

## QUESTION #21: “WHAT IS A ‘STUMBLING BLOCK?’” (Romans 14:1, 10-21)

10.13.19

### INTRODUCTION

I have a confession to make: I love the “Three Stooges” — especially the classic trio of Larry, Moe and Curly. A great chunk of my childhood was spent watching those three idiots. I loved the slapstick, the sounds. Now I understand it was acting, and they had developed incredible skill and planning to make all their stumbles and bumbles look incredibly real and painful. They were basically real-life cartoons. It was the best, and guaranteed to make me laugh uncontrollably. There has been only one downside: When I am around anyone who does something similar — kicking something in the middle of the night, bumping an elbow, anything physical that causes pain or destruction to somebody not me — I am in hysterics. So please, if ever you bang an elbow or stub a toe or hit your head, let us all pray that I am nowhere in the area. You won’t hear a lot of sympathy, but you’ll guaranteed hear a lot of giggles.

But another kind of stumbling, the kind we’re going to be talking about today, is a whole lot more serious and not really worthy of laughs at all. It’s those things that can come into our lives that can make us stumble spiritually, and put distance between us and our Master, and the Christian brothers and sisters God has so graciously placed all around us. And the proof of that risk of separation between Christian brothers and sisters is evident in this: Today’s question came from four (4) members of our church family, and it came in the form of this question: “Am I a stumbling block?” Asked this way underscored the urgency of answering as soon as possible, so that is the topic we will be looking at today: “What is a stumbling block?”

You know it’s amazing how God keeps his Word so relevant. I mean, think about it: We’re two thousand years later from the end of the biblical canon, but what makes this topic so relevant for us today is that, as evangelical churches like ours grow and reach out into our communities, we wind up being faced with some of the same dynamics as the first-century church: people new to the Christian life or people checking into what Christianity is all about or maybe specifically checking out what our church family is all about — and all this happening from incredibly varied religious backgrounds, or very possibly no specific religious background at all. A stat I’ve mentioned before: About 40% of visitors to evangelical churches are coming from no church background. Add to that the backgrounds we represent here — Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic, Assemblies, Alliance — just to name a few. Again, varied, sometimes even theologically opposing backgrounds trying to come together as a singular, unified body of believers. All those dynamics makes today’s topic incredibly important, so let’s dive right in.

Let’s start with the obvious question first: What exactly is a “stumbling block?” Well, a good definition for our purposes might be: Any obstacle that leads others, or myself, to sin.

Now in the Hebrew of the OT, the most frequent word used for “stumbling” was the word KASHAL (kaw-shal<sup>^</sup>), which meant to stumble, to stagger, to totter, to cause to stumble, to make weak. It is figuratively used to describe people falling because of evil, wickedness and iniquity. It is the most frequent word used in the OT to describe stumbling. Alongside that, the most frequent word for “stumbling block” was the word MIKSHOWL (mik-shole<sup>^</sup>), which meant an obstacle, both literal or figurative, as an idol or enticement. It was used to refer to those things which cause people to stumble morally, that is, to sin: gold and silver, idols, or false teaching.

An example of a literal stumbling block in the OT: ***“Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord” — God speaking, Leviticus 19:14.***

An example of a figurative stumbling block in the OT: ***Therefore this is what the Lord says: “I will put obstacles before this people. Parents and children alike will stumble over them; neighbors and friends will perish” — Jeremiah 6:21.*** Context: ***This is what the Lord says: “Stand at the crossroads and***

***look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But you said, ‘We will not listen’” — God speaking, Jeremiah 6:16-17.***

Basically God is saying that he himself will be a stumbling block; he himself will hinder the people of Israel from approaching him because they have rejected him and his words, with lifestyles that bear out those choices. Why should I let you seek me and come near to me when the going gets tough because you rejected me in the first place?

***Wealth: “[In the day of the Lord’s wrath] They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be treated as a thing unclean. Their silver and gold will not be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath. It will not satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs, for it has caused them to stumble into sin” — God speaking, Ezekiel 7:19***

***Idolatry: “[T]he Israelites set up idols in their hearts and put a wicked stumbling block before their faces” — God speaking, Ezekiel 14:4a.***

***False Teaching: “For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth. But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the Lord Almighty — God speaking, Malachi 2:7-8.***

Self (people themselves):

- 1) ***Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall — Proverbs 16:18.***
- 2) ***“See, I am against you, you arrogant one,” declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty, “for your day has come, the time for you to be punished. The arrogant one will stumble and fall and no one will help her up” — God speaking, Jeremiah 50:31-32a.***

Now, in the Greek of the NT, the most frequent word for “stumbling block” was the word SKANDALON (skan<sup>^</sup>-dal-on) (#4625). This is an interesting word. “SKANDALON” is the trigger of a trap; the name of the part of the trap to which the bait is placed and which, when touched by the animal, springs and causes it to close causing entrapment (the trap or snare itself). Always used in the NT as a metaphor for anything that arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall away from the faith.

A great example of this kind of stumbling block is found in Paul’s first letter to Timothy, where he expresses concern for those who are consumed with getting rich in this world (very much paralleling what God said in the OT passage of Ezekiel 7 that we mentioned before); Paul writes: ***[G]odliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can’t take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs — Paul, I Timothy 6:6-10.***

Now, odd as it may seem, one of the great stumbling blocks preached throughout the NT is Jesus Christ himself — not as a stumbling block to Christians, but to those who refuse to believe in him and try to pursue a meaningful life on their own. As Paul wrote to the church at Rome: ***What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as a way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame” — Paul, Romans 9:30-33 (quoting Isaiah 8:14, 28:16).*** The idea is that God placed Jesus Christ in everybody’s path. People either build from a foundation of faith in him, or they stumble over him in frustration over building a foundation on anything else. Incidentally, the basis for false teaching in the NT was in fact

based on a false presentation of Christ that opposed the truth of what he did and what his life, death and resurrection could mean for people.

Now while all those things — wealth, idols, false teaching, pride and arrogance — can absolutely be stumbling blocks in our lives, our focus today is on one particular kind of stumbling block that every church, including ours, needs to be aware of. Remember the original question that inspired this message: “Am I a stumbling block?” It is the central theme of our text, and worthy of our attention, for it speaks to the times when it is us, we ourselves, who are the stumbling block to somebody else. Let’s read today’s text as we look at this particular circumstance:

#### **TEXT (Romans 14:1, 10-21)**

*Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. . . . You then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.” So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall — Paul, Romans 14:1, 10-21.*

#### **ANALYSIS**

Some background: At the time that Paul wrote these words, this new faith called “Christianity” was just another brand — a sect, if you will — of Judaism. Part of that was the result of the vast number of Jews who were embracing the new faith. But as Jews came to Christ, they came with baggage: their strict adherence to the many laws — some 600 of them — that had become a part of their previous religious observation. They had laws that defined work. They had laws that defined how far one could walk on the Sabbath. And — they had laws, lots of them, that defined what they could eat: their dietary laws. There were foods that were considered to be clean and therefore could be eaten, and there were other foods that had been declared unclean, and therefore could not be eaten.

OK; fair enough. But what was happening is that, as former Jews, brand spanking new in their Christian faith, would join other, possibly more mature, Christians for fellowship meals, they noticed these other Christians, likely former Jews like themselves, eating foods that had been declared “off limits” by the laws of their former faith. And it was causing them problems — serious enough that it was negatively affecting that new faith of theirs. They’d watch these other Christians seeming to eat anything handed to them, and they were thinking, How can they be doing that? And the older Christians, for their part, were not understanding what all the fuss was about. After all, they now had “freedom” in Christ to totally disregard all the old constraints they had lived with. I mean, hadn’t God sent an angel, at the moment of Christ’s death on the cross, into the temple to emphatically rip the curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, signifying in no uncertain terms that the old ways, the old practices, had now been replaced by something else? That something else was a faith that said we could have direct contact and communication with God, we were all a priesthood of believers — and we could eat whatever we want. So you new Christians are just going to have to deal with it, grow up and move on.

Do you see the problem? Two very opposing viewpoints were colliding and were threatening to cause another fabric to rip; only this fabric was the body of believers, and the rip was being caused not by any angelic being, but rather by the very human dynamic of where do my rights stop and your rights begin? So what should we do? And certainly for the new Christians coming out of Judaism, their dietary laws were not just casual observances, but literally a part of their DNA, a part of who they were. And part of the life for Christians who had been in the faith for a while was the joy of the freedom in Christ that was fast becoming a part of their DNA. And certainly Peter, Paul, and the leadership in Jerusalem seemed to be all in on that “freedom in Christ” perspective as well. So — who’s right? It’s to address that issue that these particular words to the Romans were written. OK, so let’s take a closer look:

***Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters — Paul, Romans 14:1.***

So let’s start there. Exactly what is a “weak” faith? Well, in the Greek, the word is ASTHENEIO (as-then-eh^-o) — to lack strength, be infirm, weak, feeble; in Romans 14:1, it means to be not settled in the faith. Now, maybe just as important a question is: Whose faith is NOT weak? There are some tremendous common denominators we need to bear in mind as we are building and maintaining the family of God, that is, the body of Christ, in the world:

- 1) We are all sinners —
  - a) OT: ***Who can say, “I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?” — Solomon, Proverbs 20:9.***
  - b) NT: ***[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God — Paul, Romans 3:23.***
- 2) We are all weak —
  - a) OT: ***“I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” — Isaiah 6:5.***
  - b) NT: ***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing — Paul, Romans 7:15, 18-19.***
- 3) We are all works in progress —
  - a) OT: ***“I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’ . . . What I have said, that I will bring about; what I have planned, that I will do” — God speaking, Isaiah 46:10, 11b.***
  - b) NT: ***[H]e who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 1:6.***

Nothing says that we are works in progress like the Holy Spirit. Just the simple fact that he will be working in us until the end of our earthly lives tells us that he needs to be working in us until the end of our earthly lives; in other words, this side of heaven, we will NEVER be finished. There will always be areas in which we are not even close to pleasing to God, that the Holy Spirit will ALWAYS be working on. That is true for all of us.

And nobody knows this better than our Lord. Just consider some of the crew that he chose to do and observe ministry with him for the three years he traveled up and down Judea:

- 1) Peter was a braggadocious, “speak-first, think-later” kind of guy who declared that he would proudly die at the side of Jesus, yet caved in under the pressuring questions of a servant girl.
- 2) James and John arguably had anger issues; they asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven onto a Samaritan village because of their refusal to welcome Christ (Luke 9:52-55).
- 3) Thomas doubted the words both of Christ and his disciples following his resurrection that he was truly alive, not giving in until he saw Jesus (and his wounds) in the flesh.
- 4) Matthew was so anxious to make a living that he was willing to be a tax collector and be hated by virtually all who knew him as long as he could make a buck.

- 5) Philip, after three years in his presence, still didn't understand that seeing Jesus was, in fact, seeing the Father.
- 6) Judas Iscariot heard Christ's words and saw his works for three years and yet was still unmoved enough to betray him for 30 measly pieces of silver.
- 7) All the disciples, upon the arrest of Jesus, forsook him — not only his presence but who he said he actually was — and ran away to save themselves.

Talk about weak brothers! Yet Jesus stayed with them, ministered to them, taught them, lived with them, forgave them, and always loved them. By the time he was done with them, they would be the ones which would be the eyes, ears, hands, feet and voices of the body of Christ: the church!

And here's the critical part: Jesus did not show this abundance of grace and mercy and forgiveness because he was God. He showed all these things to the disciples as fully man. How could he be an example to us if he was anything else? It was as a man, as a person, as a human being, that he ministered and taught and lived with and forgave and always loved. And how could he do that? He tells us in his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just prior to his arrest, he says in his prayer: ***"I have brought you (his Father) glory on earth"*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 17:4a***, in his case, by finishing the work that God had sent him to earth to accomplish. But that's the key: He lived to bring God glory. Is that our prayer, our joy, our desire as well? Does anything matter more than bringing glory to God?

Now, next in our text, Paul says to not quarrel over disputable matters — in other words, about things about which we can doubt or have differing opinions. Does God prefer pews over chairs? Does God have a preference of one color over another? Does he like one style of music more than another? Probably not. Therefore, neither should we. The fact is, all of that stuff doesn't matter in comparison to what truly does matter: Doing kingdom work. Bringing the gospel to the unsaved. If it's not a salvation issue, a kingdom issue, then why should we make it an issue? But, at the same time, that view shouldn't make us treat as idiots somebody who doesn't understand why those things aren't important. We can disagree and love at the same time — and loving should always rule over disagreeing.

Now Paul makes another huge point: We all got a date with God — an appointment in his presence — where our lives will be evaluated. He tells the Romans: ***[W]e will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God." So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another*** — ***Paul, Romans 14:10b-13a***. As Christians, we will have eternity in heaven but, at the same time, God is still going to be calling each one of us to face him, to review our lives in the context of his perfect standard. That being the case, he asks how any of us can think we have any place or authority to judge anybody else when we ourselves are going to be judged. The point Paul is making is that judgment is reserved for God. Our roles? To love, to encourage, to teach, to correct, to forgive — and then repeat. And, in the context of the rest of this section, we are also to empathize with those who may not be as strong in the faith as we are. How easy isn't it for us to forget that, once upon a time, we were the ones new in the faith. We are not to be judging or, as Paul points out, treating our brothers and sisters ***with contempt*** — ***Paul, Romans 14:10a***. In the Greek, the idea of treating, as the NIV translates it, "with contempt," means something very graphically worse; the word EXOUDENOO (ex-oo-den-o^-o) — to make utterly nothing of, despise. It is a way of communicating to somebody that they are worthless, meaningless, as if they ain't even there. That's what Paul had observed was happening in the church at Rome. Does that happen here?

And then Paul gets right into the bottom line of the "what's right to eat" issue — and that bottom line has not not one thing to do with food but has everything to do with love. The question basically is: How do I love my brother or sister in this situation? How do I show the love of Christ to somebody who may not be as strong in their faith in this area as I am? How can I reflect Jesus to somebody who doesn't have a clue what that even means? Very well that Paul said to the Galatians: ***Carry each other burdens, and in***

***this way you will fulfill the law of Christ — Paul, Galatians 6:2.*** And Paul had already revealed to the Galatians, and to us, exactly what the law of Christ is: ***The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love — Paul, Galatians 5:6b.***

Folks, there is so much we do not know about each other — family backgrounds, how we're wired, life experiences — all that kind of stuff. A lot of times we view and judge people in the moment instead of considering all the unseen things that may have contributed to that moment. For instance, somebody who grew up in a household where anger was kind of the rule of the day probably will react in anger today because that's what they know best. Somebody who has been hurt in a church situation in their past will probably be awfully guarded about getting involved in our present, or maybe those past hurts will spill out in a pretty ugly way. Now that's never right — but it may be helpful for us to consider what may have led to that ugly moment. I've heard people completely new to the faith being asked to pray who had no idea how to pray, and wound up swearing their way through their prayer — because swearing was the most meaningful language they knew. Acceptable? No — but there was a reason behind what they did. To be the church God wants us to be means, among other things, that our faith needs to look like something. “Love one another” needs to look like something. “Forgive as the Lord forgave you” needs to look like something. “Judge not that you be not judged” needs to look like something. The purpose of church for believers is not to judge, but rather to know that we have people who are willing to come alongside each other, no matter the issue, no matter the circumstance, to join them and walk with them through this difficult moment — no matter how many moments that might be. Jesus did that for me; how can I not do that for somebody else? The best way to do that? Remember that, at some issue for all of us, WE are that weaker brother or sister. How would we want everybody to treat us? For believers, retribution is never the consequence of sin; reconciliation and restoration are.

And viewing everybody as “more important than ourselves” also has to look like something. The fact is, I do have freedom in Christ — but more important than my freedom in Christ is my reflection of Christ. If if something I am doing, even if it's OK for me, is truly bothering somebody else to the point of affecting their walk with Christ, then in love for the Father, his Son and my brother or sister, I need to be willing to let go of my rights, to stop doing whatever it is I am doing, to prevent a stumbling block from hurting and damaging somebody else's faith. That's why Paul, in his first letter to the church at Corinth, included these words: ***Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. . . . When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ — Paul, I Corinthians 8:9, 12.*** And that's the bottom line: This isn't just our brother or sister we're talking about here; this is Christ's brother or sister. We should care about them like he cares about us.

That also means that, as difficult as it is in a culture where it seems that everything said is meant to bang on somebody's feelings, we maybe pray for some thick skin. Not everything is a big deal. Not everything is “the end of the world.” Again, some people may genuinely not know any better. Or somebody may simply be having a really bad day or week or whatever. But the Bible gives us some guidance in how to deal with the things inevitably said or done that cut or bruise us:

- 1) ***A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense — Solomon, Proverbs 19:11.***
- 2) ***Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you — for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others — Solomon, Ecclesiastes 7:21-22.***

## **APPLICATION**

Now many of us at this point in the message may have an idea of what it means when something is a “stumbling block.” But for all the things that may fall under that heading, there is definitely one that does not: “how we are.” Our personalities, our traits, our ways of being, how we think, how we process, how we express ourselves — none of that falls under “stumbling block.” We need to remember that God made

each of us the way he wanted to, and then he brought each one of us into this fellowship, this body of believers. We see it in our own human bodies. My little toe is nothing like my elbow. My ear lobe is nothing like one of my molars. My eyes and ears may live in the same neighborhood but they ain't nothing alike. Doesn't matter — they are included in my body the way they are to work together so that my body can do the work it's supposed to. Just like us!

At a practical level, yeah, I may do things or say things that will bother people. That is something I can actually do something about. But my Norwegian descent, my brown hair, my blue eyes, the fact I'm a former Marine? I can't really do a lot about those because that's a part of what I am. You may just have to live with those.

After the start of the new year, we are hoping to offer a new-members class. And of all our expectations, we are not asking anyone to fill out some kind of psychological personality inventory. Tell us their testimony — how they came to saving faith in Jesus Christ? Absolutely! Why they like the Packers instead of the Vikings? Not so much! Why they like to read versus watch TV? I don't really care! Why blue is their favorite color, why they are morning people instead of night owls, why they like vanilla instead of chocolate? Well OK; maybe that last one is weird, but you get what I'm saying. We are commanded to love and respect our weaker brothers and sisters — just as they are. In other words, we start with love and respect. It doesn't have to be earned. In the body of Christ, it should be graciously and abundantly given — no limits!

Now, at a practical level, what are some things we can do to ensure that stumbling blocks do not occur and, if they do, that they are dealt with, and quickly? Some ideas:

- 1) Prayer. Prayer is choosing to desire God's best for somebody. That's what's at the core of the healing properties of prayer. Prayer informs my spirit with the love and gentleness of God himself, and positions me to do whatever praises God in any situation. Remember (a little "God-math" here): The shortest distance between two human hearts is a straight line to God.
- 2) Communication. We talk to each other. We have to; what if the other person isn't even aware of what they're doing? What if I'm not even aware of what I'm doing (EXAMPLE OF WALKING AWAY). If it's true that we are to treat each other as better than ourselves, as more important than ourselves, then talking with each other should be no problem. Hey, husbands and wives, how long would the marriage last if there was NO communication? How would problems be met, dealt with and put away? Linda and I just cleared 38 years; without talking things through, we wouldn't have made 38 minutes. And remember Christ's words on the Sermon on the Mount: If I know that somebody has something against me, I go to them. Jesus said so. If I'm only thinking of myself (basically if my pride gets in the way), that's not going to happen. But when did my pride have anything to do with praising God? That's the deal, for all of us: How can I praise God in this situation? What is going to bring praise to God — doing things my way or God's way? A little hint: It ain't going to be my way. What else is left?
- 3) Accuracy. Don't label people. It is something I've done that has caused someone difficulty. It's the action. It's not me as a person. Nobody here is dangerous or difficult or toxic or whatever (yeah, I've heard toxic around here a few times). Anybody around here ever have to greet somebody wearing a HazMat suit? No. See people like us — sinners saved by grace but still a work in progress. Your completion in an area doesn't mean everybody else is complete as well. And I promise you that you're still under construction in an area where somebody else is done.
- 4) Praise. What will give God praise? That's not about the other person; that's about you. How do your thoughts, words, actions give praise to God? If God's not being praised in how you're dealing with a situation, then you better head back to prayer. If God's not being praised in your actions, then somebody else is winning instead — the one who loves subtraction and division more than anything: Satan.

## CONCLUSION

In this world we as a culture spend so much time looking for our differences. We are so much “if you’re not for me, you’re against me,” conservative vs. progressive vs. liberal, racial divides, immigration divides, policies and procedures that seem to have as their only purpose to divide. Folks, that is not what the church is to be about. We are to be about Kingdom work. We are to be about being ambassadors for Jesus Christ. Remember: *[O]ur citizenship is in heaven — Paul, Philippians 3:20a*. We are to pray for every opportunity to reflect him. And that starts by reflecting him to our brothers and sisters.

Folks, there is something so much more important to consider than how we’re being affected by something. We can have our squabbles and issues but, while that is going on, people are dying outside the Kingdom, people are heading into a Godless eternity. All our time spent on our “stuff” just distracts us from the urgency of the work at hand, and dividing us just divides our attention and our resources so that the full strength possible through the combined, unified body of believers never has a chance to happen because we’re divided up into smaller groups. God brought us together to be together; anything that separates us is wrong — and the only one happy about it is Satan. When we get hung up about anything that takes our focus away from our Savior, we are playing into the devil’s hands.

Folks, there are things coming up in the months ahead where we are hoping to impact this town and this region for Christ. The greatest impact is only going to come out of the greatest unity.

Is stuff going to happen that hurts or confuses or frustrates? Yeah. Is stuff going to happen or be said that I don’t like or understand? Guaranteed. Is somebody going to come into this fellowship that I have a hard time getting to know or getting to like? Absolutely. So what do we do?

We do “Jesus.” We speak “Jesus.” We act “Jesus.” Why? This is his house, his body. We belong to him. The moment we go down any other road, we’re fighting Jesus for ownership. Does anybody here really think we can win that one? Paul wanted us to look out for the weaker brother or sister to remind us that, as ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we are to replicate to each other what Jesus did for us — which means that we live by asking ourselves: How do I love in this situation? How do I reflect Jesus in this situation? How do I come alongside this person in this situation? How do I please God and his Son in this situation?

It’s all about bringing honor and glory to the name of God through reflecting his Son in our lives. Nothing else should matter — so let’s get after it . . . together, as a unified body in Jesus Christ. Let’s pray!