

97-06-01a

For our scripture reading this morning, you'll turn with me to Psalm 101. Psalm 101. This, of course, numerically is adjacent to Psalm 100, which is a psalm that my mother had us memorize in our youth.

It's a wonderful song of praise and it has the virtue of being short and fairly easy to memorize. But this is Psalm 101. This is also a psalm of David, and in the New King James it is labeled as a vow for a holy life.

But as we look at the verses in this psalm this morning, we'll see that they bear directly on what we will be studying in Romans chapter 14, which has to do with our example. What exactly do we make of the scriptures when they talk about an example? We tend to label this as our witness or our function of salt and light in the earth. What exactly is our calling and our responsibility in the area of example? To what extent should we observe one another? Obviously, for there to be an example, somebody is observing someone else, and yet we also have scriptural teaching that talks about judging and refraining from that activity.

So how do we balance these concepts? That's the topic of our study this morning in Romans 14. We find wisdom in the words of David in Psalm 101. I will sing of mercy and justice.

To you, O Lord, I will sing praises. I will behave wisely in a perfect way. O when will you come to me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

I will set nothing wicked before my eyes. I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not cling to me.

A perverse heart shall depart from me. I will not know wickedness. Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy.

The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure. My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He who walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me.

He who works deceit shall not dwell within my house. He who tells lies shall not continue in my presence. Early I will destroy all the wicked of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord.

Now this seems awfully harsh and judgmental on David's part, doesn't it? That if there's someone that doesn't walk in a perfect way, someone who slanders or who has a haughty look and a proud heart, will be not endured, will not be tolerated, and ultimately will be destroyed. But we find here the expression of an attitude, a decision about association, a decision about toleration, a decision about separation. And you will see in this psalm also overtones that apply to David's greater son,

Jesus Christ, especially toward the end of the psalm when he says, I will destroy all the wicked out of the land, that I may cut off all the evildoers from the city of the Lord.

Now David as king did not go house to house on a search of the haughty and the slanderers and execute them to purge them out of the land, did he? But this is a foreshadowing of what Jesus Christ will do when he establishes his kingdom and sits on the throne of his father David at the beginning of the millennial kingdom. And of course, when you read the passages that discuss that future event, God promised Israel as a part of his new covenant with Israel and with Judah, that he would take away their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh, that they would be obedient and would have the attitudes that are described as positive in this psalm. And David senses the need for that and senses the importance within his own household.

Now he can't do this throughout the land as a human king, but he can do it in his household. And so this is his policy within his home regarding his servants, regarding his employees, his associates within the royal household. He has set as a policy and as a priority, first of all, adhering to this standard himself.

And that's what he says in verse two, I will behave wisely in a perfect way. And then in the third part of that verse, he says, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. And so the first item of business is one's own example, one's own heart and thought patterns.

And in order to pursue that goal, which of course is a process and not an instantaneous action, David sets that as a goal for himself. And then he decides with whom he will associate, with whom he will have relationship, whether as a master to servant or whatever it may be. And so he says, I will set nothing wicked before my eyes.

I hate the work of those who fall away. It shall not cling to me. So David, in order to do this, is going to have to discern, isn't he? He's going to have to evaluate those around him and decide, is this a person with whom my association is good and healthy and up-building, or is this a person that if I associate with them, this is going to lead me away from my goal, which is to walk in a way that pleases God.

And so right away we see that in David's mind, he has to look around and decide that there are some that he needs to separate from. Well, what is the basis of that separation? We're going to see this morning in Romans 14 that we have to know where that line is and we have to know what the basis of it is, otherwise we can make very huge mistakes. We can hurt ourselves and hurt others by failing to understand these principles.

So turn now to Romans 14 where we resume our study of this very full letter. It is probably one of the most theological, one of the most doctrinal, concentrated collections of teaching that we have anywhere in the Bible. And we have spent something over a year now studying this letter, which was probably written in the space of a day or two and sent to the church at Rome nearly 2,000 years ago.

And we remind ourselves as always when we come to Romans that this is a letter. It is a connected series of thoughts that have a goal. Paul had a reason for writing this letter.

And we've seen throughout our study that the guiding, overriding principle, the purpose in this letter is to teach believers, in this case the believers at Rome, what it is to walk worthy, what it is to please God, what is our responsibility and our calling after salvation. The reason that he was prompted to write this letter is that believers in Rome in particular, as well as in the region of Galatia and other places in the early days of the church, had wrong ideas about this. They had a wrong, there were people who were teaching this wrong, who were perpetuating a wrong idea of how to please God as a believer.

In this particular case, people said, well, to be pleasing to God you need to follow the rituals that we have in the Old Testament Scriptures. And this is an understandable error because that's the only Bible they had. There were no New Testament books in existence at the time that Paul wrote this letter.

They didn't have the Gospels in writing. They didn't have the book of Acts. They didn't have Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Paul's letters were just beginning to circulate. Some of them had not yet been written. John's Revelation had not yet been written.

So the only Bible they had was the Old Testament. And so people said, well, we've been Israelites, we've been Jews, and we've known about God. We have been entrusted with the oracles of God.

We're the people of God. We're the custodians of the glory and the communications from God. And we don't think that has changed.

And so we still need to go back to these things that God gave us 1,400 years ago and use those to guide our lives. Well, Paul and the other apostles were given the responsibility of teaching people that there had been a change. God was no longer using the ritual system as the means of calling people to holiness.

There was a higher and greater call. And along with that call came higher and greater resources from God. Every believer in this age has the presence and the power of God the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfill this higher and greater call.

And that was not true in the Old Testament age. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit were only granted in unusual cases. People who built the tabernacle, or prophets, or judges, or men of battle.

It was a fairly uncommon thing. And God was making a different point and emphasizing different

principles in the Old Testament. But people had trouble making that transition.

And many people were comfortable establishing their righteousness and establishing their goodness before God and before other people by what they did. And there was this nice system of doing that would establish you as a righteous person. I go to synagogue.

I offer sacrifices. I keep the feasts. When a feast day comes along, I do whatever the ritual is.

There are times I'll put sackcloth and ashes on my head and I do all of these actions that show me to be a knowledgeable and an observant Jew. Well, when the Gentiles started coming in, these people who were not Jewish and didn't know or care anything about these rituals, many of which had been abused in the nation of Israel and had come to be viewed as a means of righteousness rather than an expression of righteousness, the Jews tried to put this on the Gentiles who came into the church. And they said, well, that's fine.

Jesus Christ is the Messiah and we understand He's the Son of God. He's died on the cross and saved us and so forth. But that doesn't change the way you should live your life.

I mean, you can acknowledge Christ, but you still need to keep the law. You Gentile men, when you come into the church, you need to go down there to the synagogue and get circumcised. And you need to start.

We've got a feast here called Passover. We've got a feast called the New Moon. And we've got a feast called Pentecost.

And we've got a feast called Firstfruits. And we've got the Feast of Booths. And they said, hey, this is religion.

This is what you need to be doing. And they tried to get these Gentile, non-Jewish converts to keep these actions and say, if you do these things, you will be righteous. Well, this missed the point because it isn't what we do that makes us righteous.

It's what God does to us on the inside. And that's what we have seen in these first 13 chapters of Romans. And Paul has made this point, and he's swimming against the tide.

He's teaching into the teeth of hundreds of years of wrongheaded thinking among Israelites. Even in the Old Testament, when the law was legitimate and they were under the law, they misunderstood it and misused it. They said, you know, if I just offer the sacrifices and keep the feasts, I'll be righteous.

And Jesus came and pointed out to them. The prophets in the Old Testament came and pointed out to them, don't you see that it's not the blood of goats and bulls that God is really looking for. It is what's going on in your heart.

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? The prophets came and told Israel, you're missing the point. It isn't what you do, it's who you are. And only God has the power to change you on the inside.

Jesus came with that same message. And the Pharisees and Sadducees were incensed because it hit them in the ego. They had established their identity and their standing in their community based on their prayers on the street corners and their big bags that were offered of money and so forth at the temple.

And they said, you know, I'm righteous. Look at this. I gave a lot here.

I'm humbling myself by, you know, it's an odd thing to take pride in your humility, but that's what they did. They would put sackcloth and ashes on and go through these prayers and they would always make sure that they were seen because they felt like, well, you know, this is righteousness and people will realize that I'm observant and so on. And they missed the point that righteousness comes through faith.

It always has. Paul made that point here in Romans. He said, you claim Abraham as your father.

You take great pride in being Israelite and being descendants of Abraham. Look at Abraham. When did God declare him righteous? When he did a righteous deed or when he trusted God.

God came to Abraham and made him a promise. You're going to have a son and your descendants are going to be as numerous as the sands in the sea. And when Abraham believed God, the book of Genesis says, God declared Abraham righteous because Abraham trusted God for that promise.

Even though he was old and even though Sarah was pushing a hundred, Abraham said, if God says that I'm going to have a son, I'm going to have a son and I'll wait for that promise. And later on, that faith was borne out in what Abraham did when God said, Abraham, take your son Isaac and go up to the top of the mountain and slit his throat like a bull or a goat and sacrifice him. And we think, my goodness, what kind of God would ask you to go sacrifice your son? But the point of that command from God was to demonstrate Abraham's faith.

If Abraham had gone up there and slit Isaac's throat out of some weird motivation like the pagans did, there's a record in Kings where a pagan king sacrificed his son on the city wall because the Israelites were coming to conquer his town. And he took his firstborn son and killed him and burned him on the city wall. And the Israelites were so horrified, they turned around and left.

And the king actually accomplished his objective. But do you think that God was pleased with the action of that king? No, because his motivation was completely wrong. When Abraham took Isaac up the mountain, it was an expression of faith, a very high and great expression of faith.

And Abraham didn't understand all the ramifications. He didn't understand that in doing this, he was picturing God the Father and willingness to sacrifice his son on behalf of all of us. He didn't understand that he didn't know ahead of time that God was going to stop his upraised hand with the knife at the last possible moment.

What Abraham understood was that God had made a promise and that the promises of God were unshakable and were guaranteed by the character of God Himself. And Abraham put his faith in that. And he said, I don't understand all of this, but I know my God and I know that He's faithful.

He has said that in Isaac my seed will be called. And that means that whatever happens on this mountaintop, Isaac is going to be my heir. Isaac is going to have children.

At this time, Isaac doesn't have any children yet. But God had promised, in Isaac shall thy descendants be called. They're all going to come through Isaac.

So Abraham figured, even if I slit Isaac's throat, God must be going to bring him back to life because God has promised. And the promise of God was more real to Abraham than the circumstance of this potential sacrifice. And that faith is what pleased God.

And Abraham didn't actually have to go through that action because God was pleased with Abraham's faith. And God provided the ram caught by its horns in the thicket. And God provided a substitute for Isaac.

And it's such a beautiful picture. Because of Abraham's faith, God has been able to use that as a picture of Himself and His love for His Son and His willingness to sacrifice His Son and the idea of substitution, that Christ is our substitute so that we don't have to pay the penalty for our sins. But that was a result of faith.

And Paul makes that point in this book that God is pleased when we trust Him. What we do when it is an expression of that faith counts. But you can do the very same action and do it hundreds of times and it's meaningless if it isn't motivated by faith.

Now, we've come through, and that's the context when we arrive here at chapter 14 of Romans. Paul has just given exhortation in chapter 13 to love one another. Remember back in verse 8? Do not owe anyone anything except to love one another.

He says don't have an unfulfilled obligation. This doesn't mean that you can't take out a loan or that you can't buy a house via a mortgage and then technically you owe the bank. But this means if you're not going to owe anyone anything, it means you're not behind on your payments.

You're not unfaithful in the agreement that you have made with someone else. The bank is happy and they don't consider you to owe them anything in this sense if your payments are on time. The government is happy if when your taxes accumulate, you pay them on time.

If we're late or if we cheat on our taxes, God is not pleased because we owe someone something and we have not discharged that obligation. If we fall behind in payments on time, God is not pleased because we're not to owe someone something that we have agreed to and that they have agreed to. But there's one debt that we never fully discharge.

There's one debt that we can never stand back and say, okay, that's all done. And that's the obligation to love one another. We always have that obligation and it should always be in the forefront of our mind.

And when we fail that, it's just as bad as any of these other obligations that we fail to fulfill. Paul says all of the other commandments in verse 9, not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, not to bear false witness, not to covet, and any other commandment, they are all summed up in this saying, namely, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. And if you think about it, the violation of any of these other commandments, what have you done when you murder someone? What have you done when you commit adultery and cause someone to break a promise or you yourself break a promise that you've made to your spouse for fidelity and for dedication and making that person first? What have you done? You've violated love.

It's impossible to break that kind of promise. It's impossible to take away all of someone's options by murdering them without first having fallen away from love. And adultery and many of the other things that happen to marriages are not the cause of a marriage breaking up.

They are a symptom and an expression of something that has already happened. You cannot be unfaithful, either mentally or physically, if you haven't first abandoned your love and your commitment to someone else. And so if that love is maintained and if that love is intact, none of these other things are ever going to happen.

And so Paul argues from what's on the inside. If your heart is right and if your attitudes are right, you have fulfilled all these commandments already because you're never going to break them if you are transformed on the inside. And of course, our nature is fallen and evil and powerless over sin.

But the new nature that God creates in us through His Word and through His Spirit does have power and does have the ability to control and subdue these bad impulses. And that's important because that's an issue in chapter 14. So he's been talking about love.

And in verse 10 of chapter 13, he says, Love does no harm to a neighbor. If we harm someone, whether it's emotionally or mentally, if we harm them by talking about them and damaging their reputation, if we undermine them in the eyes of someone else, that's not love. And that's just as big a violation of God's standards as going out and committing any of these other actions.

It's not love. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

And he shows that the law is the record and an explanation and a detailed example of what love is. But in the same way that you can't go through the motions of love, you can say, Well, I'm going to make a list of ten things that describe a loving son, or a loving husband, or a loving brother, or a loving parent. I'm going to make a list of these ten things.

Well, they remember birthdays. They send flowers on the anniversary. They pick up their dirty socks and put them in the hamper.

Whatever it might be, you could list ten things that are an example of what a loving person would do. Well, if you hand that list to someone who's married to someone that they don't love, and you say, Look, do these ten things. This is the description of a loving partner in a relationship.

Well, do you think that by doing those ten things, suddenly love has bloomed and sprung up and the relationship has renewed? We know that that's silly, don't we? You can't mimic someone and become a genuine lover. Love has to start on the inside, and it's going to express itself in those ways and perhaps in dozens of others. And many relationships are unique, and the way that that love is expressed differs from one relationship to another.

And you can't look at one relationship and say, Well, see the way love is expressed here? If you're not doing that, you're not loving. The thing that counts is whether or not that love is there. And without that love, it doesn't matter what you do.

People have an instinct and know when they are loved and when they're not, and you can't counterfeit that. God knows when we love Him and when we don't, and there's no way we can counterfeit. We can't say, Well, but look at what I did.

It doesn't wash. Love fulfills the law, because love means that that thing exists on the inside that counts, the inner transformation, the genuine attitude that prioritizes a person. The genuine attitude that prioritizes God.

When that is there, it is the means of expressing, or the things that we do is a means of expressing what's on the inside. By the same token, it does not always mean that when we fail in an expression that the love is not there. Let me ask you this question, and obviously this is a rhetorical question, and we should ask ourselves this question frequently.

Do we love God? Do you as a believer, do I as a believer, love God? Do I appreciate what Jesus Christ did on the cross? We'll assume that the answer to that is yes, we do. We love God. We appreciate Jesus Christ.

Well, what about sin? Well, think back to a fairly recent sin. Obviously, if you sin, you have sinned against God. No matter what it is, it's a sin against God.

It's a failure to live up to God's expectations, and it flies in the face of everything that God has

done for us. It flies in the face of His grace. Now, does the fact that we sin mean that we don't love God anymore? Not really.

What it means is that human beings are inconsistent. We are not true to our priorities. We're not true to our loves.

We're not true. We're inconsistent. And our goal as believers is to move from inconsistency to consistency, to live in the light of what we are on the inside.

And it's a struggle, and it's a process, and it doesn't happen overnight. But the fact that we sin doesn't mean that we've lost our love for God. If we establish a pattern of sin, and if we don't worry about what God thinks, if we're content with an external pattern of behavior that seems to satisfy those around us, and we don't really stop and worry about what God thinks, or care about God, or go to God and acknowledge our sin, and strive to walk in the light and not in darkness, now you can say something about what has happened to that love on the inside.

By the same token, when we fail with regard to one another, it doesn't necessarily mean that that love or that that commitment is not there. It means that we're inconsistent and that we fail, and we're in the process of trying to be consistent and be conformed. And there are people who are in that process all around us.

In fact, all of us are in that process to one extent or another. So Paul talks about this, and he says that we are to love, that we are to walk properly. And in verse 14, where we finished up last time, he says, Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill its desires.

This is the task that we're engaged in, is to cut off the avenues of expression for our selfishness, to cut off avenues of expression for growth and for flourishing of our fallen nature. We're in the process of whittling away at that, cutting off its options and putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, taking away the places where the flesh can fulfill its desires, and that's our selfishness and our pride and so forth. So now he's going to continue that in chapter 14, and he says, Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not two disputes over doubtful things.

For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

He who observes the day observes it to the Lord. He who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks.

He who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.

Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lives again, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. And here's the summary of this section in verse 10.

Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God. If your English there says Christ, actually in this passage it is the judgment seat of God. We have the judgment seat of Christ in the parallel passage over in 1 Corinthians 3. This is the judgment seat of God.

And he'll continue that thought. But here's the idea. He says in chapter 14 verse 1, Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

So right away we have to decide and ask ourselves, well, what's the difference between a doubtful thing and an undoubtful thing? Because we've seen plenty of passages. Think about David in Psalm 101. There are people that are not of a perfect heart and they don't walk in an upright way.

And I'm going to purge them out of the household. I'm going to purge them out of the land. I'm going to purify the holy city and get rid of these people.

And yet here Paul says receive those who don't understand everything and aren't aware of the fact that it doesn't matter what you eat and so forth. He says receive them. Well, so now we have a judgment call to make, don't we? We have to decide, well, is this a person that needs to be purged out or is this a person that I'm going to tolerate and encourage and I'm going to accept them? This word here that says receive, this is the standard word for receive in Greek which is lambano, L-A-M-B-A-N-O.

And then it's got a prefix on it, pros, P-R-O-S. So this is pros lambano. And it means to receive and the word pros means face to face.

Lambano has a lot of prefixes. There's paralambano which means to receive alongside. This is pros lambano and it means to accept, to receive and look at someone face to face and not purge them out, not separate from them and say I don't want to look at you, I don't want to have you in the periphery.

It means to receive them, to accept them. And he says specifically this is one who is weak in faith but not to disputes over doubtful things. And this kind of reminds me, have you ever wondered what to do when Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon or some other cult type person comes to your door and knocks on it? Some people say, you know, I'm not going to pros lambano you.

Get thee hence, I don't want to talk about this perverse Third Testament and Jesus isn't really God and all these other strange things these cults have adopted as their beliefs. Other people say, well here's an opportunity to evangelize. Oh yes, come right in.

Some people really prepare themselves up and just almost lay a trap for these folks and when they come it's like I'm ready for you and I've got my list of scriptures that refute all of your teachings. This is that sort of, I mean that's kind of an absurd example but this is the type of decision that believers make. Sometimes we accept someone and try to teach them the truth.

Other times we say, hoo, anathema, get thee behind me, and we separate. We've heard that there's a doctrine of separation. There's a time to put distance between ourselves and another believer.

Well, this passage addresses that decision, that judgment call that we make. What is the basis for deciding whether it's an occasion to accept and to be tolerant and in some cases even to join someone in their behavior? We're going to go to the passage where Paul says, you know, here are these people who think it's a bad thing to eat meat that's laid in front of an idol for a while, and if someone makes you aware of that, then you refrain and you join them in that abstaining. But when do we do that and when do we say, no, let me get away from you.

You don't understand the freedom we have in Christ and you're all hung up on idols, so go away. I'm going to separate from you until you get yourself straightened out. Well, that's what this passage is going to talk about.

When we come back from our break, we're going to find out what the scripture has to say about our responsibility in this area, what the guiding principle is for determining not only how we ourselves should walk and what the role is of our example, what has been called our witness, but also how we evaluate the witness or the example of others and decide when we embrace and when we do like David says and we purge and depart away. So it's an important principle. It's one of the skills that we need to develop to be mature and to walk in a way that pleases God.

So we'll take our break and come back and examine that important subject.