

## God Will Make Them Stand

by Linda Rex

**September 17, 2023, Proper 19 / After Pentecost**—This morning I was reading the Old Testament passage for this Sunday when it occurred to me that being baptized in Jesus' death and resurrection is a lot like the Israelites walking through the waters of the Jordan with the Egyptians in pursuit. As we rise out of the waters of baptism, Jesus accomplishes for us what we cannot do ourselves—he buries the enemy in utter defeat, and puts us safely on the other shore where we begin our new life in him.

With our warrior, Jesus, fighting for us, how can we fail? All we have left to do is to celebrate the victory and begin to live this new life in Christ in joyful worship (see Exodus 15:1b–11, 20–21). Now life and death are placed on a new elevation, with grace being the operative word that guides and fuels our life in Christ.

The situation the apostle Paul addresses in Romans 14:1–12 is that we tend to get stuck on the dos and don'ts of our walk in Christ. And it's bad enough that we do this with ourselves—the worse thing is when we do it with one another. If we have never really come to a realization of our own need for God's grace and haven't fully embraced the gift God has given, we will tend to be very critical of others in how they live their lives. This is especially true for those of us who say we are followers of Jesus Christ.

It may be helpful to listen to your self, to your conversations within and without, for oftentimes we do not see how we are really functioning when it comes to these things. We are often a lot like Peter, who asked Jesus just how many times he had to forgive his brother. He thought he was being really generous when he suggested seven times—even the rabbis only said he needed to forgive three times and that would be gracious enough.

But Jesus pinpointed the issue and got right to the heart of the matter—Peter didn't see his own need for grace, his own need to be forgiven. He was focused on the error another person was committing. Jesus wanted him to face his own need for grace, and in doing so, find that he had every reason to forgive and keep forgiving, no matter how many times the other person offended him (Matthew 18:21–35).

The apostle Paul used this same principle in talking to the members in Rome who just couldn't seem to get past the things which divided them. He reminded the members that their brother or sister answered to God and God alone, and that Jesus was quite capable of making them right with the God they answered to, in spite of the ways in which they differed in their worship of God. Some still felt compelled to observe the Jewish holy days and special food requirements; others did not. Paul told them to keep these secondary things secondary, and to focus on the centrality of Jesus Christ. There they would find their unity.

Jesus is the warrior who defends each of us; he is our advocate. We do not pass judgment on one another, nor do we condemn one another, because that judgment and condemnation was already poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus already paid whatever is due—it is forgiven. The billion-dollar debt we owed has been stamped with a paid-in-full stamp and then shredded—it no longer exists.

The question is, do we live as though there is still a debt outstanding? Do we hold others to their debts, when Jesus has already made things right? Maybe instead of pointing out people's sins, they'd be better served by being told that God loves them and has already made things right in and through the gift of his Son and his Spirit, and that we want to include them in our own walk with Christ. Perhaps, instead of focusing on the enemy and evil which was drowned in the sea,

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we may want to focus on Jesus and following him, and celebrating with others our new life in him. Perhaps, we may wish to find in Christ what unites us instead of looking for things that only divide. This is our challenge as followers of Christ, for Jesus has commanded us to love one another in such a way that every can see we are his followers. We may want to ask ourselves how well are we doing this.

*Our dear God, enable us to see clearly both our need for you and your grace, and the wonderful deliverance you have given us in Christ. Open our hearts and minds, that we may receive your mercy and grace, and ever offer it to others generously and freely, in Jesus' name. Amen.*

*“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘ “as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall give praise to God.” ’ So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.” Romans 14:1–12 NASB*