

Title: Walking in Love
Text: Romans 14.10-19
Theme: Seriously loving others
Series: Romans mini-series (13-15) Summer 2020
Prop Stmtnt: Walking in love with others is a life of personal sacrifice that is worth it.

On Tuesday afternoon, Cathi and I drove around Belle Isle to see the drive-thru memorial for 900 of the 1,500 citizens of Detroit who have died from Covid. We all know that some want to politicize the pandemic and some are trying to exploit for other reasons, but I don't want to ever lose sight of the reality that people have died from this and some are still suffering and still dying. When it's personal, it's different and that's good.

Let's say that your son loves peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and in fact has eaten them every day for lunch since he was three years old. That's all that he eats and that's all that you prepare for him. This is life as you know it. But, your son is going into the 3rd grade and before school begins you are notified that there is a girl in his class who is highly allergic to peanuts and in fact is so sensitive to peanuts that the presence of peanuts in the room could result in a reaction that could be fatal. Therefore, your son cannot bring a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to school this year. How do you respond? You could say, *"This is ridiculous! You're telling me that my son can't have a pb and j? He won't eat anything else! Something has got to be done. In fact, I may pull him out of that school in order to find a school that allows him to eat pb and j's."* And you do, but you can't find a school that allows peanuts in them anymore because of peanut allergies. You are so determined that you decide to homeschool him so he can eat his peanut butter and jellies. Then, you get pregnant again. And the Lord blesses your family with a little girl, but after a series of scary episodes your pediatrician informs you that she is highly allergic to peanuts and that you need to remove them from your home. Does that change anything? Absolutely! Why? Love and relationships. I am going to read Romans 14.10-19. Notice how many times our text mentions brother (which means brother and sister) as well as referring to all of us? The gospel is not a product I use for afterlife insurance. The gospel immerses me into a people to whom I belong forever. Belonging to people calls me and compels me to live with them and for them.

Read Text:

Verse 13 begins with the word, "therefore." The command to stop condemning each other is based on the fact each of us will give an account of himself to God. You will stand before God and so will everyone else. But, you will give an account of yourself. You will not give an account of me. You are not charged with making me believe exactly as you do on everything that doesn't really matter and I am not responsible to do the same with you. You will give an account for you and I will give an account for me. But, don't minimize that. That means that I need to be concerned about the things that God is concerned about. That also means that I should not be concerned about the things that God is not concerned about. Of course, that assumes that I am able to know the difference. This reality breathes some chill into our relationships because it is not my job to get everyone to think exactly as I do on things that do not ultimately matter. That is the back drop. THEREFORE...

1. **Replace judgement with affection** (13-14)

While both the strong and the weak (weak conscience) are to stop condemning each other, verses 13-19 address the strong. Those who are mature in the faith and strong in conscience are to use that strength to look out for and protect weaker brothers and sisters. Acting as if you are better than someone else because they don't agree with you on matters of diet or schooling choices is sinful. Stop passing judgement on one another. They are redeemed by Christ and are answerable to him, not to you. What you are responsible for is to make certain that you do not put a stumbling block or a hindrance in the way of a brother (or sister). What exactly does that mean?

You have the freedom to do some things differently than others, but you do not have the freedom to demand that others do what you do. When treat others like that, it is discouraging and has the effect of causing them to stumble. When you are condemning in your tone and treatment, to others, you are blocking (hindrance) their growth as a Christian. Here is some good counsel.

A. See the issue biblically (14a)

Here, Paul uses food as an example. Jews had some dietary restrictions in the OT that are no longer in play. All believers, Jew and Gentile are not bound by any dietary code. That is biblical. Jesus taught that. Peter experienced it and Paul is repeating it. However, if you were raised believing that eating pork is not right, it may not be an easy thing for you to simply start eating pork. You may have a sensitive conscience and, quite honestly, it may be too sensitive. Some people try to be more Christian than Christ by creating rules that Jesus did not create. Are you free to eat pork? Yes. Are you free to eat meat on Fridays? Yes. Are you free to eat meat on Friday's during lent? Yes. But, if you grew up in a tradition that condemned that, then you may have some sensitivities that another person doesn't have.

B. See the issue personally (14b)

“but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean” How do I know if you think that something is unclean? I need to ask. If, for example, I invite you to come over to my house for dinner, I need to be considerate of you and ask if you have any preferences and you need to be honest and tell me. If I do not know, I need to find out. I need to love you so much that I am considerate of you to get this information. I know that the food is not unclean, but you feel as if it is. Therefore, for you to eat it, feels wrong. Even though it isn't, it feels wrong. I need to love you more than the food and be so desirous of fellowship with you, that I gladly accommodate your diet request.

C. Choose the person over the issue (13)

Some people know biblically (intellectually) that there is nothing wrong with a certain food or drink or practice, but they just don't have freedom in their heart. That's fine. That is the point. Give them space and the opportunity to work that out. That person and your relationship to them is more important than the issue anyway. What would you choose? A jar of peanut butter or your daughter? Pork or fellowship with this new Jewish believer? Steak on a Friday night in the spring or fellowship with this formerly Roman Catholic brother or sister? Jesus did not die for peanut butter, pork or steak. He died for people. If we lose sight of that, we can cause a lot of damage.

2. **Be aware of the destruction you can cause.** (15)

When you insist on practicing the freedom that you have even though it makes others uncomfortable or feel like they cannot participate, you are hurting them. *“By what you eat do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”* In spite of our rebellion against him and rejection of him, God sent Christ to humbly live in our place and then sacrificially die in our place. God considered your redemption so valuable, that his Son paid the ultimate price for it. Even when we were his enemies, Christ died for us. When you stop trusting in yourself and you trust in Christ, you become part of his family. If God can love you that much when you were his enemy, you can love one another who are family. Christ died for your brothers and sisters. How then, should you treat them?

There's a gal in our church who was diagnosed with cancer and by God's grace and the wonderful care of her doctors was able to live and be cured of it. This gal loves sports and gardening and things of that nature. So, she showed up to one of her follow-up visits with a little too much of a sun tan. Her doctor said, *“Listen, I didn't save your life for you to get skin cancer.”*

Paul is very clear with what is at stake here. *“Do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.”* In essence Jesus is saying, I didn't save them so that you can destroy them by your insensitivity. Truth without love is destructive. We need to know the truth and we need to help one another grow in the truth. But take the person who says, “Hey, at least you know where I stand on an issue” as an excuse for being condemning. That person is dead wrong, because the end result of their effect on others is to destroy them.

Do others love Jesus more as a result of your interaction with them? Do others want to follow Jesus because of you how you treat them? Isn't that the affect we are to have on others? The assumption is in verse 15 is that we are walking in love. But, if your brother is grieved by what you eat which is an example of how you are just plain inconsiderate of them, if they are grieved, that should affect you. That should bother you. That should concern you, even shock you into realizing that you cannot treat people like this. If you do not care how you affect other people you need to ask yourself if you really are a follower of Christ. The entire book of 1 John tells us repeatedly that genuine believers love other believers. So, if your attitude is that you can take em or leave them, then I need to point out that there is a big discrepancy between your profession of faith and your life. V.12 is sobering. We will give an account.

The last four verses describe what walking in love looks like. I want you to notice that all 3 members of the godhead are in view. The kingdom of God is not about what you eat or what you drink, but it is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. When you serve Christ by caring for his kids and being sensitive to them, this is not only approved by people and helpful for them, but it is acceptable to God. Walking in love is hard because it demands that we surrender our “rights” for the sake of others. But that is the heart of the gospel. That is what Christ did for us. The One with unlimited power throttled that power and set it aside in order to die for us so that we could be forgiven. Why has the Lord given you influence in the lives of others? It is so that you can use that to serve them and protect them, like Christ.

3. **Walk** (live) **in love** (16-19)

A. **Be aware of you are perceived** (16)

How many of you have a hobby horse, or you know someone who has a hobby horse? That can work for your advantage. I took Greek in college and Jerry Benge was one of my teachers. The guys in class all knew that Jerry had certain topics that he was very passionate about, one of them being college basketball. If we were not ready for the quiz, which for me, was most of the time, we act like we were asking, casually, “Hey is UK going to win this week” or some related question. Fifteen minutes later, Jerry would look at the clock and go, “Oh goodness, we don’t have time for the quiz today, but be ready next time.” And we would all go, “ok, ok.” But, there are other people who have hobby horses that drive people crazy or worse, are hurtful. Do people cringe when you talk? Do you have an adversarial tone toward others? You may have some genuine concerns about some things perhaps in the church, perhaps in the culture, perhaps what you perceive in others, but be careful that your genuine desire to pursue what is good and protect what is right, does not crush people. When that happens, what you regard as good actually will be spoken of as evil, which is the opposite of what you want.

B. **Be aware of what really matters** (17)

The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. If you want to fight about what people eat and argue about what people drink, you are not being godly. You may have some preferences on those issues, fine, but we don’t spout off and hurt people with those. You have opinions and preferences about Covid, social issues, politics, etc., fine, but, we don’t spout off and hurt people with those. There are some people who not only have a different opinion than you, but they may have a better one. That may be hard for some of you to imagine, but it’s true.

What does matter is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. What a good and needful reminder. What really matters is righteousness, not anger and intimidation, peace, not getting my way all the time and joy, not frustration because other people do not share my opinions. Notice that righteousness, peace and joy are found in the Holy Spirit. They are from the Holy Spirit. Hang on to that for a second because I want to conclude with that since it dovetails with v. 19.

C. **Be aware of God and man** (18)

Look at verse 18. “Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God...” Preferring others, being considerate of their sensitivities, loving the other person more than your preferences is considered to be serving Christ. Serving Christ is acceptable to God. God delights in this. It is also approved by men. This is one of the ways in which we get to clearly give people a taste of the heart of Christ.

Isaiah 42.1-4; Matthew 11.28-30

D. **Pursue peace and encouragement** (19)

Since peace is found in the Holy Spirit, along with righteousness and joy that together are very encouraging for other believers, if I am going to pursue these things, I need to be very engaged with, communing with, depending upon the Holy Spirit. I can't pursue peace and encouragement on my own. Either I won't want to do it, or I will want to encourage others so they will think well of me, not because I just love them. I need God's help to love others for his sake and theirs. This is what a church family is to called to look like. We need God's help to pursue this.

Lord's Table.