

Love Clears the Way

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Let us go to God's Word this morning. We're going to be looking at Romans chapter 14.! Pardon my voice is about three, probably three octaves lower than it usually is.

I have a much more tenor voice, but this morning I sound more like Johnny Cash. So, I'll do my best to, well, it probably sounds more masculine than usual, so that's probably a good thing. That's an advantage.

All right? But we'll press on through it, because being in a room full of children all week and trying to command their attention requires vocal cords, and I've stretched them probably beyond their healthy state, so bear with me.

But we'll be going to God's Word in Romans 14. And this morning the title of the sermon is Love Clears the Way. We'll be looking at really the second half of Romans 14, verses 13 through 23. So, Love Clears the Way. That is our title for this morning. We all have our issues, don't we? You have issues. I have issues.

[1 : 07] Every family certainly has issues. I mean, if you were to open up my home on any given day, stick your head in a window and listen, you would hear and see and experience firsthand the Plank family issues.

We've got our issues. My oldest is 15 almost. My youngest is four. And we've got five children, and we've got a lot of issues. And then you put me in there, and I'm a large walking issue.

Okay? Families have issues, and certainly that applies to the church of God. The church of God, the household of faith, has issues. We have issues. Every church has issues.

There will be, whenever we gather, whenever you put one or more sinners together, even if one sinner is by themselves, there will be issues. And if you put us together with all of our experience, with all the hurts we've experienced in the past, with all the ways we've hurt others, and you throw all that together, and you're going to find there's a host of issues.

It's tough to be in the church. It can be a very difficult experience to walk out faith in fellowship. And honestly, that's why I love the New Testament, because the New Testament is very practical on this point.

[2 : 31] It does provide us with crystal clear instruction from Jesus, through the apostles, on how we're to work through those issues together.

I mean, it's very practical. I mean, the New Testament is very clear that our experience of faith together is going to be a difficult one. And we're going to be looking at one facet of the difficulty of dealing with our issues in the household of faith.

And that will be found in Romans chapter 14. So it may be a temptation for each of us to bemoan the difficulty.

It might be, for some of us even this morning, there might be a relational breakdown you're experiencing in the church. And I want to encourage you to press on. And I hope by the end of this time in God's Word that you will have it on your heart more and more to cherish the work of God in the church, to make every effort to be at peace with all people, especially those in the church, and that the Lord Jesus will help us to love His people more, because it's worth it.

Because our struggle is to be a loving family. We are all in our own household struggling to be loving families, to not bicker among one another. And in the household of God, with all of our struggles and issues, we're struggling to love one another.

[3 : 54] But know this, God has anticipated our struggles, and He speaks right at them. The Lord is not going to beat around the bush.

He's going to speak right to the problem. And He's going to help us by His grace, by the Holy Spirit, who is very much involved, more than we know, in the peace and the unity that we can strive for.

The Spirit of God is active and working us toward that. So let's go to God's Word together. Romans 14. Now, before we get to Romans 14, here we go.

I'm going to back up a little bit to Romans chapter 12, because I think if we're going to understand what Paul is about to say in 14 verses 13 through 23, you do have to back up a bit, really the whole book of Romans.

I'm not going to preach an entire sermon in the book of Romans. Mind you, that would take seven or eight hours. But we at least need to get some context, because Romans 1 through 11, if you know the book of Romans, as I know many of you do, it's a most cherished book.

[4 : 57] It is Paul's longest letter, an epistle written to a church in Rome, made up of Gentiles and Jews together. And he's addressing this church, this new church, he's addressing them with the gospel.

And really, the first 11 chapters are Paul sharing the gospel with these new Christians, telling them the truth of who Jesus is, what He's done for us, and what it means for us as believers.

So he gets to chapter 12, and look with me, if you want to turn back a couple pages. Chapter 12, Paul says this, and this is a transition statement. So 11 chapters, Paul's been dropping the gospel on Rome.

And in chapter 12, verse 1, he makes a transition, says this, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

And he makes this transition in verse 1 and 2 to basically say this, in light of everything I've just talked about, I dropped this gospel bomb on you, now what?

[6 : 08] How shall we then live? What Jesus has done for you, who Jesus is, how does that then walk out in regular day-to-day life? And in particular, as we're going to find in Romans 14, how does it apply to how we treat one another in the church?

How do we deal with one another in the household of faith? And that's the transition here. We're looking at how does the gospel walk itself out? And in specifics, in chapter 14 in Romans now, we're dealing with secondary issues.

Romans 14 really is an unpacking of how do Christians deal with one another when we differ in opinion, right? There are as many opinions in this room as there are people.

There really truly are. And sometimes, opinions on matters that are more secondary can often trip us up and cause us to be divided.

And that's what Paul's aiming at here. That's our Savior's concern for the church is that we not be divided over secondary things, things that are not of first importance. That the gospel actually has enough gravitational pull to keep us together through secondary issues.

[7 : 22] That Jesus Christ, being the sun in our galaxy, is bright enough and strong enough and big enough to draw us and keep us together. That little things, though they may be important in how they work themselves out and how we apply God's truth to our lives individual by individual, family by family, though we may choose to apply those secondary things differently, bear in mind, Jesus is big enough when we gather to keep us together.

He's big enough. And that's the point of chapter 14 in Romans. And Paul is going to hold up the Lord Jesus Christ and apply directly to us in our differences of opinion how we ought to live in the mercies of God.

So, listen, I want to be a little clear here, a little more clear to what I mean by secondary issues. Now, concerning primary issues, we can't differ on opinion on a lot of things, right?

There are certain things about the Christian life and walk that you and I cannot be differing in opinion on, okay? Obviously, you know very well, Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, very God Himself in the flesh.

We're not going to differ in opinion on that. And if you do, you're probably not a Christian. So, we have another discussion to have. Because that's a primary doctrine. So, we're not talking about primary doctrines here in chapter 14 in Romans.

[8 : 47] Paul is dealing with secondary issues. And when it comes to matters of sin and righteousness, you and I should not differ in opinion, right? The Ten Commandments, stand firm, right?

You shall not murder is not debatable in the church, okay? Adultery and fornication are forbidden. So, Paul is not in chapter 14 dealing with matters of sin and righteousness.

Although, certainly, sin and righteousness have to do with secondary matters. These are opinions, debatable things having to do with conscience. Having to do with how you choose in the light of God's truth as God has laid it on your heart to walk out your life.

I mean, it has to do with... I mean, there's a host of things we could use as examples to talk about this. I mean, even down to the... Do you drink Pepsi or Starbucks? Because Pepsi and Starbucks support gay rights.

They support abortion. So, for some Christians, they say, no way, Jose, I'm not drinking Pepsi. Because Pepsi supports the killing of babies.

[9 : 55] And other Christians are able to freely drink, open up a Pepsi and drink it down without a thought of what Pepsi gives their money to. Same thing with Starbucks.

That's like one of billions of examples, Christians, of the differences of opinion that we can bump up against with one another. Or even entertainment choices.

Certain Christians say, no to PG-13. No to going to the movies. No, unless it's a Christian movie. Or say the same about music. We're not listening to secular music in my house.

Maybe you've decided that. Maybe that's your opinion. That is your strong conviction. And then you bump up to some other Christians who feel very differently. They love the latest movie.

They're listening to the latest songs on the radio. And they're even tapping their foot to it. How do we deal with that as a Christian in the church in the household of faith?

[10 : 54] Because that's not a primary issue, right? Whether I listen to or not particular bands or types of music does not mean that I am or am not a Christian. That is not a primary doctrine.

Jesus is the Christ, the saving one, that is. Whether I drink Starbucks does not get me to heaven or not. Do you see the difference? It's important to note that. So Paul's dealing with secondary issues. It's these gray areas that are not so black and white. Areas of conscience and how we choose to live in the light of truth. So, that's the context.

Now we're going to read God's word. So let's ready our hearts. Let's open our hearts to hear from God Himself on this subject. Are you ready? Romans chapter 14.

Look with me. Romans 14 verses 13 through 23. God's word. verse 14. 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.

[11 : 58] 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. 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. So, do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God.

Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

[13 : 08] The faith you have keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.

But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, would you guide my tongue, my mind to speak what is true, what is right, what is pure from your scripture. I pray you would bless these hearers.

Lord, give them ears to hear, hearts to be hungry, and Lord, give them hearts that desire to grow and change for your glory. Do this all in our midst by the Spirit, in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. The theme for what we're going to be aiming at is quite simple. It's love protects the church by prizing unity and pursuing peace.

[14 : 13] Love protects the church by prizing unity and pursuing peace. And we're going to be again looking at how love clears the way. So let's look at this text.

The first step in our pursuit here is to understand that love perceives the problem. If we're going to be truly loving one another, as Paul is trying to teach us, right?

How am I supposed to treat you? How are you supposed to treat me in these secondary issues? Well, the first thing Paul is doing here in these verses is he perceives there is a problem. Love must perceive. You have to see it. You have to be able to understand there's a problem. You have to see it. Love perceives the problem.

This passage really is a correction. Paul is correcting something that's broken, something that's going awry, something that is not on track in love. He's dealing with it.

[15:12] He's speaking right at this issue. You can see verse 13. He's going right at it. Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another any longer.

So it's happening. He says any longer, don't do this, church. Stop it. Knock it off. Don't pass judgment any longer. So love is perceiving a problem.

And he goes on to correct the problem. Rather, decide never. So from this moment forward, decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

So to understand what's going on here, let's look at some of the background. The recipients of Paul's letter had issues of division between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Christians. This is first century Christianity.

It's hot off the press. Jesus rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. The church is beginning to gather. God has placed pastors over these churches, these young congregations, and Paul and the other apostles are out doing their apostolic thing.

[16:17] They're penning letters. They're teaching the Christians who gather in these places how to live in the light of what Jesus has done. So this is the context.

And we're looking at first century Jews who have become Christians mixing and mingling with first century Gentile believers. And you can imagine there's going to be issues.

And again, wherever you put one or more Christians or sinners, there's going to be issues. So Paul is looking at this probably. It takes 10% of the letter to Romans to deal with some of these pastoral issues.

That's how important it is to the health of a church, to the glory of God, to the upholding of the gospel, that we deal with this stuff, that we don't just sweep it away, hope it goes away.

No, we've got to deal with it. We've got to see there's a problem. Love will make the effort to look and see. And I'm not just talking about looking at other people. Who's the problem here?

[17:16] No, it's looking at yourself. Look at the log in our own eyes before we proceed to take the speck out of our brothers, right? Jesus taught us on that. So we must perceive the problem.

Clearly from verse 13 we can see the breakdown, the rub that's going on. There were those in the church at Rome who were stronger. Paul describes these people in chapter 14 as those who are the strong.

I think we can see it this way, that they're the ones who had a conscience that was able to partake in certain things that the weaker were not able to take or not able to partake in.

In this case, we can look at it this way, it's probably the Gentile believers are able to eat bacon and the Jewish believers believers. Clearly not. It's an issue of pork.

It's also an issue of Old Testament law. It's an issue of foods being sacrificed to idols. And that's very similar to like the whole Starbucks thing.

[18:19] I mean, you have first century Jews, basically, they're saying, I want nothing to do with Starbucks. They are sacrificing to demons, killing babies and supporting that.

And you have first century Gentiles are saying, well, I don't have to think about that. I can drink this latte to the glory of Jesus. And I don't think about where this money is going to.

I don't need to. That's the breakdown. You can see right away, you can imagine how difficult that would be for those two people to agree. And to come to unity and a sense of love and brotherhood. I mean, that's hard stuff. Again, that's why Paul's devoting time to deal with this issue. It's a powerful force in the church that can create division. Powerful force.

So the rub here is the weak are stumbling over what the strong are up to. And the problem is one of lack of consideration. It's not just that the strong are able to partake.

[19:22] Certainly the strong are welcome to partake in the quiet of their own homes. The issue is here of someone bringing their latte or their pork to church. That's the issue.

Is when they're gathering, they're bringing their bacon and slapping it on the table. Well, what do you think the Jewish Christians in the room are going to do? Do you think they're going to be free in their conscience to come sit and to have fellowship with you?

No. No. You're forcing a separation. You're forcing a divide in the church by slapping your bacon on the table. That's the problem. That's the breakdown in Rome. And Paul's going right at it. He says, stop it. Decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of your brother. That's the remedy here. Stop bringing your pork products to church.

Stop wearing these things on your sleeve. Don't be known for and insisting on other believers that I do these things. I partake in these activities.

[20 : 24] I subscribe to this political party, etc., etc. Paul's saying, leave that stuff at home. What is in your faith? Leave that between you and God, he says later in this passage.

If your faith is able to drink Starbucks, great. Do that at home. If your faith is able to eat the pork product, and I'm talking about the first century Rome, then great.

Enjoy your pork at home. Just not too much of it. All things in moderation. Right? Too much pork can be a bad idea. I assure you. I have lived to tell the tale.

So we can see the rub here, the breakdown. breakdown. Now, just a current example that comes right to mind. I read a book called Music Through the Eyes of Faith by Harold Best.

It's a fantastic book dealing with faith and music, really. That's what the title suggests. He gives an example of a person who was in a cult. And this person in this cult, they would sing particular songs.

[21 : 36] And when he was miraculously saved from this cult, Harold Best tells that this person became part of an evangelical church, and their lives were transformed by the power of the gospel.

But there was a difficulty. Some of the songs that he sang as an unbelieving cult member were being used in the church. And all of a sudden, this person, you can imagine what this person may have felt.

To try to sing those very same songs felt filthy to them. It felt dirty. It felt evil. Because those songs represented where he was coming from.

They represented the cult, the evil that he was wrapped up in, the darkness. But now all of a sudden, he's in the light. He's in Christ. He's with the church of God. They're singing these songs, and his conscience was filthy.

He couldn't handle it. And it took time. This traumatic response that was being triggered by these songs whenever the church would gather, it took time and the grace of God for this person to realize that Jesus had indeed set him so free.

[22 : 48] So free, in fact, that what was once an evil and used for evil was now able to be used for good and for glory and grace.

Do you see how that works? But it took time. That could not be forced. You can imagine that if you were church member Joe and this guy was weeping in trauma on the ground because they were singing songs that were filthy to him, if you tried to yell at this guy, get up, what are you crying about?

Sing this song. Give glory to God. If you tried to force the issue in the moment, do you think that's going to help this guy? Do you think this gentleman is going to be served by your insistence that he stand up and start clapping and singing the song that is filthy to him because of his past experience, because of his trauma?

No. It doesn't work like that. And certainly for the first century Jews, you could not force them to realize, you can eat pork, have a piece. You can't force it.

It takes time. It takes the grace of God to work a conscience, which is a God-given gift. And faith takes time for that to be molded to truth. It takes time.

[24 : 02] So same with this gentleman in the cult that took time for him to be able to raise his hands and sing to God's glory using the very songs that the cult had used years previous.

So I hope you can see and understand what this is about. In Paul's argument, it's clear that the weak should and will become stronger.

So the issue here with the Jews and the pork products and all that, or even in current examples with that gentleman, there is a way in which God will make that man to grow in his sanctification, in his conscience, to strengthen with truth, to grow from an immature babe, to become stronger, to where he may be able to sing those songs.

Same thing with the Jews. Clearly, they are not to remain in old covenant commitments, but Paul is not rebuking them. Note that. Paul's not rebuking the weak for abstaining from pork products, even though Paul himself says, I know, in verse 14, look with me, he says, I know and I am persuaded in

the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.

So Paul's saying, their strength will add as the Spirit moves in time, as sanctification progresses. Someone who is weak, who has to abstain for a particular reason, God is moving them, but it's their own pace.

[25 : 34] And you or I cannot force that person. And no one can force you. I know there's, each of us have our issues, right? We all have our different convictions. And if someone were to come along and in strict terms tell you, grow up, deal with it, drink this, eat this, do this, don't do that.

If someone were to do that, you can imagine, that's a very tempting scenario. And it doesn't work. So this issue of these secondary things, we all are going to land in different places.

And God has us where we are. We have to be patient with one another. You know what this does? It forces the church, every one of us, to slow down. To slow down and to look at one another.

It forces you to look at your brothers and your sisters and to think with love, where are they standing today? And how can I help them? Not by forcing my conviction, not by insisting that they do different, but how can I just show love to them and help them along their path that God has them on in Christ?

How can I be useful? And I don't have to rush it. I'm not the Holy Spirit. I'm not the truth of God. I'm simply a brother in Christ and I love them and I don't want to stumble them.

[26 : 57] I want to help them. That's what this forces us to do. So Paul commands abstinence for unity's sake. He says to the strong in verse 21, it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

So when we gather, church, Kingdom Life Church, when you gather, think, be considerate of those around you. Maybe it's time to leave your pork at home.

And I don't mean that literally. I mean that figuratively. Maybe it's time if there are particular things that you hold tightly to, convictions that are secondary matters, we need to be more charitable.

We need to hold more loosely to those things. So love perceives the problem. Secondly, let's go to our second point. Love prizes unity. So love perceives the problem.

We recognize there's a breakdown and if we gather and we're not thinking or considering other believers, we're going to roll over each other. And certainly the body will not be built up in love.

[28 : 01] If we pretend there's not a problem, we're going to hurt people and we ourselves will get hurt and the glory of God will be shrouded. So may the church perceive the problem.

Secondly, love prizes unity. It can't be stated loud enough. It cannot be repeated often enough. It could not be emphasized with appropriate emphasis enough just how paramount Christian unity is. I could not, I don't have the vocal cords remaining to be able to shout it loud enough. I don't. If I did, I would lose my voice entirely. This is, if you want to put it this way, we sang about the glory diadem this morning.

I love that old hymn, All hail the power of Jesus' name and crown him Lord of all. And it talks about this glory diadem. If we were to go to see Christ, which is coming, that day is coming, the crown that he wears, what is the largest, most central jewel on that crown?

It is this. It is unity. It is the very thing that Paul and all the epistle writers are aiming at in all of their writings, is to gather the church around the person of Jesus Christ in unity.

[29 : 21] It's the very thing, if you look in John 17, Jesus prayed for it. He prays for it. You can turn with me briefly there, John 17.

This is the very thing Jesus died for and the very thing Jesus prayed for. Chapter 17, verses 22 and 23.

Jesus prays this, the glory that you have given me, I have given to them, that they may be one, even as we are one. He's praying for us, people of God, you and I.

Jesus, our high priest, prays that we would be one, even as God the Father and Jesus are one.

Verse 23, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and love them even as you loved me.

What precious, precious words. And the world will know that we are belonging to Jesus by what? By our love. The world will know that we belong to God because we are one.

[30 : 31] Just as the Father and the Son are one. And we share in His glory and His love together. This is the prize jewel on that crown. It is unity.

Unity. And it requires all the love of God to hold that in the crown and the power of the Holy Spirit for us to grow in it.

So it cannot be stated loudly enough. Jesus prayed for it. He died for it. Ephesians chapter 2. If you turn there. Ephesians chapter 2, verses 13 through 16.

What did Jesus die for? For unity. Verses 13 through 16. Paul says this, But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

For He Himself is our peace who has made us both one. Talking about Jew and Gentile. Both one. And has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

[31 : 33] Jesus brings us together. That's what He died for. To remove the wall of hostility. And finally, Jesus sends His Spirit. Chapter 2, same chapter of Ephesians 2, verse 22.

We read these words. In Jesus, you also, you the church, are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God. Jesus sent the Spirit that we would have unity. So unity is the crown jewel of Jesus Christ. It is the crown jewel of our Savior.

So, whatever gets in the way of unity, it ought to be our response to get upset. I'm serious. We ought to get upset for whatever begins to mar or cloud the crown jewel of Jesus Christ.

I think of it this way. You know, if you were to be on the street and there you are with your siblings, if you're from a family, you can remember being, walking the streets with your friends, your family, and you would happen to see your younger sister being picked on, being treated poorly, being mocked or tempted, would it be love for you to just walk on, ignoring that child, ignoring your sister in that moment?

[32 : 57] No. No. Love is jealous. Love will ride up to care for and defend your younger sibling. And so it is with the church, brothers and sisters.

Whatever threatens the unity of Jesus Christ in the church, the Christian heart rises to defend. Oh, it's precious and we're jealous for it.

We want to treat one another well and we do not want to see any one of us left behind, neglected, trampled over. We rise up together for unity because it's the crown jewel of Jesus Christ and we prize it.

Love prizes unity. So whatever mars or clouds the crown jewel, everything within us, everything in love with jealousy rises up to defend and to care for it.

We read this in verse 19 where Paul says, pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.

This is why gossip, slander, suspicions that lead to division are so comprehensively in the scriptures rebuked and warned against by God because it divides.

[34 : 10] It brings about disunity. So we have to take ownership of the church. So division, you know, it's interesting. In today's day and age, division can be a more, in some ways, a more subtle thing.

In the first century church, in Rome at least, it was very clear, you're either a Jew or a Gentile, right? Either you eat pork or you don't. You know, either you're in faith to eat food, sacrifice to idols or not. But in our day and age, it can be typically very subtle how divisions and separatism functions in the church. It can be very subtle. I think for us, our temptation could be, it has certainly a lot less to do with bloodlines, whether we're Gentile or Jewish.

It has more to do with birds flocking together. Birds of a feather flock together. You've heard that old proverb, right? Birds of a feather flock together.

I think what can often happen as Christians, we can gravitate towards people and build our closest friendships and relationships in the church around those people who share the same passions and convictions, even matters of conscience.

[35 : 19] So putting in terms of politics, where you find your heart more at ease around believers who share in your political affiliation. If they are part of a particular party, you gladly receive them as a brother or sister in Christ.

But if they are of a different persuasion, there's a division. We naturally gravitate towards those who we feel comfortable with, who we share a same conviction of a secondary issue.

So for the Christian, we have to be careful that we don't align ourselves too strictly with those who are similar to us. Because what is the body?

It's made up of many members, right? Different walks of life coming from different directions, different ethnicities, different age groups. We have to take care that we don't end up becoming separatists within the body of Christ.

We end up dividing over smaller things and gathering around. It's almost like we build our own little bonfires around the sun. We have the blazing center of Jesus Christ.

[36 : 28] But we're building a bonfire over here and surrounding this little bonfire with a bunch of Christians who share the same conviction. Do you see how problematic that is?

If we have the blazing sun who is Christ, should we not gather around Christ? And should not his gravitational pull be sufficient? Isn't he big enough?

Isn't he glorious enough? Isn't the gospel enough for us to put aside whatever these little bonfires represent? Yes. Can I get an amen? Amen. Thank you.

We need to gather around Christ. That's what Paul's saying here. That's it. Go to the sun. Not to these little side factions.

Not to these little party, these groups that happen or form around these particular issues. Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't have discussions or share convictions with other Christians. I'm not saying that. Certainly share political views with other believers.

[37 : 30] But when you come to church and you gather and you're in fellowship, don't wear that on your sleeve. Please. Make it about Christ. Make it easy. Let me say it this way. Let it be simple and easy for other believers to approach you knowing that you are all about Jesus.

If people know you're about Jesus, they will approach you because they have Jesus too if they're a Christian. And they're going to be welcomed by you regardless of your political affiliation, regardless of whether you drink Starbucks or not, regardless of whether you go to festivals or carnivals or not, or you watch movies or you don't.

It doesn't matter. That stuff's secondary. You're about Jesus and it's obvious. It's written all over you. I'm about Jesus. Won't you sit with me and talk? You know that feeling, don't you?

When you sit with another believer who's about Jesus, it's very easy to have conversation with them because you share in the love of Christ. You share that together and that over, that over, that piles over anything else.

Like a bulldozer. Any of those secondary issues, eh, oh well. Oh well. I mean, they're important to me in my convictions, yes, but no, they're not Jesus. It's not the blazing sun.

[38 : 47] That's just a little fire over here. No, I want Jesus and I'm going to make my relationships in the church about Jesus. So love prizes unity.

And Cedric last week preached from Galatians 3. What a wonderful verse that summarizes this. Ready? Galatians 3.28. There is neither Jew nor Greek.

There is neither slave nor free. There is no male. There is no female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. We're all one.

Brothers and sisters, we are all one. We're around the blazing sun of Jesus. That's enough. That's enough. That's what the church ought to be about.

So, love, it prizes unity. It perceives the problem. And finally, love pursues peace. It pursues something.

[39 : 46] In the efforts to find unity, we have to pursue peace. So there are things that this text that Paul drives us towards as response.

There are responses that are very clear. There are particular issues. There are particular pieces of pork that we'll need to leave at home. There are things that you are going to have to do differently if you're going to pursue and prize unity.

Seriously, there are things you're going to have to think about that you're going to have to consider. We have to be thoughtful about our fellowship. We have to be thoughtful of one another, mindful of each other.

Whenever we gather, and there's going to have to be purposeful, intentional things that I have to show up doing differently, I can't just show up on the scene regardless of who's there, acting any old way I please.

No, Paul is not allowing for that. Romans 14 tells us clearly how we ought to be behaving towards one another. So I can't just show up, deal with it.

[40 : 48] You know, I can't do that. I can't just say, here I am, take me as I am. No. Love does not say those kind of things. Love says, where are you at?

I want to come to you. I want to serve and love and help you. I don't want to cause any person here to stumble. I'm going to be thoughtful about this, so I'm going to pursue peace. And look with me in verse 17 to 18.

This kind of provides us with sound structure to build our understanding of where to go next. Okay? Verse 17 and 18. Paul says this, in Christ Jesus, I'm sorry, verse 15, for the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

things. These two verses provide us with a pathway forward. If we're going to love, if we're going to love one another, if we're going to love and pursue and prize peace and unity, this is what we have to do.

[42 : 01] First, it puts our personal freedoms and those issues of secondary importance, conscience issues, gray areas, Christian liberty. it puts those things in the right place.

So when we gather, we have to understand the kingdom of God is not a matter of those things.

These lesser bonfires, the kingdom of God will not rise or fall on a political party.

That stuff is going to be torched someday. Do you realize that? I'm serious. It's all going to burn.

Kingdoms of earth will be torched.

So let us not be known by this stuff. We've got to leave it behind. The only kingdom that stays is the kingdom Paul talks about.

The kingdom of God is not a matter of external things. It's righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Okay? Starbucks is going to go up in flames.

[42 : 59] Glory to God. Right? No more lattes. Oh well. These things are temporary.

You see that? These little bonfires that we find so easily gather around, they're very short temporary things. What's the only thing that stays?

Right here. The blazing sun. Jesus goes on and on and on. Therefore, how shall we then build?

What kind of life shall we be living with one another?

Not around these bonfires. No. Jesus. Jesus. So keep the secondary matters very secondary. So the issue of abstaining from or partaking in particular habits or foods or drink, whether we drink alcohol or not, whether we do this or that or the other thing, that stuff is secondary.

It's not going to prevent me from loving my brother or accepting my sister in Christ. even if they're from a different congregation. They are Bible-believing Christian, born again in the Spirit.

[44 : 06] Our hearts will rejoice to see. I love that when you're out in public and you meet a total stranger and you know intuitively they're a Christian. That's such a neat feeling, isn't it? You have immediate connection with them.

You're sitting on a train or a plane or you're just out in public and you hear about Jesus from this person and you're like, you're a Christian. And you immediately, you don't know him from Adam, but you have a love for them because they're your brother, your sister.

That's awesome. That kind of stuff reveals what life is all about. It's not about anything else. It's about Jesus. And I share Jesus with this complete stranger who is a sibling in the Lord.

Hallelujah. Right? You know that feeling. It's a wonderful feeling. And it ought to be our experience day after day with one another. Mutual affection, pursuing peace and love for one another.

What ought to be our favorite things? Our favorite things should be Jesus, his righteousness. It should be the joy and the peace and the Holy Spirit that he brings. Paul says that.

[45 : 06] The kingdom of God is not of external things. It's not of food or drink or what we partake in. It's about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That ought to be our favorite things.

What are your favorite things? What are you known for, Christian? This is a critical question on this point. If I were to ask, if we were to line up people and interview the people who know you best, what would they say you're known for?

What are you known for? What t-shirt do you wear? What does it say on that t-shirt? What is the line that describes what you're most passionate about?

What you love the most? What you talk the most? That's an important thing. What are you most talking about when you're around other Christians? Oh, may it be about Jesus because that is going to gather and not cause to stumble.

May the Lord help each of us to evaluate what we're most about, what we're most for, what are our favorite things? And I would encourage you, look at God's Word. May it be a mirror to you.

[46 : 11] The mirror is meant to look at and it's meant to see things that are broken or wrong. If you were to look in a mirror and you've got a big old hair sticking out, deal with the hair.

Deal with the problem, right? We all intuitively know this. God's Word acts the same way. If we look at God's Word and we recognize that we're not most excited about Jesus or we're not known to be about Jesus, then correct the problem.

Repent. Ask our Lord for His forgiveness. Be restored and make Jesus the blazing center of your life. I want to pause here and as we conclude, just to make sure that any are here who do not know Christ, that I have a moment with you.

Because the blazing center who is Jesus Christ one day is going to consume the earth. Do you know that? Jesus Christ will burn up the entire universe.

His heat and His light will no longer be contained. We can't see it by our eyes right now. The day is coming when that sun, the supernova of Jesus Christ, will consume the heavens and the earth.

[47 : 30] Only those who are in Christ Jesus who have believed on His name, who have repented of their sin, only they will remain. Everything else, everyone else will be thrown into judgment.

And my question to you, where are you? Who are you with? What is your cause? What is your passion? What is the center of your life?

And I would challenge you, if it's not Christ, repent. You can know His mercy and forgiveness today. That's my prayer. That's my hope. And for the rest of us, that the Lord would help us to evaluate what are we gathering around?

What are we clinging to that is not central? And are we aware of one another? Are we coming thoughtfully out of love and consideration to church? Are we dealing with these issues the way that Scripture teaches us to deal with them?

Love perceives the problem and it deals with it. It deals with it by prizing unity and by pursuing peace and the mutual upbuilding for one another.

[48 : 40] So, let's give ourselves to this love. To love the church, to love our Savior for His glory. Let's pray. Let's pray.