

Romans 14:19-21 (NKJV)

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

I was talking to a person a few weeks ago about spiritual things. He started down the path of how he prefers to worship. The person began to say how going off by himself is how he prefers to worship. Surely there can be nothing wrong with that. He didn't prefer the mainstream idea of worshipping in a formal worship service. That just didn't put him in the right mindset.

Have you ever heard that? If you have spent any time in evangelistic conversations I am sure you have. Why? Because our culture is saturated with ideas that firmly place **us** at the center of all meaning in life. Life is about **me** and how I seek to **please myself**. Evidently "selfie" is the new word for 2013. It is a word used to describe pictures we take of ourselves with our phones. I can't think of a more accurate term. Life in our culture revolves around our "selfies". I am not trying to say that taking a picture of yourself is evil, or anything like that. But I think it shows a hunger for significance that it has become such a trend. It is a reflection of our self oriented lifestyles.

When I was talking to the gentleman about the **preferred place of worship** I knew immediately that he was missing the point about **true spirituality**. I didn't do a great job of explaining it, but the real issue is that the Bible **does not tell us** how to live a spiritual life in seclusion. The epistles are written **to**, or at least **about**, life lived in the church. Look at them. Read them. We tend to read them as good Americans and try to glean how to improve our quiet times and prayer lives. We try to figure out God's will for our next purchase or our next career choice. But oddly enough, most of what is addressed in scripture is **how our lives should be lived in the context of the body of Christ**. It is about how we are to live out our Christian lives in reflecting Christ to our brothers and sisters, and then to the rest of the unbelieving world.

Now you know me well enough to know that I am not making a stand against your own personal Bible Study and prayer. I am in no way saying you should not foster your spiritual growth in private. But what I am saying is that when you begin thinking that your Christian life is primarily about you and Jesus alone, you have lost the true perspective of the Kingdom of God. You have lost the satellite view. Our context this morning is believers who had settled some things in their private relationship to Christ. Some believed some things were ok to do. Some thought

that they were not. And in a sense, both of them were right, at least in their own personal walks. But Paul did not leave it at that. That was not enough for them to know it for themselves. They had to think from another perspective.

When we read our text this morning we have got to consider those implications. We have to understand that living in such a way where we think spirituality is only Jesus and me is to live in a way that will violate the church of Christ. The spirituality that Christ wants is often viewed in some of the simplest, most observable fashions. He isn't impressed by our spiritual dramatics or histrionics. He isn't impressed by the flash and the drama. Last week we looked at the things He **is** pleased by. Looking out for our brother's best interest and laying down our rights for their good is what He is pleased by. You cannot do that in isolation. And the more isolated your thinking is, the less likely you are to do it when you have a chance. A Christian is born into a kingdom. And that kingdom is full of people. And we are all in this together.

So let's see how Paul continues to apply this.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

The word for **pursue** is interesting. For those of you who play basketball, when you are on defense and someone makes a fast break and you have a chance to stop them, this is your word. It describes what you are doing when you high tail it down the court to get to the basket before they do. You are pursuing them with great intent and passion and resolve.

Or parents, when you see your toddler heading toward a flight of steps or a road, how do you pursue them. That is the same word.

The word that Paul used here helps us to see that this is not something passive or casual. It is something we are to get behind. It is something we should be active about. And what are those things?

He gives us two things to focus on.

- 1. Things which make for peace and**
- 2. Things to edify another**

What does he mean by things which make for peace? Basically this is talking about getting along. It is talking about peaceful relationships with other believers. There is nothing complicated about **the concept**. But that is not to say that it is **simple to do**. We are told here that we should pursue these things with a passion. We are told to **do those things** that would tend to have us all getting along without divisions and fightings and schisms and resentments. And notice how he makes it **everyone's** responsibility. Maybe your personality lends to creating these problems. Maybe your personality tends to remaining outside of these conflicts. It doesn't matter. You are both told to pursue this goal.

In the light of the context, Paul is telling people who disagree about freedoms to do whatever it takes to not allow the differences in **beliefs on peripheral issues** to cause divisions. If it is not an essential doctrine, don't allow it to ruin fellowship. Agree to disagree. Or choose to keep it out of the limelight. And don't just wait for this to happen. Go after it. Be proactive. See to it that these things don't destroy fellowship.

Then next- chase after things to edify another. Edify means the act of one who promotes another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness. Do you see what I mean about the Christian life not being primarily about us in a vacuum? I may be right about an issue of freedom. I may be wrong about it. But that is not the most important thing. My brother's spiritual status is the important thing. How people are doing in their walk with Christ is the important thing. Love is the important thing.

Paul's focus on self is often self in regard to our service to others or self in regard to our service to Christ. He takes us from the world view we love, which is **how is my world treating me, benefiting me, exalting me?** How are others building me up or treating me with the respect I deserve? How are they making the center of their universe? Or what do I have the freedom to do without a care about how it affects someone else? **And he will have none of that.** He **turns it around** to answer the question, how is what you are doing bringing peaceful relations to the fellowship? How is what you are doing taking other people further in their walk with Christ?

I wonder what would really happen if we actually applied these concepts in our day to day treatment of our families. What would happen between husbands and wives if we quit worrying about our rights and applied these principles in the spots that are most pesky, most sensitive?

What would happen if we sought passionately after peaceful relationships. Naturally that means we would have to keep our flesh under control. We would have to **say no to what flesh naturally wants** and **yes** to what Christ wants for the other people in our lives. It would mean asking how can I cultivate my wife or husband's walk with Christ instead of how can I get them to do those things I want them to do for me. Most of our problems come from a preoccupation with self. The same is true for children and parents. The same is true in the church of Christ.

Mr Barnhouse asked a friend of his who was heavily involved in overseeing missions what he found **that destroyed missionary unity** and what built it up.

The man took an hour and wrote a list. I thought it might be good for us to hear this morning.

These are the things that cause trouble.

An unforgiving spirit

Self seeking

A legalistic spirit

Playing God for others

Hypocrisy

Failing to appreciate other's gifts

Failing to make allowances for one another

Lack of patience

Not sympathizing with others infirmities or , perhaps, their lack of gifts that we possess

Evil speaking

Assuming, without grounds, that others are at fault

Pulling one another to pieces

Suspecting the motives of another

A domineering spirit

A rebellious spirit

Snobbery

Hatred

Grumbling

Arguing

Murmuring

Maliciousness

Being a busybody

Greediness

Bitterness

Resentment

A sense of inferiority

Lack of security

Instability

Timidity

Spite

Laziness

Economic sponging

Lying and slander

Jealousy

Thinking too highly of ones self

A Critical spirit toward others

Carrying on controversy

Being ill informed about the position of another.

This list was compiled in the 50's. Nothing has changed. These are the things in us that can easily destroy peace. These are the things that keep us from edifying one another. And they are the ways we are continually tempted to act. Analyze what is going wrong in your relationships and some of these things will be present in you and in others.

But here is the other half of the list. It is a list of the attributes that add to peace and mutual edification.

Willingness to be in subjection to one another

Considering others better than oneself

An understanding spirit

A sense of intimate relationship to Christ

Not insisting on our own rights

Willingness to confess a wrong spirit

Sincerity

A generous spirit

A sympathetic spirit

Trusting others

Having faith in Christ

Joyfulness

Prayer

Discretion

A Critical spirit toward oneself

A gentle and quiet spirit

Using our gifts for one another

Remembering our own mistakes

Christ centeredness

Love, in word and deed

Fair dealing

Integrity

Recognizing one's place

A forgiving spirit

Doing things decently and in order

Conscientiousness

Faithfulness

Being responsible to perform tasks assigned to us

Not misusing our authority over others

Being willing to follow those in authority over us.

Do you want to be a peacemaker? Do you want to be an edifier? These are the traits to put on. All of them show a lack of self serving and a consideration of the desires of Christ and others above our own.

I sometimes think that Christ has not put us here in the church at Ferndale for no reason. He sent us an exceptional preacher and wise counsellor for about 30 years. Partly, I'm sure Christ did that because He loves us. But I think it may be more than that. I think He wants to **use** us. We have a good foundation. We have been taught what true spirituality is and what hogwash is. We have been taught to tell the difference. I believe this is becoming more rare in our world and God has plans to use us. But the question is, will we obey Him? Will we do what He says? Will we be the people to put off the old and put on the new? Will we seek peace and the edification of others? Will we do it at our own expense? If we will, we will foster a church environment that God may entrust his newest additions to. He knows they will be loved and cared for. He knows they will be built up.

But if we will not, we are not likely to be blessed with this fruit of evangelism. If all we care about is ourselves and our own, why would he add to our numbers? Do we even want to have more people to minister to? Would that even be something we would see as a blessing? It would intrude into our comfort. It would require personal sacrifice. It is not something **others** must do. It would be something **we all** must do. Is that even what we want? We know from scripture that this is what **Christ** wants. But do we identify with Christ to the place that we want to be part of that process?

Now that the purchase of church property is likely to become a reality I have a fear. I have a fear that the best thing about us will be our building. I fear that we will be better explained by sociology and psychology than spirituality. I fear that we will be good examples of rational humans but we will not display the radical obedience that characterized the church in Acts. We do what it takes to have well rounded moral lives, but we lose sight of the only thing that matters, are we pleasing Christ?

I believe a new building can be a helpful tool in gathering together more like-minded followers of Christ. But the last thing in the world I want is for us to focus on the building as anything more than a tool. The thing that matters is what Paul is covering today. Will we subvert our desires for the Lord's priorities? Will we pray **and mean** "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" Will we be obedient when our spouses are difficult to live with, when our kids don't respond as they should? When our parents aren't as rational as we would like them to be? When fellow believers are difficult to live with? When we can keep our sins secret and get away with them? That is where the truth about our walk with Christ is. That is reality. That is what God sees. Will we do business in those places? Will we live to please Him there? A new building will not cure those ills. Will we truly live to be peacemakers and edifiers? Will we live that Christ-like existence?

Let's move on in our text.

20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense.

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

First we were told to edify, which is to build up. Now we are told **not to tear down** believers. This command is stated as Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. There is no neutrality. We either serve to build up or to tear down a person in the faith. And we know that every person **who is in the faith** is not there by their own doing. They are a work of God. God has placed them there. So we are to not destroy that work of God. We are not to have a negative effect on that person. And especially we should not have that negative effect just so that we can selfishly indulge in some freedom to eat food. It is not worth it. Then Paul jumps back to the objective stance on the issue. All things are indeed pure. This is a good example of the way the word "all" can be misunderstood in scripture. Does this mean that sexual immorality is pure? Of course not. Does it mean greed is pure? No. This word "all" is used in the context of food and that is what it is talking about. There is no longer any unclean food.

Be very careful when people use the word "all" as if it is universal. You always need to define "all" by looking at the context it is used in.

So all foods are pure. That is the accurate theological statement on the matter. But there is more to it than that. There are brothers and sisters to be considered. So while the food may be fine for you to eat in secret. When you eat it in such a way that you cause a brother or sister harm, that pure food is used for an evil purpose. The issue is not about the food but it is about the use of it. If it is used in harming a brother, that action is evil, no matter what the truth of the freedom

to eat it is. So the good thing can be used to an evil end. And notice that the harm done to another believer is not called unfortunate. It is not called questionable. It is called evil. There is nothing worse than doing harm to other believers. We do well to consider that in all our interactions with those we believe to be followers of Christ. Doing them harm due to our own selfishness is called evil in scripture.

And what then is good?

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Now keep in mind that we could argue all day about having the right before Christ to eat this meat. We would be 100% correct about our theology. We would be saying, it is ok to eat this meat. I am free to eat this meat. I can eat this meat if I want to. And your theology is right. But if you eat it even when a brother has not reached the same position, how is that act considered? It is evil.

But it is **good** if you take that food that is ok to eat and **refuse** to eat it for the benefit of your brother's conscience. This is no small thing. This is essentially saying that, while good theology on non essential things is important, loving your brother is more important. If the item is controversial, the **person** becomes more important than your **position**.

So it is GOOD to not eat the meat that is perfectly fine to eat because love is more important than freedom.

Then notice he goes on to wine. This is the first mention of wine. It is very likely this was an issue of self deprivation. I have never read anything that leads me to believe that those living in the new testament era would have had the aversion to wine that Christians in our era have. But they may have had a view that said that a good Christian refrains from such pleasures in an effort to be more godly, as if the more things you deprive yourself of, the more holy you will be. Paul is basically saying, if this causes a problem to a brother, then just skip the wine with your meal. It is not a question of theology. It is a question of worth. How much is your brother worth? How much is peace with your brother worth? How much is his edification worth? If drinking that glass of wine interferes with that which would do your brother eternal good, can you really justify drinking it? It simply is not worth it. It is evil to make the choice of **that pleasure** over your brother's welfare.

Now Paul covered meat and wine, but he doesn't want people to miss the point.

So he broadens it out so no one can miss the point. He says

nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

Some of the texts omit “or is offended or is made weak”. But it doesn’t matter. Stumbling includes all those things. Remember the stumbling block illustration I gave of tripping over the chair in the shack. That is the stumbling we are talking about here. And we are not to do anything that would cause that kind of harm to another believer. We should carry out no freedoms we have in Christ that would cause them harm instead of edification. If there is something we can simply deny ourselves of **for their sake**, we should. No freedom is worth doing a brother harm.

Do you want to know what Christ thinks is important? It is the welfare of every one of His children. And if you have to make a sacrifice in their best interest, well, how great of a sacrifice is it compared to the one Christ made for you?

I hope the Word has challenged us this morning to consider what really pleases Christ, and what actions we can take to have peace with our brothers and sisters. Remember, these aren’t things we just allow. They are things we are all responsible to pursue, to run after with a passion.

I hope the Word has challenged us to consider the priority we should have of building up our brothers and sisters, even when that comes at our own expense.