

We'll be continuing today with *Part 3* of the sermon series entitled *Going to a Brother*. Last Sabbath we just barely started getting into the subject matter that is about going to a brother alone, and that should help drive the point home, candidly, that there is much more that should be considered in this matter, especially in *how* we are to actually live toward someone else or in our thinking toward someone else in the Body of Christ before exercising a matter like this, of going to a brother alone. There is a lot here and there is a lot contained in this instruction as we continue to go through Matthew 18.

Before we do that I do want to read just a little snippet here from an email I had here from one of the elders in one of the areas. It says:

“Going to your brother in God’s Church has been a concern to me for years. People go to others and not to the ones involved. It’s amazing, someone says, “Don’t tell anyone,” and you find out half the Church knows about it. I know this is human nature and God wants us to look at ourselves and change this behavior and do it His way.”

And that’s really the crux of this in so many ways, is that we have experiences in times past, and that’s a growing process – we continue to grow in God’s Church, at least that’s the objective, isn’t it? ...that we continue to grow and yield ourselves to God and have Him mould and fashion us, if you will, as we yield to that process. Sometimes we yield ourselves to that better than at other times, but as we mature as a Church God is showing us more and more, the things that are important in areas like this, because what we’re talking about here is very spiritual, in that respect. And that’s what I’ve mentioned over and over again, especially toward the beginning of this series, is that it isn’t how much time we pray, how much time we study, how many sermons we listen to, how much we know in knowledge on the websites, or anything else. It’s what we live with what we do know, or what we are learning, and desiring to grow in understanding then of those things, of that knowledge that God gives to us and then exercising it, which in time becomes wisdom, as we choose that way, as we come to understand something.

Because, just knowing something doesn’t mean it’s a part of us yet. Understanding a process, understanding things that God does, how He wants us to do various things, growing in that understanding, then we make the choices as to whether or not we’re going to continue to live by that. Knowledge alone isn’t enough. Knowledge alone isn’t a commitment. A lot of people receive knowledge, a lot of people receive knowledge of God’s way of life and don’t continue in it. It’s once you begin to understand what God is doing and you come into agreement with it. And as a whole, when people come into agreement with it that’s what they choose to live, or otherwise. That’s how God works with us and it’s a matter of our yielding ourselves to that process.

So, as a reminder, by the end of the sermon last Sabbath we finally did get to the scripture that speaks of the matter here in Matthew 18. So let’s just review this again because we’re going to go back and forth here – but again, this verse here.

Matthew 18:15 – Moreover, if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone, and if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. We looked at the word ‘**Moreover**’ here and focused on that just a little bit here just to understand that there’s a lot more to the story here. Sometimes words say a lot. In this particular case, this word here that sometimes

carries the meaning or is translated as 'and', means something else went before it. But so often my experience has been in God's Church, this is where people begin, in verse 15, and they don't look at the 'and'. Well, if there is an 'and' here then what was said before this, or the word 'now' as it's translated, or 'but'. And so if it says, 'but' something, and going on and saying this is what you're to do, what went before? ...or the word, 'therefore'. We have to know the whole entire story.

And so we backed up to **verse 14** which says – **Even so...** and again, a similar type of a use in words, 'even so' should tell us that there is more before this. And so we read that particular verse, **Even so, it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.** We did go all the way back here and tried to get all this in context where God began to talk about, where Jesus Christ began to speak of, little ones. And let's just go back to verse one and take some of that context again – not going into it in depth here but just to catch up with where we were last Sabbath.

The words, 'moreover', and 'even so', show us that there is more in front of this that we need to consider, that we need to digest, that we *need* to understand. We went all the way back to verse 1 here in chapter 18, and we'll just read this rather quickly because this is just to get everything back into our mind and to think upon these things as we go forward.

Matthew 18:1 – At the same time the disciples came to Jesus saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst of them and said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be/become converted, and become as little children...so the process, even of becoming converted, the process of conversion is a matter of humility. That's what we're being shown here. It's a matter of humility on our part, of understanding there is something so much *greater* here and we need to *humble* ourselves in order to receive it; and to receive God's way of life we have to humble ourselves, and then as we continue on in life we learn that even more so in relationships. Everything requires humility to have right relationships and that's what we're being shown here.

...Verily I say unto you, Except you be/become converted, become as a little child, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. It's about God's Family.

Verse 4 – Therefore, whosoever shall humble himself as this little child the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And so we understand the process of how we're begotten. We speak in terms of, as Mr. Armstrong did, the Kingdom of God in embryo, we're not yet born, we are in the Church of God, the Body of Christ and we're still in a physical body learning this way of life, being taught this way of life and it's a matter of our humbling ourselves in order to receive what God has for us, and this attitude of a little child that's carried through here over and over again.

Therefore, whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever shall receive; and so it's about how we receive one another. You know, going to a brother alone – there's a lot involved here, and that's what is coming out in chapter 18 here before we even get to the verse again. It's a matter of how we receive one another in the Body of Christ that's important, and how we think about each other, so that *if* a situation comes up where there is the need to perhaps go to a brother alone, *both people* need to be of a right spirit and a right mind. So often by the time someone goes to another individual though things can be so far down the line that it's difficult, it's difficult to receive someone back. But again, it's an attitude of mind here that you need to have, and the sooner that someone does this in a right way the better off, the better everybody is, the better the Body is. It's when things are left...

So often in my experience in times past (I'm going back to Worldwide, of how things happened in the Church), so often the ministry was the last to know of some situations and the whole Church knew about it but the ministry wasn't told by anyone, and by the time the ministry was told of someone, told about a situation in someone's life, it had gone on for so long because Matthew 18:15 was never applied. No one went to them out of love and out of care and concern, understanding the importance of the Body and being strong in the Body and what it means to the Body, to do so in a right spirit and a right mind.

And so we're being refined and learning these things. And I think of the timing we're learning all this too, in a magnified way, because we're focusing on this in a way that it probably has never been focused upon in that respect through so many sermons, which is good.

And so it says, **Whoever shall receive one such little child**; a child, one who has an attitude of humility, one who we pray has an attitude of humility regardless, but one who has an attitude of humility. That's how we should see each other in the Body. We sometimes see the pride too but it's an attitude we should have toward them, one of humility, to humbly receive someone else, because it's a matter of how we look to God, it's a matter of how we look to Christ, because we realize this individual, this person is God's, they've been called by God, God chose them as much as He chose 'me', and not to lift ourselves up above, in that respect, in the sense of pride and looking down upon someone. Just the contrary! And that's what we're being told here.

So **whoever shall receive one such little child**, in other words, with humility on our part. Hopefully that other person has that humility too! **...in My name**, meaning we recognize the importance of being in the Body of Christ. When I read something like this I can't help but think of the instruction that Paul gave about the subject of Passover, as they were preparing for the period of Passover for the Corinthians, and he talked about (scriptures we read on a yearly basis at Passover service), about the keeping of the Passover and how it's to be done, taking the wine and so forth and the example that Jesus Christ set and Paul explaining to the Corinthians, "We're doing the same thing," and going through and talking about these things a little bit later when it talks about judgment and the ability to discern or to judge the Body of Christ...and it's not just a physical thing about His body and what He went through for us, but it's understanding and discerning the Body, the Church, *why* He did what He did.

Let's just take the time to go there; it's good to have this in our mind as we go through this because this is healthy for us if we have this kind of spirit, this kind of attitude when we think of this subject, then this will help us to be really of a more humble spirit, if you will, we're more inclined to yield ourselves to that kind of spirit because we understand the seriousness of what is being spoken of. And so this is in 1st Corinthians 10 where the subject matter starts being discussed, but by the time we get down to the part we discuss in Passover here it's actually in chapter 11 here and following that example in verses 24 and 25, taking the cup, taking the wine, and so forth, and it talks about in verse 27 the importance of doing so in a worthy manner, not that we are worthy, we understand that; but it's to be done in a specific manner the way God gives us instruction to do it.

1 Corinthians 11:28 – But let a man examine, the word means 'to prove' yourself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup, for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, not approaching the Passover in a right spirit and a right mind toward others in the Body and toward understanding of why Jesus Christ went through what He did and what it means to take of the bread and the wine spiritually for us as we literally take it physically. **...for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment**, it's what it's talking about here, **to himself**. A type that is a matter of

condemnation, and this word carries with it more the sense of condemnation because if we're not doing things in a proper way we condemn ourselves before God.

And so it says in **verse 29 ...eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord's body**. And this word has to do with judgement then, not being able to rightly judge, discern, and understand the Lord's body. So what does that mean? Well, it's an understanding here of what Jesus Christ went through for us in the respect here of everything that we talk about on Passover night, the beating He went through, He suffered, before He was ever put to death, and then finally the spear rammed up into His side and the spilling out His blood to death.

And so its understanding what He suffered for us, *but for what purpose?* That's what it's about! Passover has a great purpose (!) ...and it's about the Body of Christ, the spiritually Body then. He suffered in a physical body to give us a spiritual Body, so that God the Father and Jesus Christ could live and dwell in us and we could dwell in them on a spiritual plane. And that's what He's showing here. What *sacrifice*, what was *given* so that that could be accomplished, so that God could dwell within the Body of Christ, so that we could *have* a Body of Christ, so that we treasure, then, the Church more, and that we treasure one another more in the Body because we understand we share in the same thing. When we're called into the Church we grasp and comprehend and we grow in that if we yield ourselves to it, that we all share in the same thing, we all share in the same kinds of battles on a spiritual plane, in the spiritual warfare that's going on out there and the troubles and the problems in the world and the way the world receives you. We're all in this together! God has called us to be a witness of that in our lives, candidly, and to learn from that process.

And so again here, the importance then of discerning the Lord's Body when we take the Passover – it's grasping and understanding that we are a Family and having that high value then on one another, of what it means to be called into the Church, into the Body of Christ, and always remembering our part in it. We're not above anyone else, not a one of us. We're in this together and we should have that kind of a Family sense toward one another and understanding this is *God's*! This is *God's* Church! We are *God's* people. Each individual that's a part of the Church has been called individually by God, drawn by God, and we do not grasp as physical human beings then the condemnation when we judge another brother in an improper way! There is a way God says we're to judge, in love – and that's a lot of what Matthew 18 is about – when we have to judge. We have to judge matters, but we better do it God's way.

That's why I love the way when it talks about Jesus Christ, because some people take it as a contradiction when He talks about judging no one, and then He says, "And if I do judge, My judgment is just." Well, what is it? Which way? That's the way the world would react to us when we speak. "Well, what do you mean?" Because they don't understand the spirit of it. They don't understand what He's saying.

Let's go back to Matthew 18. And so to have 1st Corinthians 11 here in our mind, in the mind, in our thinking when we consider a subject matter like this, or any kind of subject matter that has to do with relationships in the Church...and that's a good thing, that's a *wise* thing, because then we keep God in the picture, we keep the suffering of Christ in the picture, that they're here because of the suffering of Jesus Christ and candidly, 'I' am here – that's the way we should see ourselves – I am here because of what He suffered for us and I am no better than anyone else. That's the way we have to see one another. So we have to judge, but we should never do it with pride, that's the point. It's always to be in a matter and spirit of humility and meekness indeed.

Matthew 18:5 - And whoso shall receive one such little child in My name, someone who's been called of God, by God, into the Church, into the Body, must have this attitude of a child as well toward one another. ...**in My name**, because it's a part of the Body of Christ, the Church of God, **receives Me**.

Verse 6 – this is where we left off last week – **But whoso shall offend one of these little ones who believes in Me...** Now, the word 'offend' here means more than how we normally take it to...and this has been the *problem* a lot of times when people do go to one another, is that they talk about how that they were offended by something someone else did or someone said when it isn't always a matter of sin at all – they just got offended. And sometimes it's just flatly their fault for becoming offended in the first place; their spirit was wrong, not the other person's. Sometimes the other person doesn't even know what they've done or said that's offended someone else, and so this can be a battle and we have to understand ourselves and strive to understand ourselves before God and with others in our relationships with them because sometimes it's not the other person at all, it's just us, it's in our mind. Most conflicts come because people build things up in their own mind.

So, **who shall offend**; it's a word that means literally in the Greek, 'to put a snare', 'to put a snare before/in front of'; and it's generally in different translations translated here as 'to stumble', 'to cause to stumble'. So, **whoever shall**, in essence, **cause someone to stumble**, in other words, by your actions, by what you do, by your sin or by the improper way of doing something that God has given you charge to do in a right way. It's a two way street here in Matthew 18. It's the individual who sins, if that's what it's going to come down to, and it's the individual who goes to the person who has sin, *if* they have sinned, because I'd say it's about 50/50 my experience. Just thinking about that, I think back in times past and all the counselling I've ever done and it's probably been about 50/50. 50% of the time the other person has never done anything that could be classified as a sin and the person shouldn't have gone to them in the first place. What they should have done is got on their knees and examined themselves, their own mind and their attitude of why they feel that way about someone else in the first place, and the problem is theirs! So it's about 50/50, really, looking at this, and that's incredible!

So we have to be very careful how we do things and how we think about others and how we deal with others because God becomes very specific in our relationships with one another, and in the world, but how much more important are they in the Church to God? ...and then should be to us?

So again, **Whosoever shall offend/to give offence**, because what they have done is offensive; that's the definition here, not because they just *feel* offended. See, if someone just feels offended by something someone else has done we have to be careful of that, but if it's a matter of an offence that is an offence, like sin, **cause someone else to stumble because of an offence**, something that's offensive that shouldn't have been done – that's another matter.

And **whosoever shall offend/cause to stumble/give offence**, if you will, **one of these little ones who believes in Me**. That's pretty strong language here. We read through these things but we really don't grasp the magnitude of what we're being told here, because if we did we probably wouldn't speak a whole lot... ☺ about other people, ever, and whenever anyone else is ever mentioning we would be afraid to speak because it says, **it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he be drowned in the depth of the sea**. Now, that's so far out there we can maybe picture something like that, someone having a millstone... I think of old movies or shows where people have had a little concrete put around their ankles and dropped in the sea and usually by groups that aren't very well... anyway, so you know the picture. A millstone would have the same effect, it would take you down to

the bottom real fast and you're going to die and you're going to stay at the bottom, by the way, because that thing is heavy.

The point being is we don't really grasp the magnitude of something like this. We read something like this and we just pass right by it, we don't really spend a lot of time dwelling on what it means to us personally. And the condemnation that God is giving here, the importance of what is being said, of how *offensive this is*, of how *bad* this is, to *do* something like this, to be *guilty* of something like this, to *treat* someone in the Body of Christ in an improper way! We *REALLY* don't think of things that way; we're not used to that, we're not accustomed to that in the world or in the Church as a whole, because we are so carnal. ☺ That's the bottom line. We're just *carnal* by nature, because we're still in physical bodies; and that's the objective, one day we get out of this body, because this is the cause or the source of the cause of our problems...our human nature, because it's selfish. And when we understand that then we can more easily laugh at ourselves, of the stupidity and the folly, the foolishness of the *dumb* things we so often do, and get ourselves into problems and so forth.

We ever learn. God is ever teaching us by the power of His spirit; to understand a desire that He has in His Family is one of peace... one of peace. Jerusalem! And that's what this is about. What is spiritual is our relationships because there is nothing more than a relationship or relationships with others that really reveal where you truly are in spirit and truth of God, because we have different measuring sticks, different ways of measuring, and that's why I mention over and over again it isn't the amount of time we spend in prayer – which we should spend time in prayer; it's not the amount of time we spend in study – which we should spend time in study; not the amount of time we listen to sermons or go to the websites and learn all the things we learn. That isn't spiritual at all!

Living it toward one another and toward God – that is what is spiritual! *This* is spiritual. It gets down to the nitty-gritty because relationships and conflict... You know, it's easy to get along... If you're very much alike, people who just naturally gravitate to each other, who become friends, that isn't hard. People who become the best of friends in time, they sometimes don't understand that they are exercising certain things about one another that people should exercise with everyone in the sense of a willingness to overlook faults and so forth, and on and on it goes. But people that generally gravitate toward each other, become close friends, there is that something that binds them together obviously that's unique in life, and then there is all the measuring of all the way from that in different kinds of relationships that everyone has in life. That's just the way it is. But these are the things, when there is conflict with someone, that brings out what our spirit is, it reveals things in the mind like a mirror.

When there is a conflict there are questions we need to ask: *Why* am I responding this way? *Why* do I feel this way? *Why* do I think this way toward this individual? It's a good mirror if we would just use it that way. But we don't tend to do that, we are not *trained* as a whole to do that, but God wants us to learn that, so that it is like a training, we're in a training program as God's people learning His way of life and seeking to overcome certain things about ourselves, never being perfect but growing in that, desiring to grow in it, desiring to change, seeing the things that are in us that we don't want to be there and repenting of those things.

But again here, it is at times then when we have conflict that we should look at that deeply, and we'll learn a lot about ourselves. It's very difficult for the human mind, each individual in life, to come to see themselves for who they really are. We tend to deceive ourselves. That's why scriptures speak of, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Deceitful! In other words to take care of self and to pamper self because of selfishness it will go out of its way to preserve a

certain idea it has about itself and we don't even understand that about ourselves. We don't even grasp how we think. God helps us to see ourselves through time in the Church. We learn more about ourselves through time, and we will learn as time goes along that the vast majority of conflicts that we ever have in life with others is not the others... it's right here, it's ourselves, we are the problem.

Most often it's we ourselves individually, not the other person, and it's how we deal with various things around us that determines the kinds of relationships we'll actually have through time. But anyway, we'll go on with some of these as we go through here.

But again, **whoso shall offend/cause to stumble, one of these little ones who believes in Me, it would be better for him that a millstone were hung around his neck, that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.** So, *powerful!* It would be better if you were dead! ...in a bad way. ...in a way that wouldn't be something pleasant to go through, because you'd have to be taken out to the sea, you'd have to be thinking about this for quite a while and you know what's going to happen, then all of a sudden they put this around you, strap it to you, ever how they do it to keep it on you, and then just drop you off the edge and the last thing you're going to remember is gurgle, gurgle, gurgle, gurgle as you're going down and wishing that you had treated the other person in a different manner than what you really did. Spiritually this is how God wants us to see this because He wants us to understand the depth of our own sin, to hurt someone else in the Body of Christ...to hurt someone else in the Body of Christ to the point that it could cause them to stumble, to be hurt spiritually, is not a small thing with God and He wants us to grasp that. Because candidly, when it comes down to it we should really desire that each individual succeed and come through this way of life, grow in this way of life, excel in this way of life, and to be there willing to sacrifice our own feelings, our own desires in order to help them accomplish that. But we don't tend to think that way.

Let's turn over to Matthew 11. Let's try to get a little balance of what Christ is saying here about being the cause of offense, causing someone to stumble, if you will, being offensive to the point it hurts someone else, causing an offence.

Matthew 11:1 – And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, Are you He who should come or do we look for another? Amazing! This is John the Baptist...*John the Baptist!* After all he'd gone through, after all he'd experienced, through all his time, through all the things that God had done through him, through what he witnessed, what he saw with Christ and the baptism of Christ and so forth, when he was in a situation here where he was in prison and getting close to a point in time where he knew there were those who wanted to kill him... so often we get into a jam in our life and we can begin to think in different ways, and this is what's being addressed here.

This is John's response here; **Are you the one who should come or do we look for another?** Some doubts here about, "Are you the Messiah? Because if you're the Messiah then *why* am I going through this? Why am I suffering this? Why am I at this point in my life?" **And Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see; The blind receive their sight...**and John knew all these things but he's being reminded. It's kind of like sometimes we get into a jam in our own life and we get sidetracked and we're told to go back to the trunk of the tree or go back to the 57 Truths, or many other kinds of things we can do in order to get our mind back on track, to go back to and ask the questions about: How did I come into God's Church? How did I learn the truth? *Where* did I learn the truth? ...and get back to very basic things here. And that's all Jesus Christ basically

was telling them to tell John, “Just remind him...because there is only one way that all these things came to pass and John knows that.” It’s basically what it came down to.

The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up and the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is he, whoever it is, that shall not be offended in Me. Powerful! So again here, this one word that’s used here, ‘not to be offended in Me’; the point of this being is that, as I mentioned earlier, there are going to be times when people become offended, have offence toward something else, especially this way of life that has nothing to do with what we’re discussing here, they’re just going to be offended at it, offended at something perhaps you do and how you live your life and so forth. We’re not talking about those kinds of things. We’re not talking about that kind of an offence because it has no justification. John the Baptist had no justification whatsoever to become offended, obviously, in Christ, and so he was being reminded of that, the spiritual part of this, of the story, **and blessed is he who is not offended in Me.** Blessed is he who is not offended in the Church. There are a lot of people... whenever anybody leaves the Church it’s because they come to a point in time where they’re offended in Christ. They’re offended in God, candidly, but they’re offended in Christ, and so this even goes farther, to understand that when we come to a point in time where we don’t like certain things, we don’t like certain things that God does or how He does it, we have to be very careful that we don’t *ever* find fault with God.

That should be something that should cause such fear in us, but sometimes because of how people have grown up, what they have learned, that can be something that they have to address, this battle... and conquer and overcome quickly, and prayerfully – of finding some fault in God or in Christ. In other words, it’s God, but through Christ to the Church of truth or when He gives it, just like what we’ve gone through recently... I cringed at a few situations where individuals because of their response were candidly attacking God or Christ because this is what God was giving to us. And so again here, this is not what going to your brother alone is about, in that respect. There are going to be people who become offended in God and God’s way of life and there may be a need to go to them alone, if we see someone going through a battle like that, or something is said to us and it reflects that kind of a battle, that’s another matter, because this becomes sin.

Let’s look at another area where it speaks of such things. Matthew 13, just a couple of chapters ahead here. So just to be offended in something...the point being, it doesn’t make it right by any measure, it has to be because it *is* an offence in the sense of sin, in the sense of something that is wrong by God’s word. I mentioned, I think it was last Sabbath, that some people have become offended because someone else get’s ordained. You think, “Where does that come from?” Did the person do something wrong or is there something in another individual’s mind that they need to look at themselves to understand why they feel that way toward another brother, another person in the Church, or whatever.

Matthew 13:18 – Hear therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the Kingdom and does not understand; see, just having a knowledge isn’t enough. If we don’t grow in understanding there is a problem. We must seek to understand what God gives to us, to seek to understand His way of life, and so much of that comes by putting it into practice, living it. **...and does not understand, then comes the wicked one and takes away that which was sown in his heart.** So this is something that happens a lot! This has happened ever since I’ve been in the Church, where people have certain things sown in their heart, they get excited about things that they see and understand, and they clearly see and understand certain things, God gives them an opportunity to see and grasp the Sabbath, the Holy Days, to see that Christmas and Easter is wrong and a way of life that is right. And

after a while, because they didn't seek to understand it, it didn't have great purpose and meaning in their life, of what God was doing, and they go by the wayside. That's what it's showing here.

It says, **the wicked one comes along and takes away that which was sown in his heart.** How? Oh, Satan knows how to do that. One of the greatest tools I've seen him use through the years when people are first coming along is family, family members, has to do with other family members. It can be a mother, father, sister, brother, wife, husband, etcetera, etcetera – Satan knows how to attack people, God's people, those who are first being drawn, and come at them primarily in that way, by different relationships there that doesn't want this individual, and there is more power that's involved there. It's not just a matter of a normal relationship that would be there. You know, when God comes along and begins to draw someone then there is more involved there, there is another being out there who wants to see that fail. He knows where God's working. He knows where God's spirit works.

Goes on to say here, **this is he who received the word by the wayside. But he who received the seed into stony places, the same is he who hears the word and right away,** the word 'anon' there, that's what it means, **and right away with joy receives it, yet he has no root in himself; he endures for a while, but when tribulation,** now it gets very specific, now it tells *exactly* what's going to cause them to stumble, **tribulation or persecution arises because of the word,** that's something you just take to the bank when you're called into God's Church – persecution, trials are going to arise right away. When you come into God's Church you have to change your life because of the routine of the Sabbath, you begin to change your life because of when you work and when you don't work, and tithing. All those things totally affect your life. There isn't a person who isn't hit by those things.

It's just the way of mankind anyway; we tend to live, even as human beings, to whatever we have coming in. That's how we live, and if something else comes along and we're budgeted to the max, what do you do when you come along and you find out about tithing and the fact that you can't work on Saturdays anymore, that portion of your income is cut out too. So what do you do? Well, you're going to have to make some big changes in your life to obey God. That's what you do. If you want God's way of life then you make choices of making changes in your life to obey God because God wants us to make a choice. What do you want? Do you really grasp, do you understand what I've given to you? Because if you do, you've got to fight for it, and if you're not willing to fight for it, you're not going to come to understand it, you're not going to appreciate it and value it like you should, you're not going to treat it as a pearl of great price and one of these things is going to happen to you at some point here then.

And so we learn these things very early on as a whole. So that's what it's showing here. Again, it doesn't take long sometimes. It says, there is no root and after a while, one year, two years, three years, whatever it is, some tribulation, persecution arises, certain things come along and put people to the test...and that's good for us. It's healthy for us. It helps us to address things and grow in things that we otherwise couldn't do if these things didn't happen.

...yet it has no root in itself, but endures for a while, but when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, this way of life, **right away,** that's what the word 'by and by' means literally in the Greek. **...right away,** it's the same word 'anon'. **...right away he is offended/stumbles in the word, in the truth.** So again here, we need to understand how the word is used and what it means to stumble in that respect, wrong reasons for stumbling, to stumble in God's word, to stumble in God's way of life. That should never be the case! But to be a matter of something that because of sin and stumble in God's way of life, that's another matter and that's what we're concerned with in this sermon.

Let's go on to Luke 17:1 – **Then He said to the disciples, It is impossible/inevitable, is what the word means here, but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!** A couple of other translations of this first part of this verse are a little bit better. One of them says, **“It's impossible for the stumbling blocks not to come.”** There are going to be stumbling blocks in front of you in life. Another one here, **“Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come.”** Why? Because we're carnal human beings. People are going to do things and things are going to happen where people don't live right and it's going to cause, by example, whatever it might be, that pulls at someone else to where it makes them weak or they give into that and they become weaker.

Then He said to the disciples, It is impossible/inevitable but that offences will come: but woe to them through whom they come. It would be better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he be cast into the sea than he should offend one of these little ones. So just a different way of expressing some of the same things we just looked at here. But again here, making it very that we all stumble! We all have sin! There is no one that lives perfectly! It's inevitable, it's just going to happen... once you're baptized it doesn't mean you're perfect, doesn't mean all of a sudden you're in the Kingdom of God. It's a beginning and you're going to have situations and you've got to be careful how you live your life, because above all things you may have sin, you may have certain things that happen to you, but one thing that should be in the forefront of our mind through it all is that we don't want to hurt someone else through all this process. But the reality is, is that sin does hurt others. And so again, all the more to take these things so seriously, what God has to say about how to deal with others, how to work with others, how to make things right, to resolve matters and issues with others.

And so He says here, **Take heed to yourselves.** Take heed to yourselves! And then it goes on to say, **If your brother trespass,** it means here literally 'do wrong' or 'sin' **against you, rebuke him.** The word here means 'to reprove, correct, to address,' but in the midst of this context it's always 'take heed to yourself'. See, it's not a matter of just jumping on another person because of what they have done, it's how you do it, it's what you do that's important here as well. **Take heed to yourselves: if your brother trespass,** which means to do wrong or to sin, **against you, rebuke him;** reprove, correct, or address it. Don't just let it go by the wayside. But you have to weigh those things out too. Every little thing that someone does in life...you have to measure that: is it harmful, is it going to hurt others? And we'll build upon this as we go through this.

If your brother do wrong/sin against you, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. There's an attitude of mind here that we should always have toward someone else. I remember a minister when I first came in the ministry; he was an elder in an area, I came up and visited in a particular area, and he gave a sermon. He says, "So if they don't repent you do *not* forgive them!" I think it was the following Sabbath I gave a sermon on the subject when he wasn't around. And I should have gone to him alone, and I didn't even do it...at least I don't remember doing it, and perhaps I did, I don't remember. At that stage there, I probably didn't, I probably wasn't strong enough to do it.

If your brother trespass against you, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. The problem is because so often people still hold things against others, even when someone says, "I'm sorry." Or, "I shouldn't have done that." Or, "I feel badly about that." And even then sometimes people don't really forgive in the sense of putting it away, they still use it in judgment when... what if they do it again? And then after a while you just kind of write them off. If you're not careful you can write people off! "How many times have I gone to them about this and they still do the same thing?!" Do you give up on people? Do you quit trying to make relationships right? When do you stop trying to make a relationship

right? When do you quit doing your part? ...*when do you quit doing your part?* ...**and if he repent, forgive him.**

I've given sermons on this where candidly we should always be of that spirit anyway, but it's very difficult for us. But this is very basic stuff. It's basically telling us that this is the minimum...this is the minimum of what you have to do in life. This is the minimum. Because we have a difficult time even doing this as human beings. But this is a minimum and as we grow in time we learn that even to have an attitude of holding something against someone else is wrong, it's sin on our part to even do that. It isn't our place. Now, we do have a responsibility and that's the other story here, if we understand this spiritually, what's being said. We have a responsibility to go to someone else, because sin hurts, it can hurt others. If they do this to you they may do it to someone else. We have to think about the Body, and so we do it as a matter of duty, as a matter of responsibility before God, not because that we have something against them and they've hurt us and we're offended.

Do you get easily offended in what others do toward you or are you able to hold your peace and hold your mind and hold your attitude and feelings toward them and be forgiving toward them, understanding they've gotten caught up in something? Or do we tend to if they are loud with us we tend to maybe get loud back. If they are sharply criticizing and condemning us about a matter do we get involved in it and get worked up? In other words, when is the last time you've been in an argument? Why did you get in the argument? It takes two to argue. If the other person just wants to holler and argue at you and with you and so forth, you need to be under control...and a lot easier said than done, isn't it? But that is the goal. That is the desire we should have and we should strive to get a hold of our selves first and maybe separate ourselves and then come back and address the issue and strive to do it calmly and try to help them be in a calm spirit in doing so in how we handle it.

Verse 4 – And if he trespass against you seven times a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you saying, I repent; then you shall forgive him. It's showing this is not an easy thing. And it's saying here, how many times are you going to do it? The point being is you don't keep track, you just keep doing the same... you keep doing the *right* thing no matter what, and that's hard to do as human beings. We need God's help to do the right thing all the time if you're being taken advantage of. And what does it reflect in someone else if you have the guts, if you have the ability to address something and do it calmly in the way God says to do it and *someone seven times in a day, twelve*, doesn't matter, and each time they come back and they say, "I am really sorry! What was that, 15 minutes ago? I'm sorry, I did it again!" You just keep doing what you have to do and they have to hopefully keep doing what they do and hopefully they'll keep coming back with that attitude and that spirit. Sadly, it just doesn't work that way as a whole, but that should be our goal.

Romans 14, because there is another attitude that one must embrace in humility and love when considering this matter of offending or a cause for stumbling. The major thing in all this when we look at it, it's *our* attitude, it's how *we* think toward others, it's how we respond to others, that we don't respond in kind, when we do go to someone or we do talk to someone about anything to resolve issues that we be in control and that it be a matter of something that is handled the way God says to do it – basically out of love, out of care and concern for them. Because if that care and concern isn't really there then carnality is going to come out. If we're not looking to the end product, to the end result, and have the best care and concern for them in the end of that, then we're not going to handle it well. When it's all said and done, even if it doesn't start out that way, it better end that way in how we deal with someone. It's always our attitude; it's not the other person. You can't control anyone else in life, you can only control yourself, and that's what God wants us to do. He wants us to learn to control

ourselves and be in control and do things His way and seek that they be motivated by genuine care and concern and love for them and a willingness to sacrifice if need be in order to accomplish that, to sacrifice for their sake because we do care for them, because we do love them, we want to see them succeed, we want to see them be in the Family.

Romans 14:21 – It is good... Paul addresses different things here at different times because he's working with different people and what they were coming out of, their past, but we can strive to apply this to things we can comprehend in our society, in our time. **It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.** In other words, how far are we willing to go to try to help someone else? ...so that someone else doesn't have an unnecessary battle in life? Isn't made weak by a wrong example of something we might do. And that's basically what Paul is addressing here.

Let's back up here to see the context of what he's saying, **verse 12 – So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.** That's what we're talking about here. It's us. We need to look in the mirror first all the time in relationships. What are we doing and how are we doing it? It's so easy though to not do that. All we see is the other person and what they've done, what they've offended us by, or what we feel they have done so badly, so poorly, and oftentimes because of our human nature we can get lifted up a little bit about ourselves and how good we are and how could you do such a thing, and so there's kind of a condemnation and looking down upon someone else when we go to someone else and discuss something. We don't really end up helping them in the long run because of this attitude we carry with us, and so we can actually end up causing someone to stumble just because of a wrong attitude.

Verse 12 – So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge, and this word has to do with condemn or to be critical of, with a critical attitude. And we've all experienced this in life, when someone's come to you and they just have a critical attitude and they're just condemning in the way they're discussing...they're not really trying to help you out. I mean, they might be right about what they're saying and you have to be careful. It's like the guy throwing the rocks at King David, what he had to say, David was willing to listen because he may be right about what he's saying so he was not so quick to cut his head off, listen to what he has to say, don't be so quick, in other words, to condemn, to be critical of. The other individual was critical of David, throwing rocks at him and so forth, and this reflects human nature.

Let us therefore, as it says here, **not therefore judge,** don't condemn, don't be critical, **one of another anymore.** God says don't live this way because that's our normal human nature, that's the way we tend to be. We tend to be critical of others, we tend to be judgmental of others, how they're doing something, and we find fault with how they're doing it. I've had people get into arguments about what roads they're going to take to go to the Feast of Tabernacles. "How are you going? Which direction? Which highway? Why on earth would you go that way?!" It's like, "Well, what business is it of yours in the first place, you know?" If they want to take a big circle and come in from the backside, who cares! ...and they're driving! But you hear the craziest things sometimes in life...and they get upset about it because it's like, "How could you be so stupid?!" That kind of an attitude. And you *know* when someone is coming at you that way and looking down on you.

How many people I've known through time that they've grown up that way too in households where parents have treated their children that way, "How could you be so stupid?!" Now, sometimes people feel that way anyway in life but parent and child relationships are not easy in life, period, because of human nature, because of what we have, but I've known of people who have really been messed up

sometimes in life because this has happened to them in such a distorted way, that they've been torn down so much in life that they can't accomplish anything, they can't do anything, they feel so useless about anything and everything they do in life, and they have such a struggle then because of that that they carry with them, an inferiority they carry with them all their life that they're always fighting because they were so torn down by their parents, maybe one parent always critical, always judgmental, always... nothing they did was good enough! Have you known people like that, that have had battles like that in life? How horrible is that?

But that is a tendency of human nature and you have to be careful of those kinds of things. And so God says don't be that way, don't be critical and judgmental and so quick to judge and condemn others and be down on others. Don't make your life be about finding fault in other people. That's why, when I read this earlier on in the very beginning here: "Going to your brother in God's Church has been a concern to me for years. People go to others and *not* the people involved. The ones they should go to are the ones they so often don't go to." That's *this spirit right here* in Romans 14:12-13 that we're talking about. *That's* the spirit that shouldn't be in us, this thing of chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, chirp, of spreading the news, and it's not the good news about others.

What is this about human beings that we get some kind of perverted enjoyment out of talking about other people's calamities or problems or things that they've done that we feel are wrong that others need to be aware of too. We want to be the sharers of this kind of knowledge with others in the Church, or wherever, because we really want others to know this is what they're going through and this is what they've done. Isn't that really sick when you think about it in that light? That really is sick! Why would we want to share those things with one another unless it's your job to address some of it – that would be the only reason – otherwise that isn't the way to live life, it isn't the way God wants us to live life. He doesn't want us to think that way toward His children...on the contrary, we should think differently toward His children. But this is the normal tendency.

And how often and how easy has it been made today in today's world? I think of the expressions there when it talks about the Israelites and it talks about their tent and every man at their door and that expression that's there meaning that people were spreading this stuff around. It means they weren't inside keeping their mouth shut, they were at the door, they were ready to talk to anybody going by and sharing the news... tearing down God's way of life, tearing down others, tearing down Moses and Aaron or whatever it might be. Today it's so easy, people can be by themselves in their home and have instant access – cell phone, telephone, internet – "Did you hear...?" "Did you hear about so and so...?" "Did you hear the latest?" There are expressions that are used in movies and shows, because that's the way we tend to be, we just seem to really relish in talking about others.

Now, if we could just stop and look in a mirror spiritually at ourselves and see why we do that we'd learn a lot about ourselves that we'd really get sick of if we could really see it on a spiritual plane. It'd kind of make us want to puke spiritually because it's a putrid kind of thing of human nature, that people do this toward others. It's the exact *opposite* way God says we're to live life toward each other. It is the *opposite* to the way of peace. It *is* the way of Satan. This is what Satan did from the beginning with the angelic realm, that little chirping behind the scenes talking about God, saying things about God, what God was doing, how God was doing it, finding fault with it. God wasn't doing anything wrong. And people can share things about somebody else that they're not really doing wrong but put it in a light that makes it sound bad. The world does that all the time – I think of what I've gone through recently in that area. Twist and distort things; it's incredible what people can do to each other.

So, so much of this is about ourselves, how we can see ourselves and that's what God wants us to see, is ourselves. **So then everyone shall give account of himself to God**, not of someone else, okay? We're not going to give account of someone else and what they've done, we're going to have to give account for ourselves and what we have done and how we've done it.

Let us therefore not judge/not condemn/not be critical one of another anymore, but rather judge this, that no one put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. It's better to go so far with this that we want to make sure that we don't do *anything* that would hurt someone else in the Body, that would cause them to stumble or to fall. Now, that's an incredible way of thinking. If we can embrace that kind of thinking and have that all the time – WOW! That would be an awesome thing, it really would! It would resolve so many problems and difficulties in life in relationships, but we can't think this way naturally, it's something we have to ask God for help to do. It doesn't happen naturally, you have to ask God for help to do this. Because there are things in ourselves we have to admit before God first of all, repent of, because it's going to involve the process of repenting of things in ourselves so that we can do this.

And that's what God wants us to see, that there are things we need to repent of so that we're not guilty of such things, because we are, we have been. When was the last time you were on the telephone talking about somebody else in God's Church? When? When was the last time you were on the telephone and someone else about someone else in God's Church came out of your mouth and maybe it wasn't really nice or really painted in a way that would be one of being protective or supportive or whatever of someone else. Did we tell the good news about someone else?

Verse 14 – I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who esteems something to be unclean, then to him it is unclean. Now this is a little complicated language here and it's highly misinterpreted oftentimes by what people read and it can definitely apply and it does apply to some physical things too, but what he's really showing here in large part is about the mind. In other words, it's in your own mind; sometimes rightly so, but oftentimes not rightly so. Things come out of your mind to determine whether something is unclean or not, and the reality is only God can show us what is right and wrong, clean and unclean, and so he's showing here that it's a matter of your mind and the way you think, but he uses some other things here, physical things, and that's what we generally see first and focus in on. The world certainly does, the protestant world does, the physical part of this and they don't grasp the rest of it at all, the spiritual part of what he's saying here.

Verse 15 – But, really better translated here, **Now, if your brother is grieved or distressed,** is what this means, **if your brother is distressed by your meat, by your eating meat;** so now he gets down to something that is very physical here, **then you are not walking in love/agape toward them.** That's what it's saying here, you're not walking in love toward them. **So if your brother is grieved or distressed by your eating meat...** what is being talked about here? Now, for Paul there were a couple of other things involved here. Primarily it had to do at times when there were those things that were offered up to idols and then brought back down and they sold the meat then in the marketplace, and it bothered some people's conscience. Paul is showing here what makes it clean or unclean. Paul understood that for someone to eat that it's not a sin, because someone else has mis-used it, but if it's sold here and you buy it from someone who has sold it, you don't have to go out and find out what was done to it beforehand, you didn't have any part in that. It's just meat hanging there and you go and cook it and you invite others and you serve it to others, but if somebody else knows that's where you got it and it causes them to stumble because they're just new in the Church or newly coming along and they have

this conflict because of their past, then if you do this in front of them if it's going to hurt their conscience, if it's going to hurt them, and you try to get them to eat, or if they...

In other words, even though they don't understand that it's okay to do it, at this point, and if because of your serving it to them they go ahead and eat it against their conscience, they sinned, they've done something against their conscience. Because it's about the mind! And God wants us to deal honestly with what is in our mind, whether we understand or not. That's kind of like we can take this back to through time, through things that people haven't known. I think of going all the way back in time there, there are so many other things we understand today because of what Jesus Christ came and gave in the last 2,000 years for mankind than what was understood in the first 4,000 years, and yet people are judged by what they know.

Now, if Paul had never come to know this and understand these things, that it was okay to do so, to eat this, that would be another matter. It could be just simply a matter of sin and that's how people would have to treat it, but it wasn't, and Paul taught that in scripture here later on. I think of people who are vegetarian. That's not a really good example in some respects but I've known of situations where people try to tell them, "Well, it's okay, it's in the Bible. God shows us that we can eat meat!" But even there it's not a religious matter at all, it's just a matter that some people just don't want to eat meat but you're putting pressure on them to show them that "Well, you're not fully balanced!" I've heard of things like this. It's like, "You're not fully balanced if you don't realize this is a part of diet and you should have some meat on occasion... once every month, what's it going to hurt you?" Why would you do this to a brother if they don't want to do it? But how much more if it's a matter of the conscience, a matter of sin? And that's where the problem is. If it be a matter of something that goes against the conscience, but even if it doesn't go against their conscience we still shouldn't strive to...

People who come in the Church who are Baptist, I have to say Southern Baptist because...and that's kind of going away now, but basically Baptists are in the south, deep south, it's getting deeper and deeper now, you've got to go deeper in to find it, where they don't drink alcohol. More and more are drinking, they're embracing it. This is one of those kinds of things where doctrines don't always agree in all areas, but in the north I don't think it's ever been a problem in the Baptist church. But in the south, the deep south, basically it's a sin to drink alcohol. I have known of individuals who have had a difficult time taking Passover, taking a little bit of wine - had to deal with them, work with them, because of this thing of the conscience. All their life they were told it was sin and God has to heal that in their mind through time and some individuals are able to make that change quickly and some have a battle with that through time because of their personality, their background and so forth. And so you have to be careful.

If you know someone is like that and they have a battle with it, to have them over to your house and you're going to insist on having beer and wine available at that time, why would you do that if they're going to have this battle, especially early on? Out of love toward them - that's what God is showing us here - out of love toward them just don't do it. You don't have to have it! *You don't have to have it.* Carry it a little farther...what if someone who has been an alcoholic comes into the Church and they acknowledge that they have a battle there and they can't drink it, and then for you to have them around and to place it in front of them or... Some people have even done this, "Well, if you just have a little bit in moderation you'll be okay." Give me a break! No, you don't know what they're battling, what they're going through!

The point is, if you love someone there are things you're not going to do...you're not going to do toward them, you're not going to try to push something upon them, or you're not going to set an example that's wrong for them or bad for them.

I like the rest of that verse there; we need to read the rest of verse 15 – **do not destroy him for whom Christ died, by your meat.** The point being is, what if someone is brand new and they're coming along, especially brand new, and we can relate to this easier, and there is something that they have in their background that because of your example, especially on a religious plane here, that you do in front of them...if it would cause them at that point to quit coming, to quit coming to the Church and not continue on the process of growth, how horrible would that be? As far as God's way of life is concerned, someone should...that we should be the *cause* of someone stumbling. And that's what we're being shown here, that we need to go above and beyond these things, to think about others and their situation and where they are in their growth.

Verse 16 – Let not then your good be evil spoken of; and the word here is the word 'blaspheme', 'evil-spoken of'. Better translated it says, **so that your good isn't then slandered or blasphemed; for the Kingdom of God is not, in essence, about meat and drink, but righteousness;** sometimes people have made it things like eat and drink and I think of examples a long time ago when there was this thing about jello and where it comes from? And because of that I've known of people who have gone to people's cabinets and pointed it out to them, somebody new in the Church, and condemning them for having jello. "Don't you know?!" And they didn't even understand themselves that there was nothing wrong with it, but... **the Kingdom of God is not about meat and drink but righteousness,** the right way of treating people, being concerned about them. You might have a freedom to do certain things but for their sake you don't do it. **...and peace;** how to make for peace, how to have peace – by your example – and what if by your lifestyle...?

I think of a situation in one part of the country that came to hand at one time where after services there were some people who would get together for eating and the like, and some made available too much beer, alcohol for the group, and some were drinking too much; but they continued doing it, they continued bringing it and continued doing this on a regular basis until finally some had to be addressed about it. But some young people that were new, because they didn't *know* that this is something you shouldn't do, because there were older ones there, one who'd been in Worldwide a long, long time and serving in the Church and so forth, and yet setting this kind of an example of drinking *with* them, drinking to excess himself. And you think, how much did it hurt those young people? Well, come to find out it hurt them a lot! As time went along here, found out certain things were going on and one thing led to another and was causing all kinds of problems in a particular area. Why would you do something like that to hurt someone? Isn't it a whole lot better not to have it around at all?

We've done that in the ministry, asked people to be more careful of those things when you're around others, to set an example, to strive to be an example, to not go beyond and do something even though you might have the right to do it if you're at a place for two hours eating or whatever and were to have a couple of glasses of wine or whatever, to refrain from that for the sake of others because the point being is that there are others who come along out of the world, who they're accustomed to having three or four drinks in an evening and that's just not right, that's not balanced, it's not good, somebody can get killed out there, someone could go to jail for that, for doing something stupid like that, it's illegal. You get that much alcohol in your system and you think, "Well, I can handle it."

And that's the way a lot of the world is today, they think they can go ahead and do those things, but people come into God's Church and you learn, no, you shouldn't do that, that isn't the right example. But if they see someone older doing that how much damage is done? How does that affect their life in other areas then, to let down standards and so forth; that's why we should strive to uphold certain standards in God's way of life, in respect and love toward God and toward His people?

...the Kingdom of God is not about meat and drink, it's about relationships. That's what's important. It's so that we don't hurt others and so that we don't cause others to stumble or cause someone by our wrong example to become weaker in what they're doing – especially someone who is new. The desire for them should be to set the best example possible, to be on our best behaviour in every way, for their sake, to set a high standard for their sake...because they should learn to strive to set a high standard before God in their life, in their community and wherever they are. Because if you do something together in God's Church, together, how much more are you going to do it in the world? ...around others in the world? How much more are you going to let down your standard, a standard of life that we should uphold more? It's just human nature isn't it?

Verse 18 – For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God, and approved of men. So it's how we think toward others and that we're careful of our example, that we're careful about what we do, setting an example, being an example, striving to be an example. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with striving to be a right example for the right reasons? Not as a matter of self-righteousness, but as a matter of showing something here, an attitude toward God, an attitude toward one another within the Body and so forth.

Verse 19 – Let us therefore follow after, and the word here in the Greek is 'pursue'. **Let us therefore pursue the things which make for peace**, that's what it's about, peace, because it's about relationships. What can we do to make peace? Sometimes it would be good just to get a hold of some things, drop our account to Verizon, or AT&T, or whatever telephone communication we have, just cease from communication for a while and think about these things. 😊

Let us therefore follow after/pursue the things which make for peace; that would be a start in some cases in life, **and things wherewith one may edify another.** You know what that means, the Greek here? 'Build'...that we may help in the building. That's what we're a part of; we're part of a building process here, **that we may help to edify/to build another.** If you can be a part of, because of a right example, to help someone else to live stronger, better, strive for a high standard of life, then that's good.

For meat, it says, **do not destroy**, or as the word here means also, 'to overthrow' **the work of God.** It's about what God is doing when He calls us into the Church. A change is to take place, we're to change the way we are. We're not to be like the world, that's why we strive to be different from the world in all things that we do. That's why we strive for moderation; we strive not to be like the world. Whatever is moderate in things, even of dress, we strive to be in the moderate range, not the extreme. We don't want to be to the far right either and be unbalanced in things and this go too far in our mind, because people can carry this too far where you go so far, you can go so far that you become righteous about *your* standard. It becomes *your* standard and not what is really to edify others, it becomes what edifies you. So there is balance in everything in life and you can't give that to anyone, it's something that's learned through life, through living this way of life and God gives the balance then as time goes along.

So he says, **Let us follow after that which makes for peace and the things which may edify/build another. For meat, do not destroy or overthrow the work of God. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eats with offence,** the word meaning ‘stumbling’ or ‘an occasion for stumbling’. So again, a rather awkward translation, but a couple of other translations combined make this easier to understand. It’s saying here, ‘If you put these things first in serving Christ, that will be pleasing to God, and you are not likely to be the cause of someone stumbling. So let us concentrate on the things which make for peace and unity and on the growth of one another. In other words, what God is building, to be concerned about that and not to get in the way of what God is building but to help be a part of that process, to help enable that process to take place more easily.

Verse 21 – It is better not to eat meat, nor to drink wine, nor anything that may cause your brother to trip/to stumble/be made weak. Beautiful what it says here! In other words, in things we do in relationships we really need to be more concerned about others and not just about ourselves and our judgment. We need to be more concerned about judging ourselves as Paul is talking about through Romans here. He’s talking about first we need to look at ourselves and be more concerned about ourselves than we are about someone else in the sense of not having everything the way we think it should be. We need to make sure we’re doing everything the way it should be before God and judging ourselves in these matters and striving to make sure that we’re so concerned about others that we don’t want to do anything, we don’t want to be the cause of causing someone else to trip, to stumble, if you will, or to be made weak! Because human nature, if we understand it, will latch onto something that is weak to justify their doing something else that’s weak! I hope you understand what I’m saying here!

If we were to do things, or where things have been done in times past, where people began to let down standards, morality, so forth, or a higher standard, it tends to rub off, it tends to spread because it’s not this concept and this idea of striving to do things in a better way and striving to please God in everything we do, because God’s not as much in the picture, we’re more concerned about our being able to do something our own way. And it’s easier then for people to let down and it rubs off on a younger generation of people that are growing up in the Church even. I’ve seen these things happen in families; if families begin to let down certain standards then young people, their own children can see that and themselves begin to let down or let down in certain areas and justify, “Well, if mom and dad can do this it’s not so bad what I’m doing in the Church.”

Verse 22 – Do you have faith? Then have it to yourself before God. It’s a beautiful verse! **...have it to yourself before God;** don’t try to cram it down somebody else’s throat. If you’re confident in what you believe before God and you’re in unity and oneness and harmony with things, that’s the way it should be, indeed, but when someone else is not fully in the same place where you might be in certain things don’t be so quick to jam it down their throat or to condemn them or to find fault with them or go to them about it. You have to be careful in how you do these things, how you implement these things in life, and that’s what God is showing us.

Do you have faith? Then have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in the thing which he allows. And he who doubts, expression here that means ‘goes against his conscience’ **is condemned if he eat, because he does not eat in faith; for whatever is not of faith is sin.** So again, it goes back to this conscience and the mind and how you think about things and how easy it is actually to cause someone else to stumble. It’s not that hard, by a wrong example, it can rub off on someone else.

Romans 15:1 – and so the admonition continues on here in the next chapter, what’s being spoken of. And again, kind of difficult in some of Paul’s language here. **We then who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak/weaknesses of the weak**, it says here, **and not to please ourselves**. Again here, awkward things with human nature. **We who are strong**; because this is a two-sided sword. If you begin to think that you’re strong and you look at yourself as being strong and you’re kind of lifted up by that and you’re looking down on others then it’s kind of all gone out the window anyway, it’s just a matter of pride and you’re not going to be able to be a right example anyway. Someone that’s lifted up with their own self-righteousness doesn’t serve the Body, doesn’t serve the Church, doesn’t serve other people.

We then, who are strong, ought to bear the infirmities; it’s something you keep...if you have faith, keep it to yourself between you and God! You don’t carry it around! When a person carries it around it shows. When a person carries it around it comes out in the way we address someone else. It comes across as condescending – we’re righteous, you’re not. That’s not how to help members of the Body, of the Family.

We then, who are strong, ought to bear the infirmities/the weaknesses of the weak, and we all know there are differences in the Body, and that’s why humility is such a good thing, humility, because there are going to be areas where you still have weaknesses, you still have faults no matter how long you’ve been in God’s Church. No matter how strong you are in different areas of your life there are still areas you’re very weak in, so to have that spirit of humility before God and that God’s been patient and merciful to you.

Verse 2 – Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification/building. The whole point being through all of what Paul is saying is we should be more concerned about others and caring for others and being an example to others and having a desire to do things right before them, because we don’t want to hurt anybody. How far will we go not to hurt someone? Next time you’re on the phone and someone else’s name comes across your lips, out your lips, think about that. How far am I willing to go not to hurt someone else?

Matthew 18:7 – Woe unto the world because of offences! For those things which lead people to stumble. **Indeed, it is necessary that offences come**. Why? Because of free choice. Everybody stumbles, those things are going to happen, there is always going to be conflict in life, everything is not going to be easy, it’s not going to be like your best friend, if you have a best friend and you don’t have difficulties, and when you do you’re able to work through them quickly. Life is not like that with everyone. There are going to be situations where there are going to be times when you’re going to have to fight against being offended by what someone else has done and not responding in the way you’re being treated by someone else. And yet God expects us to strive to do that. **Indeed, it is necessary that offences come, but woe to that man through whom the offence comes!** So you don’t want to be the *cause* of an offence, of causing someone else to be hurt, causing hurt upon someone else, that they have a struggle in the Church, in the Body because of something you have said, something you have done, some way you have treated them.

Therefore, if your hand or your foot offend you/cause you to stumble, cut them off... We knew of a family in one place we were at one time many, many years ago – probably 30 some years ago – who had a family member who had a problem in a spirit world, who literally tried to cut off their arm because of this verse; demented, distorted thinking, because they took it literally, physically. And you think of the human mind, how sick the human mind can be and how a demonic world would like people to look at

things God tells us. And so many in the world don't understand what this is talking about in the protestant world either, let alone sometimes even in God's Church.

Therefore, if you hand or your foot offend you/cause you to stumble, cut them off and cast them from you: it's better for you to enter into life lame or crippled rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. It's a word that means 'age-lasting' fire, in other words it's talking about the time of judgment that comes when everything is finished at the very end, that which some individuals, it says, receive, will receive. It's a matter of something that is destroyed forever and never comes back again. In other words, it's given the example here of fire that consumes. There comes a time in life where no one's ever going to be resurrected to life, have life in them again; it's a final judgment, a final decision here, and it's given the example over and over here again of gehenna, gehenna fire, something that carnal human minds can understand. It's a valley close to Jerusalem that people understood, in their minds could make a relationship to something that's destroyed like garbage and burned up, that that's what can happen to human life if people don't chose God's way of life. It's consumed and gone forever, in essence, just like a fire consumes and burns up something and it's totally gone and it's never there ever again, it never comes back when it's consumed. People get these ideas of 'hell' and fire going on and you're there being burned all the time... anyway.

What does all this mean? What does this mean 'if your hand offend you, cut it off', 'if your eye – pluck it out'. What in the world are we to learn from this? It has to do with judgment. It has to do with understanding that we all stand before God as Paul talked about there earlier in Romans as well.

Matthew 3:7 – let's just notice some scriptures here - **But when he, speaking of John, saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath that's coming? You generation of snakes – not just snakes, but you poisonous snakes. That's what they're called here, in essence. Who has warned you to flee from the wrath that's coming? Therefore bring forth fruit meet for repentance:** if this is genuine and you're genuine before God, **then bring forth fruit meet for repentance:** in other words, appropriate for or reflective of repentance. We tell people in the Church, before you're baptized you have to bring forth fruit meet for repentance, that reflects, or that's appropriate for, or that shows repentance here. Sometimes that means the most basic of things that we can look at in life have to do with attendance, Sabbath Services, how much do we want this? How much do we want this? There must be a desire to be in fellowship with others in the Church, things about tithing and so forth that reflect that a person is committed to this way of life. Because those are the things, the Sabbath and tithing, as a whole, that are the first steps. Those are the basic things that the Church never lost in the beginning, even in Sardis if you go back in time and look at that. When Mr. Armstrong came along, had the name of the Church, had the Sabbath, and had tithing, because those are the most basic of things that reflect whether a person even wants to begin this course of life. So it says, **therefore bring forth fruit meet for repentance.**

Verse 9 – And do not think to say within yourselves, We have Abraham for our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. The point being here is that it's not a matter of lineage, it's not a matter of physical lineage, God gives the physical life to someone, where to cause elements of the earth to come together in life and they didn't descend from Abraham. The point being is they can become a part of Abraham, because becoming a part of Abraham, the bigger part of that is the spiritual, not the physical, not the physical lineage. And that's the problem the Jews had so often there, it was a matter of going back, "We're children of Abraham," and having a self-

righteousness about that and that's not what it's about. It's a matter of that which is spiritual, begettal that's important before God, not physical lineage.

Verse 10 – And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which does not bring forth [good]fruit is cut down, it's the same word we read earlier on, 'to be cut off', 'cut down' in this case here, and cast into the fire. We should understand what this is talking about. Again, we understand this is about judgment. If someone doesn't bring forth fruit in their life then this is what will happen in time, there is judgment.

Verse 11 – I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance but He who comes after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to carry: He shall baptize you with the holy spirit and *with* fire. There are some in the protestant world who want to be baptized with both. They want the baptism of the holy spirit and fire, and they don't know what they're asking for, because that's not what it's talking about here. I don't know if any of you have ever heard the expressions like that. Some Pentecostals use these expressions, they want the baptism of the holy spirit and fire...and the fire is the end when you don't live God's way of life. It is the judgment. It is the gehenna that it's talking about here. The word 'baptized' just means to be 'immersed'. There are two kinds of baptisms in life; one will lead to eternal life if we yield ourselves to the process that begins with water, being baptized under the water and coming up and living in newness of life, being begotten of God's spirit. And if that way is not chosen through time then there is another baptism, another immersion, and it's given here as the example of fire, in other words, to be consumed and never to be resurrected again. There is an end to life, in other words, fully consumed.

Verse 12 – Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor and gather His wheat into the storehouse, into the grain bin, in other words, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. In other words, it's going to be fully destroyed, never to be again. And again here, just carrying it on in these last two verses, showing here something that is going to happen. Everyone comes under judgment and there is that which leads to eternal life and that which leads to an end for all eternity. We're going to be immersed in one or the other. So it's a matter of judgment.

We just looked at the word about being 'cut down', understanding the importance here that either we bear fruit in life, we yield to the process, we want God's way of life, we want what God is offering us, or the choice is no...and sadly there are those who are going to choose no. Just like in the demonic world - it's astounding – you think of so many beings that chose something different from what God had given to them from the beginning, and yet there are human beings that are going to do the same thing. There are people that have been in our past that things have happened in life that they don't want this way of life, they really just don't want it and that's a choice.

1 Corinthians 12:13 – For by one spirit we are all baptized into one Body; so we're bringing together two things here to grasp, to understand as we go along here. But again here, **We are all by one spirit baptized into one Body;** we spoke of that at the beginning of the sermon when we went to 1st Corinthians 11 talking about not being able to discern the Body of Christ. That's what it's talking about. It's not just discerning or understanding what Jesus Christ suffered in a physical body but understanding what it means for the spiritual Body. **For by one spirit we are all baptized into one Body, whether it be Jew or Gentile, whether we be bond or free; we have all been made to drink into one spirit – whether we be male or female.**

Verse 14 – For the Body is not one member, but many; so again here, it's a principle that we understand. The Body is made up of many members. God wants us to comprehend that. Paul goes on to say... things that had to be taught in the early Church that we still have to learn when we come into God's Church; it's something that we all have to come to understand in time. **If the foot shall say, Because I am not of the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?** Because we want something different or we think we should be someplace else, or whatever? **And if the ear shall say, Because I am not of the eye I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where is the hearing? And if the whole were hearing, where is the smelling?** The point being here Paul is getting across that we're all members of the Body and we may not know what part of the Body, where we are, but it goes on to say...**but now God has set the members, every one of them, in the Body as it pleases Him.** He has called people from all kinds of backgrounds. He doesn't call everybody who is all alike, thank God! He calls diversity, differences. We learn through that environment. We can learn the love of God because of how God has worked with us, how God works with the Church, and we learn, we grow in an ability of something that we wouldn't be able to have any other way, something that's moulded and fashioned within us because of the way God does it.

But again, Paul making the point here that we are one Body and there are many parts of the Body, many members of the Body, and we must understand that God puts us all in the Body where it pleases Him and we yield our self to that process. Because candidly, the reality is I've seen some of the greatest of horror and problems and difficulties in the Body since I've come into God's Church exist when people aren't happy where they are in the Body and they see other things in the Body they want to have and think they should have and judge other who they think they have something or don't have, and it's this constant thing of human nature that we have to battle and fight against in our being.

One more area of scripture to put all this together; Matthew 5. To be thankful we're in the Body, to just yield our self to God to do the moulding and the fashioning.

Matthew 5:27 – You have heard that it was said unto the people of old, in other words, since that time. He's going back and reminding them of when the law was given, in essence; **you've heard of the people of old,** the Israelites, going way back in time here. It's just an expression. **...you shall not commit adultery;** so he's going back obviously here to the 10 Commandments, that's what he's talking about here. **...but I say unto you that whoever looks on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery already with her in his heart,** in other words, it's in the mind, it's in the heart, that which is spiritual, and that's what is being shown here.

Then it goes on to say, **and if your right eye offend you, pluck it out.** It's not talking about something physical here. So what is it talking about? **...and cast it from you;** throw it away from you, **for it is more profitable/more beneficial for you that one of your members should perish;** literally in the Greek language here it means 'be destroyed'. If one of the members be destroyed –many members, but one Body. I hope we understand what it's talking about. See? **...and not that the whole Body should be cast/thrown into gehenna.**

Verse 30 – And if your right hand offend you cut it off; it's that same word 'to cut down' like the tree that doesn't bear fruit, **cut it off and cast it from you. For it is more profitable/more beneficial for you that one of your members should perish and not that the whole Body should be cast into gehenna.** Sobering when you understand what it's talking about here.

All the way through Matthew 18, when we read it, it's a two-edged sword, it truly is! Because it's about the person who causes offence who sins, and it's also about the individual who goes to a person and understands there is a great responsibility in dealing with matters within the Body when we know of sin. And if we do, there is an incredible responsibility upon God's people to handle it properly, to do it His way. That means you have a responsibility to do it but a responsibility to do it the right way. It's powerful what this means.

I have seen many in the Body; I've known of many ministers in the Body who have a difficulty of applying some of this, of going to another person, because that could be a weakness. I've known of others who go too quickly, and that can be a weakness. I'm showing this with the ministry because this is the way it's always been in God's Church. If it happens in the ministry, please understand, when they have received training and guidance and direction in these things, even more so it happens throughout the Body mightily so. I hope we understand that, the point of that. There is a right way and a balanced way and a sound way to address things and that's what we're ever striving for in God's Church.

That's what it's all about. That's where growth comes from – ever striving to do things in the sound and balanced way God says to do it because there is always the two sides – even in going to a brother alone. Some who don't want to do it at all because they don't want to address people, they don't want to have to address a bad situation, and perhaps because of their background... all kinds of reasons. A lot of times people don't want to go to someone else, especially if they are friends with them, or the closer they are to them, because they're afraid they're going to lose their friendship and they don't understand, you may lose a *member of the Body of Christ* if you *DON'T do it!* Do you love them? Do you want to exercise love the way God says to exercise it? You have a responsibility to do it, but you have a responsibility to do it the right way too. And so there is the other side sometimes then that can tend to look down upon others and easily find fault with others and measure others by a certain standard that's there and be ready to jump on a problem and address something as soon as it happens. And sometimes you can't do it that way, there's balance in addressing it.

We've gone through in times past of discussing there are situations where we have to be careful not to insert ourselves in some people's situations in life. You don't want to be sheriffing, you don't want to be controlling, because there is a *balance*, and you've got to ask God for help to do that *His way*, not *your way*, because this isn't about *'my' way*. We can each say that – “This isn't *'my' way*; it's your way God, whatever Your way is.” And seeking to do it in a balanced way God's way.

This is not easy. This is something that takes God's spirit and crying out to God for help to accomplish, to do it in a sound and a balanced way, because human nature tends to go to one side or the other, and to find the balance, the soundness, that's the goal through time.

Matthew 18:4 – Whoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whosoever shall receive one such little one in My name receives Me. And whoever shall offend/cause to stumble one of these little ones who believes in Me it would be better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences, because it's necessary indeed that offences will come, but woe to them through whom they come.

Verse 8 – therefore if your hand or your foot offend you/cause to stumble, cut them off and cast them from you. You know, it can literally come down to that in time? It comes down to a point in time here of something within the Body, within the Church, that hopefully it doesn't go this far, but some things

do where an individual has to be separated from the Body for the sake of the Body. It goes back to what Paul said, "A little leaven can leaven the whole lump." When you go back and see some of the things that are discussed in the book of Corinthians and what happened when the Church began to accept an individual who was having a relationship with his Father's wife, and both at that time were supposedly coming into the Church. Both were to be put out of the Church. Paul condemned them and judged them and told them that they should have taken care of this matter and separated them; and all in the context, as Corinthians goes on, of a little leaven leavens the whole lump and makes the Church weaker. There are things that people are to stand up and do that may be uncomfortable because they were obviously friends, they obviously had friendships and so people will... if they tolerate certain things that are wrong what does that do to the mind? If you begin to tolerate and allow things that you know are that wrong, where is the mind? What are you thinking? Do you not recognize that you're guilty of the same thing if you allow and tolerate such things in life in the Body, in the Church?

So there comes times when you have to deal with things because it's better for the Body. It's better for the Body that those individuals be separated from the congregation and told they cannot fellowship and be a part of the congregation. Then in time what happened was Paul had to write a second letter and include in the second letter (that's not the whole purpose of why he wrote it to the Corinthians), to tell them to bring him back – to bring him back because he has repented. She wasn't, but he did, he came to repentance. And he talked about how important it was that when someone comes to repentance, to receive them back as a brother and to forgive and all that be put away and to not leave them out there with Satan, cut off.

So there is a fine line and a fine balance even with that in the Body, but it's about love for the Body and what God is doing within the Church and sometimes things are not pleasant. But you know what it does? It causes you, if you yield yourself to the process, to learn to judge more and more righteous judgment and to be in unity and oneness with God, because it has to do with judgment. There is a lot involved in the matters of judgment in life and how God judges us and works with us, and there is a lot to do with how we learn to judge, because this is how we learn to judge. It's in our relationships with one another. We learn when to insert ourselves in a matter and when not to insert ourselves in a matter. Thank God He doesn't insert Himself every time we make a mistake or stumble. You have to weigh those things out, and there is a fine line and fine balance, but that's what we're ever striving for.

So often God stands back and He lets us do various things, then it's a matter of something if that is addressed. He doesn't prevent something from happening. Sometimes, if we're not careful, we try to prevent some things from happening in life when they may not even be there, but we try to prevent them. It's hard to speak in generalities like that sometimes without getting specific.

Going on here; **therefore, if your hand or your foot offend you/cause to stumble/cause someone else to stumble**, cause weakness in the Body, a little leaven leavens the whole lump, then you have to weigh those things out. Is it sin? At what level is it? Is it hurting others? To what degree is it hurting others? Is it *sin*? Oftentimes you keep coming back to that – is it *sin*? Sometimes there are some things you have to become involved in that is not yet fully sin, and again, I'll try to give some examples as we go along here later on in the sermon here, because we're down to the end here today.

I think it's very sobering to end here today that we've come to a point in time here where it shows that there is a time, literally... I have never enjoyed these times. I *hate* them when they happen. But afterwards I'm always thankful that they've happened. When there are those that it comes to the surface have been fighting against God, lying to God, lying to God's Church, and something comes out

about their life and what they're doing and how they're hurting the Body. I think of rebellion that's happened at different times in God's Church going all the way back to the 70's. Over and over again this happened at different times. I think of a matter that happened up in Toledo at one time where, thankfully, and the Detroit area, where there was a large part of the Body that turned against this way of life, in essence, and God took them all out with one fell swoop. I've never seen anything quite to that magnitude where it happened all at once. Usually it's a group here, a group there, an individual here, an individual over there, but it was just like a vacuum cleaner, all at one time, God just took it all out at one time.

It hurt like mad, because it has to do with betrayal and being stabbed in the back and all the things that go with that...that song I oftentimes talk about, about 'going to God's house side by side and council blended sweet' and then something like that happens where all of a sudden the individual is an enemy to God, to God's way of life, to you, to others in the Body. Those things hurt! But the best thing when it goes that far is that that part be cut off from the Body, because if it's not, if those things were allowed to exist in the Church and where they have been in times past in some areas, that's what has caused others to go astray, that's what's hurt others and led others astray. Its better they be nipped in the bud and gotten rid of, and that's a hard thing to do sometimes. But there are times that God requires that of us, to do the things that aren't easy.

We'll stop there today. Again, this is a very sobering subject. I find it very sobering, I hope you do too, because it's about us and it really comes down to a need for each one of us to really look at ourselves closely in the mirror, to how we do things and to seek to do it God's way, because this is no small thing about going to a brother. There is a lot involved here. And I feel very inadequate just going over some of these things and just today here, going through some of these examples here, because there are so many different examples we could throw out here and weigh, but the basic principles are what we need to grasp, and the most basic principle of all is always self...self-self-self.

~~~end