

Watch Your Life Romans 14:13-15

As we come to our passage this morning, we recognize that it is connected to what Paul has been talking about because this paragraph begins with the word “therefore.” “Therefore” looks back and starts to bring conclusions to bear. You can see that these conclusions form the rest of the chapter. We have a “therefore” here, and then in verse 16 begins the same way with the word “so,” also forming a conclusion with the same word, and then in verse 19, “so then.” It brings a conclusion of one conclusion and then enters into another conclusion that Paul makes based on judgmentalism and unity in the household of faith.

And Paul has just warned all of us that we will have to appear before God. Just because we have redeemed through the blood of Christ we will not slip into eternity unnoticed but we will appear before God, and even as we looked at last time, even though there will be no condemnation to those who are in Christ, our works will be examined to see the nature and see how they glorified Christ. And we realize that judgment, ultimate judgment is God’s prerogative and not ours. We realize that those who have been called are God’s servants and not ours. And about nonessential matters we have to be so careful. It is easy to make our way the only way. Home schoolers can judge others and even relate to only those who home school, even in the church. Those in public school with only those who public school. And we can actually have very harsh divisions in the church. And it is not to say the education of children is not important and it is not an issue that we should not discuss. But it is the judgmental attitude, even if someone else is convinced that this is right for their children, or they might feel ill-equipped to homeschool their children, they are forced if you want into our group this is what you have to do.

You can even see this in the pandemic between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals. Some of the comments that were made about the other group. And when you listen to the opposing group, they had clear convictions on why they got vaccinated and why they did not. I agreed with one group and not another, but I knew that if I forced individuals to do what I did I would cause them to sin against their consciences even if I make a logical case. We were free to talk and seek to understand and even challenge one another, but that is different from forcing or coercing or the angrily denouncing others.

And the amazing thing that happens to be in all issues of life is that we forget our calling. We forget who we are to represent. And we forget the greatest battle is always in us and not around us. We tend to concentrate on people and others, what they think and do, but we seldom concentrate and seek to judge our own hearts and actions. Think of it: we say that we are not finished products and there is so much that needs to be changed in us, but when was the last time you confessed to God what needs to change in your life. When you have not seen eye to eye about certain issues in Christianity, we often concentrate on the other person. But what has God shown you about you? Has he shown you how impatient you are with people? Has he shown you how short you are with others, or how unloving you are, or how unkind and ungracious you can be? Has he shown you how you do not trust in His wisdom and sovereignty that he has actually brought these people and these situations into your life for your

good and his glory? I have a friend who has no category called the weak. He has no category for those who are immature or something that believers can disagree on. It is either you agree with him on every issue and every issue is given a life or death status, or you are disobedient and outside the will of God. And he draws many people to himself through his strong rhetoric that condemns other believers who see certain issues differently, and who would be sinning against their conscience if they went the way that he wanted them to go.

Maturity is the ability to see what is just areas of growth in people's lives, what is essential to believe, and what is things that are important to us but we can disagree on, and what areas on absolutely essential. That takes humility and discernment. That takes the ability to love others and be patient with them. And how mature are you in this area? Are you exhausting to others because everything is so heavy and everything is equally a big deal? In order to live that life that glorifies God we have to realize two truths.

1. One is that we need to be experts at examining our own hearts. V. 13.

When I write a sermon, I study the text to try and see the meaning and understand all the parts, how they fit together, and what they mean. And then I write it out, and then in about ten to fifteen weeks I revisit it. I study it once again, and get ready to preach it. And one of the things I try to do at this point is internalize the message. Really contemplate that it is just not giving information to people. What is this passage saying about God? What is it saying about me? And here is the hard part - looking at my own life in light of this passage. That is how the Scriptures become life-changing. Before this passage can change others I need through the grace of Christ let it change and examine my own heart and life. And right here: is there areas in my own life that through my arrogance of being right that I am actually uncaring of others, and even causing them to be discouraged in their walk with Christ? There are times in our lives where we can be right, but through our actions and attitudes with others be so wrong. We need to be able to examine our own hearts and lives. Are you seeing areas when it comes to how you think and act with others that you need to change?

This really is an interesting verse. Look at what he says here, "**Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.**" Based on the fact that God will judge us, and it is only his prerogative to judge and not ours, Paul says, "let us." So it is a call for all of us, both the strong and the weak. We shouldn't be listening to a message like this and be saying, "I hope so and so gets this message." By saying that or thinking that we are saying that we do not need this message. And he says basically to stop doing what you are doing. This is an activity that God does not want you engaged in. And let me say clearly again, that the judgment here is not over some cardinal doctrine such as the deity of Christ, but whether certain foods were clean or unclean, or the observance of certain holy days. And it is amazing because when we do judge one another we hold one another in contempt. There is a feeling of superiority and certainly not the oneness that we have in Jesus Christ. Have you ever been in the presence of someone who thinks they are so superior to you? Well, don't be that person. Don't be overly critical. Don't be given over to overt condemnation. You can be

in people's presence and it is one judgement after another, and they can think they are seeing so clearly. It is so exhausting, but can find ourselves doing the same thing.

But Paul says, don't do that. Rather than judging others, look at what he says here, **"but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of your brother."** Now look at that word "decide." It is the same word "judgement" that you have in the previous verse. There it means being critical of others. Here judgment carries another meaning and that is to decide or determine. So I look at the situation and the circumstance, and I think about what activity I am engaged in or what the issues of the day are, and I start to think how my actions and words and behaviours will affect others. So I judge what is going on in my own heart, but also decide what is the best way to help them; what is the best and highest way to encourage them to follow Christ, and not be an obstacle in their way of following Christ. Is the conversation that I am having edifying? Does it help them follow Christ, or does it confuse them? Am I making a big deal off something that is not? Are the actions that I am doing confusing others?

Now I want us to realize what this passage of Scripture is calling us to. It is calling us to limit our lives in certain areas in order to help others live out their faith in Jesus Christ. There is conscious effort in how to help others and not be an obstacle. And that is what it means to be a stumbling block. A believer does not do this knowingly. He does not want to be a hindrance to anyone's faith, but we can do that by just not thinking, or rolling our eyes and just not thinking how this could effect others. And the examples of this are numerous. In days gone by, Christians would often say that they have the liberty to drink alcohol. There is no stipulation against alcohol in the Scriptures as long as alcohol does not consume them. But most Christians used to say that many adults have been saved out of a life where alcohol was wicked and evil as far as how people used it. It was tied up in worldly and evil activity. It how the ungodly celebrated. So believers would willingly give up their right because they did not want to unknowingly cause another to fall. And people get so frustrated. I have the right to have a glass of wine. And you do, but with all the choices you have, and realizing the harm that alcohol has caused in our world and how many were saved out of that culture, is this really the wisest course of action?

There are so many other areas that this could cover, but sometimes it is more about our freedom rather than thinking of others. What about simple things like the way you dress? Women can dress not provocatively but just on the border of it. We do not want to be prudes and dress like we lived in the 1800's but so often a person can cause another to stumble. And you might say, well he needs to get his mind out of the gutter. I have the right to dress the way I want. But is there any thought about the other? We talk so much about rights in Christianity today. Christians have become experts on the Constitution and their rights. But how does the exercise of my rights effect my fellow believer? There is a such a carelessness and disregard. They just need to grow up! And one of the greatest stumbling blocks that I have seen this past couple of years is causing other believers to be angry and frustrated and hopeless because we have made a secondary thing a primary thing. We care more about self than we do others. We have become experts at condemning others and not seeing the war in our own hearts and lives.

2. We need to let our love for God cause us to love others. Vv. 14-15.

Wow, this is something that should consume us, and that is our love for God should cause us to love one another. So much so, that we are willing to forgo just about anything rather than be an obstacle to my brother and sister in Christ. So the motivation here is not just a fear that I might be judged by God in causing my brother or sister to stumble, but the motivation is my love for God and others. There is no way that I can say that I love God if I do not love my fellow believers. And love in its truest form always involves sacrifice. I give up what I can have or even enjoy for the welfare of others. We realize this world is always mocking your faith, and seeking to tempt us to sin and away from Jesus Christ. It is an awful, sinful world. But a worse sin is one of God's children causes another believer to fall into sin. We can be that instrument.

Look at what Paul says here, **“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.”** This is quite the statement from a former Pharisee who would have loved and cherished the Mosaic law to realize that the dietary restrictions were null and void through Jesus Christ. But many newly saved Jews would struggle with this new freedom, and even though they knew that they were not saved by what they ate or didn't eat, it still would be a struggle. It is the same of those who came from a pagan background. Many of the festivals and sacrifices of animals involved the deity of that day inhabiting the sacrifice. So when you ate the meat you were taking in the deity. But idols are nothing. They do not exist. This sacrificial meat was cheaper in the market, but for the weak to eat it, even though they know their security is in Christ, it would be a sin. Paul sees the principle so clearly. Nothing is unclean whether it is beef or bacon. God has given us all things to enjoy. And we can be thankful for our tastebuds.

But for the one who thinks it is unclean then it is unclean, as Paul says. He is saying don't sin against your conscience. And here is the thing you have to realize: we all have struggles and we all have temptations that we are more susceptible toward. There are things that we might not be able to engage in or places that we could go, that would be perfectly legitimate for another believer. If we think that we are either sinning against God or will be tempted to sin against God, then simply refrain. Don't do it. Our relationship with God is always of paramount importance. It is so easy to look down on others that have hang-ups, but praise God that they see them and are sensitive to their relationship with God. And we have to ask ourselves - what are the activities and places and things that would lead us astray?

But here the emphasis is on others, because look at what he says in verse 15, **“For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”** We have heard others say when others want to engage in an activity that others might struggle with, “I don't care.” I heard it during this pandemic. I don't care if people think it is unloving. They need to grow up. This is not sin. I don't care if they think the vaccine is harmful they need to strap them down and put it in them. I don't care if they lose their job. It is their choice to lose their job. If someone has that strong of a conviction that they are willing to lose their job, even if they are wrong, can we really say, “I don't care.” Or if someone wears a mask. Cue eye rolling. Masks don't do anything. I don't care that they are uncomfortable. And really if we can say it really clear because we realize that

God is sovereign where everyone is on their Christian pilgrimage to Christ-likeness, I don't care about God. I don't care how he wants me to treat that person. I just don't love God or this person enough to limit my freedom.

And think of it, because it is talking about **“if your brother is grieved by what you eat.”** The meaning of grieved is hurt or in distress. Here is someone I thought was mature and living for Christ, and one of two things happen. We cause them to engage in the same activity and they sin against their conscience and their relationship with God is hindered. Or, they are grieved that someone they respected would sin against God and they would be in some way discouraged in following Christ. If this mature believer cannot follow Christ in this simple area such as limiting their freedom then what hope have I? And they are discouraged and grieved by Christ.

And Paul wants us to know, even if you are right about the meat or right in your position, your unwillingness and failure to limit your freedom is a failure to love your brother. I'd rather have cheap steak than my brother be encouraged to follow Christ. Listen to what Paul says in a passage that we have related to this section over in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13, **“However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”**

Imagine never to eat meat again - to actually become a vegetarian for the sake of another who was brought up in a culture where the eating of meat, because of its connotation with idols, will always be sinful. He knows its only meat but always be looked upon as sin. Here is the question: would you do that for the sake and the spiritual health of another believer? Maybe a better question is: what would you not be willing to give up? What would be too much? I find that the only ones arguing for more alcohol consumption are believers. The world already realizes how many pitfalls and how it can take control of someone. Grow up! It's my right and freedom to drink. Give me chapter and verse to tell me I cannot.

Again, we can apply this to so many areas of our lives. This passage is calling us to think, not just what is permissible to me, but more importantly how do I minister, love, and encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ in Christian love and unity? And again, think of the seriousness of this lack of empathy and love in our lives. Look at the end of verse 15, **“do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”** Can you think of anything more valuable than the sacrifice of our Lord? Our Lord died for individuals. He loved them with a sacrificial love - a love that gave up. Are we willing to give up? Never use your liberty as an opportunity to sin or cause other to stumble and sin.