

Romans 14:1-12 N.T. 152 (NRSV)

¹Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸If 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. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Romans 14:1-12 N.T. Page 152
“The Essential is Enough!”

Opening Prayer: Please bow with me in prayer. O God, draw us into your holy presence and whisper your Word of Life into our hearts and minds. O God, you are our God, and that’s enough, **Amen.**

Introduction: As most of you know, I like airplanes. This is the background of the desktop of my computer. That airplane is the Cessna Citation X+ which is the fastest civilian airplane in the world, with a maximum speed of a **hard-to-fathom 712 mph**. My fascination with airplanes started when I was 12-years old **when my dad brought** this brochure home from work one day. That’s the original Learjet, the granddaddy of all business jets. There are very few things I’ve kept from my childhood, but this Learjet brochure is one of those things.

What exactly makes an airplane an airplane? What is something you absolutely have to have for an airplane to even to be an airplane? **One answered might be an engine.** Look at those monstrous jet engines on the Citation X+. Well engines certainly are important, but they are not absolutely essential for something to be an airplane. **After all, gliders** don’t have engines, but they can fly through the air with the greatest of ease, just like all of the other flying machines. **How about the pilot,** you can’t have an airplane without a pilot. Well that was true when I was a kid, but it’s not true today. **These days it seems** like drowns are everywhere. **So, while** lots of airplanes have engines and pilots, neither is essential to something being an airplane. What’s that one thing every airplane has that it wouldn’t be an airplane without? **Yes, a wing.** You have to have something to produce lift. **Some airplanes** have rotary wings, like helicopters, **and others** might appear not to have a wing, like this lift body, **but the essence** of what makes an airplane an airplane is a wing. The saying isn’t an engine and a prayer, or a pilot and a prayer, **it’s “a wing and a prayer.”**

Well, what makes a Christian a Christian? Is it the church the person attends? You know the building with the stained-glass windows, and a steeple with a cross on top? Is that what makes a Christian a Christian? Of course not. **How about the Bible**, is that what makes a Christian a Christian? You know, a person with a really big book tucked under their arm with gold guided pages and a black leather cover embossed with the words “Holy Bible.” Is that what makes a Christian a Christian. Again, of course not. **What’s the one thing** that a Christian can’t possibly be a Christian without out? Come on now, the answer is easy and obvious. **A Christian can’t be a Christian without “Christ.”** Christ is absolutely essential to any Christian being a Christian. It’s not the building, it’s not the book,—it’s the person, Jesus the Christ, who stands as the very essence of our faith. We are Christians because of Christ. **The essential is Christ!**

PAUSE

Move I.

Yet so many get stuck majoring in the minors. They want everyone to be perfect just like them, or at least perfect like they are when they're in public. You do have to keep up appearances you know. **They have perfect church attendance** all the way back to the days when their grandma first brought them when they were just little tikes in nursery school. **To be a Christian** you have to go to church every week. Other people might only come to church every other week, or maybe even one week in three, but you're here every Sunday, Sunday in and Sunday out, surely that's what makes you a Christian, right? **Sitting in church** every Sunday morning no more makes you a Christian, **that sitting** in first class on an airliner on your weekly flight to Podunk makes you a pilot. When it comes to being a Christian, **focusing on church attendance** is like majoring in the minors.

How about giving? To be a Christian you have to put money in the offering [basket | plate] every week. And it's not just important that you put something in each and every week, you need to be sure others see you doing it. Once again, you have to keep up appearances you know. **You can't put in nothing**, you have to put in something. **You would be amazed** how many people give a buck just so they can be seen putting in something. **Now if you only made \$10 last week**, then there's nothing wrong with putting in a buck, but most people who put in the buck made a whole lot more than that. Oh, **and now with the advent** of electronic giving, some churches have **little cards** you can drop in the [basket | plate] that say "I gave electronically," just so you can be seen giving something. But once again, **putting something in** the offering every Sunday no more makes you a Christian **than buying an airline ticket** for your weekly flight to Podunk will make you a pilot. When it comes to being a Christian, **focusing on giving** is like majoring in the minors.

Finally, how about serving in the church. **You have been a trustee, or you have helped** serve every funeral dinner since 1982, **or you have been an usher** for as long as anyone can remember. You're not one of those dead beats that just comes to church now and then and makes everyone else do all of the work. You do your part; you are a good and faithful servant. But being an usher, or serving funeral dinners, or being a trustee for 20 years doesn't make you a Christian, **any more than working in an airplane factory** for much of your life will make you a pilot. When it comes to being a Christian, **focusing strictly on service** is also like majoring in the minors.

Yes, when it comes to living the Christian life, **there are just so many minor things** we can get hung-up on that we end up missing the major, the essential, while focusing on the minor. **That's what Paul** is writing about in our Bible lesson today here in Romans 14. **Some Christians** are focused on following kosher dietary laws, **and other Christians** are focused on keeping strict Sabbath observances, and what Paul's calling all of that is "**majoring in the minors.**" There are going to be differences in the church, particularly in minor or secondary details. **The church across the street** serves wine at communion while we serve grape juice. **You come into worship early** and sit quietly and reflect while **that other person** comes into church and chats with a friend while drinking coffee. Paul is telling us not to make such comparisons. Allow the minor to remain minor. **After all there** is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Ephesians 4:5-6). **Yet so many are still getting stuck majoring in the minors.**

End I.

Move II.

But being a Christian is about following Christ. I know I'm stating the obvious, but I fear that the pressures of life are distracting many of us, and that the minors of the church are consuming yet others, such that we're collectively overlooking the essential. **We're too busy** either following our own dreams, **or hiding** from our own fears, to ever get around to actually following Jesus.

The people gathered here today are all very different. You come from different backgrounds. **Some of you** were born and raised in right here in Erie. You've been here in both the good times and the bad. Some of you natives want to stay here for the rest of your lives, while others, particularly some of the youth, can't wait to get out of here and set off on some adventure elsewhere. And yet others of you, like me, **were born somewhere else**, and find yourself here in this city for a season of your life. You hope that when your time comes to head somewhere else, that you'll leave things at least a little better than the way you found them.

You also come from different families. **Some of you** here today have parents who have stayed together. **Others of you** here today have parents who've separated or divorced. **And yet others** have a parent who's totally absent from your life. **Some of you** are from stable loving families, **while others** of you are from families that are still doing their best to love you even though parts of your family are disintegrating as I speak.

And finally, you come from different economic circumstances. **Some of you** here today live in a nice home and have plenty of money stocked away for retirement. **Others of you** here today live in a rundown rental and are barely getting by from paycheck to paycheck, and for yet others you've been out of work so long that you can't remember what a paycheck looks like.

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Some of the youth here this morning are **from families** who are already stocking away money so you can go to college when you graduate. **Others of the youth here today** have families who can barely provide enough food for today, yet alone promise any financial help if you're lucky enough to graduate and have some college accept you.

Yes, we are a very diverse lot of people. **Rich, or poor**, or somewhere in between. **Stable, or in crisis**, or in various states of dysfunction. And yet we all have one thing in common. We're all here today, because at some point on our lives **we responded to God's calling** on our lives. At some point in our lives we decided to follow Jesus, even though we're not exactly sure where Jesus is taking us along the way to our final destination.

In the very middle of our Bible lesson today, the Apostle Paul writes some words that apply to all of us. These words are for all who have decided to follow Jesus all around the world. **It doesn't matter** if you're rich or poor. **It doesn't matter** if you're educated or simple minded. **It doesn't matter** if your life is stable or out-of-balance. **All that matters** is you are following Christ. In Romans 14:7-8 (NRSV) Paul writes, **"We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 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."** Some hear a fatalist ring to those words, but to us who have been called to follow Christ, we hear the promise that no matter what the path from here to our final destination, Jesus is going to lead us. **We may yet walk through the dark valley** of the shadow of death, but we will fear no evil. **Dawn's early light** awaits us just over the horizon. Life yet provides so many distractions. **But being a Christian still is, and always will be, about following Christ.**

End II.

Move III.

So, stay focused on the essential. The basis for leading the life of a Christian—you know, a person who is a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ—is to develop and maintain your relationship with Jesus. Once again, I suspect that to many of you this advice is old hat, but all I can say is after spending my whole life in countless churches, not many seem to get it, let alone do it. **There’s a quote from Luke in Acts 17:28a (NRSV)** that sums up our utter dependence on Christ into one neat and tidy declaration. **“For in Christ we live and move and have our being.”** Christ is the essential and our whole lives, the very essence of our being, the firm foundation of our future hope, are all wrapped up in our relationship with him. **Christ is... the essence** of our faith, **the substance** of our hope, **and the embodiment** of our God.

When I first started working on this message, **the title was going to be “The Essentials are Enough.”** The message was going to focus on the classic list of basic Christian beliefs. Intertwined through the various Christian traditions the essentials are the beliefs that show up pretty much everywhere. **They are catholic beliefs** spelt with a small “c” which simply means universal.

The common essential beliefs are (1) **belief in** the divinity of Christ, (2) **belief that** salvation is by grace through faith, (3) **belief that** God raised Jesus from the dead, (4) **belief that** there is only one God who we know in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and (5) **belief that** news of Jesus’ death and resurrection is good news for everyone. Of course, we have many other beliefs **namely that God created the heavens and the earth**, but that belief isn’t uniquely Christian, that’s a belief we share with Jews and Muslims.

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Developing lists of beliefs is a very left-brained activity. It appeals to our tendency to want everything to be neat and tidy. **But you can't put God in a box. You can't contain** God within the words of a Creed, **or even within** the pages of a systematic theology book. No list of essentials can ever be definitive. No list of essentials can ever be complete. **That's when I realized** I need to stop approaching this with my left brain, and let my right brain have its way. So, I removed the plural and went to the singular and renamed this message "**The Essential is Enough!**" Jesus is enough. Jesus is really all we ever needed. Jesus is the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, he is our Lord and Master, our Savior and Redeemer, and our God and our friend.

So, the essential to being a Christian is to live and move and have your very being in Christ. **Do as** Christ does, **think as** Christ thinks, **and be as** Christ is. It's simple, it's obvious, and yet it's totally impossible **unless we allow Christ** to live and move and have his very being with us. It is Christ's Spirit that makes us one with God, and one with each other, and one in ministry to the entire world. **So please, stay forever focused on the essential.**

End III.

Conclusion: What's the one thing that a Christian can't possibly be a Christian without? It's Christ. Christ is essential. **Yet so many are still getting stuck majoring in the minors.** They focus on church attendance, or giving, or serving, or using wine or grape juice, or if it's ok to have coffee in worship. They are majoring in the minors. **But being a Christian still is, and always will be, about following Christ.** It's not about chasing your dreams or hiding from your fears. It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, educated, or simple minded, stable, or out of balance. All that matters is that you're following Christ. **So please, stay forever focused on the essential.** For it is in Christ that we live, and move, and have our very being. Jesus Christ is "*The Essential* and that is Enough!"

{Play Audio: "*Give Me Jesus Clip.mp3*" [0:14]}

Closing Prayer: Let's pray. O God, you have given us Jesus. Jesus is the savior of our souls and the Lord of our lives. The essential is enough! **Amen!**

10:30 Closing Hymn: "*We Are One in the Spirit*" Black Hymnal No. 2223

All Four Verses

Sending Forth: Are you distracted? Are you too busy chasing your own dreams, or hiding from your own fears? Then stop focusing on the minors and start focusing on Jesus. Go forth with Jesus and you'll see that "*The Essential certainly is Enough!*" **And all of God's people said...Amen!**