



We Belong to the Lord

Romans 14:7-13

Sermon for January 2 2022

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Sermon Introduction

For our first sermon of 2022, we will begin a one-year journey through the New City Catechism. "Catechism" comes from a Greek word katacheo, which means "to teach."

Martin Luther was a German pastor about 500 years ago.

He helped to lead the church back to true biblical theology.

Luther wrote a catechism that used questions and answers to teach basic Christian ideas.

Luther did this because he could see that many Christians didn't understand what they believed and why.

In 1529 Martin Luther said, "the common man knows practically nothing of Christian doctrine, and many of the pastors are almost entirely incompetent and unable to teach."

It is possible to go to church for many years and not understand what it means to be a Christian.

Luther even found that some pastors in Germany didn't understand Christianity!

Our brother Clement is attending seminary here in the United States for that same reason.

Clement has a passion to return to central Africa and help pastors there to have a deeper understanding of theology and biblical truth.

The kind of truths we find in this catechism.

One Voice Fellowship is a church of people from many backgrounds.

Some of you grew up as Christians, but from different cultures and theological understandings.

Some of you did not grow up as Christians, and you are still learning the basics of the faith.

The leaders of this church have decided to study the New City Catechism this year because it is an excellent summary of the most-important Christian truths.

We are different people who are united by the same Savior.

It's important that we have the same mind about what we believe.

Because what we know in our minds about God will affect our hearts and our entire lives.

As Paul said in Romans 12:2,

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

There are 52 questions and answers in the New City Catechism.

We have provided you with copies of all 52 in your own heart language.

Today, on the first Sunday of 2022, we will be looking at Question 1.

I will read the question, and then let's read the answer together.

Question 1: What is our only hope in life and death?

Answer: That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now let's look at today's passage of scripture.

Romans 14:7-13 (ESV)

7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

8 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.

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God;

11 for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

Together we read Isaiah 40:8:

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Let's pray together.

Father, we need you to send the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to the truth in your Word.

Please give us understanding, so we can live in a way that pleases you.

Because we belong to you.

Our sin debt was paid by the precious blood of Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God.

That's why we pray with hope and confidence in His name.

Amen.

Here are the three points for today's message:

Point 1. We belong to the Lord.

Point 2. We live knowing that God is watching.

Point 3. We can die with hope.

Point 1. We belong to the Lord.

Let's think together about what Paul is saying in verses 7 and 8:

7 "For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

8 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."

If you remember anything from this passage of scripture, remember those last four words in verse 8:

"We are the Lord's."

We belong to the Lord, my friends.

We like to think that we are independent.

American culture promotes the myth that each person is autonomous.

That's a big word meaning "self-directed."

Many car companies are trying to make autonomous cars, that do not need a human driver.

All of us, if we are honest, like the idea of being autonomous.

I think this is because we trust ourselves more than anyone else.

We think we will be happy and safe if we can control all aspects of our lives.

That's why we try very hard to be autonomous and independent.

But autonomy is an illusion.

The truth is, we are all servants to someone or something.

Before you become a follower of Jesus, you are a servant of your own desires.

You have feelings and desires that control your actions.

Have you had that experience?

When I became a Christian, God showed me that pride and lust were the forces controlling my life.

Every decision I made was dictated by either pride or by lust.

I thought I was autonomous, but I was a slave to sin.

Paul described it this way in Romans chapter 7, verses 15, 17, and 19.

Romans 7:15 "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate.

17 So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

19 I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway."

Paul says that it was sin inside of him that was really driving the car.

He was not autonomous.

Neither am I.

Neither are you.

Our lives are directed either by sin or by Jesus.

Our lives are directed either by sin or by Jesus.

Jesus knows that the power of sin over our lives is too powerful for us.

When Jesus died on the cross, the power of sin over your life was transferred to Jesus.

Our sin was injected into his veins, and the power of sin died with him.

That's what this next verse means.

Look at Romans 14:19.

9 "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

"To this end" means "for this purpose or reason."

The reason Jesus Christ died and lived again was so that he would become Lord of the dead and living.

His death and resurrection put the power of sin to death, and gave us the power of life.

When you trust in Jesus, you are spiritually resurrected and given new life.

You receive the power to live differently.

But it is not autonomous power.

It is not independent power.

Verse 9 says that Jesus is Lord.

The words Lord and God are used repeatedly in these verses, and Jesus is both.

If you have trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sin, then he is the Lord of your life.

You are not autonomous.

That truth is the reason for point number 2.

Point 2. We live knowing that God is watching.

There is a lot of division in the world today.

People and countries are in conflict because they have different views on things.

And the Body of Christ is not immune to this kind of conflict.

Paul was writing to the church in Rome.

In that church there were believers from Jewish backgrounds and believers who were Gentiles.

They had different opinions about alcohol and eating meat and celebrating holidays.

Religious arguments like this can be very divisive because everyone believes they have God on their side.

Paul could have resolved their conflicts by telling the Christians in Rome to form different congregations with different beliefs.

He could have told people from Gentile and Jewish backgrounds to establish separate churches. Paul didn't do that, however.

He told them to accept and love one another, because they were brothers and sisters with the same Father, united by the same Savior.

The eternal truths they shared were more important than their differences.

We are building a special kind of church here at One Voice Fellowship.

A church of believers from many countries and cultures who practice our faith in different ways.

We are also sensitive to our visitors who are still learning about Jesus and what it means to call him Lord of their lives.

In this church we will have different opinions about a lot of things.

It is important to recognize that some opinions belong in different categories.

In the center of this picture we have the central beliefs of Christianity.

Every true follower of Jesus must understand these and believe them.

The gospel is at the center: "God saves sinners."

We don't save ourselves.

God helps us see our sin so we will repent and turn in faith to Christ.

In Jesus we receive new life that is everlasting.

Also in the center is the truth that Jesus is fully man and fully God, born of a virgin.

Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand in heaven.

Everything in the Apostle's Creed that we read earlier belongs in this center circle.

In Romans 14:10, Paul is not talking about these central truths.

He's talking about things outside the center circle.

Here are some examples of things that are important, but not central:

Is it okay for Christians to drink alcohol?

Is the earth 6,000 years old or 6 billion years old?

Should we celebrate communion once a month or every week?

Should Christians pray all at the same time, or take turns praying separately?

I am sure we have different opinions about these things in our church.

How do you feel about your brother or sister who answers those questions differently?

Look again at verse 10, please.

Paul says to one person, "why do you pass judgment on your brother?"

Why are you criticizing your brother or sister in Christ, because they have a different opinion about something that is not a central issue?

Then Paul says to the other guy, "Or you, why do you despise your brother?"

I think Paul is saying to the second man, "Why are you judging this brother who is judging you?"

My friends, as human beings we are better at conflict than peace.
We like to argue and divide into different camps.
This church is not going to be divided by our cultures or our opinions.
One Voice is a place where diverse people focus on Jesus and on the central truths he teaches.
We will find our unity in Him alone.
That's one reason we are going through the New City Catechism this year.
We need to focus on the central truths of Christianity.
If we all understand and believe these things, then we can truly live as brothers and sisters who might have different opinions about less-important questions.

Paul is reminding us here in verse 10 that the only one who has a right to judge us is God himself.
Be careful when you say that your brother or sister is wrong or foolish.
Be slow to judge one another, because God is watching and judging us and everyone in the world.
Let's look at verse 11, please.
11 "for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.'"

Here Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23.
My friends, one day every human knee will bend before God.
People in heaven and hell will kneel down and confess with their tongues the truth about the King of kings and Lord of lords.
On earth today there are many human kings, and presidents, and judges in courtrooms.
But there is only one Supreme Ruler of the universe.
Look at verses 12 and 13 please.

12 "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.
13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."

When we disagree with someone, God wants us to value our brother or sister more than being right.
Love is more important proving we are right.
But what should we do when we disagree about something that a very important theological principle?
Again, love is more important than being right.
Verse 12 reminds us that everyone will give an account to God.
He is the true judge.
You can be right about a central theological principle, but wrong about love.
And if your brother is wrong about theology, you can still love him because God is the final judge.
That truth should affect our behavior while we live.
And it should also affect how we think about our own death.

Let's move on to point 3.

Point 3. We can die with hope.

Look again with me at Romans 14:8-9.

8 "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.

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

We live to the Lord.

And we die to the Lord.

If we remember those two things, it will have an impact on everything we do.

We "live to the Lord" by remembering that we are not autonomous.

We "live to the Lord" by praying before we make decisions.

We "live to the Lord" when we honor God with our money, and our time, and our bodies, and our words.

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul wrote:

"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price."

True freedom is only found under the Lordship of Jesus.

He purchased our lives by shedding his blood.

We belong to the Lord, brothers and sisters!

This fact should affect how we live.

It should also give us peace and hope as we think about our own death.

The letter to the Romans we are looking at today was sent by Paul to Christians in Rome.

The government in Rome was persecuting believers for their faith.

Christians were executed by crucifixion, by fire, and even killed by lions.

But they died with courage and hope.

They "died to the Lord."

Their faith was a testimony to the world around them about the truth of Christianity.

The Roman authorities hoped that killing Christians would kill the growth of the church.

But the opposite happened.

Today there is increasing persecution of Christians in India.

Men like this believe that all Indians should be Hindu, so they are attacking churches and putting pastors in prison.

New laws are being passed that forbid conversion to Christianity.

The amazing ministry started by Mother Teresa to help the poor was recently told they cannot receive financial help from outside of India.

That will be hard for their ministry.

But, in a climate of increasing persecution, our brothers and sisters in India are worshipping with joy and hope.

They know that following Jesus is dangerous in their country.

But "if we die, we die to the Lord."

This Saturday I will attend a funeral for my uncle in Chicago.

He was an alcoholic, but he was cured of alcoholism when he surrendered his life to Jesus.

I can go to his funeral on Saturday and be sad for the death of my uncle.

But I can also rejoice because my uncle understood that Jesus is "Lord both of the dead and of the living."

That made an eternal difference in his life.

How about you, my friends?

I hope this truth will affect how we all live in 2022.

Let's pray about that together now.

Jesus, in 2022 we want to grow in our understanding of what it means that you are Lord of both the dead and the living.

Help us, through the Holy Spirit, to remember that we will give an account of our lives to you one day.

We want to honor you, magnify you, and bring you glory in everything we do—in how we live, and how we die.

Help us remember that we belong to you, and to live out of that truth.

We ask it in the name of Jesus our Savior.

Amen.