

# "Mastering Indifference"

Text: Romans 14:5-9

***"Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen."*** Hebrews 13:20-21

Dear Servants of our Savior Jesus:

Indifference is killing our society. Worse yet, indifference is destroying souls. Our society is rewarding God's extravagant grace and blessings by turning their collective backs on him, denying his very existence. It's as if our society now believes that, having been blessed by God with so much, we suddenly no longer need him. Which is sort of like saying, *"I don't need to show up for work on Monday because I got paid last Friday."*

The seed of indifference is sin – most often sin that we imagine we got away with – sin that no one seemed to notice or about which no one seemed to care. It usually starts in childhood when you do something that you shouldn't, or fail to do what you should, and get away with it. The seed of thought that is thereby planted is that *"it doesn't really matter."* That outlook gets transferred to every aspect of life. *"As long as I can get away with it, it doesn't really matter, and therefore I don't really need to be concerned about it."*

The effect is usually gradual and cumulative. You don't do quite what you used to, and yet it still seemed to be enough. That then becomes the new base, and the slide has begun.

The greatest danger here is, of course, spiritual rather than physical. It's one thing to let your housework or yard work slide; it's something altogether different when spiritual indifference takes hold and your faith-life slides. The challenge here is both to maintain a standard and to recognize the danger of *"I'll do it tomorrow."* The best way to know that you are not sliding is to continually *advance* in your study and understanding of God's Word and will. The best way to avoid the *"I'll do it tomorrow"* problem is to recognize that *"not now"* almost always turns into *"never."* If it isn't right now, chances are it won't be right anytime in the future.

God's Word has more to say about all of this – especially how the problem can be corrected – as we will hear in our text for this morning, found recorded in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

***ESV Romans 14:5-9 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.***

This is the Word of God, the holy, perfect, inspired words of our Maker. Desiring to be strengthened, encouraged, and instructed by these holy words, and to thereby beat back the indifference that threatens to destroy us, so we pray: ***"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Before we get further into our theme this morning, we need to talk about *"relativism."* There are various definitions, but the one that best explains how the word is used most often today has to do with the belief that ethical truths are dependant upon the individuals or groups of individuals holding them. In plain English: *Right is whatever you believe it is.*

This week our country remembered the attack of September 11, 2001. For those who can remember back that far, the immediate reaction to that event was rife with examples of relativism – on all sides. Our enemies celebrated, believing that it was perfectly acceptable to kill innocent men, women, and children to further their cause. Here in the United States, many thought even a nuclear strike against civilian populations in the Middle East was justified. "Right" became whatever action would satisfy the emotion of the moment.

More to the point this morning, relativism can actually be a component of indifference, and we begin by defining relativism mostly because it seems that that is exactly what Paul is promoting in the opening verses of our text. There Paul, in talking about eating food sacrificed to idols and the observance of certain festivals or holy

days, said, **"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind."** It sounds like Paul is saying, *"Whatever you do in life is acceptable, as long as you are convinced in your own mind that it is right for you."* Worse still, it sounds like Paul is promoting abject indifference: *"Do whatever you want. It doesn't matter."*

Is that what Paul is here writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Is he here advocating relativism and indifference? Obviously not. The critical point is that Paul is talking here about *adiaphora* – things that God has neither commanded nor forbidden by God. In other words, Paul is talking about those things for which there is neither an absolute right nor an absolute wrong. There is therefore no one right answer that can and should be applied to, or imposed upon, everyone equally. *"In such matters,"* Paul is saying, *"let your conscience be your guide. Do what in your heart you believe to be right."*

Note that Paul gives no such guidance concerning those things that *are* commanded or forbidden by our God. In such cases there is no personal decision to be made. God himself has decided the matter, and man's inner conviction can never be permitted to alter God's holy will. Nor does man have the right to be careless or indifferent when or where God has commanded or forbidden.

The sort of thing for which Paul was offering guidance here were questions like, *"Should a Christian abstain from all alcohol?"*, or, *"Should we worship on Saturday or Sunday?"* We know also that one of the thorny issues the Christians in Rome faced was whether it was right or wrong to buy and eat meat from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples. No doubt they had many other questions, like whether they should circumcise their sons, celebrate the Passover, or keep the old Jewish Sabbath laws. This was the sort of thing Paul was addressing when he told them: **"Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind."** The Christians of that day wrestled with such questions. Today we have other questions, and where God has spoken, indifference is never an option.

To all of these questions Paul gives an answer – a guideline that can be applied to *all* such questions. Not only are we supposed to act in harmony with our consciences, he gave us a simple truth as a constant guide: **"None of us lives to himself... For if we live, we live to the Lord."** Stop for just a moment and think about those words. Word them through, and as you turn this great statement from Paul this way and that in your mind, note how contrary these words are to the general flow

not only of our society but of our own sinful flesh. Recognize how incompatible, how obviously and dramatically they clash with the growing philosophy of the world around us. It is a foreign thought to the unbeliever that his life and his times are not his own. Yet God's Word tells us just that: **"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."** (1 Cor 6:19-20)

The godless rage at such words – understandably so. The very core of their existence is based upon the notion that they *are* their own, and therefore entitled to do (or *not* do, as the case may be) whatever they want with their bodies, their time, and their material wealth. Examine it and see. Prostitution, abortion, gambling, pornography, drug abuse, drunkenness, idolatry – whenever man attempts to justify such things, the argument is always predicated on the false notion that we are our own, and therefore have a right to do whatever we want with what is ours. This also explains the fanatical promotion of evolution in our society. Man is terrified at the thought that we are accountable to a Creator, so man's solution is to pretend there *is* no Creator.

Christians, on the other hand, are privileged to know the truth, revealed by Paul in Galatians 2:20: **"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."**

So then we start plugging our timely but troubling questions into that basic formula, and our direction becomes much clearer – as it no doubt also did for the Roman Christians struggling with similar questions. Where should I live? Where should I work? Whom shall I marry? Does it really matter what I eat or drink? At what age should I retire? When you recognize that every aspect of your life is supposed to be all about service to your God – about **"living to the Lord"** – the answers to life's questions are usually pretty obvious. The problem is that that sinful side in us doesn't like what it hears.

But our text did not end there, did it? As valuable as this insight might prove, it is complemented or completed by what comes next. In fact the Holy Spirit through Paul next adds the part that brings it all into sharpest focus and perspective. Not only is it true that **"none of us lives to himself,"** more importantly, **"No one dies to himself."**

So also not only **"If we live, we live to the Lord;"** but also... **"if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."** This is how the first part of our text is further clarified and given perspective. Making decisions about food, drink, clothing, work and the like here on this earth is important, but that importance is clarified when placed alongside the prospect of **"dying to the Lord."** This we often fail to consider, and we make our lives much harder as a result. In fact this is how or why indifference first takes root. We forget that "not now" becomes "never."

The fact is our life here is really not so much about our life here as it is all about the life that most certainly follows this one. Our text sums it up with these familiar words: **"So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."** What exactly does that mean, to be **"Lord both of the dead and the living"**? It means that our relationship with our Savior was altered by his death, but will not be altered by ours. When we belong to Christ while we are alive, we will still belong to him when we move from this life to the next. That's also why life here on earth is all about Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Our text offers even more insight into all of this with the simple words: **"Christ died and rose and lived again."** We've heard such words before – many times before – so much so that we tend not to *hear* them always with thought and understanding. The fact is we are Christ's because he rescued our very souls from the agony and despair of hell itself. The cost was his very lifeblood – and more. His blood would have been insufficient had he not first lived a holy, sinless life of perfect obedience. Remember that was the standard God had set for anyone who wanted to earn his way into heaven. Fail, even once, and you are forced to find another way. That's also why Jesus had to offer a perfect life on the cross, and it was that perfect life and therefore innocent death that God the Father credits now to *our* account – yours and mine. God has declared us holy and righteous because he visited the sum total of his righteous anger upon his own Son, who there on the cross died as our substitute - condemned, abandoned, and in utter misery. In our stead.

What joy and comfort we find in that simple phrase **"and lived again."** Jesus' life didn't end with his death and resurrection. Neither will ours. This simple truth is arguably the best antidote to our creeping indifference. If it were all just about this life, no big deal. Do whatever you want. But it's not, is it? God knows that. Satan knows that. You and

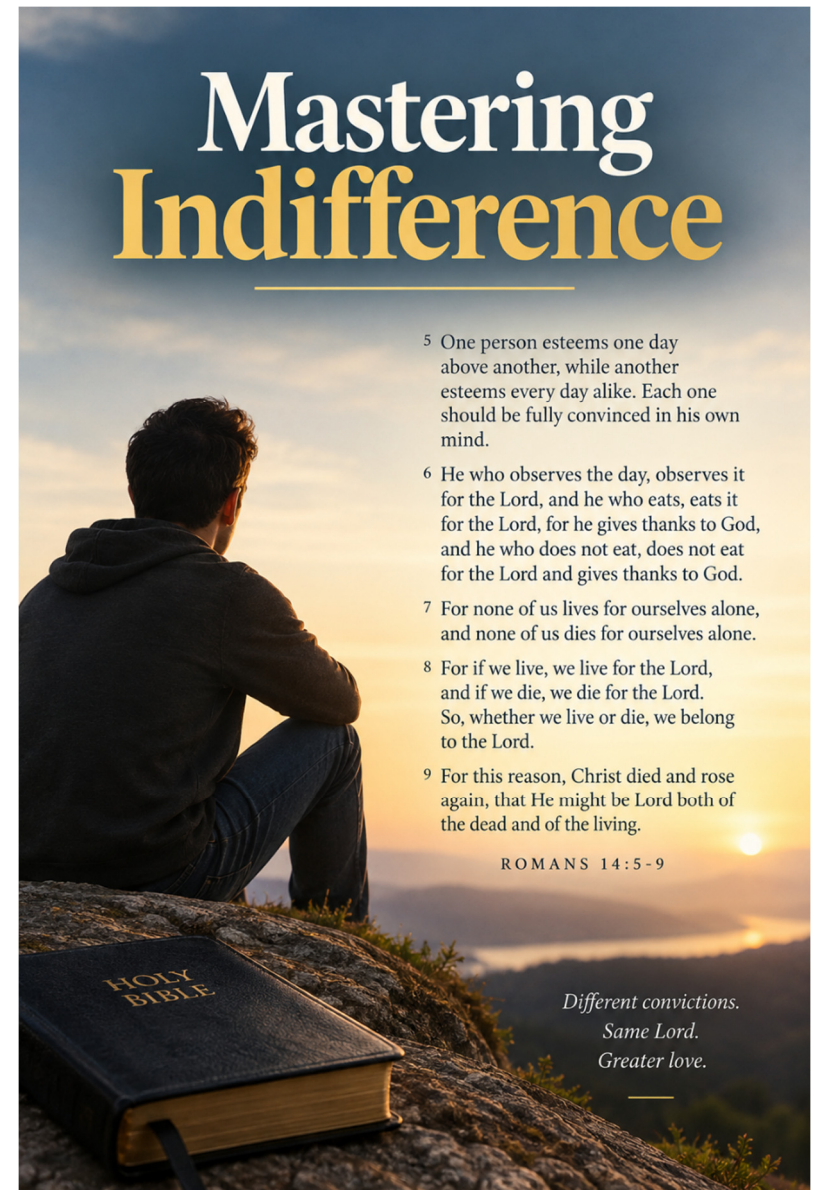
I seem to be the only ones that forget – which is a big part of the devil's plans for our eternal destruction. In fact it is only through the working of God the Holy Spirit within us that the devil's desires are frustrated, that his desires do not live in our hearts as *our* desires. We no longer belong to Satan; we belong to the One True God. Jesus repaired the breach between us and our God by removing our sin.

All falls into place with this information, doesn't it. Since our lives have been purchased by Christ, we are now his – willingly, joyfully, thankfully his. What a joy and comfort then to be able to put our ourselves into Paul's words in our text, and to use those words to beat back the indifference that threatens to destroy us: *"If I live, I live to the Lord; and if I die, I die to the Lord. Therefore, whether I live or die, I am the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be my Lord, while I live and when I die."* Amen.

ESV **Genesis 50:15-21** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." <sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, <sup>17</sup> 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

ESV **Matthew 18:21-35** Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. <sup>23</sup> ¶ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

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# ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

## ST PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – September 13, 2026**

### The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

### The Opening Hymn – 200

"God Has Spoken by His Prophets"

### The Order of Service – Hymnal page 31ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

### The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**The First Lesson:** (Genesis 50:15-21) Forgiveness is critical to human existence. Forgiving someone who has sinned against you is not always easy, but it is always God pleasing. We read first an excellent example of how Joseph was able to forgive the evil done to him by his brothers, and he did so by looking to the bigger picture of how or why God might have allowed such a terrible thing to be done to him.

### The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 130 (Hymnal Page 104)

**The Second Lesson:** (Matthew 18:21-35) The Old Adam seeks numbers. That side of us wants to quantify exactly what has to be done in order to avoid God's wrath. Jesus teaches us here that forgiveness is meant to be an attitude of the heart – man forgiving his fellow man because God has declared all of us innocent in Jesus Christ.

### The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed *(Projected on Screens)*

### The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 556

"I Lay My Sins on Jesus"

### The Sermon – Text: Romans 14:5-9 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

**"Mastering Indifference"**

### The Offertory – (Projected on Screens)

### The Post-Sermon Hymn – 403

"This Is He"

### The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

### The Preparation for Holy Communion *(Hymnal page 38)*

### The Distribution

### The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving *(Hymnal page 41)*

### The Benediction

### The Closing Hymn – 554

"My Faith Looks Up to Thee"

### Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time.

**A note on Communion:** It is a matter of conscience among us, drawn from God's Word, that communing together is an intimate expression of confessional fellowship based on shared beliefs. We therefore ask those who have not publicly declared their unity of faith with us to first meet with the pastor for the information you would need and want before communing. Please understand that we seek only to follow the Word and will of God and are in no way judging your Christian faith.

### Attendance – Sunday (10) Average (35)

#### This Week at St. Paul:

|                                                                    |             |                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|
| Today                                                              | -9:00 a.m.  | – Sunday school and Bible Class       |
|                                                                    | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service with Holy Communion |
|                                                                    | -11:15 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour                     |
| Tuesday-Thursday – West Central Pastoral Conference in Sioux Falls |             |                                       |
| Next Sunday                                                        | -9:00 a.m.  | – Sunday school and Bible Class       |
|                                                                    | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service                     |
|                                                                    | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour                     |

**CLC News** – Mr. Nick Naumann has returned the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon, SD. Gift of God of Mapleton has called Pastor Matthew Hanel. Pastor Chad Seybt has returned the call to Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ. Pastor Thomas Schuetze has returned the call to Living Hope of Appleton, WI. St. Paul's of Austin has called Pastor Aaron Ude. Trinity of Spokane has called Pastor Glenn Oster.

**September Schedule** – We have resumed our regular (non-summer) Sunday schedule, with Sunday school and Bible Class at 9:00 a.m. and Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m. Since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town for the West Central Pastoral Conference (September 15-17) and CLC Board meetings (September 21-23), midweek classes will not resume until September 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Church Council and Women's Fellowship Meetings** – Also looking ahead, both the Church Council and the Women's Fellowship are scheduled to meet on Sunday, September 27 during the fellowship hour.

**ILC Tour Choir** – Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table for hosting members of the ILC Tour Choir on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. We need to know what other arrangements to make if members cannot host all the choir members in their homes.