

Unity > Uniformity // Romans 14:1–15:13 // *Romans #29*

Christmas With the Summit REPORT

Well, when it was all said and done, the total attendance at our Christmas services in 4 locations was nearly 14K. Even more significantly, 88 people made a first-time profession of faith

- This put us at 981 official POF in 2019. (Our goal was 1K, so by God's grace that was right there at it.)

Could we celebrate that for a minute?

- **TSC**: Think about what **God is doing** here at TSC.
- POF isn't anything we can conjure up or plan or market...God is on the move and we get to be a part of that.
- We **don't just want to REACH ppl**, we also want to DISCIPLE them.
- We're **keeping our focus on WY1**--each of us has at least one person we are intentionally sharing Christ with and helping to disciple after they make a POF. WAIT ON GOD

Also, every year at Christmas we take up an offering, 100% of which we give away. This year we sent it to our missionaries carrying the gospel to nations overseas--and to some ministries that serve the nations right here in our backyard, like ministry to refugees.

Works Consulted:

"Gospel Unity (Romans 14:1–15:7)," Joby Martin

"Love and Liberty (Romans 14:1–15:4)," Tony Merida

"Hope, Race, and Power (Romans 14–15)," Tim Keller

"Romans 14:1–23," Sam Storms

"Caring Enough to Liberate" (Romans 14:1–12), Tony Evans

Romans for You, "Romans 14," Tim Keller

- You gave more than \$70K toward that on one Sunday.

THANK YOU. Thank you for that. **Thank you for serving**... 2400 of your volunteered to make the Christmas services possible, by far the largest vol base we've ever had. And could you thank in particular our worship teams?

Romans 14

This one is **another doozie**... It will be a good way to start the year, though.

Chapter **14** and the **1st ½ of 15** are one extended discussion about how to get along with people in the church who disagree with you on something you feel passionate about.

Paul is going to say that for most of these things, **unity > uniformity**. Somebody in the early church said it this way: **"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."** **St. Augustine (?)** (It's attributed to Augustine but no one really knows if he said it. Regardless, it's a concise summary of what Paul says here.

Do you remember what Paul said in **Romans 12**? **Rom 12:16: "Live in harmony with one another."** Well, these chapters explain how to do that even when you disagree with people in your small group on things you find important.

I'm going to try to be specific about things our members disagree on here--I thought about teaching this whole passage in general in terms

but then I thought, *'No, let's just be specific. That will be more fun. And, I've been looking for a way to generate more email that I have to answer.'*

So, pay attention: **I guarantee you that I will say at least one thing today** that makes you bow up. **If not, I will have failed as a preacher.** (Everybody look at your neighbor and say...) And when you **hear that thing that makes you bow up**, *at that moment you'll be ready* for Paul's teaching about how to process that.

And if you send me an angry email, it's ok. I can handle it. I've already got this **award** this week.

(We'll get to them later...)

1 Accept anyone who is weak in faith, but don't argue about disputed matters.

- **Disputed matters**. Paul is **saying that there are things** we will disagree about in church that should not lead to division.
- Now, he is **not saying that there's never anything in the church** shouldn't divide over.
 - **Throughout Paul's letters he has identified** things that should make us separate.
 - **In Galatians** Paul says "If anybody teaches a gospel different from this one," you should label them a false teacher and not entertain them in the church.
 - **In 1 Corinthians** he says, "If someone is practicing open immorality, remove them from your fellowship."
- But not everything rises to that level, and here Paul introduces a category called "disputed matters."

A theologian named Michael Bird gives three levels of importance for issues in the church that I find helpful:

(1) **Matters essential for salvation;** (person of Christ, the way of salvation)

(2) **Matters that are important to the faith and the church, though not essential for salvation;** (inerrancy of the Bible; understanding of morality and gender and marriage)

(BTW, these 2 are almost always spelled out clearly in Scripture)

(3) **Matters of indifference – non-essentials, debatable things, preferences, opinions.**

The Greek word for *opinion* is τύπτερ. (Twitter) I think that's the right pronunciation.)

We are not to twitter over inconsequential, disputed matters. This is what ROMANS 14 is about...

Not everything in Christianity is a first order issue--but here's the catch: *The longer you're in church the more you start to like your opinions on everything and think everyone else needs to live by your opinions.* In fact, in your mind, these are not even opinions anymore; they are just the way things are--the way mature Christians see the world.

And here's the deal: for many things **in the Christian life, God has not spelled out what he wants to the letter**. He gives us principles and expects us to use wisdom in applying them to new situations.

- **And that's maturity:** Having the wisdom to know what the right thing to do is even when it is not spelled out in Scripture.
 - **As a parent, that's my goal for my kids, right?** I don't want to have to **tell my kids what to do in every situation** for the rest of their lives. I want to teach them the principles so that they can figure out what to do on their own.

- **It's the same with God in Scripture.** You are supposed to use principles to develop wisdom to know what to do in new situations.
- **But here's the thing:** we should **always show restraint in equating our wisdom**--our application of a principle--with **the Word of God.**
- Unless you can give it a chapter and verse, don't give your perspective in the application equal authority with God's Word.
- **Spiritual maturity is not just developing strong convictions,** it is learning to show restraint in the weight you give those convictions.

Paul then addresses **2 contentious issues** in the Roman Church.

(**NOTE:** These are not going to be the same things that are contentious in our church), so we'll just **use these as examples** and glean from them wisdom for **how to deal with contentious issues** at our church.

The first one is in vs. 2: **One person believes he may eat anything, (that's me, btw. And I love this next verse—vegetarians pay attention) while one who is weak eats only vegetables.**

- There it is, **folks. The word of God.**
- Ha! This is not really about the health benefits of a carnivorous diet.

The city of Rome was a city filled with temples, and almost everyone is Rome was an idol worshipper. And most of the meat sold in the market had been **presented** to an idol for its blessing, and some if it was **actually offered** to an idol. (You've seen this: you put the meal out in front of the idol. **Well, the idols rarely** ate any of it, of course, so they would then sell that meat at a discounted rate.)

And so, some of the Roman Christians, particularly the Jewish ones, felt like the fact that the meat had been offered to an idol permanently tainted it, and to accept the discount was to participate

in idol worship. **Plus, a lot of the meat was pork,** and Jews looked down on that anyway.

So, to avoid all this, many Christians simply refused to buy meat in the market and ate only veggies. They were like, "Isn't that what Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel in the OT? We're like them."

But other Christians in the Roman church said, "No. No. We know that idols are not really gods. There is only one God. And his power would counteract any of the idol magic. **Plus, Paul taught us** in the book of Galatians that **Jesus' death has** cleansed all things for us." **So pass the bacon."**

Curious: How many of you would have been on **team veggie**? How many would be on **team meat-eater**?

That's issue #1. Issue #2: Vs. 5: **One person judges one day to be more important than another day. Someone else judges every day to be the same.**

- There were **Jewish Christians** in this church who still thought that **the Sabbath (our Saturday) was the day they should worship on.** That had been a big deal in Israel for 1500 years, so why change it?
- **Furthermore, they thought that even though they were Christians** they should still observe Jewish holidays, since God had established them for Israel to remind them of various things throughout the year. (**They understood these things weren't necessary for salvation,** but still, observing them was good practice since God had established them.)
 - **Decent argument, right?**
- **Other Christians said, "No, these things are part of the old law and the death of Jesus** has completely released us from these

things¹ Observe them if you want, but there's nothing inherently special about them.

How many would have been “**observe the holiday**” people?

I want you to note: **Paul had an opinion in both of these issues about which one was right.**

- Paul was **definitely on team “meat-eater.”** In vs. 14 he tells us: **14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.**
- **In Colossians 2 he says directly that after Christ** there is nothing inherently special in any day of the week.²
- Paul calls **those who didn't understand this “weak”** in their understanding of the gospel.
- And he wants them to be strengthened in faith by becoming **better informed** by the gospel.

So Paul is not saying, “**Everybody is right here! To each his own!**” Paul thinks the weak are wrong.

And that's what makes this passage so helpful.

Paul shows you what to do with people in the church who disagree with you on things you think are important. When you are really convinced they are wrong.

- (Again, we're **not talking about things directly addressed in Scripture or things essential for the faith**--WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT somebody who says, “I think there are multiple ways to

¹ (Interestingly, this question is still germane in parts of the church. 7th Day Adventists say we have to worship on Saturday. Others say, “No, we should do corporate worship on Sunday because that was the day of the Resurrection, and the early church worshipped on that day.” On the mission field, for those who work among Muslims, some move their corporate worship day to Friday, because that is the day Muslims take off and so, if you are going to choose a day to not work and go to church, the easiest day to do

God, or I feel good about living with my girlfriend, or ‘I think looking at pornography is ok.’ That's not what Paul is talking about.

- We're talking about **wisdom areas** where Scripture is not clear).

He says in those areas, UNITY is more important than UNIFORMITY.

You say, “**Oh, pastor, this is easy.** I'd never let anything not directly addressed in Scripture divide me with someone else.”

Really?

In the church I grew up in some Christians sometimes argued about **what you should wear to church:**

- Some said that God deserves our best in worship, and that should include what we wear.
 - They said, “If you were going to meet with royalty you would dress up, so shouldn't you dress up to come before God?”.
- Other Christians said, “**No--man looks on the outward appearance**, God looks on the heart. It doesn't matter what you wear.”
- But I knew Christians who were **genuinely bothered if they weren't dressed up** in church—like they were disrespecting God.

Dancing:

- **I was taught** that real Christians would never go dancing because dancing always leads to fornication.

that is a Friday. That was what my team did, and when we did I got reamed from some friends at home. They said, “No, Sunday is God's holy day. You have to worship then!”)

² See also Gal 4:10; Col 2:16–17. Requiring things that the Bible doesn't require, having greater strictness in non-essential matters, doesn't show that a person is a stronger Christian, but a weaker one. Tony Merida, “Love and Liberty” preached at Imago Dei Church on August 13, 2017.

- Of all the sins looked down on in my youth group, dancing was considered the worst!
- My youth pastor told me the reason we shouldn't make out with girls was that it might tempt us to go dancing.

The church I grew up in was totally teetotaler

- **We were taught,** “The Bible says, *‘Wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging and whoever is deceived by it is not wise.’*
 - **Technically we are free** in Christ to drink alcohol, but that doesn't mean it's wise.
 - Technically **we're free in Christ to disassemble a belt-fed machine gun** and eat it piece by piece. That doesn't mean it's wise.
 - We know that **1 in 7 people who drink develop a problem** with it, and so even if you don't develop a problem with it, someone who follows your example might, **so the most loving thing to do is avoid it altogether.** Right?
- **Others Christians say,** “But the Bible specifically says that God created wine for our enjoyment.
 - And **Jesus drank it,** so it can't be inherently sinful.
 - Just because something can be abused doesn't mean we avoid it. The **more Biblical approach** is to live out before your neighbors and kids a healthy, God-glorifying relationship with alcohol than to avoid it altogether.

That was the world I grew up in: Always-wear-your-Sunday-best- to-go-to-church and don't **drink or dance or chew** or go with girls who do. And **then I met and fell in love with a sweet little Presbyterian girl,** and you know how they are. They are free in Christ all over the place. She got me to loosen up a little... she even got me to start dancing. And then made me stop.

“We don't have questions about those anymore...”

Let me bring up a few more:

Is it ok for Christians to read or watch the **Harry Potter** series?

- **Some in this church say,** “Clearly, this is witchcraft. The story is literally about witches and wizards and some of the terms come straight from the occult. So, no, we should avoid any hint at Satanism.” I know you're here because I get letters from you.
- **Others say, “Look. It's fantasy like Lord of the Rings and Chronicles of Narnia.** There is good and bad. The kids even celebrate Christmas so they are clearly not Satanists. Plus, JK Rowling is a member of the Church of England. I've even got a book in my library called *The Gospel According to Harry Potter.*”

Can a Christian do Yoga?

- **Some say, “That's a Buddhist practice,** and you can't separate the practice from the origins. Yoga in its original formulations is about clearing your mind and finding oneness with the things around you, and that's not Christian. And they are right.
- **But others say, “I'm not going into all that when I do Yoga.** Yoga is just good stretching and there's nothing anti-Christian about letting your mind rest and listening to gong sounds for a few minutes.”
- So we have Christians with **different ideas on Yoga** in this church. And don't even get me started on Yoga pants.

How about this one: Joby Martin says, get a home-school mama and a public school mama together and ask what the best educational approach is and **then just get some popcorn** and sit back and prepare for a UFC bout.

- **Home-school mom be like:** *Sure, you can send your kid to the place where they outlaw prayer like in the times of Nebuchadnezzar and teach your kid that he came from monkeys and where he might get stabbed in the face by a gang member... that's fine ... but we love our son and want him to develop a biblical worldview so we homeschool. Statistically they are more*

likely to walk with Jesus if you do that, so clearly homeschooling is the godly choice.”

- **Public-school mom:** *Yeah, that’s cool. We just want our kids to have things like... social skills. We think it’s cool that Timmy can churn his own butter and make his own clothes but we want our son to know things like ... math. And we think our kids need to learn how to deal with the temptation of the world and not just run from it. After all, Jesus promised he would protect us in the world, not to vacate from it—and if all the Christians flee the public school, where is that going to leave society? How can we be salt and light to the world if we vacate it? Keeping our kids in public school is an act of love for our neighbor.*³
- **And some of you just bowed** up as I went through one of those. And you thought, “Well, that’s dumb.” And that’s the point. You are passionate about these things. **People in Paul’s day were just as passionate** about eating meat offered to idols and Jewish holy days.

You say, PJD, what’s your opinion? I’m not telling you. I will tell you that **on the school question**, we’ve done all 3: private school, home school and public school and saw advantages in each. (**Veronica says she couldn’t homeschool all 4 at once because** the Bible clearly says *Thou shalt not murder*. And my wife would’ve killed my kids if they were home-schooled)

How about this one? (Politics)

- **Some believers say**, “A man like Donald Trump with such severe ethical and moral compromises and who says such derogatory things about others should NEVER get a Christian’s support. I don’t care what good you think he’s done, he’s encouraged division and bigotry in America. Christians supporting Trump is a

compromise to our witness and our witness is worth more than any supposed political benefit.” So, #NeverTrump

- **Others say**, “Well, I am not a fan of all that he says and does, but I like him better than the alternatives. All the current Democrat candidates support abortion on demand, publicly flaunt Christian ideas on morality and marriage and promote restrictions on religious freedom, so even though I’m not a fan of his character or morality, I think the better choice is to vote for him. Just like God used the pagan King Cyrus in the Old Testament to help Israel, he can use Trump to do good things, too.”

Chances are, most of you have strong opinions on that and all the above.

We may not argue about eating meat sacrificed to idols and whether to observe the Feast of Tabernacles but there are **hundreds** of secondary issues we fight over.

So here are **Paul’s instructions on how to handle** these conflicts in the church:

1. Obey your conscience! (vs. 5)

⁵...Let each one be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶Whoever observes the day, observes it for the honor of the Lord. Whoever eats, eats for the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; and whoever does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat it, and he gives thanks to God.

³ Thanks to Joby Martin (in his sermon on Romans 14) for this fresh spin on this ever-present dynamic. Joby Martin, “Gospel Unity” preached at The Church of Eleven22 on August 19, 2018.

Whatever you do, you should be able to do it as an offering to God. Can you listen to this, watch this, participate in this as an offering to God?

Be fully convinced you can, because, here's the thing: If you feel like something is wrong, and you do it anyway, it's **wrong to you**:²³ **But whoever doubts stands condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith, and everything that is not from faith is sin.**

Does that make sense? Even though it was not wrong in itself, because you thought it might be wrong and did it anyway, it was wrong to you.

- Example: **To my knowledge, this (holding up two fingers) does not mean anything immoral in our culture.** But if I think it does, and I do it, it's sinful to me even though technically it doesn't mean anything).

The point is--obey your conscience, and don't do something unless you are *fully convinced*.

BECAUSE it's always dangerous to go against your conscience.

We don't talk about conscience much anymore--and that's a tragedy, because your **conscience is a gift** from God.

- It's a type of moral intuition where you know something before you can articulate it--a kind of 6th sense.
- That's the **etymology of the word: *con-science***. Science: to know. Con: with. It's something that goes "with" head knowledge that goes beyond it. Before your head knows it, your heart feels it.
- **It's a gift of God--be very cautious in going against it, because numbing it is dangerous.** Because, if you get used to doing what your heart feels is wrong, you'll gradually tear it apart until doing wrong doesn't even feel wrong anymore.

2. Be open to having your conscience reformed (vs. 5)

As I showed you, Paul challenges the weak in this passage to get stronger. First, he calls them weak and very gently explains how he sees the gospel applying to these questions.

So, even though your conscience is a precious gift from God, that doesn't mean it can't be wrong and become better informed. **And sometimes you have to challenge and reform it.**

- **The Christian school I grew up in** taught me that any kind of rock beat in music was sinful.
 - It was the devil's beat and even if you put Christian words to it, that was like serving a T-bone steak on a plate of manure.
 - **Later I learned that wasn't true**, but even after I knew that here, my heart would still feel guilty when we'd sing a song in church with a drum beat in it.
 - My conscience had to grow in the truth.
- It **bothered Peter's conscience to eat with Gentiles**. He'd grown up thinking that was impure. Paul told him in Galatians 2 that his **conscience was wrong** and needed to get more in line with the gospel.
- One more: Some of you grew up being taught **interracial marriage** was wrong, and even after you came to realize you were wrong, it still bothered you to see an interracial couple. You have to retrain your heart to feel the right thing.

So, obey your conscience, but be open to it being retrained.

(Honestly, this might be the most counter cultural thing I say in this whole sermon. **Are you humble enough to learn from another Christian** that you may not see something the right way? **SOME OF YOU HAVE A DISAGREEMENT IN SG AND JUST NEVER GO BACK**

What kind of great church would this be if members were willing to listen to each other and change their minds? Humble enough to listen--TELL ME ABOUT WHY YOU FIND THAT SO OBJECTIONABLE--and secure enough in their identity in Christ to be wrong.)

3. Be patient with those who don't see things as you see them (vs. 3)

³ One who eats must not look down on one who does not eat...

When you feel **freedom to do something that someone else** has a problem with, you'll probably be tempted to say, "*Why are you adding rules to the Bible? You're such a legalist.*" (DEF of LEGALIST--someone stricter than me)

But **one of two things is true:**

- **First, you might be wrong.** I'll just tell you, I'm a pastor and theology decade and I've changed my mind on a lot in the last decade. Nothing essential for the faith. The more I grow in Christ, the more I realize how much of my perspective has been shaped by my own selfish and sinful prejudices and cultural perspective.
- **Or two, God has graced you with insight he hasn't given to someone else yet.** Just realize that you didn't arrive at that insight because you were smarter--God gave you that insight as an act of grace. So be patient and gracious with others as God has been patient and gracious with you.

When the roles are reversed, and you don't approve of something someone else does, don't reject them:

⁴ Tony Merida, "Love and Liberty" preached at Imago Dei Church on August 13, 2017.

...and one who does not eat must not judge one who does, because God has accepted him.

When someone else does something you don't approve of, you'll be tempted to say, "Oh, you are just not very spiritual." "You are so worldly." Or maybe even, "You're not really a Christian." (The word "judge" (*krino*) means to pronounce doom."⁴)

But what does Paul say? "God has accepted that person despite their mistakes. So who are you to reject them?"

Do you realize how many times you've been wrong on in your spiritual life, and yet still God has never stopped accepting you? **Who are you then** to reject someone else?

- Friend, the **good news of the gospel is that God accepts us despite** our mistakes and **that should influence how we accept** one another!
- **How can you not fellowship with someone** that God is in fellowship with?
- Are you saying that your fellowship is more selective than God's?
- In fact, by not welcoming them, you are implying that God's acceptance of them is misguided!⁵

In **15:7** Paul says, "Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted you. This will glorify God!"

I love how **Michael Bird** summarizes this: Paul is bent on stressing that Jesus is Lord of the weak (i.e. teetotaling Sabbatarian vegan Jews) and the strong (i.e., bourbon-sipping, Saturday-shopping, bacon-munching Gentiles). If God has justified them, they cannot condemn each other. If God has raised them up, they cannot put each other down. If they belong to the Lord, they belong to each other. If

⁵ Ibid.

everyone calls him “Lord,” they must call each other “brothers and sisters.” If God has accepted them, they must accept each other.⁶

Recognize the sincerity of your brothers and sisters in Christ, and respect them even if you can’t fully go where they go.

The church is unique--our unity is not merely the weak conforming to the strong; it is the strong accommodating and bearing with and seeking to understand the weak.

Paul follows that up by saying, in vs. 4,

4. Stop judging God’s servants as if they reported to you (vs. 4)

⁴ Who are you to judge another’s household servant? Before his own Lord he stands or falls.

This one principle would dissolve so much conflict.

They don’t answer to you. If they are wrong, God will correct them. **Stop** acting like they answer to you.

Now, this doesn’t mean I **stop speaking my convictions**. Paul keeps expressing his in this passage.

But after saying his convictions, he still embraces those who disagree as brothers and sisters and he doesn’t look down on them.

- **Can you accept in close fellowship people** who see the public school/home school question like you?

⁶ Michael Bird, *Romans*. The Story of God Bible Commentary series. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic: 2016), 473.

- Why is it that home school families only seem to hang out with each other? Why do public school families only hang out together?
- Can you **accept into close fellowship** (like the same small group), those who answer the “who should we vote for” question differently?
- Or does the moment that come up in **your small group you find it ‘hard’** and make you look for another one?

Speak your convictions, but don’t stop embracing them and including them. **If God embraces them and welcomes them as beloved family**, so should you.

5. Prioritize your brother’s spiritual health over your freedom (v. 15, 19)

¹⁵ For if your brother or sister is hurt by what you eat, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy, by what you eat, someone for whom Christ died... ¹⁹ So then, let us pursue... what builds up one another. ²¹ It is a good thing not to eat meat, or drink wine, or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble.

Paul is saying, “If my eating Baal-blessed bacon is harmful to my brother, and they just can’t shake feelings of it being wrong, and their conscience is wrecked when I eat it, I’d rather **give up pork** than hurt them spiritually.

That’s love, friends. To the Gentile Christians, Paul is like, “Look--stop bringing your BLT sandwiches to discipleship group because your Jewish brother/sisters are freaking out.”

- And the Roman Christians were like, **“But Jesus died for bacon!”**

- **And Paul was like**, “Yeah, but even more importantly he died for your brother. Your focus should be the same as his: how can I help and build up my brother?”⁷

John Stott: “Did Christ love him enough to die for him, and shall we not love him enough to refrain from wounding his conscience? (The word Paul uses **in vs. 15 to say “wound” their conscience** means ‘grieve’ or ‘distress.’ Make them feel like they are participating in evil)”⁸

If your **drinking alcohol** really bothers someone’s conscience, don’t do it in front of them. Don’t talk about it. If it makes them stumble, love them more than your freedom.

6. Prioritize unity over uniformity (vs. 17)

¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit...

AGAIN: Truth matters. And some things are worth dividing over. Again, throughout his letters Paul would show that.

There is a time to divide--but the bar for division should be really, really high.

- One of **Jesus’ last prayers** was for the unity of the church.
- So, if I am going to separate, it should be about an essential matter.

The kingdom of God is not (about uniformity in) eating and drinking (It’s about peace and love and unity)

⁷ Joby Martin, “Gospel Unity” preached at The Church of Eleven22 on August 19, 2018.

⁸ . Did Christ sacrifice himself for his well-being, and shall we assert ourselves to his harm? Did Christ die to save him, and shall we not care if we

Unity in the body of Christ is **more essential than uniformity** in non-essential matters.

So, remember Michael Bird’s three levels of importance

- (1) Matters essential for salvation;
- (2) Matters that are important to the faith and the church, though not essential for salvation; (Again, these two are almost always spelled out clearly in Scripture). These we sometimes have to divide over.
- (3) Matters of indifference – non-essentials, debatable things, preferences, opinions. (alcohol, politics, school choices, and lesser-important doctrines like Calvinism).

These we should never divide over.

But that’s easier said than done, because some of these things we are passionate about.

For many things, family fellowship is more important than being recognized as right and unity is more important than uniformity.

The gospel, the body of Christ, our witness is more important than uniformity of opinion.

Can we be a church like this? Our community needs a church like this. Especially as we enter **2020**--we’ve got media outlets and politicians bent on polarizing us.

destroy him? John Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 365.

They need a **church that is more passionate** about Jesus than we are our opinions on non-essential matters.

- **That's why I rarely tell you about many of my opinions from up here...** It's not that I don't have them or I'm scared, it's that I want this church about the gospel and not about uniformity about non-essential and debatable matters.

Can we be that kind of church? Can we do it for Jesus?

Paul's summary: 14:8 If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

We are the Lord's and it is not pleasing to him to be united to Christ and divided over debatable issues.

- **Insisting on uniformity** with your opinions can be a very self-serving thing.
- Selfishly, we want to justify ourselves and show why we're right and only be around people who echo back to us how right we are.
- **Love lays down the desire to be exonerated as right** so we can serve and build up each other and please Jesus.

Wouldn't it be great to be a part of a church where our unity in the gospel was more important than our division over debatable things?

Can we do it for Jesus?

As a parent, when my kids fight, it hurts ME. SAME WITH JESUS

Can we do it for him?

If you just said Amen, then a bunch of you need to go home and change your Facebook posts today. A bunch of you are divided from

another member in our church because of disagreement over a non-essential and you need to repent and be reconciled today.

Let's be a church where our love of the gospel is stronger than our perspectives on debatable matters.

