

**We Survived**  
***Ask the Right Question***  
**May 31, 2020**

“We’re all in this apart.”

I think if you were to put a caption on where we were this time last week – at least as it related to the coronavirus and what “next steps” should or should not be taken ...

If you were to put a caption on where we were, collectively, as a nation, “we’re all in this apart” is probably as good as any. We have been divided on pretty much every aspect surrounding this crisis.

But, today, with the terrible, terrible way that George Floyd died and the way that some are responding to that outrageous cruelty, the division and the tension and the hatred among us and between us as a nation is even

greater. We're all in this *even further* apart than we were before.

... which is why I can say that I am now *more certain* of two truths than I have ever been in my entire life.

**First, that sin is real and until Jesus returns to set all things right, we are all going to be, at the exact same time, both its victims and its perpetrators.**

I wish it were not true, but what we are witnessing and participating in is the natural order of things in a world that is marred by sin.

... which means that, in spite of our best efforts ...

- Some level of sickness and death
- Some level of cruelty and injustice

- Some level of “the powerful” abusing their power

... will always be with us.

And, therefore, we have to learn how to accept it and deal with it.

- That doesn't mean saying “it's OK.”
- Nor does it mean looking the other way when it happens.
- And it doesn't mean we don't try to do better and hold ourselves accountable.

It just means being a realist about ... well, reality.

Sin is real and this is how it's going to be until Jesus returns and brings the Kingdom of God

in all of its fullness to this earth. And I'm more certain of that than ever.

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The second thing of which I am more certain than ever is that ...

**We, as Christians, have the answer to all the division and the hatred and the strife.**

Actually, that's not the best way to say that.

A more accurate way to put it is that ...

**We, as Christians, follow the One (Jesus of Nazareth) who both taught and demonstrated the answer to all the division and hatred and strife.**

And now, He calls and empowers those of us ...

- Who *believe* in Him ...
- Who *know* Him ...

- Who *trust* in Him ...
- Who *follow* Him ...

... to rise above the fray and *be that answer* in a world that is constantly being marred by sin and sinners ... like us.

"You – all of you together," Jesus once said, "are the light of the world. You – all of you together – are the salt of the earth" meaning ...

- "Your *influence* is what will preserve it."
- "Your *presence* is what will stave off the rot."
- "Your *example* is what will make people thirsty for what *you have* that *they do not*."

So, even though I'm not certain of very much

when it comes to exactly what happened and what needs to be done about coronavirus.

And even though I'm not certain of very much concerning the reality of racism in this country and what ought to be done about it along with a hundred other issues we face ...

... I *am* certain of those two things.

- We live in a sinful, messed up world and that's how it's going to be. So, we have to deal with it without making it worse for each other.
- And we, who are Christians, follow the One who taught and demonstrated how to do that.

And that's what we've been talking about for the past four Sundays in this series, *We Survived ... now, if we can just keep from*

*killing each other.*

If you're new with us or watching for the first time or for the first time in a long time, I want you to know that you can watch, listen to or read the text from those messages by going to the media section of our app and our website.

## **What We've Learned**

And, I think, as we bring this series to a close – and by the way, this will be the last message focused directly on the coronavirus challenge ...

As we bring this series to a close (and also because of the events of this past week), I think it would be good to go back over some of what we've learned, because the problem confronting a group of first-century Christians in the city of Rome has an incredible amount

of application to what Christians today are facing.

Of course, if you've been here for any of the past three weeks, you know that the details of *their* problem seem bizarre to us because their cultural challenges were not the same as ours. But the root of the problem is identical:

- Two distinct groups of people who come from very different backgrounds
- Two distinct groups of people who are certain that their way is the right way
- Two groups of people who are convinced that those on "the other side" are more sinful and more evil than they are
- Two groups who both claim to love and

follow Jesus ...

... who are about to kill each other (metaphorically speaking) and their churches.

Now, I'm not going to repeat everything I've said over the past three weeks, but I'll summarize it like this.

About 30 years or so after the time of Jesus, news about him and what He had done as well as His teachings had spread pretty much all over the Roman Empire, including its heart: the city of Rome itself.

And, in that city, which was quite diverse culturally speaking, the churches were made up of ...

- Jewish men and women who had come to believe that Jesus was the Messiah

because He had been crucified and had risen from the dead ...

- As well as *non-Jewish* men and women (often referred to as “Gentiles”) who had also come to believe in Jesus.

Because these two groups came from such different cultural and spiritual backgrounds *before* becoming Christians, there was conflict over two major issues ... issues which, again, to us, seem strange and maybe even trivial.

But they weren't trivial to these folks.

- The Jewish Christians, who had grown up attempting to observe the Law of Moses, believed that certain kinds of meat were “unclean” and therefore unacceptable, while the Gentile believers had no such qualms.

- And the Gentile Christians believed that since God made *everything*, every day should be considered “holy”; every day was the Lord’s day ... while the Jewish Christians believed that those days commended by Moses – the Sabbath and the Feast Days – are to be observed in a special way.

And these disagreements had become so heated and intense – exacerbated by the racial tension that had existed between Jews and Gentiles for centuries; I mean, for Jews and Gentiles to be on opposite sides wasn’t a new thing ...

It got so heated and intense that the Apostle Paul, who had been almost singlehandedly responsible for the spread of Christianity at that point, was compelled by the Holy Spirit to write them a letter which we have in the New

Testament as “The Letter to the Romans.”

And if you’ve ever read it, you know that it’s an amazing theological and philosophical masterpiece. I mean, there’s nothing like it in writings from that era.

In fact, it was this particular letter that led Martin Luther, the founder of Protestant Christianity, to understand that salvation is *by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone*.

But the point of the whole thing – the point of *everything* Paul explains to these first-century Christ-followers about God and what God was attempting to do through both Jews and Gentiles in Jesus ...

The point of the whole comes down to *how they are treating one another*. It’s the bottom line for Paul.

**And so, near the end of the letter he writes ...**

*Accept the one whose faith is weak ...*

And, as I've said each week, I don't think *Paul himself* is calling anyone "weak." Instead, I think he's sarcastically quoting what each side in the conflict had been saying about the other – that they're "weak in faith."

**Accept the one whose faith is "weak," he writes ...**

*... without quarreling over  
"disputable matters."  
Romans 14:1 (NIV)*

... which are non-essential issues, because whatever days you treat as "holy" and whatever food you eat (or don't eat) doesn't justify you before God or atone for any of your sin. Jesus already did that.

**And then Paul explains what acceptance looks like.**

*The one who eats everything  
(Gentile Christians) must not  
treat with contempt ...*

And, as I said last week, that word "contempt" means "the feeling that a person or a thing is beneath consideration, worthless and deserving scorn."

*The one who eats everything  
(Gentile Christians) must not  
treat with contempt the one  
who does not (Jewish  
Christians).*

*And the one who does not eat  
everything (Jewish Christians)  
must not judge the one who  
does (Gentile Christians) ...*

In other words, "don't go around thinking that you are somehow better than they are because of what you don't do that they do and vice versa."

### **Don't judge them ...**

*... for God has accepted them.  
Romans 14:3 (NIV)*

And I don't think Paul is talking about God accepting them and forgiving them in Christ.

I think he's talking about God accepting their behavior in these two specific areas *because of their motivation.*

### **He writes ...**

*Whoever regards one day as special (Jewish Christians) does so to the Lord.*

*Whoever eats meat (Gentile*

Christians) does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God;

In other words, they pray before they eat.

*And whoever abstains [from meat, meaning the Jewish Christians] does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

*Romans 14:6 (NIV)*

They pray before they eat, too!

And what Paul is saying here is that, even though the rationale for what both sides are doing might be different, the heart is the same. The motive is the same.

- Both sides are doing what they do to honor the Lord.
- And they're doing it with gratefulness and thanksgiving to Him.

And that's why, in these "disputable matters" (things which are non-essential to being a follower of Jesus) ... each person can make up their own mind and God will be pleased with their decision.

Therefore, don't judge or condemn each other. And don't treat each other with contempt.

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Now, as we've seen each week of this series, the application of this to us – to those of us who are believers in and followers of Jesus – in this coronavirus situation is obvious.

We all have different convictions and levels of comfort over ...

- Reopening businesses

- Reopening churches (like ours)
- Wearing masks
- The decisions our federal, state, and local leaders have made.

... and the list could go on and on.

But instead of following in the pattern of this world and treating our brothers and sisters in the Lord *with contempt* – thinking of them as “beneath consideration, worthless and deserving of scorn” because of what they believe about these issues ...

- We are to *accept* them and respect their convictions.
- We are to *accept* them and avoid arguing with them ...

... because they're trying to do the right thing; they're trying to do what they think God wants them to do, just like we are.

And we're not to set ourselves as judge over them. Not only does that usurp the position only God can hold, it's a ridiculously wasteful expenditure of emotional energy.

That's because, for every way in which you can tear *my* life apart and point out all the inconsistencies and hypocrisies, *I* can do the exact same thing to *you* ...

... which, in response, makes *you* want to do it to *me* ... and then *I* want to do it to *you* ... and on and on it goes until we hate each other, and we are both destroyed.

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So, that's where we've been over the past few weeks. And I hope that, in some way, what we've talked about has challenged and encouraged you to rise above the fray of the discord and strife that is all around us.

## **You Make the Call**

But there's one more thing that needs to be said on this subject and it goes back to those "convictions" we all have and what we're to do about them, especially when we're around others who have the exact opposite convictions.

And this is going to bring us to the heart of what Jesus taught and demonstrated for us – the thing that made Him so unique and can make us effective as light and salt in this world.

So, let's get into it.

If you've been paying attention as people discuss what they think ought to be done collectively and, more specifically, what they think *they themselves* ought to do (and not do) in this current coronavirus reality ...

If you've been paying attention, you've probably noticed that almost everyone is basing their opinions and actions on *questions* – often *unspoken* questions – that they believe will lead to “the right decisions.”

I've picked up on five of them, though there are probably more.

The first one is ...

### **1. The wisdom question: *is this wise or is this foolish?***

For instance, most people would say “keeping our distance from one another right

now is *wise* because it prevents transmission. So, we should do that instead of oh, let's say, going to the Lake of the Ozarks and standing shoulder-to-shoulder in a pool with a couple hundred people we don't know."

Some would say "keeping the economy shut down for so long will cause more long-term and widespread damage than the virus itself. That's *foolish*, so we shouldn't do that."

Another question people are asking themselves is ...

## **2. The security question: *Is this safe or is this dangerous?***

For example, quite a few people are thinking, "if I stay at home, I'll be a lot safer than if I go back to work. So, because of my health or the health of someone I live with, that's what I'm going to do."

And a lot of people are thinking, "if I let my kids go back to daycare or to back to daycare or Adventureland (when NHCC reopens), they'll be a lot more exposed, which is dangerous. So, I'm not going to do that."

Then there's ...

### **3. The liberty question: *is this limit truly necessary or is it government overreach?***

For example, many people are thinking "our leaders are becoming way too comfortable with 'executive orders.' So, I'm not going to do what they say. I'm going to open up my business and live with the consequences."

Others are saying, "this is why we have government in the first place. They're doing what they're supposed to do in a time like this. So, I'm going to do what they say."

Then there's what I'll call ...

#### **4. The discernment question: *is this information accurate or is it “fake news”?***

Everyone is watching, listening to, or reading something. And what we are watching, listening to, and reading is shaping our opinions as much as our own thoughts.

Not surprisingly, most of us say that *our* sources – our channel, our blogs, our podcasts – are accurate and that’s why we trust them, but those of the “other side” are “fake news” and should be discounted.

And finally, there’s ...

#### **5. The morality question: *is this good or is this evil?***

For example, some would say by keeping things locked down, we protect those most at risk in our population, which is good.

Correspondingly, anyone who thinks everything should open up right now is “only interested in making a buck,” which is, of course, evil.

Others would say that a much greater evil is already being unleashed as collective mental health erodes (to say nothing of economic and financial health).

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See how this works?

Almost everyone – including you, including me – is asking one or more of these questions as they try to determine what they think ought to be done for everyone and for themselves.

And I think that’s a good thing. I think all of these are great questions to ask because none of us should be making foolish,

dangerous, misinformed, or evil decisions.

## **A Higher Question**

That said, there is another question that needs to be asked *in addition to* these questions; a higher question, one that gives the proper context to all of these questions because it's very easy to look at any given situation and be swayed by our own personal biases without even knowing it.

It's also possible to have the right answer to a question and totally miss the point.

For example, in the Roman church that we've been talking about, because of their tradition based on the Law of Moses, the Jewish believers believed what the Gentile Christians were doing by eating certain kinds of meat was evil.

But Paul – a Jewish believer himself – told them that it wasn't.

**This is what he wrote (and we read this last week).**

*I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. Romans 14:14 (NIV)*

Of course, when they read that, the Gentile Christians would have immediately said, "aha, we are right! We win on the morality question! What we're doing is *not* evil. It's good!

"So, stop your whining and pass me a pork chop."

But Paul, likely knowing that might be the response, doesn't stop there. Instead he lays the groundwork for this other, higher,

question.

“Yes, you Gentile believers are right. Yes, Jesus taught that it’s not what goes *into* your mouth that makes you unclean but what comes *out* of it.”

**However, he says ...**

*If anyone regards something  
as unclean ...*

And who is that in this situation? It’s the Jewish Christians, right?

*If anyone regards something  
as unclean, then for that  
person it is unclean.*

*Romans 14:14 (NIV)*

And what Paul’s getting at here is that there’s something beyond the morality question.

What he’s saying to the Gentile Christians is

“listen, your Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ cannot get past the internal feeling that it’s somehow wrong for them to eat meat, even though it’s not.

“Therefore, for the sake of their conscience, they have no choice but to treat it as being wrong *for themselves*.

“Not for you but for themselves. They’re still not to judge you over the fact that you’ve have a different conviction about it.”

“But, for them, it’s wrong.”

And then Paul writes what is probably one of the most critical “so what” passages in all of his letters and probably in the whole New Testament.

In fact, what he is about to say to the Gentile Christians in the next two sentences

summarizes pretty much everything Jesus taught and demonstrated. It exemplifies the answer to all the strife and division and hatred we see, not in only in our world right now ...

... but, also between Christians who have different opinions about coronavirus and racism and politics and ... and ... and ...

So, what does Paul say next?

- To those who were “right” on the morality question ...
- To those who actually may have had, technically speaking, a “stronger faith” (or, at least, a more accurate one) ...
- To those who understood the value of freedom in Christ as opposed to being bound up in legalism ...



... he wrote:

*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.*

*Romans 14:15 (NIV)*

“Wait, wait, wait ... so Paul, you’re saying there’s a greater issue than whether or not something is right or wrong?”

“Yes, that’s exactly what I’m saying.”

“And there’s something more important than whether or not it’s ...

- Wise or foolish?
- Safe or dangerous?
- Accurate or inaccurate?”

"Yep."

"Something even more important than my own personal freedom?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"Listen, all of those things matter. All of them are important. However, *if your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love.*"

Now, a lot of serious Christians resist this statement or try to put qualifiers on it because they think Paul is saying, "so, whenever someone has a problem with what you're doing, then you just need to not do it."

But when you put it in context of the whole passage, that's not what he's saying.

What he's saying is ...

- You can be right without flaunting your rightness and making someone else feel as if they are “beneath consideration, worthless and deserving of scorn” in the process.
- You can have the freedom to do something and yet choose to limit yourself when you are around someone who doesn’t have that same sense of freedom.
- You can willingly lay down your rights at a given moment without permanently ceding those rights to someone else (or to the government). You can put the needs of others before your own.

But the reason you wouldn’t choose to do those things, Paul says, is because “you’re no longer acting in love.”

Or to state it in the positive ...

**What Paul is saying is “love is to be the ultimate guide to how you treat one another.”**

As I said earlier, this is the point of everything he has written in this massive letter. It's all designed to lead to this, which is why ...

**In the very next sentence, he writes ...**

*Therefore, do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. Romans 14:16 (NIV)*

In other words, “if you don't act *in love*, something that is *good* – something God Himself has *declared* to be good (in this case whatever food you want to eat) ...

“It will be spoken of – it will be perceived – as evil, because it will be tearing down and destroying the very people Jesus died for.”

So, the higher question that ought to be added to those other really good questions we're all asking – of course, if you're not a believer in and follower of Jesus, you don't *need* to add it; you're *welcome* to do so and I think you would be *smart* to do so ...

But if you *are* a Christian, this question is non-negotiable for you. It's non-negotiable for me.

It needs to go before *and after* all the other questions because this question – more than any other – reflects what Jesus taught and demonstrated in His own life.

So, let's call it the Jesus question (since this is his idea).

**The Jesus question asks, “What does love require of me?”**

“In this situation, what does it look like for me

to love someone the way that I have been loved by God?"

## **Love One Another**

And again, if you're not a Christian, you don't need to worry about this.

But if you are – if you believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again and is coming back to set everything right someday – you need to remember that Jesus came to introduce a new agreement between God and people:

- An agreement paid for by his blood which means we don't have to atone for our sins because He already did.
- An agreement which reduced down to a single commandment the seemingly endless list of laws and commands that

even the Jewish people would have said  
were a burden.

**And here is that command.**

*“A new command I give you:  
Love one another. As I have  
loved you, so you must love  
one another. By this everyone  
will know that you are my  
disciples, if you love one  
another.” John 13:34-35 (NIV)*

The distinguishing characteristic of a follower  
of Jesus isn't ...

- Their wisdom
- Or their courage
- Or their discernment
- Or their freedom
- Or their morality.

It's loving one another in the same way that  
Jesus has loved them – us.

And how has he loved us?

Those who walked with him on this earth, like John, the best friend who wrote what we just read would have said ...

- Though he was perfect, He didn't flaunt his righteousness. He didn't make us feel as if we were "beneath consideration, worthless and deserving of scorn" in the process.
- Though he was God and free to act as God, He chose to limit Himself and experience everything we experience in this sin cursed world.
- Though he was God, he willingly laid down his rights as God; even allowing Himself to be crucified on our behalf so that we could be justified – set right –

and forgiven. He put our needs ahead of his own.

By the way, the initial followers of Jesus were so impressed by this characteristic of Jesus that in the years after his resurrection and return to the Father, they continually referred back to it.

In fact, not long after Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, maybe 5 or 10 years later, John also wrote some letters to Christians who were divided and fighting with one another.

And, in the first one, after reminding them of the new commandment of Jesus to love one another ...

**He hammers home its importance by writing ...**

*Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. I*

*John 2:9 (NIV)*

What John is saying is<sup>i</sup> the person you dismiss, the group that you dislike, the group that you don't want to have anything to do with the person that you just, maybe you don't want to use the word "hate," but you almost hate them ...

That person is somebody for whom Jesus died.

And if you mistreat someone for whom Jesus died, don't kid yourself. You can't be in the light. You're still in darkness.

Now we intuitively get this because you if I were to mistreat your brother or your sister, or if I were to mistreat your son or your daughter and then said, "Hey, let's together and have coffee" that's not something you would want to do, right?

I can't pretend like things are good between me and you when I've mistreated someone you love. When I mistreat someone you love, it's like I'm mistreating who *you* are.

And if you mistreat my wife or one of my daughters and you think you and I are cool, we are *not* cool. You cannot mistreat someone I love and think that things are good with us.

And I'm not saying "oh, you're not really saved ... you don't really know Jesus." What I'm saying – what John is saying – is that you're *living* like someone who isn't saved and doesn't know Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

So, bottom line is this.

- I don't know what your situation is concerning the coronavirus.
- I don't know what it's like to be in your shoes.
- I don't know your financial situation.
- I don't know your family situation.
- I don't know your political perspective or your take on this whole thing and what you believe you and everyone else should be doing and not doing.

But what I do know is that before and after you ask yourself those other really good questions ... if you're a follower of Jesus, you need to ask yourself the Jesus question: "what does love require of me?"

What does love require of me ...

- When I go into the store or a crowded room?
- When I engage with someone who doesn't see things the way I do?
- When I have to stay home with my spouse and kids longer than ever before?

What does love require ...

- When I think about whether or not I should go back to church?

The thing about this question is that it's far less complicated than researching chapter and verse in the Bible (not that I'm against that) but there isn't any chapter and verse for a lot of this stuff.

But this question – the Jesus question – gives

us all the guidance we need.

And it has the potential to change the world.  
It has the potential to change your world and  
it has the potential to change my world.

And if you're a Christian, this is what we've  
been called to do, to ask of every single  
person we meet, the people that are easy to  
love, and the people that are difficult to love,  
the people that we find next-to-impossible to  
love.

What does love require of me?

Let's pray.

- We are the "just as" people. Jesus takes us just as we are. Then He asks us to treat others just as He has treated us.
- We can only give what we have received

1. New four week series next Sunday – Can We Talk? (Because apparently we can't). We're going to talk about how we talk to one another.

2. Also, changes coming next Sunday ... based on Mayor Lucas' recent orders which allow us to have more people onsite ... need your feedback. Please fill out survey in the email I sent you Thursday PM or go to the sign me up tab on website or app.

Your opinion matters to us because we cannot do what love requires of us unless we know what people are thinking.

3. Offering thanks ... need help, just ask.  
HOPE

# Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> From Andy Stanley's message, Love vs. Everything