

Reimagining Church

Part 4: How to have Unity with Diversity

Romans 14:1-4,13-19 and 15:5-7 - [watch online](#)

Summary:

We can move beyond polarization and division while still holding onto our convictions. But it will require us to reimagine church with patience, trust, and courage.

Main Ideas:

[01:16] Instead of reconciling our divisions the Church adds to them.

[01:48] The solution to a divided world is a united Church.

[03:27] It is possible for people who truly love Jesus to disagree on what it looks like to follow him.

[05:10] Acceptance is the key to unity.

[09:41] We can accept each other because God accepts each of us.

[10:49] Our responsibility is to ask “What does Jesus’ love look like” *in our own lives*.

[11:49] Acceptance requires us to embrace others without pushing our own views on them.

[13:24] Unity requires us to trust that the Holy Spirit knows what he is doing.

[14:31] Nothing shows a divided world the reality of Jesus’ love like a diverse yet unified church.

[17:41] We can disagree and still be in the same family.

[19:47] When the Church is united it can heal the divisions of the world.

Invitation:

[18:26] Read: Romans 14-15:13

[18:38] Evaluate:

- What issue(s) have I put above unity?
- What conviction do I not understand? How can I better understand someone with that conviction?

[19:06] Pray: Jesus help me follow you even when it seems to contradict what I think is true.

Discussion Questions

1. On a scale of 1-10 how comfortable did you feel with this message? Why do you think that is?
2. Have you ever felt pressured to conform to certain viewpoints or beliefs? What challenges do you foresee in accepting others with differing perspectives?
3. Read Romans 15:7. How do you think our attitudes toward acceptance and unity within the Church can impact the broader society?
4. How can we support each other in prioritizing genuine unity in the Holy Spirit over adhering to external norms or opinions?
5. How can your group pray with you this week?

Transcript:

IN: We can move beyond the polarization and division that has polluted our lives.

We can hold onto our convictions while still accepting, respecting, and actually loving each other.

And surprisingly, the Church was originally created to be the answer.

This isn't some bait and switch to get you to go to church services.

This isn't some wishful thinking or naive dream. It CAN happen... now.

But it requires us to reimagine church with patience, trust, and courage. So let's talk about it together.

WE: Everyday we are told we need to be outraged b/c that person that said/did that thing that makes them terrible people that want to ruin our world.

You're either against them or you are against us.

- If you're not as outraged as we are then either you're not paying attention, you're a mindless sheep or you're weak

It's exhausting... not just being outraged all the time but trying to keep up with what we should be outraged about.

And sadly... the Church, instead of being a beacon of hope and reconciliation... finds itself contributing to the very divisions it should be healing.

Instead of reconciling our divisions the Church adds to them.

We don't have to give into the division. We don't have to play along with this either/or game

Jesus came to bring us something better...

He created The Church/Ekklesia to be a new way of living... an alternative/different kingdom.

We can be what this world desperately needs right now.

We can reclaim our identity as agents of peace, love, and unity in a fractured world.

B/C... The solution to a divided world is a united Church.

BACKGROUND: Let me take you back to about 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection in AD 57.

- To a church that was as divided as the culture it found itself in.

A church had grown in the city of Rome... made up of Jewish and non-jewish JF's.

Sometime in the 40's, Emperor Claudias expelled all the Jews (including Jews that had become JF's) from Rome

- When they were allowed to return about 5 years later...
- JF-ing Jews found a church that had become very non-Jewish in custom and practice

Tensions soon arose...

Many of the returning Jews said, “Jesus is OUR Messiah and to follow him means keeping our Jewish laws.... Specifically celebrating the Sabbath, eating Kosher, and practicing circumcision.”

- “You gentiles are following some hippie dippy easy going love stuff... You’re morally weak... not living up to the righteousness God demands of us. You’re being soft on sin”

Gentile JF’s said, “Yeah, no thanks. We’ve been following Jesus just fine w/o all of that.”

- “You are weak minded and your faith is weak b/c you’re stuck in the past... not actually trusting Jesus”

The reality was... People who loved and followed Jesus were disagreeing on what was morally acceptable for a JF...

It is possible for people who truly love Jesus to disagree on what it looks like to follow him.

So the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to this very divided church. The book of Romans.

In it he provides a way forward for this ancient church that can help us navigate our divisions now...

Probably one of the most difficult messages to give...

- B/c most of us aren’t going to like the answer
- More people have left over what I’m about to tell you than any other reason.
- Why within the span of 3 days I was told we were too woke and then too conservative.
- So buckle up...

GOD: Romans 14:1 Who’s the weak and who’s the strong?

We always assume we are right and “strong” in faith.

And those with whom we disagree are weak... in their mind, in their faith, in their morals...

In this case...

Weak = The minority- Returning Jews holding onto old beliefs (conservatives if you will)

Strong = The majority- Gentile JF’s (more progressive in their thinking) embracing this new way to be the people of God

What does Paul tell us to do with people we consider weak in faith?

- Argue with them. Talk about them behind their back. Make sure everyone else is on your side. Kick them out of the church, leave them for another church?

Accept them. Acceptance is the key to unity.

Accepting... “You mean like getting along w/ people who see things a little differently?”

- Maybe they drink and I don’t but it’s cool. We can agree to disagree and mix it up.
- Maybe they are more conservative/liberal but we can still get along on the main stuff

Nothing too major like what God views as morally right or wrong... right?

But Paul says... “No... I’m talking about what you think are big issues...”

- “Don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.”
- These aren't just preferences, or minor issues...
- This is what they see as moral or immoral. What is right and wrong to do as a JF
- What it actually means to daily follow Jesus.

See we like the idea of unity... even acceptance... until we are actually passionate about the issue... then we can't imagine how any good person/Xian could think/believe such a thing...

And when there are these types of huge differences... Paul says accept each other and don't argue about it.

Accept people we feel hold views that contradict God's views?

“Uh that doesn't seem right, Paul... maybe give us an example...”

V. 2 We think, “What's the big deal? “Someone wants to be a vegetarian... fine whatever.”

Most commentators agree there is a lot more going on here.

In a Gentile city like Rome, the capital city of a pagan empire, it was near impossible to find meat that hadn't first been sacrificed and offered to an idol of some kind and to find meat that was prepared properly kosher.

So in the Jewish mind to eat any meat was running the risk of participating in idol worship... breaking the 1st two of the big 10 commandments.

- You shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not make idols

And to break the kosher food laws was to also break the laws God had given Israel.

Paul also brings up whether people see certain days as holy or not... most likely referring to keeping the Sabbath... commandment #4... which is rooted all the way back to the creation of the world.

For the Jews... These laws were/are a huge part of what it meant to be God's people

- Jews had faced death for staying faithful to these laws

So in the Jewish JF's mind if you are going to follow the Jewish Messiah and honor God obviously you must keep the laws he gave to Moses so long ago.

But the gentiles were never given these laws. Jesus had brought a new agreement for all people... Not based on rules but based on pledging allegiance to him as their true king.

And in this huge mess of conflicting strongly held moral views Paul says...

V. 3 Look down on = despise.

- The “strong” had a prideful disdain, condescending judgment on people whom they considered to be hung up on backward obsolete rules from the past.
- The “weak” did the same seeing themselves as the righteous few holding the line for God. Judging the others for not being as godly.

Paul tells both groups to stop judging/criticizing each other.

Why? B/c it's good to be nice. These are not important conversations?

No... b/c there's something that supersedes all of it... God has accepted them... both groups.

As pastor Ken Wilson said... We can accept each other w/o approving each other's moral standing on this or that issue. God does, or we couldn't be saved.

Do you think God refuses to accept us until all our beliefs line up perfectly with his?

- Of course not. And they never will.
- Yet he still loves us and accepts us.
- And as his people we are to do the same.

We can accept each other because God accepts each of us.

Listen carefully...

Whether or not we affirm each other's moral views should have no impact on whether or not we accept each other.

If fact... when we say “I affirm this behavior of yours or I don't affirm that”... we are actually standing in judgment of someone else's morality and taking the place of God.

- We are saying “I have the right to judge whether what you are doing/who you are is moral or not”
- And Paul says... you'd better knock that stuff off right now... b/c you're on dangerous ground

V. 4 It is not our role to judge someone else's service to God

God's the one who judges, and in the end you know what's going to happen?

- He will help them and they WILL stand and receive his approval... b/c Jesus has already saved them

Ultimately what you choose to do is between you and God. He is the one we all will give an account to.

Our responsibility is to ask “What does Jesus' love look like” in our own lives.

And sometimes God will give individuals different answers for their specific situations.

So we can't push our agendas/views on each other... forcing people to conform or leave...

- Pushing them to do what they think is wrong and be who they are not...

But how can we actually do this?

V. 13-16 Gentleness... not pushing our own way. But allowing each other to work out God's will for our lives

Acceptance requires us to embrace others without pushing our own views on them.

You want to keep eating kosher/keep sabbath, fine. You don't? Fine. Between you and God.

I won't push my views on you and you won't push yours on me.

I also won't flaunt it in front of you. "Mmmm this idol meat is soooo delicious. You're missing out."

We will both follow what God puts on our hearts b/c we both belong to him.

"Ok but won't this lead to just wishy-washy people doing whatever they want?" "Like how do we have any moral standards as a community?"

- I get it. I've been there.

But when we ask what seems like a very legitimate question we are forgetting one very important fact

- God's Spirit is living within and guiding each JF.

V. 17 KoG not about following the right rules... It is about living a life of goodness, peace and joy... IN THE HS.

So why would we judge each other on which rules we do or don't follow?

If we are all fully trusting the HS to guide us and lead us...

If we are willing to allow him to change our thoughts, hearts, motives... **then he will.**

We are not each others' Holy Spirit. Let him do his job in his time in his way.

Unity requires us to trust that the Holy Spirit knows what he is doing.

What you think someone needs to work on might be something he never gets to for them b/c there's more important things for them to discover that you aren't aware of.

So what do we do instead? **V. 18-19**

Instead of trying to decide who's in and out. Whom we should approve of and affirm or not... our goal should be harmony and building each other up (whether they agree with you or not)...

- Support and love and care for each other.

And if we can get this right... our divided world will notice... **15:5-7**

Nothing shows a divided world the reality of Jesus' love like a diverse yet unified church.

But instead we pick our pet issues and use them as a litmus test to see if they are "true Xians"

B/c, I mean some of these issues are not disputable... the bible is very clear on some of these things...

- *You've been thinking of that one issue this whole time haven't you?*

Yes... The bible writings are very clear on some things for sure...

But many people would have told Paul, "The bible is very clear about meat sacrificed to idols and observing the sabbath."

- It would have been incredibly controversial just for Paul to say these things are disputable.

So how do we decide what is disputable and what isn't...

Disputable when...

- It doesn't involve a matter of basic/core Xian belief...
 - There is one God, in 3 persons, Jesus as part of that trinity came to earth as fully human and fully God.
 - Lived a perfect life of love, died to free us from sin and rose again conquering sin and death.
 - He now reigns as king and invites everyone to join his kingdom of love and peace now and forever.
- When both sides can make reasonable appeals to Scripture
- When faithful, loving JF's take different views on the issue
 - Almost every hot button topic that divides us today has Jesus loving biblical experts who have spent their lives studying the languages, cultures, beliefs that created the biblical text... on both sides.
 - Including the ones we've been told the Bible is clear on...
 - Abortion / LGBTQ+ / Evolution / Gender Roles / Israel and Palestine / The nature of hell/ The rapture
 - If the world's best experts can love Jesus and disagree, maybe we can too.

So is there ever a time to draw a line? Of course...

What's not disputable?

- Pride. Greed. Hypocrisy and judging. Adultery.
- Murder (what constitutes murder?)
- Abuse
- Our obligation to care for and protect the weak, marginalized, poor.
- Forgiving our enemies
- Loving our neighbor

CROSSCREEK: So at CCC what makes us family isn't our shared view on this or that subject (even the ones we see as "the big ones")... what makes us family is Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

We say... We can disagree and still be in the same family.

What does that mean/look like in every situation for every issue?

- You probably have some specific issues you're thinking of...

- The best I can give you right now is we are still working on it. Ongoing conversation.

As pastor Ken Wilson wrote... "We can disagree on this question without separating from each other. We can hold our respective positions as firmly as our conscience dictates. But we have chosen not to treat this matter as something we have to hold in common in order to share a true unity of the Spirit."

YOU: So invitation: **Read:** Romans 14-15:13... don't just take my word for it. Read it for yourself. Especially if feels uncomfortable.

Evaluate:

- What issue(s) have I put above unity?
- What conviction do I not understand? How can I better understand someone with that conviction?
 - If we say... I just can't understand how a Xian could hold such views... it means we haven't asked

Pray: Jesus help me follow you even when it seems to contradict what I think is true.

WE: Imagine the freedom we would have to simply love each other...

If we were free from having to evaluate other people's choices.

If we freed ourselves from the debates that have ensnared our world and churches.

If we didn't take on the moral authority to affirm or not affirm someone else's convictions?

But we fiercely, boldly, and courageously chose to accept each other the same way God accepts us?

What would happen if our focus was true unity in the HS instead of conformity to some group's chosen view?

This is the unity our world desperately needs... When the Church is united it can heal the divisions of the world.

John 13:34-35