

September 1, 2024 The Inevitable Decisions Romans 14:7–12, Matthew 25:31-46

“So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore,” Rom. 14:12-13.

I've been reading a book this week that perfectly expresses my struggle to figure out what God wants me to convey today. It says, "Preachers often hesitate before they speak. The stakes are high, for words have the power to bind or set free, to build up or tear down. It's no wonder that preachers pause before preaching."

Preachers feel this way because sometimes the words they speak aren't their own but from God. These words are meant to guide people to make decisions and commit to God. They are not easy to speak. As I speak to you today, my intention is to set free and build up, not to bind and tear down.

Today, I am feeling a lot like the prophet Jeremiah, who said in Jeremiah 20:9, “If I say I’ll never mention the LORD or speak his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It’s like a fire in my bones! I am weary of holding it in!” Now, I know what some of you might be thinking, “Oh, here comes another sermon! The pastor is on the soapbox again!” But let me clarify, **“I am addressing everyone here, not just one person.”**

As I studied Romans 13 and 14 in preparation for this morning, I was once again faced with the tension of living between two worlds. It's a struggle that many of us face as we seek to understand and embrace our faith's teachings in the midst of evil, and the very human desire to seek revenge. This battle is not unique to us. In fact, if you have been following the news this past week, you probably encountered a congressman’s public struggle with this very issue, a poignant reminder that we are not alone in our spiritual journey.

As we enter the months ending in "-ember" and approach the end of the year, I want to emphasize the importance of our faith journey. This journey requires our active participation and firm decisions about our commitments as Christians and children of God. **Let's not underestimate the power of our choices in shaping our spiritual path.**

It's important to note that some decisions are made for us; we don't get to choose them. These are what some might call "acts of God," such as **(a) our birth**: We don't choose our parentage, race, or sex. **(b) living responsibly**: We can't avoid responsibility. Some may try to escape by being indifferent, as illustrated by the man with one talent in Jesus’s parable recorded in Matthew 25. Doing nothing is a sin, and trying to avoid life's responsibilities through indifference is wicked. **(c) having a relationship with God**: A person's relationship with God may be good or bad. **(d) having a relationship with others**, either influencing them or being influenced by them: Your influence may be positive or negative, but you will have influence. **(e) having a relationship with yourself**: Everyone is responsible for their own choices. Whether they love or hate themselves, their choices about their lives are inevitable. People can be good or bad stewards of their lives.

Finally, everyone will stand before God in judgment. The judgment will be universal, with all people gathered before God without exception. The first matter of inquiry will be the state of one's heart with God. Those who love and seek God will be forgiven for their sins and will have eternal life with God and the redeemed in heaven (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 8:1; Titus 2:14; 1 John 1:7). Rewards and greatness will be based on faithful service rendered on earth, including using our talents and possessions to help others (Matt 25:14–41).

In Romans 14, Paul addresses a conflict within the church, urging its members to accept and respect each other instead of arguing and condemning one another. He emphasizes that despite differences, all believers are God's people.

But then Paul goes on to basically say that all of the disagreement and debate are only things that are unimportant, trivial, and insignificant in light of the reality of eternity, and they really do not matter. Why? because one day we will stand before God and have to answer to Him about our lives. And nothing else will matter at that point because the game will be over.

In football games, there is a two-minute drill and a two-minute warning. The two-minute drill is one of football's greatest moments because it creates anticipation for a come-from-behind victory or the hope of hanging on to the lead in the closing moments of the game. Closely related to the two-minute drill is the two-minute warning, during which a time-out is given for teams to plan for the final two minutes of action. One thing about the two-minute warning and the two-minute drill is this: we know that the end of the game is coming. Could we be living in the final two minutes? Are we a step away from the end when Christ will return and judge every single human being that has ever lived? Have we been given the two-minute warning? I don't know.

Many years ago, I concluded that I believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and that only God the Father, as stated by Jesus in Acts 1, knows when that time will be. My role is to follow, obey, and trust in God. Today, I stand before you and reaffirm that mission once again.

Are you prepared for the game to be over? Have you made peace with God and are you living in a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ? Moreover, are you in the right relationship with your family, church family, friends, boss, co-workers, and neighbors? If not, it's not too late to make that decision that will determine where you spend your eternity. **In verse 13, alongside verses 11 and 12, it's mentioned, "So don't condemn each other anymore. Decide instead to live in a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path."**