

97-03-23b

Well, we are back now from our break and our lesson this morning has certainly generated a lot of lively discussion and it's an important area to think about and to discuss because it's one of the most practical and commonly occurring areas where our faith and our hope have an effect on love and the way that we express it. We stopped in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, seeing some of the things that qualify as evil and these things, especially things like complaining, verbal sins, selfish pursuit, which covetousness as classified by Paul as idolatry and pursuing selfish gain, pursuing personal goals to the exclusion of God in the body of Christ can be an occasion for separation. And sometimes these things are wrapped in the flag, as it were, the Christian flag and people will say, well, I've got this ministry opportunity or I've got this opportunity to exercise my spiritual gift and I'm going to do this and do that and do the other and here's the way I'm going to do it and here's how I'm going to raise funds and here's what I'm going to accomplish.

And we perceive, because of our understanding of the Word of God, that this is not God's calling, it's not God's way, God's power is not behind it and it can be very awkward at times to say, we are fellow members of the body of Christ, I have personal regard for you, but I cannot go along with you in this pursuit, I can't go with you into this organization, I can't follow you down this path, I don't believe it reflects the truth of the Word of God and I hope that we can continue to have fellowship on those things which reflect what we all agree is good, but in this area I have to tell you that I understand the Word of God differently and I hope you will respect my decision to not participate with you in this because I can't go against my conscience, I can't go against my understanding of the Word of God because of my love for you. Love is not an occasion for compromise and this is the passage to go to. Of course, people may say, well, are you saying that what I'm doing is evil? You're on your own at that point, but we have to be clear about what we choose to associate with and what we choose to separate from.

One thing that is essential is to not do the old thing of throwing out the baby with the bathwater and because we find one thing wrong, anathematizing the entire situation, the entire church or the person as a whole just because there's one area that we have to separate from. It's a lot easier to just think in real black and white terms and we see one thing wrong and we say, anathema, be gone, I have nothing more to do with you, don't talk to me until you get this thing fixed. It isn't that easy.

It's important that we cling to what is good and many times all of us who are growing believers can look back and see where believers more mature than we are have put up with our foibles and our misunderstandings and our weaknesses and misunderstandings and have supported us and encouraged us in the things that were good and we've grown out of our misperceptions and our bad patterns of action and behavior. Some of us may have had a gossip problem or some of us may have had an insecurity problem that manifested itself in a pattern of behavior that other believers didn't want to be around, but we are supposed to build each other up and the whole

reason you build something up is that it needs building up. There's a lack there somehow.

We don't all come into the body of Christ complete and mature and thoroughly furnished unto all good works. That's what growth does for us and part of growth is fellowship and speaking the truth to one another in love. So we have to look for those occasions and those opportunities and not burn the bridge and cut off the communications and rip out the phone because there is an area with which we have disagreement because we perceive it as being out of line with God's will and God's plan.

That's what Paul is talking about here. So this interaction between love and good and evil is one of the most practical areas of truth we could possibly address. Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. Paul is talking about love in this section.

1 Thessalonians 5 beginning at verse 12. We beseech you brethren to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

And we exhort you brethren, this by the way in verse 14 is the same word we have in Romans 12. We urge you brethren, admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that none of you repays evil for evil.

Now notice here he says there is going to be evil involved. When you are dealing with the weak and the faint hearted and the idlers, those that we have to deal with in patience, there is going to be evil floating around in here. He says don't return evil for evil in these situations but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

We have to abhor what is evil but we don't get so far away that we are not around that evil anymore. We are going to be around it to the point where we are exhorted not to repay evil for evil. Always seek to do good to one another and to all.

Rejoice always. Pray constantly. And these are some of the keys to implementing this truth.

If our interaction starts resulting in no peace, no joy, those are the first three fruits of the spirit, aren't they? Love, joy and peace. And it's not love if the joy and the peace go away. Rejoice always.

Pray constantly. Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit.

Do not despise prophesying but test everything. Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

So you can see here once again that we have these concepts linked. As we exercise love, as we encourage and exhort one another, admonish one another, exercise love toward one another, we

still hold fast to what is good and abstain from every form of evil. When we find evil coming our way, we don't return it.

We seek to do good to one another and to all. We see these concepts addressed as well by Peter over in 1 Peter chapter 3. 1 Peter, I always immediately think of the theme of suffering, suffering for the sake of righteousness, which is his overarching subject in this letter. But in 1 Peter chapter 3, in verse 8, after talking about relationships between wives and husbands, Peter says, finally, this is 1 Peter 3.8, finally all of you have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing. Notice that blessing is contingent on obedience in this area. Blessing is contingent on fulfilling the call.

And it's up to us. Some of us will fulfill this call and some will not. For he that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.

Let him turn away from evil and do right. Let him seek peace and pursue it. Sometimes when there is an area of evil in the life of a fellow believer, it is easier to maintain the peace by separating the evil from the good and separating from that area of evil.

Hopefully we don't have to cut off communication and fellowship altogether, but we're going to find that if we fail to abhor what is evil, if we fail to separate from it, it's going to interrupt peace. There's going to be discord. We're going to have troubled waters in our soul and we're going to have to start analyzing and saying, is this a test of my faith? Is this a time for endurance and patience and forbearance and long-suffering and these parts of the fruit of the Spirit? Or am I troubled because I'm tolerating the presence of evil? I'm participating or consenting or tolerating in some way when I should be separating and abhorring away from this wrong function.

And whatever we do, we should have peace. It shouldn't be discord and strife. It shouldn't be troubled waters in the soul.

And sometimes that's our red flag waving, that it's time to put some distance between us and some activity or some aspect of interaction with our fellow believers when it is constantly bringing us down and causing us to lose our peace and lose our joy. A lot of times that's because we're coming in contact with an evil that we need to be separating from. It's one of the ways that we discern.

And this is a function of maturity. One of the great things about this age is we don't operate on rules. We operate on principles.

A rule-based system will always fail in the face of the unusual, the unexpected, the unforeseen. Oh, we didn't foresee this situation. We've got to make a new rule.

That's one of the problems with our legal system because judges and juries no longer operate on the basis of principle but only on the basis of interpreting the law, finding the rule that applies. There are always loopholes and gaps and unforeseen circumstances that the rules don't cover. Then what do you do? Well, you try to make a new rule, more legislation, case law or whatever it may be.

The beautiful thing about God's plan for us in this age is that it's based on principle. Principles can be applied in any circumstance. Principles hold true and are flexible in their application.

They can be used and relied upon in a variety of circumstances, even if they've never been seen before. That's what God gives us here. This is a principle.

Whatever the circumstance, abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. Remember what Paul was saying about praying, rejoice always, pray without ceasing. One of the keys in a situation like this is to go to God and lay out the facts before him.

It's an opportunity for prayer. Prayer is an exercise in the application of principles in the presence of God the Father. We bring up a point of circumstance or a point of interaction with people in our prayer life before God, our conversation with God, and in doing that we try to think the way he thinks.

Have you ever noticed that in conversation when you're around different people, you tend to tailor your conversation to their interests or to their perceptions, to their standards, and we naturally adapt when we're with one family member or another, one friend or another. We tend to think like they think almost unconsciously when we're in conversation with them. It's one of the beautiful things about prayer is that when we go before God, it enhances our ability to think like he thinks.

Sometimes we get the answer to our question in the midst of our prayer because in presenting it to God, we start seeing it from his perspective. We say, well, that seems pretty clear now that I think about it. As I bring it before God, I see that here's this selfish element involved, or here's this lack of faith on my part, and looking at it from God's perspective, this really isn't a problem after all.

Prayer is an essential in applying this truth and performing this imperative that Paul lays before us. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous. His ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil. And there is cursing by association just like there is blessing by association. And if we fail to abhor what is evil, to step away from it, to stay away from it in the lives of fellow believers and those who are in our periphery of love, we will find ourselves sharing in the displeasure that the Lord has over that.

So, this comes under the category of hating what is evil, abhorring what is evil. Take a look at 2 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 14. This is one of our famous passages.

Many of us have memorized this, to not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. 2 Corinthians 6, verse 14. What fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? What has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God.

As God said, I will live in them and move among them. I will be their God. They shall be my people.

Therefore, come out from them and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. The word here for unbelievers is the word for those who have faith, pistois, the faithful ones, with the negative in front of it, the letter A, a pistois, just like we saw on Hippocrates this morning.

Put that A in front of it. This is a faithless person. This is not restricted to those who have not exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ and have been delivered from the lake of fire penalty.

These are the faithless. It can include, but is not limited to, unbelievers in the traditional sense. This can be the faithless in terms of believers.

Do not be yoked together with faithless believers. This is what puts the lid on the ecumenical movement. People who claim faith in Christ and may, in fact, have exercised faith in Christ and yet do not function according to biblical principles, do not operate on the basis of faith.

Their ideas for evangelism and for rehabilitation of personal life, rehabilitation of marriage, rehabilitation of family and so forth, ideas for ministry, are not based on faith but are based on works. Human energy instead of divine power. That's faithlessness.

Paul says, whatever is not of faith is sin and we are not to be yoked together with it. We don't involve ourselves in Christian organizations that don't operate on the basis of faith. We have to make that call.

We will be exposed to them. We will find out through fellowship with believers that are involved whether there is anything good that we can cling to and what the extent of the evil is that we must separate from. Do not be unequally yoked together with the faithless.

We can't say these people are believers so it doesn't matter how much iniquity is involved. It doesn't matter how much darkness is involved. It doesn't matter how much of the thinking of Belial is involved.

It doesn't matter how much faithlessness is involved. They are saved so it's okay for me to

fellowship. It's okay for me to yoke myself together.

Not so. Righteousness comes through faith and faith alone. Our life is lived by faith.

God's glory is reflected by faith and not by works. This passage has much wider applicability than don't marry an unbeliever. We need to be aware of that.

Notice what God says here in this quote from Leviticus. Come out from them and be separate from them says the Lord and touch not the unclean thing. Then I will welcome you and I will be a father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters says the Almighty.

Now he's talking to the children of Israel who are already the people of God. They are already his sons and daughters on paper. But these are sons and daughters indeed.

This is the welcome that the father has for the sons and daughters that's based on their obedience. Not based on their position. Not based on their title or their official standing as sons and daughters.

But they're sons and daughters indeed. Notice that this is not based on faith. God doesn't say believe in me and you will be my sons and daughters.

That's how the initial position is attained. This is based on obedience. Come out from them and be separate.

Touch not the unclean thing. These are works. These are lifestyle choices.

God says when you make these choices in your lifestyle, you will be my sons and daughters. I will be your father. We have a wonderful passage in Ephesians chapter 5 that relates directly and is a close parallel in fact to what we see in these passages.

Ephesians chapter 5. Paul says therefore be imitators of God in Ephesians 5.1 as beloved children. Notice the link there to being a child of the father. Be imitators of God as beloved children.

Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. A fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But fornication and all impurity, covetousness must not even be named among you as is fitting among saints.

Let there be no filthiness, no silly talk or levity which are not fitting. But instead let there be thanksgiving. Be sure of this that no fornicator or impure man or one who is covetous, that is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

This is one of the classic passages that reminds us of the fact that inheriting in the kingdom is not a synonym for salvation. We can be saved in the traditional sense and be covetous or be impure or be a fornicator, can't we? Would we say that anyone who commits fornication is not really

saved? Not at all, either in the physical or in the spiritual sense. But we can be a believer and have a lifestyle of evil and forfeit our inheritance in the kingdom.

Inheritance is not a synonym for salvation from the lake of fire, but it is, speaking of blessing and reward and the full privilege that belongs to someone who is a son or daughter indeed. Let no one deceive you with empty words for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. These are sons of God who are disobedient and God's wrath is going to fall.

What does he say in verse 7? Therefore do not associate with them. For once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.

And try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord, that good and perfect and acceptable will of God. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. How do we expose the unfruitful works of darkness? We identify them and separate from them.

We don't turn a blind eye. We don't, in the name of love, overlook evil. It is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret, but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it is said, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart. Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

And even that idea in verse 21 of being subject to one another or placing one another ahead of oneself is something we'll see as we move forward in Romans chapter 12. So again we could spend weeks in Ephesians chapter 5, but you see the overarching idea. There's no compromise when it comes to evil in the name of love.

Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us, but he never compromised with evil. He exposed the unfruitful works of darkness among believers. He labeled the Pharisees for what they were, and he separated from them.

And that's our calling as well. But notice that when Nicodemus, for example, a Pharisee, came to Jesus and was interested in discussing the truth, Jesus met with him and spoke with him. He didn't say, you're a Pharisee, all Pharisees are evil, get the hints, I have nothing to do with you.

Jesus clings to what is good. Nicodemus is seeking. He's messed up.

He's a Pharisee. He doesn't understand the new birth. He doesn't understand many things about the Spirit, but he's asking.

He's there. He's there by night. He's afraid.

He's got his opinion, his reputation to think of. But Jesus focuses on that which is good. He focuses on the questions and the thinking that Nicodemus is doing that's in the right area.

He doesn't condone his activities as a Pharisee, but he clings to what is good, and he separates from what is evil. And that's our calling as well. Our passage, our Scripture reading for this morning, 2 John chapter 5, I'm sorry, verse 5 through 11.

2 John really is just a single chapter, as it were. Notice in the light of what we've seen, these words again. John says that we should love one another in verse 5, and this is love, that we follow his commandments.

This is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love, that you walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is a deceiver and an antichrist.

Look to yourselves that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward. Isn't that interesting? He's talking to believers, and he says you've got to pay attention to what you're doing, who you're associating with, so that you don't lose your reward. Anyone who goes ahead and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, anyone who transgresses, does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, does not have God.

A lot of commentators, a lot of people who come to this verse will say, this is perseverance of the saints. If you're truly saved, you'll abide in the doctrine of Christ. And see, here's John saying, if you're not abiding in the doctrine of Christ, you don't have God.

Well, what did Jesus himself say to the disciples in John chapter 15? We've been there many times, but Jesus says, if you have my words and keep them, you're the one that loves me, and I and my Father will come and make our home with you. And this is the doctrine of the indwelling of Christ, which is not automatic for all believers. It's conditioned on obedience.

It's conditioned on clinging to what is good. And so, when Jesus tells the eleven in the upper room, they are obviously believers. John 14, 21, for example, he who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

He says in verse 23, if a man loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Now, the converse of that is, the flip side of that

coin is, if someone does not value the word, does not love Christ as a believer, Christ and the Father will not come and will not make their home with him.

They will not have that indwelling presence in the living, effectual sense, and will wind up being classified as John does here in 2 John. Anyone who transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, the words of Christ, does not have God. It doesn't mean they are not saved.

It means there is no presence. There is no power. And the same John who wrote John 14 and recorded the words of Christ wrote 2 John, and he knows what he is talking about here.

You can be a believer and not have the abiding presence of God because you don't value the word. You don't abide in the command and doctrines of Christ. He who abides in the doctrine has both the Father and the Son.

You can just draw a circle around that and write down John 14, 23. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, now we are not talking here about salvation, are we? Jesus isn't pleading the blood as it were. He is not talking about the cross and eternal salvation.

Anyone who does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into the house or give him any greeting. For he who greets him shares his wicked work. Someone who doesn't teach the Christian life of faith, the Christian life of pleasing God and abiding in the doctrines of Christ, we don't fellowship with them.

We don't abide with them. We don't greet them. We don't maintain fellowship with them.

If they misunderstand, if they are engaged in righteousness by works, if that is their pursuit, if that is what they are teaching, if that is what they are bringing, if that is how they are influencing other believers to get into righteousness by works, Christianity by works, and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ, that is a basis for separation. That is evil and we abhor that. That is distracting and deflecting believers from the fulfillment of our calling.

It is an awful thing. So John points this out in 2 John 5. Finally, turn with me to 2 Timothy 2. Another section where relationship between believers and the church is being addressed. Paul is talking to a pastor.

He tells Timothy, starting in verse 14, talking about the enduring and reigning with Christ and denying Christ and being denied by Christ. If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

Remind them of this and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words which does no good but only ruins the hearers. This is something believers do. We can get wrapped around the axle on some point of doctrine.

We can get all obsessed with figuring out exactly what 1 John 1.9 means or why do you believe

this and I believe that? What do you think about this aspect of the ministry of the Spirit or that aspect? What do you think about the way this person teaches it or that person teaches it? You start disputing about words to the ruin of the hearers because this is a distraction to faith. It is a distraction to the fruit of faith which is the declaration of righteousness by God, the reflection of God's glory. There is a difference between speaking the truth to one another in love and disputing about words.

How do you tell the difference between a discussion that edifies and a dispute that ruins the hearers? One of the first criteria is that peace and joy evaporate and it's no longer congenial. It's no longer good fellowship. It's no longer speaking the truth in love.

It now is a source of conflict. It's a source of division. It's a source of distraction.

People get wrapped up in that and aren't hearing anything else from the Word of God. Do your best to present yourself to God as approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. Avoid such godless chatter.

Separate from this godless chatter for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness and their talk will eat its way like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved away from the truth by holding that the resurrection is past already. They are upsetting the faith of some but God's firm foundation stands bearing this seal.

The Lord knows those who are His and let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity, separate from iniquity. If someone is presenting a doctrine, in some cases, even if it's a true doctrine, you can have reached the point of understanding something from the Word of God and you decide that everyone else needs to understand that as well and shake the faith and destroy the faith of a believer who hasn't learned up to the point of understanding that. And if believers continue to push that truth and make an issue out of that truth and cause less mature believers, believers who aren't as far along, to stumble, you've taken a good thing and turned it into a bad thing.

In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and earthenware, some for noble use, some for ignoble. If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, and the Greek here says if anyone purifies himself from the latter, and that latter refers to two things, it refers to the ignoble vessels, the vessels of dishonor, and what made them dishonorable, which are the things that they should have separated from, the evil things, the divisive things, the ruining things. They're all identified.

Paul says if you separate yourself from those latter things, the ignoble things, the evil things, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. Notice how in each of these passages peace has showed up.

That's one of the ways we know we're on the right track, because there ought to be peace. It's the fruit of the Spirit. It's the characteristic of the right road.

And it doesn't mean that we won't have some anguish when we have to separate or when we have to deal with issues of evil. There's always going to be that sadness. Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem and someone could say, well, he didn't have peace.

Well, he did have peace, but it's peace in the sense of recognizing that we're in the center of God's will, in the center of God's plan, and that the things that we're doing are necessary to fulfill our calling. Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies. Verse 23, you know that they breed quarrels.

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will change their minds and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will. This is all talking about believers.

There is a time to speak the truth. There's a time to simply step away and avoid, and that's one of the things that we have to learn how to do. So as we see Paul urging us and exhorting us in Romans chapter 12 to have love that doesn't wear a mask, to not put up a false front, to not pretend that things are okay when they're not, to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good.

We find him going on in verse 10 to say, be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. And that's where we'll pick up next week as we see Paul continue the practical application of the truth that he's taught us thus far in this great letter. But let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the truth of these things, and we thank you for the fact that you have provided for us in the practical day-to-day decisions of our lives, in our interactions with one another, with our fellow believers, with our families, our friends, our co-workers, and the guidance that you give us and the wherewithal that the Holy Spirit uses to reveal to us your perfect will in each of the decision points of our lives. We pray that these things will be resources in our soul, that they will live in our thinking, and that we will find that good and acceptable and perfect will that you have for us that fulfills our calling and reflects your glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.