

Sermon- Taking A Self-Inventory

Scripture- Romans 14:1-12, CTW- Ps 150

Hymns- 81, 137, 669

Theme- For all Christians, it is important to take a self-inventory in order to find out what our strengths and weaknesses are. Whenever in doubt, we should ask: "Can I do that without sinning?", and: "Can I influence others for good rather than being influenced by them to do evil?"

I. Introduction:

A. In Romans 14, Paul deals with an issue about food and debates that stem from Christian Freedom. When discussing this matter, Paul points us to our identity in Christ, and how that impacts this issue and these debates.

How we see and define ourselves is one of the most important things in our lives. Our perception of ourselves can affect a variety of things. It can impact how we think about ourselves. It also impacts how we can feel about ourselves.

If you think you are important, you will feel important. On the other hand, if you feel that you are useless, you will feel useless and bad about yourself. Our self-perception can affect our thoughts, which in turn, can affect our feelings.

Our perception of ourselves also can impact how we interact with each other too. For example, if you think highly of yourself, you might begin to think that you might be better than others, and then treat them accordingly because of that.

Paul picks up on these truths in Romans 14.

B. It helps to know something about the history of the church in Rome and the new Christians there.

The Christians in Rome were having problems with how they interacted with each other, and Paul puts his finger on why that

is. He knows the solution to the problems and quarrels: it is their identity in Christ.

The Romans have not focused on that. But before we can talk about the solution, we need to know what exactly is the problem.

II. What is the issue?

A. The Christians in Rome were a diverse group of believers, much like we are today. These Roman congregations were made up of two entirely different groups of people. They consisted of Jewish converts who grew up with the Law, and traditions of the Old Testament. They also consisted of Gentiles, non-Jews.

The ethnic ratio of these churches is unknown but it is thought that there were more Gentiles since the Jews had been expelled from Rome just a few years prior to the writing of Romans.

But when you have Jewish converts with Gentile ones, a common question and problem always arises: what do you do with the Old Testament food laws and feast days?

The Jewish converts grew up with those traditions and rules while the Gentiles did not.

The Old Testament had prescribed the dos and don'ts for food in places like **Leviticus 11** and **Deuteronomy 14**. In those chapters, we see what is okay for the Israelites to eat, and what is not okay for them to eat.

For instance, the people were not allowed to eat unclean animals like camel, eagles, reptiles, certain insects, mice, and rabbits. Not too bad so far, right?

But this list also included other foods like shrimp, lobster, oysters, and crab. They could not eat pork either. So no sausage, ham, pork chops, pepperoni, or America's current favorite food, bacon!

They also could not eat blood, so no medium to rare steaks. They could eat clean animals like fish, oxen, sheep, goats, cows, and venison though. Dave Shover would be 100% in favor of that!

Along with this, the Old Testament also prescribed special feasts and days for the people to follow and observe as well.

With the coming of Jesus, we have a wrench thrown into all of these things.

Colossians 2:16-17 says, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

This is like a long distance couple cherishing a photo of each other while they are apart. Once they are married and together, they don't devote the same attention and time to that photo. Why is that? It is because they have the person. Why focus on the photo?

B. Jesus fulfills these laws and feasts. He has declared all foods to be clean. The laws and festivals pointed to Him and find their fulfillment in Him. Why have the photo, when you have the person?

All believers are free from the food restrictions of the Old Testament, and do not need to do the festivals and feasts. On the other hand, they are also free to continue to abide by them as well.

In the Christian congregations at Rome, some believers still kept these things. Others did not. The "weak," those who don't realize or understand their full freedom in Jesus, still continued to abide by these things.

These believers were cautious with these food laws, and just ate vegetables to avoid the difficulty of eating unclean food. They still

kept certain days and feasts. But can you blame them from a human standpoint?

If you were a Jew, you kept those things your whole life, and you avoided certain foods altogether. Think about how challenging it would be to eat some of those forbidden foods, or to not celebrate some of those holidays!

The “strong” Christians, those who understood their freedom in Jesus, choose to refrain from these things. They ate what they wanted and held that all days were the same.

C. As you could imagine, with two completely different views on this issue, problems arose, and they did. This led to quarreling and fights Paul says.

It led the ones who ate everything to despise the ones who didn't. The ones who didn't eat passed judgment on those who did. You can almost picture Paul like a mom with fighting children who yells out: “Stop!”

As Christians, we can have quarrels and fights over similar things even though we are just Gentiles. We can look down and despise others in matters that we have Christian freedom in.

At a recent Christian conference in Fort Wayne, Indiana, a professor talked about a teaching experience he had before his presentation. This presenter was of the Reformed background and was also a world class Martin Luther scholar.

Since he was an expert, he was invited to teach a class on Luther at another Seminary, which he did. Now every good speaker knows that you need to get your audience's attention right from the get-go.

To start the class off, he used a humorous Luther quote about beer. (Did you know that Luther was an expert brew-meister?)

Unfortunately, it did not go over well with his audience, who were of a background that refrained from drinking. The professor said

they immediately tuned away from him at that moment, and he faced an uphill battle. The issue of having a drink, or even just mentioning it, divided the audience, and they stayed that way.

But choosing to drink or not drink is not the only issue that Christians might have divisions with. We can see it with the music we listen to.

Some people only listen to Christian songs while others are fine with things they hear on the radio. In a season like Lent, we might see some people give up something or fast, while others don't.

We might see it with what we watch on TV or read. I remember some years ago that reading something like Harry Potter, a book about wizards, could lead to some arguments. We can even see it with our worship preferences.

We have Christian freedom in all of these matters and more, but our opinions can create conflicts. We might judge others, think less of them, or argue with them if their choices don't align with ours on these issues.

We aren't so different from these Roman Christians, are we? Our fights aren't about food but they have the same kind of issues behind them.

III. Look at How Paul Resolved the Issue at Rome.

Paul pointed them to their identity in Jesus. In verses 7-9 he writes: "For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

A. Paul says it is not about you or who you are, but rather, WHOSE, you are. We are Christ's, purchased and won with His blood. We belong to the One Who fulfilled the Old

Testaments Laws and restrictions. Our very lives are to point to Him and the salvation that He brings, and gives.

The apostle then tells them that this identity has implications for their situation. He says, "Who are you to pass judgment in terms of Christian freedom?"

In verse four, he says, "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand."

Paul is saying that the Roman Christians are free and forgiven in Christ. They are not fighting over what is right and wrong, they are fighting on an issue that is debatable.

They are free in regard to these issues but not free to judge His other servants in regard to these issues. Paul points out that they are doing these things to honor Jesus, not to gain salvation or righteousness.

B. Then what is the solution for our day? It is the same. Like with the Romans, it is not who you are that matters, but whose you are that does.

That is what we need to remember when we have these issues. We are Christ's, and we are made His own through faith and baptism.

Since we really belong to Jesus and not to ourselves we have **kingdom value**. Why? As Paul says, our Lord laid down His life for us! He died for us! If that doesn't scream you are precious and valuable to God, what would?

This identity in Christ effects our self-worth because in Christ, we have it! He loves and cares for us not because of anything we have done, but because of what **He has done**.

This identity also changes how we see ourselves, for we are not defined by our failure, wrongs, short comings, or

accomplishments. Rather, we should always **see ourselves in Christ and in His grace that covers all these things.**

This identity in Christ, once we identify and get aligned with it, should change how we interact with others.

We must see our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ as forgiven, having value, worth, and importance. This view leads us to not passing judgment in terms of Christian freedom because they are Christ's, and we should not spend our time judging one another in these matters.

Remember: It is not about who you are, or who they are, but **WHOSE** you are. We are all children of the king!

AMEN? Let Us Pray...