

ROMANS 12-16: Putting Your Faith into Action

The Secret To Uniting The Divided Church

Rough Transcript

Jeremy Schurke

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Amen. Welcome to The Man in the Mirror, Bible study. I'm a new guy. My name's Jeremy Schurke. I recently was hired by Man in the Mirror to run Mirror Labs, which is a R&D initiative, to better understand guys in their 20s and 30s and help them move closer to God and others. Pat asked me if I would do one of his revered lessons in his Bible study. And I think this Bible study is older than me, and so I was honored to be asked, and I'm glad to be with you guys today. And hopefully you've been doing this for a while and you know that we're in Romans, we're in part four of four sections of Romans, the putting your faith into actions. And today we're going to be going over Romans 14, one through nine, which I've titled, *The Secret To Uniting The Divided Church*.

Because I'm jumping in here kind of in the middle of this thing, I want to kind of do a quick recap and context of where we are in Rome, what this letter from Paul is saying and why it's so needed. So apparently, Claudius was hearing about this Christus guy in the synagogue who was causing a lot of havoc amongst the Jews. And some of the Jews were forming into this new sect of Christus followers, and he didn't like that, so he banned all the Christian Jews in Rome, and then the Gentile Christians were kind of in charge of the church there. After Claudius died, the ban was lifted and all these Christian Jews come back. Whenever there's two or more groups that have different backgrounds coming together, well, there's bound to be conflict, right? We as humans, we feel comfortable around people that are like us and people who are different.

It causes to ask questions and it causes difficult conversations. And usually if there's two different groups, at least one feels out of place. I don't know if you've ever felt out a place. I went to Cuba two years ago with some friends, we decided we're going to go to Cuba for 24 hours. I don't know why. I don't know whose idea, but when you're with friends, you just let it rip and this will happen. So, the moment we touched on the ground in Havana, we stayed 24 hours and got on a plane to leave and come back. And during this trip we were traveling, I think in west Havana, we saw this museum and one of the cool, classic cars and the taxi. And all of a sudden I had this odd feeling come over me that I was out of place because at this museum, there was a downed American plane out on the steps in front of the museum.

It wasn't even in the museum. And it was from the Bay of Pigs. It was a weird sensation, right? Like, oh, we're not friendly nations, we're kind of hostile to each other. And it made me think of several other things about how maybe some people come to America and see our museums and our prized victories and how that might even make them feel. And I get it. We like our traditions. We have a lot of rich traditions and people, all people, hold fast to what they know, their traditions. And in some ways this is great. There's a lot of great traditions that we need to hold on to. Remembering and honoring the past is something that we should do more often, I think, but not all traditions are great traditions. And the question is, what if people's traditions are at odds with each other, or even worse?

What if they're at war with each other? So, that's what kind of makes this passage that we're going to go over today, so relevant, because Rome is a lot like America and America is a lot like Rome. There's a lot of different people and a lot of different traditions under one country, even in ours. We have people that celebrate black history, we have people that celebrate confederate history, we have people who have an immigrant experience, we have people who have deep American family ties and all of these people are living in this country, which is truly a giant experiment. Can we actually do it? And lately, I would have to say our differences are kind of flaring up and being more divisive than normal, but that's not just in culture. That's also within the church ranks. Right now, I would say, there's two different camps.

There's one that reflects traditionalism, Christian traditionalism rather. And then there's another one who rejects it. So the two major camps in the Christian Church today are ones that reflect Christian traditionalism and then one that rejects it. And when we look over the passage today, we're going to see the same thing, that there's nothing new under the sun, right? In this passage, we see two camps here. We have one that reflects Jewish traditionalism and then one who rejects it. So again, what Paul's telling these Christians in Rome, can't be more relevant to us today. So before we get started and I read, I'm going to pray for us, and we'll get going. God, thank you for anybody who's watching this. I hope that you give them ears to hear and give me words to speak, and that your truth and your wisdom and your love reigns over this video and over the conversations it produces.

Thank you for giving us your word and letting us be able to reflect and dissect and apply it. It's in your name, we pray, Jesus. Amen. All right. Romans 14 one. Where am I going to go first? Through three. We're just going to go through it slowly and surely. Except the one whose faith is weak without quarreling over disputable matters. One person's faith allows them to eat anything but another whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. Ouch! Vegan burn. Are the meat lovers rejoicing in your group? Well, let's keep reading. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt, the one who does not. And the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

All right, what's going on here? As you know, the Jews in the old Testament, they had some rules that God laid down about clean and unclean meats. And these, once repelled, Christians who were Jewish from Rome left, came back and had their same traditions that they've had for thousands of years, right? And they're getting together with these new Gentile, Christians who don't have any rich tradition with clean and unclean foods. And these Jewish Christians, they're in Rome. They're looking at this idol factory of Roman gods thinking that all this food is sacrificed to the Roman gods. And I'm sure they're looking around saying there cannot be one clean piece of meat in the city. In fact, I think it would be better for us to just eat vegetables full time, than to maybe mess up on eating clean needs and unclean meats. So I think the intent there was, we want to honor our Lord and we'll sacrifice meat, so we don't even care anymore.

It's important to remember that the Jews are in a period of transition. Their whole world is being turned upside down. Their Messiah came, Jesus, the ones who believe this is the Messiah, who totally gave them a mind-bending new way to look at reality and at life. And they're in this transition of trying to figure that out. You might be thinking, how does this apply to us today? Well, I used to live in Haiti. I was a missionary in Haiti for a while. And while I was down there, there were times when voodoo priests would bless goat meat and offer it to me as food. So I ask you, if a voodoo priests blessed meat to their voodoo gods and say, hey, eat this. What would you do? I'm going to tell you something, I'm weak. Okay? Maybe it was, my stomach was weak, maybe it was my faith, maybe was just me.

But I was like, that looks great. How about we give it to someone else that they're maybe more hungry than me. Okay. It's an interesting situation. When I initially read this section, it says, these people are weak because they don't eat meat. I don't know, my knee jerk wants to say, well, if they're weak and the other side has to be strong by implication. And a lot of commentators, a lot of people who divide this

section up, they call it the weak and the strong, the problem is, when you read all nine verses, I don't see where Paul calls anybody strong. In fact, you have a side where there's these meat lover Gentiles, who are treating the veggie lover Jews with contempt. And then you have the veggie lover Jews that were totally judging the meat lover Gents, and both were wrong, and therefore, both are actually weak in the faith.

My eyes, my heart, my mind were conditioned upon first reading to see a right side and a wrong side. And not only that, guess whose side I saw myself on? I never seen myself on the wrong side. Whenever I see a wrong side, I say, oh, okay, well, I'm going to be on the right side. I'm going to do this. And when you do that, like me, it's very easy to judge the other side. So when you're saying, well, where are the strong guys, I'm on the right side, you guys step the game up, you're not doing well. And I tend to live out of this assumption. I don't know about you. That I'm right. That's my knee jerk reaction. I am right. I'm always right. And this is a very American tradition.

And therefore judging is actually, probably one of our favorite national pastimes as Americans, that we're on the right side of history, you need to step your game up. So I'll be the first to admit this, that I am much quicker to judge than to try to understand. So verse four is for me. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master servant stand or fall, and they will stand for the Lord is able to make them stand.

WE TEND TO JUDGE AND REJECT BELIEVERS WHO ARE DIFFERENT THAN US

Here's point number one, today, we tend to judge and reject believers who are different than us. When we see people who are different, even believers of the same God, we tend to judge them and push them away and reject them because they're different. Now, why is this a problem? I'm going to go over three reasons, very quickly. And here we go. Number one, God judges our judgments.

Jesus says, judge not, that you be not judged, for with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use it, it will be measured to you. We all need to be extremely careful about what and who we pronounce judgment on. Number two, not only does it interrupt or is a problem between us and God, it's a problem between God's people, because we become agents of division within God's people. I've often thought about this. Why is it so hard for the church to work together? The local church. Why is it so hard for us to come together? We have this in-house territorial, sheep-snatching mentality with each other. And they're all too common, right? We see it all the time, that we don't actually put our own kingdoms down and kind of work together. And it's sad and it reflects a much bigger problem within Christianity and the church.

And that's that we treat others with contempt and judge other Christians that are different and it divides us, and that's a problem. And we see this, Paul says this in Titus, he says, for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful. He is self condemned. It's no mystery that our culture is bitterly divided right now, amongst multiple lines, right? And the truth is, I think the American church has a lot of deep reflecting and repenting to do in actually aiding culture into divisiveness. We haven't really modeled anything different for them. We've actually done the same thing and then aided them into being more divisive, which leads me to my last point, which is it's an issue between us and God.

It's an issue with us in church, and it's an issue with people outside of church, because we harm the testimony of Christ. The number one way we would ever trust a message that God has for us, and that God loves us, is by the actions of the messenger himself. Jesus' prayer for all believers was this. My prayer is not for them, the apostles alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, father. Just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me,

that they may be one as we are one I in them and you and me, so that they may be brought to complete unity.

Then the world will know that have sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me. We need to ask ourselves some really difficult questions as a church, of why we've been in decline, year after year, decade after decade, of people leaving. Because today people, men in particular, they're not only leaving the church, those outside the church are seeing less and less reasons to be a part of the church. And at the end of the day, guys, people don't specifically care that much about our worship service. Everything is a hollow shell of the organizational church, if the center core is not built on true relationships, where people feel cared for, where they don't feel judged, where they feel accepted, where they feel embraced, where they feel like they have time to change. And if they don't feel that, then we need to ask ourselves, do we feel cared for? Do we feel accepted?

Why can't we relay what we feel? Maybe because we don't feel that at all. Let's move on. Five and six. One person considers one day more sacred than another, another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day especial, does so to the Lord, whoever eats neat, does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God, and whoever abstains, does so for the Lord and gives thanks to God. What's the special day here? A lot of commentators think it's referring to the Sabbath. The Sabbath is normally a day of celebrating and feasting, but the Jews and Rome actually appear in historical records to have kept it a day of fasting, instead, to remember that both in 63 BC and 37 BC, it was on the Sabbath that Jerusalem fell to the Romans and its defenders were taken into captivity.

So today, I'm mourning for them in remembrance. And it kind of be like, if a Hawaiian Christian lived in Japan and they once a year, we're celebrating or not celebrating, but remembering at least, Pearl Harbor and remembering family and friends and the Christians were like, hey, every day is the same here guys. If this isn't a special day in the kingdom of God, that day doesn't matter. Well, does it? When you think through it, it's tough, it's complicated. We can kind of see both sides here, right? And you know what? That's what Paul says. He says, each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Because, Paul is telling us that at the end of the day, point number two, God cares more about your more motivation than your action.

GOD CARES MORE ABOUT YOUR MOTIVATION THAN YOUR ACTION

He says this, whoever regards one day as special, does so to the Lord, whoever eats meat, does so to the Lord, for they give thanks and whoever abstains, does so to the Lord. Now, while Jesus wants our unity, he's not asking for cultural conformity. Diversity in the body of God literally is one of the biggest testimonies to God's reality and the power of the gospel. In first Corinthians, it says, if the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. Unity and diversity should co-exist in the people of God. Both then, should coexist in the people of God. Thinking about this, what the easiest solution in Rome would have been, as these Jewish Christians and these Gentile Christians are kind of clashing on just how to actually functionally live out the Christian life?

They could have just split into two churches, right? That would have been literally the easiest thing, to just drop it, split into two, we got first church of the carnivores and then rooted church, plant-based experience, that they both can go do their thing. Would I have liked to visit both churches? Definitely. I would love to see what that kind of fleshed out to be, but that's not the point. The point is, that didn't happen. They took a harder way. It just comes down to the point, the easiest way is division, avoidance, judgment. But if you look at the motivation, if their motivation is to honor God, then we can agree to disagree, and embrace one another. And there's a lot of questions like that, even in the church today. Like, can someone get tattoos and do so for the Lord?

Can someone watch an R rated movie and do so for the Lord? Or drink alcohol, or smoke a cigar, or dye their hair purple, go out, dancing, use the Message translation, can they vote differently? Can they champion a specific set of human rights? Can they drive an expensive car? Can they do all that and do it for the Lord? The answer is yes. Does that mean that's always the case? Absolutely not, but it is a possibility. So we have to look at their motivation, because at the end of the day, what you do matters less than why you do it. So whatever we do, we're either doing it for the Lord or we're doing it for ourselves. That's basically what you can boil it down to. And if someone says, hey, I'm doing this for the Lord and it's not a sin, well, accept them, give thanks to God for them.

For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourself alone. If we live, we live for the Lord. If we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord for this very reason, Christ died and lived so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. Paul is basically saying, stop trying to be God to one another. That's not your role. Your role is not to be God to one another. There is one God, and you're not it. It's the Lord of the dead and the living. And guess what? It's not you. So interestingly here, in seven and eight, we got, he lives, dies, live, live, die, die, live, die, but then in nine, he flips it and says died and lived, dead in the living. Why do you think Paul didn't say, the living in the dead? Earlier in the sentence too, Christ lived and he died.

He didn't. He said death first and then life. I think is because he's modeling something of the Christian life, which brings us to point three today, which is, strong men die to themselves, to live for God's people.

STRONG MEN DIE TO THEMSELVES TO LIVE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

We have to die to ourselves, to live for God's people. The only difference between truly weak and strong men is that one relies on their own strength, and one relies on the strength of Christ. Christ's strength was on full display on the cross. We all know that. Christ died and lived so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. The strongest man ever died. So strong that he conquered death and he raised, and he ascended and he is living right now, so that the dead and the living are under his Lordship, his judgment. He went first and now we are to model our life after Christ to die to ourselves, to live for the benefit of others.

The Lordship of Jesus is the foundational truth for unity in a body of diverse opinions, because here's the Big Idea, guys, **God's church is bigger than yours**. Whatever you think the church is, God's church is bigger than that. It's bigger than yours. And God loves his church. He loves every single, unique, eclectic member in it. And God loves when we are one, as the Trinity is one. As David said in the Psalms, how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity. So here's the secret to uniting a divided church. You need to look in the mirror. This is called Man in the Mirror. You need to look in the mirror, and you need to repent on how you are judging other Christians. That's the first step. You need to repent about how you're judging other Christians. And then the next step is to start examining the underlying motivations of why you're doing what you're doing and why other Christians are doing what they're doing.

Is it to honor the Lord, or is it to honor yourself? And finally, to move forward in life, we need to die to ourselves to truly live. And God says, when we die to ourselves, we can truly live through relationship with him and loving and serving others. The easiest and one of the most ungodly things we can do is surround ourselves with like-minded church members. We do not aspire, or some people do. I would say, please do not aspire to live in an echo chamber of similar views, experiences and perspectives. It will lead you to become opinionated, closed off, intolerable and normally, incorrect. And you will craft a life around justifying yourself to condemn others.

That's one option. The other option, the better option, the hardest, and one of the most godly things we can do, is surround ourselves with a diverse group of believers, to aspire, to live in a kingdom, not an

echo chamber, with different experiences, different perspectives, different views. And this will lead us to become curious, welcoming, charitable, and normally, gracious. And we will craft our life around seeking God to love others. At the end of the day, I think this quote by St Augustine's really good, really helpful. In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, charity, our Liberty in all things, charity.

Let's pray. God, we want to be your people, first and foremost. We want to be under your reign. We want to be under your lead as our father, as our king, and we want to honor you. We want to live holy in your sight because we know that you've designed life to be the best and function the best under your Lordship.

And today we are cultural in the sense that we judge very quickly and we do not seek to understand others that are different than us, even within your church. And so we want to repent in the ways that we hold other believers with just a view of being contempt. And then also that we judged them secretly or openly. That is not the way that you've called us to be. You called us to be united. You called us to be diverse. Help us today, to realize that our actions matter less than our motivations, and you care about our hearts a lot more than what we can provide and do for you.

Help us to see that in others too, and help us to die to ourselves. It's a thing that we hear all the time, but we are called to die to ourselves. And sometimes we do that begrudgingly, but what's the other option? To live for this world? Because, it's not fulfilling. And so dying to ourselves is the most fulfilling thing we can do. To die into our own opinions and our own perspectives for your glory and for your kingdom, is the most fulfilling thing we can do, and help us to do that so that we can then live for others, to serve others, specifically, the people that you love and adore. Help them have fruitful conversations. Thank you for this time. In your name, we pray, Jesus. Amen. Thanks, guys.