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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Pentecost 17

Romans 14:5-9

LIVE FOR CHRIST!

Right after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Benjamin Franklin remarked, "Now we must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall each hang separately!" If our nation's fathers had not remained united in their common cause, if they had each pursued self interests in preference to the interests of the newborn nation, their mother country would have had no trouble defeating them. There would be no United States today.

In a similar way God speaks to us in Romans 14 of the importance of staying united as believers. We have a common cause that replaces self-interests. We live for Christ. So today let's take to heart God's earnest desire for our unity. Live for Christ! First, He has purchased you for this purpose, and secondly, He has freed you for this purpose.

Christian unity has always been threatened by our natural and unspiritual desire for rules. Especially problematic are what we call "adiaphora." Adiaphora are things that God has not expressly commanded or forbidden us to do. When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome there were issues like eating kosher foods only, having your children circumcised or not working on a Saturday. Should a true Christian do these things or not? In Martin Luther's day there were questions like should we eat fish on Fridays, should clergy wear robes and other special vestments in worship, was it wrong to have statues, stained-glass windows and paintings in a church?

Our American culture today has become much more secularized in its thinking, but there are still questions that Christians ponder: Is it alright to smoke? Do Christian parents permit their children to

read Harry Potter? What is the best kind of music in a church? Is it alright to buy a wide-screen T.V. or should I increase my Sunday offerings 10 or 20 dollars a week? What if someone delays getting that wide-screen T.V. because they give more offerings than I do? Does that make them a better Christian than me? Can a Christian wear fur or eat veal? Is it alright if both parents work outside the home? Should we purchase the cheapest possible carpet or the most luxurious carpet available for the sanctuary? Matters like these can even become divisive as Christians disagree over them.

The simple answer to these questions is: Live for Christ! In fact, He has purchased you for this purpose. Following rules where God has not made rules does not make you a better Christian or more God-pleasing. Disregarding them is not a virtue either. Rather, approach these questions by saying, "To whom do I belong? I belong to Christ. My life belongs to Him. I am not my own master. Christ is. So then, how may I live for Christ?"

Living for Christ is not a burdensome thing. Because of our natural sinfulness each of us is like a car that was headed towards the junk heap. Maybe physically or emotionally we even feel like a wreck already. But Christ purchased us. His life was the sticker price. He has the title on us. His Spirit took possession of us already at our baptism. Now Christ is in the driver's seat on the highway of our life. He purchased us and rescued us from becoming scrap metal. It's a pleasure to be driven by Him. It's a blessing of our salvation.

God says here in Romans 14, "*If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.*"

So the question is never, "Should I or shouldn't I?" The question is "What serves Christ?" He purchased me for this purpose—to live for Him. And now with Christ in the driver's seat living for Christ is the most liberating thing. Our possibilities are not fenced in by the junk yard of self-interests. You can live for Christ because Christ has freed you for this purpose.

In Luther's Small Catechism the meaning to the 2nd Article of the Apostles Creed says, "*All this Christ did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.*" Because the blood of Christ covers you, every part of your life is as righteous, innocent and blessed in God's evaluation as Christ's own life –from tying your shoes in the morning to pulling the covers over you at night.

As a believer this gives you great freedom when you encounter any adiaphoron neither commanded nor forbidden by God. Barring immorality and false doctrine whatever you do is holy and blessed in God's eyes. It serves Christ. Like any form of gluttony, smoking five packs a day would be immoral. But God has nowhere forbidden us to light up. Why should I be prevented by someone else's weak conscience from enjoying that blessing? Not offering our best to the Lord is immoral, but nowhere did He forbid us to purchase a large screen T.V. We can enjoy it with gratitude in our hearts to God. On the other hand, nowhere has God commanded New Testament Christians to wear their Sunday best, or kneel when they pray or fast for Lent. But why should someone else's misgivings inhibit my joyful expression of reverence toward God? Barring immorality and false doctrine, God takes as much delight our your freedom as you do. Only we use our freedom not to satisfy ourselves, but to live for Christ.

Romans 14 says, "*One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord.*"

Be careful then not to think less of other believers who exercise their freedom in ways you don't. For Christians live to please Christ, not you. But we have let ourselves become bothered by it, haven't we? Either we disapprove in our hearts of those whom we think are making not-so-spiritual choices, or we are resentful of

those whom we think are acting like they are "holier than thou." Or we condemn someone in our minds for being too stuck on rituals. In our hearts we are sinning against our fellow believers to think like this and that destroys Christian unity. But Christ heals our unity by forgiving each of us our wrong thoughts and giving us each an equal status before Him through faith.

We are each blood-bought children of the King who are free from serving ourselves and are freed to serve Christ. Let us strive together to defend the freedom we enjoy in Christ. Otherwise satan will try to impose conditions on our salvation and we will no longer be saved by grace alone. Whether at home, at work, at church or wherever we are, let it be our one common cause to live for Christ.