

Our passage today begins with "therefore." Whenever we see a "therefore" we must... by now you all know that we go back to see what it is there for. The preceding passages were on love and acting in love. We understand that we are not all at the same place in our walk with the Lord and we all have a long, long way to go to be like Christ. We are to esteem others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). We are to love one another. We don't judge someone who is another's servant (Romans 14:4). To his or her master they must answer, not to us. That is why we refrain from arguments about issues that are not essential to our faith (2Timothy 2:24).

These attitudes and actions are so clearly spelled out for us, and yet we see so many people claiming to be Christians who act in a way that is contrary to the Spirit's instruction in this passage. We see our own tendency to argue for our opinion. May I suggest that sometimes we argue because we are trying to convince ourselves that we are right? We feel an affirmation when others agree with us or convert to our way of thinking.

There is nothing wrong with respectful discussion. When both parties are seeking truth from the word of God, it is healthy to discuss issues. However, when both sides are convinced and will not hear the other side, discussion turns into argument and distracts from fellowship in the Lord.

It often separates people into denominations or cliques.

Now that we know what that "therefore" is there for, let us proceed to our passage. *¹³ 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.* As brothers and sisters in Christ walking humbly in the Spirit, we leave judgment on non-essential matters to God. We don't put ourselves in the place of a judge. Understanding that others have differing convictions, we are careful not to bring up issues that may cause conflict.

A good example of this is the consumption of alcohol. If you have a brother or sister over for dinner and you know that they believe the consumption of alcohol is ungodly, you should not offer them a glass of wine. It's best not bring up the issue of alcohol. You may feel free to have a glass of wine with your meal when you are alone, but don't insist on that freedom when you are with others.

A stumbling block can be a word or action that causes another who is weak in faith to act contrary to their personal convictions. We should be encouraging one another to live up to our convictions rather than trying to challenge them. **Trust the Holy Spirit to change a person's viewpoint. That is His job not ours.** When we encourage a person to compromise their convictions, we are not only

Commented [notes1]: Philippians 2:3 (ESV)
³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

Commented [notes2]: Romans 14:4 (ESV)
⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Commented [notes3]: 2 Timothy 2:24 (ESV)
²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

encouraging them to look to man, but we are also implying that it is unimportant to stand for what one believes (Ephesians 6:13).

Paul's example, which follows, is about food offered to idols. Gentiles were used to sacrificing an animal to a pagan god and then having a feast with the meat of that animal. New converts associated the consumption of that meat with idolatry and the sexual acts that accompanied the worship of that idol. Their consciences would not allow them to eat that meat. The mature believers understood that meat offered to idols was still simply meat (1Corinthians 8:4-7). *¹⁴ 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.* That knowledge would not help change the young believer's conscience. Regardless of one's argument, consuming that meat brought up images of pagan worship in the young believer's mind. Just watching his brother eat that meat would be offensive to him.

Paul goes on to say, *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.* If we are walking in love we will not offend our brother or sister. "Destroy" sounds like a harsh term. **How many people do you know who have walked away from the faith because they were offended by something a believer did or said?** If our careless actions or words caused a person to discontinue their examination of the Christian faith, we should be grieved. To walk in the Spirit is

to walk in love. While the young believer's conscience is focused on words and actions of others, the mature believer's conscience will be attuned to the sensitivities of others so as to draw them to Christ rather than driving them away. Kent Hughes put it something like this, **"The baby Christian focusses on the externals instead of the eternals."**

The expression, "destroy the one for whom Christ died," should give us all pause. Our Lord Jesus died for that young believer or seeker. What a tragedy if we caused them to be repelled from the fellowship of believers because of minor doctrines, or politics, or even our non-essential personal convictions! May the Lord help us to walk in love every moment as we yield to the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Keep an eternal view.

¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. Paul is speaking about the freedom that we have in Christ. He had discovered that all foods were good when they were sanctified by prayer (1Timothy 4:3-5). He had revelations of deeper insights of Scripture which many could not accept. There were many things that he regarded as good that he could not share with others, especially young believers. By sharing those good things with those who were not yet ready to receive them, Paul might cause what he found to be good to be spoken of as evil. By walking in love with sensitivity to others' consciences, we do not let what we regard as good be spoken of as evil.

We often face this with issues of doctrine. Eternal security, limited atonement, the

Commented [notes4]: Ephesians 6:13 (ESV)

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Commented [notes5]: 1 Corinthians 8:4-7 (ESV)

⁴ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one."

⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords" - yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

⁷ 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.

Commented [notes6]: Galatians 5:25 (ESV)

²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.

Commented [notes7]: 1 Timothy 4:3-5 (ESV)

³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

necessity of baptism, end-time chronology and other peripheral doctrines are issues about which we all have strong opinions. Discussing the Scriptures related to these issues can help us understand that we are all basing our conviction on the word of God. However, when we argue about these and question each other's motives, we have moved from building one another up to separating ourselves from each other (1Corinthians 12:20). It's important for us to discern when a discussion becomes personal. That is when we need to cordially agree to disagree. Return to the essentials of our faith on which we all agree. By doing so we find unity and don't drive each other to extremes or call one another's conviction evil.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is not about what kind of food you eat or what you can and cannot drink. It is not about the Mosaic laws, or health rules, or any outward thing. The kingdom of God is within (Luke 17:21). It is about a heart made right with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. It is about living in gratitude for all Jesus has done for us. It is about the life of the Spirit within us and all His fruit of love, joy, peace, etc. If our conversation or actions with one another do not line up with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24) then we are yielding to our old nature. This verse is a great reminder to not focus on outward things but on the heart. Jesus told the Pharisees that it was not what entered into a man defiled him, but what came out from the

heart (Mark 7:15). The kingdom is about the eternal not the external.

18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

If you serve Christ from a heart that is made right with God, and if the fruits of the Holy Spirit are manifested in your words and actions, you will not only be acceptable to God but you will be approved by men as well. Of course, there are those who will be offended by loving actions and carefully chosen, gracious words, but most people will appreciate actions that demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. That gives you an opportunity to speak the words of life. You earn the right to be heard. Even when it is necessary to speak words of conviction, we can do so in a loving and gracious way. Because Christ died for those to whom we are speaking, our goal should be to speak in love, in a manner in which they can hear us and not in an offensive or uncaring way. Our words will be the words of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Galatians 4:6).

19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Paul is drawing a conclusion from what he has said previously. By walking in love and demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit and considering that Christ died for the one with whom we are speaking, we not only are approved by men but acceptable to God as well. We pursue what makes for peace. We aim to build one another up in Christ. **Love recognizes that the ego of man is fragile.** If we want to advance the kingdom of God and please Christ with

Commented [notes11]: Mark 7:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him. "

Commented [notes8]: 2 Corinthians 12:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

Commented [notes12]: Colossians 4:6 (ESV)

⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Commented [notes9]: Luke 17:21 (NIV)

²¹ nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Commented [notes10]: Galatians 5:22-24 (ESV)

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

our actions, we will pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Sadly, through the years, I have seen churches and friendships in Christ fractured because we will not live this verse. Our ego insists that we must be right and that the other person must acknowledge us as being correct. Instead of mutual upbuilding, we cause division and hinder the work of the kingdom (Matthew 12:25). Let those of us who hear what the Spirit is saying to the church take these words to heart. Let us be determined to pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding, even if we must set aside our freedoms to do so (Psalm 34:14).

²⁰ 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. Paul is using the example of food, but it applies to many areas such as politics, minor doctrines, entertainment, and much more. God is working in the heart of the seeker who attends a fellowship. We risk destroying what God has done to that point in their heart and mind when we carelessly push a minor issue. I've seen a family leave the church because one man thought he had to tell the parents not to talk about Santa Clause. Another seeker left because they were told exactly how to discipline their child.

Your political opinion may be the best. Your doctrine may be perfect. However, if you insist on pushing those opinions and minor doctrines on a person who is seeking the truth before they are ready to

hear, you will stumble them. Jesus told His disciples that He had many things to say to them, but they were not yet ready to hear what He had to say (John 16:12).

In saying that everything is indeed clean, Paul is reminding us that he is not referring to that which is sinful or to unholy things, but about discretionary liberties that are a gift from God. Even these good things can put us into bondage if we overindulge in them (Philippians 4:5). Some people will not use Facebook because they inevitably spend too much time on it. If you can't control a freedom, even good things can become enslaving and sinful to you.

²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. We should refrain from anything that might cause our brother to stumble. We should walk in love. We should refrain from controversial doctrines when we know that they will end in arguments. My personal rule of thumb is: "When in doubt don't." Ask yourself if what you are about to say is edifying. Will it build others up? Or is it likely to bring division? Is what I'm about to say something that exalts me or encourages us all? Jesus said, "Woe to the one through whom temptations come" (Matthew 18:7). Will my words or actions tempt someone to sin?

²² The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. The freedoms that God has given you are between you and God. If you have any

Commented [notes15]: John 16:12 (ESV)

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 12:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.

Commented [notes16]: Philippians 4:5 (ESV)

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Commented [notes14]: Psalm 34:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Commented [notes17]: Matthew 18:7 (ESV)

⁷ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

doubts about any of those freedoms, you should set them aside until you know for certain. Do not try to adapt others' convictions for yourself. Through the study of the word of God and prayer, know what you believe and why you believe it. But if that belief may cause a young believer to stumble, keep it between yourself and God.

The last verse in this chapter, like that of the final verses in the previous two chapters, is well worth memorizing as a summary of what Paul has taught. Believers often wonder about the will of God in their life. When the Scriptures are not clear, we must look within our heart to see if we are at peace or if there is conviction from the Holy Spirit (Colossians 3:16). What may be right for one person might be wrong for another. When seeking the will of God remember this verse. ²³ *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.*

Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. My faith might be misguided, but if my heart desires to please God by my action, does not the all-knowing God understand? And if I am doing what is right, but my heart convicts me that it is wrong, does not the all-seeing God know that I am rebelling against Him (Proverbs 21:2)? I am not speaking of clear-cut guidelines such as the Ten Commandments but rather of those questionable areas in which we must discern the will of God. Certainly God knows when we are acting according to

our convictions by faith. He also knows when we are acting in rebellion.

Sometimes people will come to me in a quandary over whether they should do one thing or another. I asked them which choice they have peace about. I ask which way they think would be pleasing to God. And when they are divided equally between the two opinions, I ask which they would prefer. I am so encouraged when I can tell their heart is only to please God. I know our heavenly Father delights in that too. When with all sincerity they can say that their choice is to please God, yet they don't know which choice is God's perfect will, it may be that they are free to make the choice that they desire, knowing that it is an act of faith. If it is the wrong choice, God will soon reveal it to them (Isaiah 30:21).

Today we have heard that the apostle Paul has warned us to walk in love and to be careful not to offend a weaker brother or sister. We limit our freedoms so as not to destroy the work of God in the one for whom Christ died. In demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit, we consider the needs of others before our own. We pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. The church and the individual life that practices these principles out of love for God will be blessed (Psalm 133:1-3).

Question

- 1 How can opposing opinions be discussed in a healthy way?
- 2 Who changes our convictions?
- 3 Are inanimate objects good or evil?

Commented [notes18]: Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 30:21 (ESV)

²¹ And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This is the way, walk in it," when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.

Commented [notes21]: Psalm 133:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

² It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!

³ It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Commented [notes19]: Proverbs 21:2 (ESV)

² Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.

- 4 How might we destroy the work of God in one for whom Christ died?
- 5 Why would a new believer be offended by eating meat?
- 6 What is the kingdom of God about?
- 7 What are we to pursue?
- 8 How might we destroy the work of God in a person?
- 9 When does freedom become bondage?
- 10 When is our action sinful?