – by God’s willingness to treat us better than we deserve and to give us freely what we cannot earn, with no strings attached.

And for those of us who are Christians, it’s good to be reminded of that *regularly* and *often*.

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Ok, if this is your first time with us or your first time in a long time, you need to know that we’re in week three of a four-week series called *We Survived! ... now if we can just keep from killing each other*.

And I’m aware that the pandemic isn’t over, and that there’s a possibility things could get worse again in the fall but, in most parts of our country, the numbers are declining ... which is why most parts of the country are beginning to open up again.

But what's ironic and, frankly, sad, is that while it's likely that we've survived the worst-case scenario in terms of the disease ...

The tension and anger and expressions of outright hatred over what we should do and not do next is causing emotional, relational, and even spiritual destruction on a scale at least as great as the pandemic itself.

I say that because the percentage of people whose health has been affected by COVID19 is relatively small.

According to the website "[our world in data](#)", about three tenths of a percent of the U.S. population has succumbed to the disease (290.5 deaths per million to be exact).

Now, the percentage of people in this country who have fallen ill at some level is certainly greater than that.

And those who have been affected economically is certainly greater than *that*; maybe as high as 30-35% (which includes the 16% who are unemployed because of it).<sup>i</sup>

But the percentage of people who have been angry with someone else over their opinions about the coronavirus and then expressed that anger either in person or online?

My unofficial guess – based on what people have told me, what I’ve observed and what I’ve experienced – is that it’s at least double that.

In fact, I would be shocked if 7 out of 10 people listening to me right now haven’t, at some point, slammed “the other side” – that is, politicians or pundits or other people who hold differing ideas about “what’s *really* going on with all of this” and what ought to be done about it.

Unfortunately, I don’t see us flattening the curve on *that* anytime soon ... *unless* ... there is a

fundamental change that takes place at the heart level.

And that's what we've been talking about for the past two weeks.

And we're going to talk about it today and again next Sunday because it would be so ironic – and awful – to “survive” the pandemic but wind up “killing each other” (metaphorically speaking) and our relationships in the process.

It would be awful if our unabated anger – our bitterness and our contempt – towards “*them*” ended up destroying *us* – meaning our heart and our soul – in the process.

## **The Roman Problem**

And to help us avoid that, we've been focusing on part of a letter written almost 2,000 years ago to group of Christians who were divided by

an “us/them” conflict; a group of Christians who were about to (metaphorically speaking) kill each other and the churches to which they belonged.

Hard to believe Christians would do that kind of thing, isn't it?

*Nope.* Not really.

Never forget that the number one requirement for becoming a Christian is that you're a sinner! That's why you need a savior – Jesus!

And what sinners do is *sin* ... against God, against one another and even against themselves.

Anyway ... the letter, which was written by the Apostle Paul, is found in the New Testament and it's called “The Letter to the Romans” because that's where these people lived; in the first-century city of Rome.

And what I want to do right now is to read you a fairly long portion of it which will take us back through some of what we talked about in the first two messages. (If you were here for those messages, you may remember that we focused pretty narrowly on just one or two sentences).

So, this will give us a bit of a review and also move us into what we need to see today.

OK, here we go.

**Paul writes ...**

*Accept the one whose faith is weak ...*

And I'm going to stop right there and say, as I have in both messages before this one, that I don't think *Paul himself* is labeling anyone "weak" because that's a surefire way to put people on the defensive.

Instead, I think what he is doing is sarcastically quoting what one side in the conflict had been saying about the other – that they’re “weak in faith.”

(By the way, another reason I think this is probably sarcasm is that Paul does this same kind of thing in several of his other letters to really drive home a point, like he is doing here).

**Accept the one whose faith is “weak,” he writes**  
...

*... without quarreling over  
disputable matters. Romans  
14:1 (NIV)*

“Disputable matters” are things about which there is ...

- No direct commandment from God
- No “thus saith the Lord”
- No “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not”

... which means that these are issues over which good-hearted, reasonable men and women can have differing opinions.

Paul is saying “don’t get sucked into fighting about that stuff. Don’t waste your emotional energy on that.”

And then he specifically addresses what was probably the greatest “disputable matter” over which they were fighting.

**He writes ...**

*One person’s faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. Romans 14:2 (NIV)*

Now, if you missed either of the first two messages, that has to sound really, really strange.

Unfortunately, we don't have time today to go back into all the details of how and why this conflict began and why it mattered so much. So, if you want to know more, I encourage you to watch, listen to or read those messages which can be found in the media section of our app and our website.

Bottom line is that the churches in the city of Rome at that point – which was about 30 years or so after the time of Jesus ...

The churches in Rome were made up of ...

- Jewish men and women who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah who had been crucified and raised from the dead ...
- As well as *non-Jewish* men and women (often referred to as “Gentiles”) who had

also come to believe in Jesus.

And because they came from such different spiritual backgrounds *before* becoming Christians –

For example, the *Jewish* Christians had grown up attempting to observe all of the Law of Moses: 637 regulations concerning things like ...

- What to eat, what not to eat
- What to wear, what not to wear
- What was work, what was not work
- Which days were considered holy and which days were not.

And the *Gentile* Christians – the non-Jewish men and women – had *none* of that in their spiritual background.

In fact, most of them had grown up worshipping idols and participating in *pagan* rituals that were totally sacrilegious to their Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ!

So, because these two groups came from such different spiritual backgrounds *before* becoming Christians ...

... when they gathered together as a church body (because that's what churches do – *they assemble*, which is the literal meaning of the Greek word that gets translated *church*; there's no such thing as a church that never meets) ...

Anyway ... when they gathered together as a church body, there was a conflict over what could be eaten ... which seems weird to us because we don't typically have a meal when we meet. But they did.

And what was happening was that the Gentile

Christians – who, for reasons I mentioned in the first week, hosted most (if not all) of the gatherings ...

The Gentile Christians, who had no qualms about food like the Jewish Christians did, would serve meat that might have come from an animal that had been sacrificed to an idol or, at the very least, wasn't kosher.

And that, according to the Law of Moses, meant it was “unclean” and therefore unacceptable to the Jewish Christians.

And when all of those good people said, “no thanks, we'll stick to the veggies” the Gentile Christians accused them of being “weak” in their faith.

“You just don't understand the Gospel. You just don't understand grace.”

... which of course, made the Jewish Christians

mad, so, *they* started saying not-nice things about their Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ.

In fact, I think they may have even said “oh, we’re not the weak ones. *We’re* strong because we’re still following the rules God gave Moses – even though *we don’t have* to because of grace and because of Jesus.

“We do it simply because we’re disciplined. We’re committed. And you slackers clearly are not.”

So, Paul addresses both groups.

“Some of you think it’s ok to eat everything; some do not.”

**However ...**

*The one who eats everything  
(Gentile Christians) must not*

*treat with contempt the one who does not (Jewish Christians).*

*And the one who does not eat everything (Jewish Christians) must not judge the one who does (Gentile Christians), for God has accepted them. Romans 14:3 (NIV)*

Ok, now that's how far we've gotten over the past two weeks and we've drawn some applications from that.

But now we're going to move forward.

## **To Each His Own**

And we're going to move forward with *why* Paul tells them they shouldn't judge or look at each other with contempt.

**And, by the way, that word "contempt" means**

**“the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless and deserving scorn.”**

Paul says “you’re not to look at one another like that. You’re not to judge one another like that.”

And here’s why.

**And this is so awesome.**

*Who are you to judge someone else’s servant?*

Or, to put it in more contemporary terms, “who are you to review someone else’s employee?”

*To their own master, servants stand or fall.*

*Romans 14:4 (NIV)*

“To their own boss, an employee is rated up or down.”

“Hmmm. So, Paul, you’re saying that Jewish guy who I think is so weak in his faith because he

doesn't feel the freedom to eat meat ... is someone else's servant?"

"Hmmm. That Gentile woman who I think is so irresponsible and self-centered because she just eats whatever she wants ... she is someone else's servant?"

"Absolutely," Paul says. "And their master/boss – not *you* – determines whether or not their actions are good and acceptable."

**Furthermore, Paul says ...**

*And they will stand ...*

... they will be rated favorably, whether they're a meat-eating Gentile Christ-follower or a veggie-only Jewish believer ...

*... for the Lord is able to make  
them stand. Romans  
14:4 (NIV)*

And what Paul is saying in that statement is radical.

“The Lord is OK with *both* the meat eaters and the non-meat eaters. The Lord is OK with *whatever position* you all take on this. He’s leaving it up to each of you to decide for yourselves.”

And then Paul moves on to address the other divisive issue over which they were going to (metaphorically) kill each other and the church.

**He writes:**

*One person considers one day  
more sacred than another;*

“That would be us,” the Jewish Christians would have said. “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy, along with all the other feast days that God told Moses we were to observe. That’s what we should all be doing.”

**And, Paul continues ...**

*... another considers every day  
alike. Romans 14:5  
(NIV)*

“That would be us,” the Gentile Christians would have said. “God made *every* day, so *all* of them matter to Him. All of them are holy, so we don’t need to single out any particular day or days.”

And Paul’s response concerning both “persons” and the calendar?

**This is amazing.**

*Each of them should be fully  
convinced in their own mind.  
Romans 14:5 (NIV)*

“Wait a minute, Paul. I thought you were going to tell us who is right!

But Paul doesn’t.

Instead, he says this is another one of those “God says you can choose your own adventure deals.”

He says, “come to your own conclusion on this matter.”

**And here’s why. And this is such great Holy-Spirit inspired wisdom from Paul.**

*Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.*

*Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God;*

In other words, they pray before they eat!

*And whoever abstains [from meat] does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

*Romans 14:6 (NIV)*

They pray before they eat, too!

And what Paul is saying here is that, even though the rationale and the conclusion might be different, the heart is the same. The motive is the same.

- Both sides are doing what they do to honor the Lord.
- And they're doing it with gratefulness and thanksgiving to Him.

And that's why, in these "disputable matters" (things about which there is no direct instruction from God) ... each person can make up their own mind and God will be pleased with their decision.

In fact, just a few sentences after this, Paul shares *his* own mind – *his* own conclusion, *his* own practice – concerning the issue of eating meat that might not be kosher or might have

been sacrificed to an idol.

And, remember, Paul is Jewish by race and by heritage.

Remember, he's the guy who once worked for the Jewish Temple leadership in Jerusalem hunting down followers of Jesus and dragging them before those leaders where they were flogged, stoned and sometimes executed.

Remember, Paul was a Pharisee. He was – dare I say it - a religious conservative; a fundamentalist before the word was invented.

If there was a scale of how Jewish a person could be in race and in practice, Paul had been at the top of it.

And then he met Jesus. And everything changed.

So, what is Paul's own personal belief and practice?

**He writes:**

*I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself.*

*Romans 14:14 (NIV)*

In other words, “you Gentiles who believe in and follow Jesus, *you’re technically right* on the meat issue.”

“The Law of Moses doesn’t apply to you. In fact, it never has.”

“And it doesn’t apply to me anymore. And it also doesn’t apply to my Jewish brothers and sisters among you.”

“*However,*” Paul says ... and this is so important, this is the whole point of where we’re going to go in the rest of this message.

“Yes, you Gentiles are right. Jesus taught that it’s

not what goes into your mouth that makes you unclean but what comes out of it.”

**However, Paul says ...**

*If anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. Romans 14:14 (NIV)*

“If they’ve thought about it and just can’t get past that internal feeling that it’s somehow wrong, then, for the sake of their conscience, they have no choice but to treat it as being wrong *for themselves*.

“Not for *you* but for themselves. Remember, they’re not to judge *you* over the fact that you’ve have a different conviction about it.”

“But, for them, it’s wrong.”

“And you need to accept them and their conviction. Accept them and don’t get into

arguments with them about this stuff because *even though* you're technically right, there is no win in that."

"Plus, remember that they aren't stupid. They have good reasons for why they feel and believe as they do. They are *fully convinced in their own mind* just like you are. And they are *trying to please God* just like you are."

"And you need to respect them for that instead of treating them with contempt."

## **For Good Reason**

Now, again, Paul is talking about strife between Christians over differences in their religious and spiritual convictions and practices. And there are a host of applications that could be made in those areas in our day and time.

But we're not talking about that today. We're

talking about *this pandemic* – COVID-19 – and how to survive it without killing each other in the process.

And I believe – as all of our pastors do ... I believe that what Paul has written here can be of great help in that even if you're not a Christian; even if you're not part of a church ...

... although, as I have said each week, my main concern is for those who *are* Christians and, very specifically, for those who are part of *this* church, North Heartland Community Church ...

Because some of us are judging one another, and some of us are looking at one another with contempt because of what we believe about things like ...

- How safe it is to go back to work
- How wise it is to have “a studio audience”

in the room for this service

- How important it is to get the economy restarted vs. keeping things locked down
- Whether this thing really is that big of a deal
- Whether or not it's coming back in the fall
- Whether masks are really necessary or not.
- Whether President Trump or Dr. Fauci or Governor Parsons or Mayor Lucas is doing a good job or not.

... and the list could go on and on.

Some of us – maybe most of us – are looking at our brothers and sisters in Christ (for whom Jesus died) and thinking of them as “beneath consideration, worthless and deserving of

scorn” ...

All because they have a differing opinion over things that are clearly “disputable matters” to use Paul’s terminology.

But when I use that term, I don’t mean that there is no “thus saith the Lord.”

I mean there is no clear answer.

**I mean that it is possible to logically conclude that either side of the issue is the correct one – and also to conclude that it is incorrect.**

Both positions are, at the same time, defensible and indefensible.

That’s what makes it disputable!

For example ...

- There’s a case to be made that it’s safe to

go back to work and to church.

There's a case to be made that it's not.

- You can make a case that it's more important it is to get the economy restarted now instead of keeping things locked down.

And you can make a case that if we open up too soon, the virus will spread faster and we'll have to shut down again.

- There's a case to be made that the coronavirus is going to come back even worse in the fall so we'd better be prepared.

And there's a case to be made that it might not. And, if it does, it won't be as bad.

- There's a case to be made that masks really

are necessary.

And there's a case to be made that while they might be helpful, as long as you stay six feet apart, they're not actually doing that much.

- And there's a case to be made that our leaders are doing a great – the best ever.

And a case to be made that they are not.

And by the way, the ones making those cases and counter-cases are typically experts in their field. They are way smarter than most of us.

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Point being ... since it is possible to conclude that either position is correct (or incorrect), Paul's advice to "accept each other without quarreling" makes a lot of sense.

Now, that doesn't mean you can't discuss or debate with someone. You can. And you probably should because that's how you learn.

In fact, several weeks ago, I emailed Dan Fowler and Teresa Loar, our City Council representatives with some of my concerns right after Mayor Lucas put out his 10-10-10 rule.

And Mr. Fowler responded to me. He also copied the mayor, Rex Archer (the head of the KCMO health department) as well as the deputy director of that department!

My basic concern was that I didn't understand what the rule was trying to accomplish. At the beginning of this whole thing we were all told the goal was to flatten the curve so that the virus would not overwhelm our medical system.

And from the stats in our area, we've never come close to that. At the time I wrote, there were only 31 cases in Platte County.

So, I said, “I don’t understand the purpose of these restrictions, especially in the Northland.”

And then we had this very interesting email dialogue through which I learned why the health department is still concerned about overwhelming the system. In the interest of time, I won’t go into the details.

And I can’t say that I necessarily see it the way they do.

However, I do understand their logic and I can see how they might be right – after all, this is what we pay them to do. More importantly, after this dialogue, I believe they really are trying to do the right thing. They’re not trying to “take away our rights” – at least, not intentionally.

So, again, Paul’s advice doesn’t mean you can’t discuss or debate an issue with someone.

But when that discussion or debate crosses a line – and we all know intuitively what that feels like. We all know when it’s happened.

- *It’s when we start judging and looking at the other person with contempt – thinking of them as “beneath consideration, worthless and deserving of scorn.”*
- *It’s when winning the argument becomes more important than respecting the person and preserving our relationship with them.*

When we get to that place, it’s a sign we’ve gone too far and it’s time to stop. It’s time to be quiet.

It’s time to say, “you know, even though your reasoning and conclusion are different from mine, I trust that your heart is the same. Your motive is the same. You’re trying to do the right thing, just like I am. You’re *trying to please God*

in this, just like I am.”

“And though I don’t agree with you, I respect you for that. And I will still love and accept you as my brother or my sister in Christ.”

## **In Real Life**

Now, that sounds *so easy* when we talk about it right now, doesn’t it?

“Sure, absolutely. That’s *exactly* how we ought to do it.”

But what really happens to us in the moment is quite different. Not only do we think we need to win the argument. We also think ...

Well, as I was preparing for this message, I came across a post that perfectly captured what most of us think.

## **One person wrote ...**

“I *absolutely am* judging the selfish and dangerous actions of those who choose to do the wrong thing, who put their own wants ahead of the collective need.”

## **And ...**

“I won’t apologize for that. These folks DO need to be called out for their dangerous behavior.”

And just to be clear, even though the person who wrote that was coming from a more liberal political perspective, there’s a conservative version of that though process, too.

Whichever side you’re on, the basic thought is ...

“I don’t care if your motive is good. I don’t care if your heart is in the right place because what you support, what you believe in and what you

want to do (and are doing) is destructive.”

- “It’s destructive to the economy and people’s financial health!”
- Or, “it’s destructive to everyone’s physical health!”

(Pick a side, any side).

**“What you are doing is evil and you need to be stopped.”**

“You need to be called out. You need to be shamed. You need to be scorned.”

“And somebody needs to do that, so I will.”

Now, on the surface, that sounds like a justifiable way of thinking. It sounds like righteous indignation (which is, by definition, *righteous*).

But here's the problem with that, especially if you're a follower of Jesus.

Now, if you're not a Christian, this doesn't apply to you. You don't have to take this seriously. I think you'd be smart to take it seriously, but this isn't directed at you.

**Jesus once said ...**

*"In the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."*

*Matthew 6:1 (NIV)*

Point is that God doesn't tolerate a double standard. Point is you can't judge others in one way and yourself in another.

But that's what most of us do. We have a double standard.

**Most of us judge others based on the *impact* of**

**their actions while judging ourselves on the *intention* of our action.**

In other words, when you mess up and the result is bad, it's because you're a bad person.

When I mess up, it's because I had a good reason because I'm a good person.

“You were driving too fast and you cut me off because you're just a bad driver. You're selfish and inconsiderate.”

“I was driving too fast and I cut you off because I was running late for work. My kid was sick and I had to go get them at school. I'm a good person and I had a good reason.”

We're strict with others but we cut ourselves slack. It's “grace for me” and “justice for you.”

And that's a double standard.

Jesus is saying, “If you believe what they’ve done deserves condemnation and wrath, then you should expect the same. Don’t demand justice for others when they mess up and then cry out for mercy for yourself when you mess up.”

Now, some of us might say, “well, OK, Rick, I get that.”

“But, honestly, in this coronavirus thing, I’m *not* doing what they’re doing. I am not being selfish. I am not being dangerous. I’m not doing anything or advocating anything destructive health-wise or wealth-wise.”

That might be true. I’ll take your word for it. You’re behaving perfectly.

But I have a question for you.

**Are you doing *anything* in *any* area of your life that might be destructive to others and the common good?**

I'm pretty sure you are.

For example ...

- Do you ever eat too much or drink too much? Do you smoke?

If so, you are adding to the drain on the medical system in this country. That's destructive.

- Do you ever spend too much money? Waste money on stuff you don't really need?

If so, you are limiting what you could contribute to the work of God and for the benefit of others in need. That's destructive.

- Do you have a pattern of becoming overly angry with your kids about stupid stuff

that doesn't matter?

If so, you are wounding them. And because hurting people hurt people, it's likely they're going to turn around and wound others. That's destructive.

And by the way, just so you'll know – I'm not picking on anyone here. Everything I just listed, I myself have been guilty of at one time or another. And the list could go on.

But here's my point.

I can go through every aspect of your life and legitimately, justifiably, tear it apart because there are so many ways in which you are falling short. Maybe not in this particular situation but there are many others.

And you can look at my life and do the exact same thing.

Because all have sinned. We're all sinners and what sinners do is sin. We fall short and we contribute to the propagation of evil and destruction in some way.

And we can point that out and point that out and point that out forever and ever.

But where will that get us? Nowhere good.

And that's why judgment and contempt are not the answer in this situation or in any situation.

The answer is what Paul wrote at the very beginning.

*Accept the one who you think of  
as being weak.*

Accept that maybe she wants the economy to open up not because she's a money-hungry conservative who wants to kill grandma and her friends, but because she owns a business that's

going to fail and she doesn't know what she'll do if that happens.

Accept that maybe he wants everyone to wear a mask not because he's a liberal control freak who wants to take away everyone's rights, but because he's doesn't want to become an asymptomatic carrier and infect someone else who might then get sick and die.

Accept that these people have good hearts and good reasons for what they believe and what they do and want others to do.

And accept that they ain't stupid. Ain't nobody stupid in this deal.

And remember that even though, as a sinner, you yourself were once *truly* "evil" in God's sight, He did not treat you with contempt.

Instead, He offered you grace and mercy and therefore you are able to give it to others.

Would you pray with me?

## **CLOSING COMMENTS (2)**

1. Next week – how do you decide what you should do and not do in this time? Ask the right question.
2. Sign up again for Live Studio Audience.
3. Offering – online sign up / button if watching on app or browser / mail a check
4. If you need financial help, please let us know.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> From <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/20/business/economy/coronavirus-economy-survey.html>