

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Let's Build Up, Not Tear Down

Transcribed Message
November 12, 2023
Romans 14:19-23

A man by the name of Rupertus Medvenius is credited with a very familiar statement. He is the one who supposedly first said, "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity." Rupertus may have said that but there's about six other people that are credited with that statement too. But we're going to go with Rupertus on this one. It's a statement that's been adopted by a lot of churches, a lot of denominations down through the years. I suppose if we did a better job of actually doing it, there might be even less denominations and church groups but we haven't always done as good a job at following it as we have of making the statement.

In Romans 14 in these verses we just read, 19 to 23, I think Paul would say yes, this is the essence of it. In essentials, we need to have unity. We need to be in agreement. Those are the things that we declare together that we believe. In so many other things that are in this category of nonessential, then we extend to each other liberty. But whatever we do, in all of these things, we do so on the basis of love. Jesus himself said that he was going to build his church. We get to enter into that construction project with him when we build into each other's lives and when we do this work that God has called us to do.

A very quick review. We've been working our way through Romans 14. As we've been doing so, we've been stacking one principal upon another. Paul builds on these all the way through. We'll continue on into the 15th chapter with a few more, but as you look at the ones that we've already looked at, you can focus on the capitalized words because we welcome each other. We don't want to look down on each other. We don't want to be judgmental in our heart towards each other. We want our conscience as the thing that Paul consistently says our conscience is to be our guide. The reality is we are all one day going to stand and give an account for our lives before the Lord himself. We certainly don't want to ever bring spiritual harm to a brother or sister in Christ. We

realize in our lesson last week that the kingdom of God is not these external things. It's matters of the heart. It's spiritual issues that God is most concerned with. Paul is going to build on these again this morning.

Let's look at three more principles, actually seeing it as when rights are wrong. When rights are wrong. Very first one that we see. The principle number eight. Building each other up is the most important thing. Building each other up is the most important thing. Paul starts off and he says this is really a matter of edification. This is a matter of edification. Look again at the 19th verse. "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." There Paul gives us a whole lot in this 19th verse. A lot going on in this verse. He begins by just taking us right back to the primary thing. The primary thing. It begins with an affirmation. We might even say it begins with a reaffirmation. The very opening words of that 19th verse. "So then". Those words are two things that they cause us to look back at what he just said. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy. We're supposed to immediately after we read "so then" look back to those verses. But he is also in a sense saying now carry this forward. Look forward with this. In conclusion. Let's do this. You might say it in that way. Just as he told us in verse 17 that the primary things are not opinions. Verse one he started off this chapter. It is not about opinions. It is not about things about which God has not given this clear revelation and clear direction. it's about all of these other things that are not spoken of in Scripture.

We again notice that he's talking to the strong. When you look at that 19th verse and I make that statement he is again talking to the strong. What is it in that 19th verse that that tips you off that he's talking to the strong? When he says let us. So again, we saw that back in the 13th verse. He said let us back then. He identified himself with those who are strong in the faith. Obviously the apostle Paul is strong in the faith and he identifies with those in the church in Rome who are strong in the faith. He wants them to see this primary thing and this reaffirmation that he is making and he says in effect this is going to require a commitment of you. This is going to require a commitment. I see that in the sense that the strong are to do something. The strong are to pursue. So then let us, those who are strong in our faith and in our understanding of the doctrine of Christian liberty, of what it looks like to be free in Christ, this matter of freedom to

exercise these rights that we have as a believer. We are to pursue something. So then let us pursue. It requires a commitment. The word “pursue” literally is the idea of chasing after. We might say go for it. We might say get after it. Make every effort. That's what it's going to take. This simply rules out passivity.

Do you know how many times as you're reading especially in the epistles you're reading the exhortations from the Holy Spirit with regard to our Christian life and experience. How many times do the statements and the imperatives of Scripture remind us that you cannot get to where you need to be in a spirit of passivity? We just can't do it. We are to pursue these things. We are to go after these things. We are to make every effort. You're not going to fall into what Paul is exhorting us about this morning. These things are not going to just happen. I don't know exactly other than to say it's just our fallen nature, but somehow or other when you think in terms of the Christian life, we disassociate so many things in the Christian life from some very practical life experiences. We learn very early on in life if you want to achieve a measure of success in anything have to pursue it, don't you? You have to go after it. You have to be diligent about it. You have to be disciplined about it. You have to be dedicated about it. Pick anything that you want. When you're in school it takes discipline, diligence, and take a spirit of pursuit to accomplish the things and the goals that you want. If you're thinking in terms of sports or the arts and music or work, whatever it is, we recognize as a fundamental principle it's going to take dedication. It's going to take diligence. It is going to take effort. Yet somehow or other, and again I think it's just our fallen sinful nature, that we slip into this passivity mode with regard to our spiritual life and journey. You're never going to be a strong believer or ever be in this category of one who is strong if you have the attitude and heart of passivity. There is going to have to be diligence, Paul says. You're going to have to pursue these things. You're going to have to go after these things with a sense of determination.

Look at what it is that we are to be pursuing. He tells us in effect two things with one goal. Those two things we are to be a peacemaker and we're to be a builder. We're to be a peacemaker and a builder. Let's start with the first one. Let's start with being a peacemaker. What makes for peace? If you know Paul, he talks a lot about peace. He talks about, as we've seen repeatedly in Romans 5, we have peace with God through

the Lord Jesus Christ. He talked about this fundamental standing before God, of having a sense of it's well with my soul. How do you have a soul that is well and it is at peace? It's because we have been justified by faith. That's Romans 5.

But then there's this matter of peace that is very subjective and Paul speaks to that in Philippians 4 when he says we have a peace that passes understanding. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your needs, your requests be made known and to God, and then we have a peace that passes understanding. In a sense, there's an objective peace in my relationship with God. There is subjective peace in terms of that whole matter of not having an anxious heart. But what is he talking about here? Here he is talking about this horizontal relational peace. I am at peace with you. you're at peace with me. This is what we're pursuing. We're pursuing a relational harmony, a relational peace. This is what we're to give ourselves to, he says. So that's what's in view here. The point is very clear. Every exercise of my Christian liberty, every time I step into this matter of opinions and my rights if you will, I do it with one eye on you or other believers because I don't want to do spiritual harm to you. In that sense, I become a peacemaker. I'm thinking and making choices and decisions in my life based on a desire to be in harmony with you and not to harm you, to promote unity with you. That is being a peacemaker.

What would you say are a couple of great hindrances to peacemaking? I have two words in mind. The first one starts with an S and it actually could end with an S. What do you think it is? It destroys peace and peacemaking. There's an E in there, an L, there's an F. Selfishness. I want what I want. That is the very opposite of what he's laying out in all of these principles. The attitude of heart and mind that says when I step into this matter of opinions, I want what I want. That's the opposite of peacemaking. I think the other word that destroys peacemaking starts with a P and it ends with an E and it has a big I right in the middle. Pride. Selfishness is I want what I want. Pride is I'm right and you're wrong. Paul says to us here one of the first things we have to understand is we need to be pursuing peace. We need to be peacemakers.

The other pursuit that goes hand-in-hand with being a peacemaker is this matter of being a builder. Being a builder. Be an edifier. Look at the 15th chapter and the second verse. He's going to say the same thing. "Let each of us please his neighbor for

his good to build him up.” That’s what he’s talking about. He’s talking about a spirit and heart of peacemaking towards each other and then this matter of edifying and building each other up. What did Jesus say in Matthew 16? It’s part of our big idea. He said I will build my church, so Jesus was looking to the future at the point of the cross of Pentecost when the church begins. Jesus said I’ve got a building project in mind and the building project I have in mind is the building of my church. Paul says in Ephesians 2 that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. He goes on to talk about all of us having gifts and capacities and abilities and we’re part of this building up. We’re part of the building up of the body of Christ here at Covenant. He is going to remind us in 1 Corinthians 3 to be careful how you build because you’re building alongside of another who is also building. So be careful about how you build. 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Encourage one another and build each other up. This is all through the New Testament epistles. This is a big deal to God. This is a big deal to God. There are some 41 one another statements in the letters to the churches having to do with how we relate and how we treat one another. Peacemaker, builder, and a host of others. You’re not an island. You’re part of a building project. We’re all interconnected. That is the consistent theme in all of the pictures that we have in the New Testament about the church. The one common thread through all of them is how interconnected we are.

We hear today often about this matter of deconstructing of one's faith. We hear about people walking away from their faith and walking away from the church. It is a very common statement to say I'm walking away from the church but I'm not walking away from Jesus. Can you show me in this book how you can validate that other than your feelings and your emotions? I understand that sometimes it's driven from hurt and pain, but you can't on the basis of New Testament ecclesiology, New Testament doctrine of the church, you can't make the statement I'm walking away from the church but I'm not walking away from Jesus. Jesus is building the church. The church is the body of Christ. So whatever harm and whatever hurt and whatever pain, and I understand it's real and I understand it's deep and I understand significant, but please don't walk away from the church and say you're not walking away from Jesus. This is what he has promised He is building. Whatever else you may experience apart from

and outside of a church, and I'm not talking about just what happens in the four walls, I'm talking about the life of the church right here and in other expressions. But that is what God has called us to. That's what he wants us to be about and that's what's on his heart. That's what we see so consistently here. So that's the positive side. Be a peacemaker. Be a builder.

Now there's a negative side to that. There are going to be some limitations that he's going to put on us in verses 20 and 21. In verse 20 he starts off with a command. Look at verse 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." It's a command. This statement that he makes to us in the 20th verse is a command. It's in the present tense so it's communicating to us that it is happening. He was writing this letter in the 1st century. Around 57 AD when Paul is penning this letter under the direction of the Holy Spirit to the church in Rome and these various places where they were meeting, the word had come back that this is a divided church. It's divided primarily between Jews and Gentiles and they are struggling deeply over how to bring this together especially in the area of opinions. So he says in this 20th verse by way of an imperative, by way of a command, this is happening right now. You guys need to stop acting this way. You need to go back and understand what it means to be a peacemaker and a builder.

Again, it's directed to those who are strong. We're going to see at the very end there's a word to the weak but this whole section is filled with admonitions and imperatives and instructions to those who consider themselves strong. It's to those that he lays this greater burden on. There is a greater accountability, isn't there, to those who are strongest? When parents go into a room where there is nothing but chaos happening, who do they look for first? They look for the oldest usually. The oldest is supposed to be the one who knows what should be happening and what shouldn't be happening. They don't generally go to the smallest person in the room and begin to speak with them about what's going on. They probably look for the oldest. Why do we do that? Because they're supposed to know better. They're supposed to have an understanding of what is the right behavior. That is exactly what Paul is saying here. To

those of you that are strong, you have to stop acting in the way that you're acting. There is a limit to this matter of freedom. There's a limit to this matter of liberty.

If we don't do that, notice secondly he says it's a detriment to the work of God. It's a detriment to the work of God. Read the verse again. 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." Notice what he does not say. Look at those words again. "Do not for the sake of food destroy..." What did we think he would say there? Do not destroy each other. That would be the most common thing for Paul to say after what he has just given by way of instruction in verse 19 in my mind. He could've much more easily said you guys, knock it off. Stop this. You're destroying, hurting, or harming each other. But he wants to give us a sense of the weightiness of this, of the gravity of what's going on, and so he doesn't say simply to stop tearing down each other. He says to stop destroying the work of God. That is because God is the one who said I'm building my church. This is my construction project. We get to enter into it but he is the general contractor. he is the owner. He is the guy that's making it all happen. He's the one that we are working against.

The work of God and the hindrance and the detriments and even instruction is in what realm? It's in the realm of sanctification. He's not talking about salvation in these verses. We said that repeatedly as we grappled with what does it mean to destroy the work of God in the life of somebody else. Clearly in his mind is the matter of progression from being a weak untaught believer to being a strong believer. It's to be immature and going to maturity. He has in mind this whole matter of sanctification. It is what he says in Philippians chapter 1 verse 6 when he reminds us that God is the one who has begun a good work in us. For God has begun this good work in you. He is going to bring it to completion. He's going to see it to its end. But it's a work of God Paul says in Philippians 1:6. Ephesians 2:10. After he makes that amazing declaration for by grace are you saved through faith, that not of yourselves; it's the gift of God lest any man should boast. Then he goes right on to say in verse 10. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus. Do you see the weightiness of this? Do you see the gravity and concern of Paul? It is not a matter of people tearing at each other. They're literally

harming the work of God in the life of another believer who in some way is being impacted and not progressing as they might.

You could say about that Ephesians 2:10 for we are his workmanship. It is the word masterpiece. You can turn to the person right next to you right now and say you are a masterpiece. That's what he says. We are his workmanship. We're a masterpiece. These wackos – that's a pastoral term – that are going into these museums today and destroying and defacing and marking up masterpieces. It's crazy, isn't it, that we have these beautiful works of art that are being threatened by crazy people who want to make a point about something unrelated to that. But here is this glorious masterpiece and it's being as Paul would say here being destroyed. It's being defaced or marred. To destroy or to hinder, to interfere is to dismantle what God is doing in another believer's life. That's a big deal. And you're doing it over food? And you're quarreling and bickering over drink and over days and feasts and seasons? Then we can add our page that we've looked at numerous times and our favorite things that we think we're right about and somebody else is wrong about. That's what is in view here.

Paul quickly adds that it doesn't mean we can't enjoy these things. Again, look at the verse. Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God. As soon as he says that, as soon as he makes that weighty, heavy reminder of what we can be doing by way of harm to another believer, he immediately says everything is indeed clean. Everything is indeed clean. These are the gifts of God that are to be enjoyed. If God had specifically said don't do that, Paul is saying that's in this matter of opinion. If God hasn't revealed his truth on that matter, then he is saying there is liberty there. There's freedom there. God doesn't give us direction on those things. Paul is saying those things are pure, they're clean. But.

But there's a big adversitive there. There is a big qualifier there. There's a big reminder that we have to keep something in mind because he says indeed everything is clean, but he quickly adds lest we run off and forget the very thing he just told us. But it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. This matter of food and drink and days are in fact evil if we're exercising our rights in the wrong way. They can in fact become something other than a blessing in our life and a gift to be enjoyed. Exercise your liberty but never exercise your liberty, never enjoy your freedom in Christ

at the expense of another believer. Your rights are wrong when you say I don't care about you. Here's the word from Paul. God cares. God cares about every one of us. He cares about the workmanship that is going into our lives. God is concerned about that. It's a big deal to him.

Now look at verse 21. He says it's good. It's good. "It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble." Two things about this. First thing we noticed is the word is in the emphatic. When you look at your English translation, the very first word in the Greek text is the word "good". Remember we've said repeatedly when you want to emphasize something in the Greek language you put it at the very front of the sentence. It just jumps off the page. Good, Paul says. Good. This is something that is to be enjoyed.

But he basically says the exact opposite of what we think he might say. He says it's good and we might very well expect Paul to say at this point go for it. Enjoy it. Take advantage of all of this. He just said everything is clean at the end of verse 20. We come to verse 21 and we thought he was going to say because everything is clean and everything is to be enjoyed go for it. Enjoy it. Pursue it ... as he did say about peace and building. But he doesn't say that. In fact, what he does say is it's good when we refrain from causing somebody else to stumble. We don't want to ever put harm in someone else's way. We don't want to ever cause someone else to sin.

It's good in its emphasis for being good but notice also it's open-ended. He says it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. He extends it out and he broadens it beyond that. The unity and harmony of the church is of great concern to God. In light of verses 10 through 12 when we just learned previously that we're all going to give an account one day to the Lord, these verses are even more impactful when we see it in light of that. I do not want to do anything that when I stand before the Lord He is going to say Carlton, why didn't you do a better job of being a peacemaker? Why weren't you attempting to build others up rather than constantly putting stumbling blocks in their way, harming them because you were stepping into your liberty which is good, but it is not good when it's harming another.

Now look at the 9th principle. The freedom is not to be flaunted. Verse 22. So we're going to come back now again to this matter of liberty. Verse 22. The first part. The faith that you have keep between yourself and God. The principle is freedom is not to be flaunted. Paul has repeatedly reminded us that all of these things that fall into this big bucket of opinions are good. They're to be enjoyed. Decide what your view is on them. They're not issues about the kingdom. The kingdom is about his righteousness and peace and joy. These other things are nonessentials. Those that you have a free conscience to experience and enjoy, enjoy them. The strong are to give careful consideration, he says, to the weak. The weak is not in relation to the gospel obviously because when he says the faith you have keep to yourself, he would never say keep your faith to yourself because it was the faith of the gospel. That we're to share. That is to be made known. But here again this matter is in relation to keeping to ourselves our personal choice and conviction. Our conviction is I can do that. I can eat that steak. I have total freedom and total liberty to eat that steak and know that God has given it to me to enjoy. Somebody else says no I can't eat that. He's basically saying the strong are not to flaunt their liberty. They're to always exercise their freedom in consideration of the weak.

Again, you is emphatic. Don't brag about your liberty. Don't brag about your freedom. Don't parade it in front of everybody. You have to know the context that you're finding yourself in and if within that context there may be a brother or sister who doesn't have the freedom that you do, then be a peacemaker. Be a builder. Don't exercise your liberty. Don't flaunt your freedom in Christ and you try to shock them in their conscience. They don't have the freedom to do that. Don't become an evangelist for eating steak. Don't become an evangelist for something that God says there is liberty or there is a reason to limit our liberty.

On the other hand, he says the strong are not asked to renounce their freedom. You're not asked to renounce your freedom. You're just simply to keep it private. Enjoy. This is a gift from God. All of these things. You don't need to apologize for them. These are things that God has given you liberty to enjoy. Just don't flaunt it.

Now last principle. number 10. We're all called to live by faith. We are all called to live by faith. Verse 22. Last part. "Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass

judgment on himself for what he approves.” So here's Exhibit A in this matter. To live according to one's conscience is to be blessed. To live according to one's conscience is to be blessed. Here's an additional beatitude. We go to Matthew 5. Jesus gives us nine beatitudes there. They start off with happy is the man. Happy is the woman. We know those. Those are the Beatitudes. Those are expressions of happiness, of blessing. That's the same word that is used here. You are blessed, he says, when you live according to your conscience and your conscience is fully informed by the word of God. That's the key. the strong believer has a conscience that is fully informed by the word of God, gives them an understanding in this matter of opinions to enjoy the things that they enjoy.

Some of you aren't there yet. It's okay. You'll get there. That's the encouragement of Scripture. You look at those who are strong in their faith to have freedom to exercise and take liberty in some of these matters. You're not there yet. That's what he speaks of secondly. Exhibit B is to live in doubt is to be condemned. 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.” Doubt is the opposite of faith. To be condemned is the opposite of blessing. You can't go against your conscience. If your conscience isn't strong, then you can't participate. You can't step into those areas that violate your conscience because he says whatever is not of faith is sin. In this context of liberty and freedom in Christ is what he's talking about. If your conscience doesn't say go ahead and eat steak, your conscience says no, I can only eat vegetables. This was a real debate going on in the Roman church. They were having struggles over what they could and could not eat because of their backgrounds and their upbringings and the wide gap that existed between Jews and Gentiles. As they have come to faith in Christ some of them have matured and grown and seen what Paul has said. The kingdom of God is not food and drink. The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. But until their conscience got to the place of freedom, Paul says whatever is not of faith is sin. Don't exercise liberty. Don't exercise freedom, for your conscience does not say to you that's good. It's okay. Do it. When your conscience provokes you and says are you sure? Do you think you can do that? Don't do it because you're not operating out of faith. Your conscience is not yet

where it is fully trained by the word so you obey your conscience even at this point in which it may be weaker than someone else. Jesus said he was going to build his church and you and I get to be a part of that building project. We get to engage with each other. We get to be peacemakers in each other's lives. We get to be builders in each other's lives, encouraging each other in our individual walk with God. and God is pleased and he is honored.

What do we take away? the question is a simple one. Do we love each other enough to give up what we want to do for the sake of another? Chapter 14 flows out of as we've repeatedly said out of chapters 12 and 13. Chapters 12 and 13 are filled with statements about loving each other, about preferring each other, about giving honor to each other, about thinking less of oneself and more of somebody else. That's the foundation that this 14th chapter is built on. We have to come at this point in our study and we just ask ourselves: Do I really love my brother and sister in Christ enough that rather than bring harm or detriment into their life I love them enough to serve them in this way and to be a peacemaker and a builder.?

My friends, I know somebody who did. And I know somebody who is and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. While he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor. He left the glory of heaven to come to this earth to give his life as a ransom for many, to seek and to save those who were lost. He did it because he loves us. He did it because he wants to demonstrate this beautiful picture of the grace of God and the mercy of God that's been extended to us. We can't get to where we want to go which is eternal life with God forever on our own. We can't get there by our own works and our own efforts. We can only get there because somebody loved us enough. That somebody was Jesus. He was perfect in every way. His death on the cross was God's provision to bring to us forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. if you'll believe that this morning, the simplicity of that truth, if you will believe that what Jesus did is all that needed to be done, God says he will forgive your sins and he'll give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for the great love that you have shown to us in the person of your son Jesus. Thank you that you have demonstrated this love even while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Thank you, Father, that you loved the world so much that you sent your only Son that whoever would believe in him would not

perish but have everlasting life. we pray that this love you have demonstrated towards us would be a love that we extend to each other in the body of Christ here at Covenant. Cause us to be peacemakers. Cause us to be builders. Give us a heart to pursue these things, Father, with the diligence, with the discipline, with the dedication that is born of your spirit that brings glory to your name. We thank you in Jesus's name, amen.