

Title: Grapes Are Really Messy
Text: Romans 14:5-12
Theme: What do I really love more?
Series: Romans 13-15, Summer 2020
Prop Stmtnt: Loving others more than being “right”

Read Text:

We breathe the air of individualism, materialism and narcissism. When I say that we breathe the air of individualism I mean that our world constantly assaults us with the message of: “It’s all up to me. I can do this. I don’t need you. You get in my way. You slow me down. You make my life complicated.” When I say that we breathe the air of materialism I mean that our world constantly assaults us with the message that money and things provide ultimate security and identity. If I have enough money (whatever that is) then I will be safe from all harm. If I have the right things, then people will respect me, envy me, and want to be with me and if people respect me, envy me and want to be with me, then that means that I really am somebody. When I say that we breathe the air of narcissism I mean that our world tells us that life is all about us. In fact, life is one big selfie. It’s all about being seen, being known, making a splash, being heard.

The aroma of individualism, materialism and narcissism appears to smell sweet because it appeals to us. We like that and we want a Jesus, a Christianity that will confirm that, so that we feel affirmed in pursuing that. But the real Jesus and genuine Christianity doesn’t do that.

Genuine Christianity (that is, the way we live as believers in relationship to one another – the church, and to the world – our mission field) is based on the gospel. The gospel is the good news about the fact that Jesus came to this world as the Son of God who died on a cross as a sacrifice in order to pay for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him. Every person who trusts in Jesus, follows Jesus. Following Jesus is described in Romans 12.1-2 as a “living sacrifice.” That seems like an oxymoron. How do you live when you die? When you understand the Christian life, you learn that it is the only way you can really live. Living as a sacrifice is what marks our lives. But, what does that mean? It means that we die and keep dying to individualism, materialism and narcissism. We do not accept the lie that it’s all up to me, that we have to have the envy and respect of others or that it’s all about me. We accept the truth that surrender, humility and suffering are part of the God-ordained path for growing his kids into looking like Jesus. We choose to surrender our agenda to Christ. We choose to prefer others and consider their needs more important than our own. We choose to not be worried about being recognized or getting credit. We choose to suffer. We choose to die to ourselves. We live with a posture of loving others more than ourselves. We owe them a debt of love. And when we are faced with the ongoing reality of the fact that none of us is perfect at this, we lean upon the Lord and ask for grace to help us live anew as a sacrifice.

Last week Chad pointed out our responsibility to enlarge our circles so that we are engaging with people who do not share our same opinions on non-essential issues. How have you accepted the weak, this week? How have you attempted to enlarge your circle with people who have different views than you do on matters where there can be some legitimate disagreement? And right now, there are plenty of issues floating around. For example,

Some of you likely have some opinions about Covid, its origin, our government and society's response to it, the CDC, state guidelines and directives that are not shared by everyone in the church. Some of you likely have some opinions about social justice that are not shared by everyone in the church. Some of you likely have some opinions about the President and the Governor that are not shared by everyone in the church. Some of you likely have some opinions about how the leadership of this church has responded to all things related to Covid and I know that your views are not shared by everyone in leadership. The reason I know that is because the elders have at times not been agreement on what we should do and when we should do it. How do we as one body of believers deal with issues that threaten our unity? Realize that there are two categories and know which category is in view.

There are some disagreements that are worth fighting over and dividing over. True unity is not based on sentimentalism, but on truth. If there is disagreement about a foundational issue like the inerrancy of Scripture, the Trinity, the atonement, the humanity and deity of Christ, justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then we will kindly, lovingly but convictionally go to the mat over these. These are gospel issues. With all those who are in agreement with the gospel, which means we are in agreement with these core doctrines, we view them as being in the gospel house. Now, in this house there are a number of rooms.

In some cases, the rooms exist because we are not in agreement on matters of polity. For example, I have a friend who believes that women can be pastors and elders. He is my friend and my brother in Christ. I care for him and his church and pray for him. But, I could not pastor his church and he could not pastor here. We can work together on some community initiatives and we have. I could not be a member of his church because I am not in agreement with their practice. Now, he is in the gospel house, but in a different room. He is not my enemy, but we both recognize that we are in different rooms. Now, I do not want the walls that separate us to be any higher than they need to be. And I want to shake hands over those walls as often as possible.

But, this text is dealing with something that does not demand even the division of another room in the house. These are disputable issues that are neither gospel issues, nor are they ones that we should divide over. Here we are dealing with issues that threaten the unity of a local congregation, but shouldn't. In fact, they will only threaten the unity of a church, if that church forgets the gospel. What is the issue?

One person esteems one day as better than another and another person esteems all days alike. Neither position is the official position of the church. There is no position of the church on this, nor should there be. There is supposed to be room in the church for both. And when I mean room, I do not mean that you simply tolerate the person who holds to a different view than you, but love them, esteem them, care for them and encourage them.

What is the most important issue in verses 5 and 6? It is not that there is agreement on the issue. It is not that the church come up with an official position on this. The most important issues is that you provide room in your heart for the brother or sister who has a different view than you do on a matter that does not ultimately matter.

I. **Think and think carefully!** (5)

Paul establishes the situation which was going on in the church. Jordan thinks that one day of the week should be honored as being different, while Jeremy thinks that all days are to be honored because for the Christian, every day is holy. Then at the end of v.5, we have this admonition: Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. That is so good for us, because when it comes to disputable matters, we are all prone to be influenced by what others think because we want them to think well of us. So, if there is someone that you like and respect who holds to the special day view then you may be inclined to hold that view because you like them and you want them to like you. That's not good enough. You need to be convinced in your own mind of the rightness of your position. So, let's take the various perspectives on Covid and facemasks.

A. **Are you fully convinced in the rightness of your position?**

What I find interesting in this text is the fact that "one person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike." There are two people who disagree about this. This does not mean that everyone in the church has an opinion about it. Some may not care and see no reason to.

Again, some people may be a little more wound up about all things Covid than others are. What you think about Covid is not an eternal matter, but what you think about Jesus is. So, to those of you who have a very strong opinions about Covid, are you fully convinced in the rightness of your position? In order to be fully convinced, there are some other questions that you need to answer, such as:

B. **What do you base that on?**

C. **Is it possible that you are misinformed?**

D. **Is it possible that you are not completely informed?**

E. **Does someone have an experience that can speak to this?**

Do you know everything there is to know about Covid, social justice, the president and governor? Of course not. Let's say that there is a member of our church who is white and was, as a child, adopted and raised by a black man. Do you think that this member of our church has some perspectives that others do not have? Absolutely! Let's say that there is a member of our church who is black whose dad is a police officer. Do you think this member has some perspectives that others do not have? Absolutely!

Do you see the benefit of making certain that you have a well thought out, that is an informed position on matters that are important to you? We tend to engage on matters that matter to us, but if we haven't thought out our position, then we are really tempted to engage in sinful accusations and mud-slinging instead of having a reasonable and profitable conversation.

II. **Think and think carefully about others!** (6-7)

Your brother and sister are infinitely more important than you convincing the world that you are right on an issue. *“Oh I saw that one coming! I could’ve told that was going to happen.”* And maybe you could and maybe you were right in your assessment of the situation, but if you use your rightness as a club to crush people, then you are actually in the wrong. Isn’t that what 1 Corinthians 13.2 says? *“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries (conspiracies) and all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing.”* We are to be people of truth and love. Truth without love is ugly. Love without truth is a train wreck. We are called to embrace both. So, if we are going to think carefully about one another, we need to ask this question:

A. Do you acknowledge the conscience of your brother/sister? (6)

The one who esteems one day as being more important than the others does so sincerely to the Lord. Being sincere to the Lord is what matters. The one who esteems all days as being important does so sincerely to the Lord. Again, being sincere to the Lord is what matters. Both of these are believers. They are in Christ. They are also both sincere in their devotion to the Lord, but they hold to a different view on a non-gospel issue. So, acknowledge the fact that your brother or sister has a conscience and be tender toward that. If you do not believe that one day of the week is really special and Jordan does, and you say, “Jordan, you’re an idiot. Stop being bound by the law. That’s crazy.” What are you doing? You are mocking Jordan’s sincerity. What if Jordan accuses Jeremy of being sinful, or undevoted? He is doing the same. This is what Paul is pointing out. Both Jordan and Jeremy need to consider the conscience of the other and when they discuss this issue, if they ever need to, they do it with affection and encouragement for the other. Please do not mock, even in your heart, the views of others on disputable matters that you are not in agreement with.

Do you possess the ability to measure the quality and quantity of faith in the heart of another believer? The answer of course is No. Only God knows that. So, consider the following statements in view of that:

“This facemask stuff is a joke. People need to start trusting God and stop living in fear.”

What does a statement like that assume? It assumes that there is no benefit from wearing a facemask and that anyone who does wear one is not trusting God and is being unspiritual. Are there people who wear facemasks who do not trust in God and live in fear? Perhaps. Has God given you the ability to be able to look into the heart of every person who wears a facemask so that you can determine conclusively that they are not trusting God? No. So, if someone makes a statement like this, is this encouraging and helpful? Are you being mindful of the conscience of your brother or sister? What about this statement?

“People who refuse to wear facemasks are only thinking of themselves and should be shamed.”

What does a statement like that assume? It assumes that people who do not have a facemask on are selfish and ignorant. Are there people who refuse to wear a facemask because they really don’t care about others? Perhaps. But again, are there people who forgot their mask, lost their mask,

have a legitimate reason why they don't have one on? Of course. But, if you assign judgement You are making a judgement that you do not have the insight to make, nor the authority to give and the result is that harms others and creates even more distance.

In v.6 both people are honoring the Lord. There is a lot to be unified about. And that unity in the gospel and that unity in seeking to honor the Lord informs us as to how we talk to one another about these minor areas where there are different opinions. Christianity flies in the face of our sense of rugged individualism. Look at v.7

B. Do you acknowledge the relationship you have with your brother/sister? (7)

“This is driving me crazy. I can just leave. Who needs church anyway, people are such a bother.” What does this verse say to that? I am in a relationship with other believers. I am not an island. My life affects others and their lives affect mine. That is not only a reality, that is a good thing. We need each other way more than we realize. We do not learn too much from ourselves and we do not learn too much from people who always agree with us. If we are never with other people, then we never learn how selfish we tend to be. If we never listen to others, we never learn how ignorant we are. If we never have to make room for others and prefer others and love others, then our hearts will not only be small, they will shrivel. God SO loved the world that he gave his Son! These past few months have not been good. As a church I would not say that we are divided. I am grateful for that. I would say that we have become in some cases, distant. This is part of my burden in preaching this series. In the best of times, differences come up and challenge our unity. When we are distant from one another, those differences become larger than life (reality) and can create way more problems than they should and I want us to be on guard. I do not want the distance of this pandemic to be the occasion for unnecessary or sinful division.

C. Do you acknowledge the relationship that we all have in the Lord? (8-9)

Do you realize that no matter what (in life and death) you are the Lord's? Dead or alive, we are the Lord's. Christ died and rose again that we might be his forever and so, we are. WE are the Lord's, forever. You realize what that means, don't you? We will never be rid of each other. Therefore, we can never treat each other as being disposable. If you hold to a different view than I do on a disputable issue, I need to learn to live well with you in view of that, even if I continue to hold to my view.

III. Think and think carefully about the account you will give. (10-12)

We will all stand before God and give an account. That frees you from the burden of trying to make someone believe exactly as you on these disputable issues. It is ultimately between them and the Lord. That provides a lot of freedom. But, it is sobering because you will need to be ready to explain your views, and your treatment of others. Now, I don't know exactly how all of that will work out. But, if I am reading this text correctly, it makes me take a little more seriously my responsibility to think carefully, humbly, and obviously biblically about things. I am the Lord's. We are the Lord's. And that is what really matters.

Every congregation has a choice. We can be a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes. Marbles only affect each other when they happen to collide in the bag. Grapes, on the other hand, start to lose their skins and over time become part of a whole. Marbles are clean. Grapes are messy. But you can't make wine with marbles.