



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

The Serious-Minded Church

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Romans 14:19-23

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¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 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. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble 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. 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.

(Pastor prays)

Every clear-minded Christian feels the tension in the air —pandemics, politics and religious freedom. We believe abortion is murder, racism is a sin, and marriage is between one man and one woman for all time. We hold these truths, not because we are issue-driven conservatives, but because we are Bible-believing Christians and, as such, we are not strangers to swimming upstream against the rising cultural flood. We trust that this world is not our home and Caesar is not our Lord. Jesus is Lord and it's His kingdom that consumes us. It's why this passage is so fitting.

Paul writes to a Christian church floating in a sea of pagans called Rome where life was not valued, sex was not sacred and Christ was not welcome. And as Paul writes, it's like he puts his hand under our chins to lift up the head of weary Christians to say "get your eyes up and see the exalted Jesus, the one who loves you, died for you and redeemed you on the cross. Get serious about Him and building His kingdom, not with politics and arguments but with strength

and grace and the Gospel.” We are Gospel people above all and that means before you become identified by issues, make sure you are serious about Christ and Him crucified. Because I think in the days ahead your devotion to the crucified, resurrected Messiah will be tested. The church will be tested. And the church, the gathered body of believers, is the Lord’s church, purchased, established and built by the Lord Himself and upon the truth that “Jesus is Lord.” Christ has promised He will build His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. And if Jesus is that serious about building His church, then His followers must follow. This is a call to serious-minded Christians.

Serious-Minded Christians Get Serious About Christ

Let’s talk about five characteristics of serious-minded Christians

We live to bring peace

Notice what Paul says in verse 19. So then. This is a summary of all he’s been saying in Chapter 14. ¹⁹*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* Paul writes this as a command. He includes himself and he uses strong words. Let us “pursue.” That word is to chase, hunt down, go after it till you catch it. My beagle named Spurgeon hates the moles in our yard. We have a bunch, and if he catches a scent of one, he howls and digs and slings dirt and will dig a Panama canal to catch one. A single-minded, obsessive pursuit. That’s this word “pursue” that which makes for peace. Peace in the body, the peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. Peace with God comes from the Gospel so we trust the Gospel, live the Gospel and share the Gospel.

The Gospel is that God is Holy and man is a sinner. That separates man from God. God sent Jesus into the world to live perfectly like we can’t and then die on the cross as our substitute. God raised Him from the dead and now His death takes the place of man’s if we repent from our sin and believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. You won’t have peace with God without Jesus Christ. And we pursue the peace of God, strength in adversity, humble affection, genuine concern, and lasting hope for tomorrow. I don’t mean peace at all cost which smothers the truth. I mean peace at the ultimate cost which is the cross of Jesus. And if we are God’s people, God’s children, we remember peace is a gift. So many times Paul would finish his letters with a call and reminder of peace. In Philippians 4:9 he said, ⁹*What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.* And in 2

Thessalonians 3:16 he again says, ¹⁶*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.* We don't take the peace of God for granted. In verse 19 we are reminded to pursue, to chase, the peace of God. In this life you can get distracted into chasing a lot of things. Serious-minded Christians get serious about Christ and run after peace. Let me show you another characteristic in verse 19.

We work to build up

Notice what Paul says at the end of verse 19. ¹⁹*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* Building up one another. I want to focus on that phrase "building up." Paul often talks about the church as a building and each of us as bricks or living stones in that building. The phrase Paul uses here "building up" is found 18 times in the New Testament and Paul uses it 15 of those times so it's safe to say it's important. We can never underestimate the power of genuine Christian encouragement. I don't mean compliments or nice things, I mean Christ-centered, Gospel-saturated, life-giving words. You can never know how badly someone needs a life-giving word from you. Connie and I watched a documentary called "Cowboy Iron." It was about a man who decided to participate in 50 Iron Man competitions in 50 days in 50 states. Physically he was fine and actually got better as time went on but social media trolls and naysayers almost broke him mentally. But, his 11-year old daughter gave him one word of encouragement that made him turn the corner and finish. How much more if it's Christ-centered and Gospel-driven, pointing to the real hope and strength and endurance there is in Christ. Don't you want to be known as someone who's crystal clear on the Gospel and a genuine source of building up. Building up how? By strengthening, supporting, comforting, confronting, listening, empathizing, pursuing, tolerating, counseling, carrying, celebrating, correcting, contacting, interceding, challenging, serving, sacrificing, praying, enjoying, noticing and investing. Let's not forget as people who were once dead in sin and now alive in Christ, we have a responsibility to build up. When serious-minded Christians get serious about Christ and His church, we run after peace and we work to build up. There is a third characteristic.

We live the mission

When you look at verses 20-21 you will see they are saying the same thing. Verse 20 started negatively and verse 21 is more positive. 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. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. Look what *not* to do in verse 20. *Do not* destroy (abolish) or cancel the work of God. Pay close attention to the phrase “work of God.” It’s strong and almost unique as it is used only one other time in the Bible. And when Paul talks about the work of God, he’s talking about people specifically and the church in general.

Now go back and read verse 20 and notice what he is addressing. Do not (for the sake of food) destroy the work of God. The sake of food, dietary concerns, something that is ultimately not that important, a third- or fourth-tier issue, don’t pull out the nuclear weapon on a brother who disagreed with you on a matter that is not top tier. That person and this church is the work of God, and you can’t let some peripheral issue threaten the building of God’s church and God’s people.

I’m not saying you can’t debate issues, have strong opinions and question others’ stances. I’m saying that if all you are is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail. It helps to think of people, brothers and sister in Christ, as “the work of God.” It really helps to think of the church as the work of God, and you don’t want to destroy it because you have a clearer or righter understanding of something. Notice how he states it at the end of verse 20 and into 21. 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. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*

There are three things the strong person is to avoid out of consideration for the weak. Eating meat. This probably had something to do with Levitical of pagan idols. Drinking wine. Probably about a pagan ritual or drunkenness. And anything else that might cause a brother to stumble. Look how widely Paul makes that point: “anything.” The believer who is pursuing peace and building up the church will gladly abstain from any activity that might cause a fellow believer harm. He will do that to live the mission of the work of God which is saving the Gospel believing sinners and building the church. Serious-minded Christians live the mission. There is a fourth characteristic we need to look at.

We control our mouths

Paul is addressing the strong believer who is confident in grace, free in Christ and knows good theology, and Paul says here, you don't have to tell everything you know all the time and you don't have to display your views for all the world to see even if you are absolutely right. If you do, it's more likely to be more impressive about *you* than honoring to *Christ*. Some of you've got to just give to God and trust that in His own good time He will strengthen and grow other brothers and sisters without you constantly correcting every single thing. It means living in a genuine awareness of your call to build up brothers and sisters in Christ. Let me end with this one last characteristic.

We get strong in the Lord

Most of this passage is aimed at the Christian who is strong in faith, calling him to be more careful in how he lives and what he says. But this last verse turns to the Christian who hasn't really taken hold of God's grace and had his conscience fully informed by God's word. It's the believer who's not sure he's doing the right thing but goes ahead and does it anyway. That's sin because it didn't come from faith. That's inner conviction that what you are doing is fully in line with your Christian faith. Truthfully, if we are going to be serious-minded Christians, then every act of our lives should be in the light of that final sentence in verse 23. *For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.* And it starts with us getting serious about Christ.

I want to be a man who is serious about the Lord Jesus, and I want to serve a church that does the same. Let's close like that just thinking about how the Gospel informs that. The Gospel that God is holy, loving and kind. He is the creator judge of the whole world who created you in His image. But that image has been disfigured by your own sin, so that now fellowship with God has been terminated. God in His kindness sent Jesus, who is all-God and all-man who lived perfectly and righteously. And at the cross where the great exchange happens, Christ took and paid for your sin. Then He gave us His righteousness for anyone who turns from His sin and believes then He will be saved. Then we have peace with God and can live in the peace of God. Then you can join this throng of people that build people and the church, people who stay on the mission of the work of God. You can join people who watch what we say, live fully informed by faith for the glory of the Lord and good of the church.

(Pastor prays)