

Let no one stumble.

Verse 13: Therefore let us stop passing judgement on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

We need to resolve not to judge our brothers and sisters. What is the stumbling block here? To think that idol food is unclean (v. 14). Imposing on others what we think is good for us (v. 16).

What are the effects of stumbling? Judging one another, so the brothers are heartbroken (v. 15). We are also not walking in love (v. 15). They are destroying their brothers and sisters (v. 15), criticizing each other (v. 16). They are not based on conviction and having doubts (v. 23). Invites brothers and sisters to fall sins (v. 21), feeling a slumber in his heart (v. 22).

Verse 14: I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.

What is the Apostle Paul convinced of? Paul says he knows and is convinced by the Lord Jesus.

Verse 15: If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died.

Our brother and sister are noble because Jesus Christ died for them. He says that we should not hurt their heart and destroy their spiritual life by our own obsession with food. We should always keep in mind that Jesus Christ is behind our brothers and sisters in the church.

verse 20. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble.

He is saying that we should not waste the work God has done in working salvation for them by causing them to stumble through food. Paul is asking us to be convinced one last time.

verse 23. But whoever has doubts is condemned if they eat because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Act with conviction. Rom. 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Let us return to the spiritual basics of the gospel.

Ephesians 6:12: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Verse 17: For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Verse 18: because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.

Verse 19: Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

The attributes of the Kingdom of God are spiritual. Rom. 8:6: “The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace”. It is the thoughts of the flesh to dwell on the law. It is the mind of the Spirit to keep peace and reconciliation without criticizing our brothers.

Our resolution is to make sure that not one of us stumbles. 1 Corinthians 8:9-13: On the issue of eating food prepared for idols, Paul says this. “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak (9). Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.”

Jesus also teaches us not to cause our brothers and sisters to stumble.

Matthew 18:6-7: “If anyone causes one of these little ones – those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that causes people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” This is a warning to the Jewish religious leaders of the time who were persecuting the people who believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should be a person who leads each person who believes in Jesus Christ to live a life of faith standing firm on the gospel.

And also, we can learn from the Jerusalem Conference. I mentioned last week the event that led to the evangelization of the Gentiles. It is the story of Cornelius, a Gentile in Acts chapter 10, who was saved. After this event, the Apostles and church leaders held a meeting because they wanted to make sure that not a single person stumbled.

In AD 51, about 5 or 6 years before the book of Romans was actually written, there was a large conference known as the Jerusalem Conference. In Acts 15:1-2, we see that this controversy was very serious and contentious. “Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” And at the meeting, after a heated debate, it was decided to do this. Acts 15:19-20: “It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead

we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.” The Jerusalem Conference put together about four items and informed the churches of them. The churches should discuss any problems, even if there are heated arguments. They should remove and improve things that cause stumbling blocks to faith and lead a healthy life of faith. And the goal of that improvement should be to reach Jesus Christ.

We Christians should return to the attitude of preaching the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is our great cause. **Matthew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”** Pastor Kanzo Uchimura said this. “I am for Japan. Japan is for the world. The world is for Christ. All is for God.” We realize from these words of Pastor Uchimura that we have to return to the main idea of the gospel.

When small things cause divisions in the church, everyone stumbles and loses sight of what is important. One of the sisters criticized the church for teaching “love and reconciliation” but breaking up with each other. She criticized church’s members and left the church. But please don't be too troubled. Other religions have more conflicts than Christianity. 2 years ago, there was a murder case at a famous shrine in Japan due to a power and property dispute among the priests. Even in Korean Buddhism, there had been many cases of violence due to power struggles. Every group of human beings will be divided because of human sins.

Therefore, please do not be afraid of schisms in the church. Of course it will happen, but we need to remember the love of Christ and overcome it. And if we focus on Jesus, the Holy Spirit will work more easily, and we will be led in prayer. We have to love one another under the forgiveness of the cross of Jesus Christ. And we have to be reconciled. Only the Church teaches it. Let us be proud of that and do it together.

Our MJCF is a small church. But I am confident that the bond of love of the church is very strong. We see our parents' family in Japan and Canada once a year or less, but we see our church’s members every week. The church, a community centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ, is really different from other organizations in our society. It may be easy to become complacent when we accept people out of love, but even if we are a little complacent, we can experience love and God's miracles in the church. However, please be assured that we stand on the truth that even we do not bend. I am not saying that anything is OK.

I would like to end with a final example: In the 1960s, Korea was poor after the Korean War. At that time, churches often prepared bread and other items for evangelism and held children's worship every week. However, there was an incident in one church where shoes

were stolen every week. The thieves were so repetitive that the church's members started looking for the culprits when they caught the culprits. However, the pastor said, "Please stop it. The child may encounter Jesus Christ while stealing." Perhaps because of such a loving pastor, there was a revival of Christianity in Korea from the 70's to the 90's. And the girl whose shoes were stolen many times became an adult and a famous actress. And she is now active as a goodwill ambassador for the Organization Against Hunger. I think this is a testament to the love and perseverance of Christians that has had a positive impact on both individuals and society. I am sure that the child who stole a few shoes will quit stealing at some point, become a Christian, grow up healthy, and contribute somewhere in society. I believe that love of Jesus changes people certainly.

I have not stolen any of your shoes, but I am one who has been very blessed by your love and patience. As one of them, I am convinced that MJCF has done very good deeds so far as a church. Through the love and patience of Pastor. Gerald and Mrs. Rie, each member of the congregation has been able to live a richly individualistic and spontaneous life of faith. And not only Pastor. Gerald and Mrs. Rie, but also Mr. Tsutomu, who has passed away, and his wife, Mrs. Miwako, who is still active in the church, and other members are doing their best for the salvation of each and every soul. I believe that we have been really attentive so that no one stumbles. There are not many churches that are so attentive to each and every one of us. I am a witness that the love of everyone at MJCF has kept me alive and kept me from stumbling. I have been able to raise my children together with you all. Words cannot express my gratitude for the love and patience of each and every member of the MJCF congregation. However, I am praying that the time has come for us to take on the challenges of a new vision. I would like to pray with you about the future of MJCF.

Let's pray together. Our heavenly Father! You taught us that the Kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but about righteousness, peace, and joy given by the Holy Spirit. Please Father, give each of us the righteousness, peace, and joy of God in abundance at every moment. And please show us the right path for the future of MJCF. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.