

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

CAN CHRISTIANS WITH DIFFERENT DOCTRINES HAVE BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP?

EPHESIANS 4:1-16



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

RTS-124

Can Christians With Different Doctrines Have Biblical Fellowship

Sermon

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

Today we are asking a question that reaches into our churches, our friendships and sometimes our own families.

Can Christians with different doctrines have Biblical fellowship?

Imagine two men sitting at the same table with open Bibles.

One is a Baptist.

The other is a Pentecostal.

Both say that the Bible is the Word of God.

Both confess that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Both believe that He died for our sins, was buried and rose again.

Both say that sinners must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But they disagree about speaking in tongues.

The Baptist believes that every believer receives the Holy Ghost at salvation.

He may also believe that the miraculous sign gifts belonged especially to the apostolic age.

The Pentecostal believes that the gifts continue and that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Ghost.

Can both men be saved?

Can they call each other brother?

Can they pray together?

Can they serve the poor together?

Can they preach from the same pulpit?

Those questions sound similar, but they are not identical.

Recognizing someone as a Christian does not mean endorsing everything that person believes.

Loving someone does not mean surrendering conviction.

Holding conviction does not give us permission to become proud or cruel.

Some Christians act as though every disagreement proves that the other person is unsaved.

Others act as though doctrine does not matter as long as everybody is sincere.

The Bible permits neither extreme.

Our primary passage is Ephesians chapter 4.

Paul begins by saying, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

Then he tells us how believers are to walk.

"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."

Notice that Paul does not begin with winning an argument.

He begins with lowliness.

He begins with meekness.

He begins with patience.

He begins with believers bearing with one another in love.

Then verse 3 says, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

We do not manufacture the unity of the Spirit.

The Holy Ghost creates that unity when He places believers into the Body of Christ.

Our responsibility is to keep it.

But Paul does not describe unity as an empty feeling.

He gives it doctrinal content.

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism."

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

Biblical unity rests upon Biblical truth.

Later in the same chapter Paul warns that believers must no longer be children "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."

Then he gives the balance in verse 15.

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ."

We need truth.

We need love.

Truth without love can become harsh and proud.

Love without truth can become weak and deceptive.

The church needs both because Christ is full of both grace and truth.

Here is the controlling truth for this study.

Every Biblical doctrine matters, but not every doctrinal disagreement has the same effect upon salvation, church membership or Christian fellowship.

Let us begin with something we should be willing to admit.

God's Word is perfect, but our understanding is not.

Psalm 19:7 says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul."

The defect is not in Scripture.

The defect is in the people who read Scripture.

We bring limited knowledge.

We bring traditions.

We bring experiences.

We bring assumptions we may never have examined.

Sometimes we see clearly what another person overlooks.

Sometimes another person sees something we have overlooked.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:9, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part."

That does not mean truth is uncertain.

It means our present knowledge is incomplete.

No Christian living today understands every verse perfectly.

No pastor has corrected every mistaken conclusion.

No denomination has permission to speak as though its name guarantees infallibility.

Acts chapter 18 introduces us to Apollos.

The Bible calls him eloquent.

It says he was mighty in the Scriptures.

It says he was fervent in spirit.

It says he taught diligently the things of the Lord.

But his knowledge was incomplete.

He knew only the baptism of John.

Aquila and Priscilla heard him.

They did not ridicule him.

They did not spread a warning that nobody should speak to him.

They took him unto them "and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

Apollos was sincere and gifted, but he still needed correction.

Then there was Peter.

Peter had walked with Jesus.

Peter had preached on Pentecost.

Peter had seen thousands saved.

Yet Galatians chapter 2 records a time when Peter behaved wrongly toward Gentile believers.

Paul said that Peter "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel."

Paul corrected him publicly because the error was public and other people were being led astray.
Peter's error was serious.
Yet Paul did not say that Peter had never been saved.
The presence of error does not always prove the absence of salvation.
There is, however, a difference between a teachable mistake and a stubborn rejection of God's Word.
Apollos received instruction.
Peter received correction.
A believer who loves truth should be willing to open the Bible and be corrected.
The goal is not perfect knowledge before fellowship.
The goal is humble submission to the perfect Word of God.
That brings us to salvation.
A person does not need to know everything in order to be saved.
But a person must believe something.
Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."
We are not saved because we passed a theology examination.
We are not saved because we understood Revelation.
We are not saved because we could explain every spiritual gift.
We are not saved because the church sign said Baptist.
We are not saved because the church sign said Pentecostal.
We are saved by grace through faith.
But faith is not powerful merely because it is sincere.
Faith must rest in the right Person.
The jailer asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"
They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."
First Corinthians 15 gives the content of the Gospel.
Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.
He was buried.
He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.
Paul calls these matters of first importance.
There are truths without which the Gospel is no longer the Gospel.
If Jesus is not the eternal Son of God, we have another Jesus.

If Jesus did not truly die, there is no payment for sin.

If Jesus did not bodily rise, our faith is vain.

If salvation is earned through works, grace is no more grace.

Galatians chapter 1 warns about "another gospel."

Paul says that even if an angel from heaven preached another gospel, that message must be rejected.

The messenger does not judge the Gospel.

The Gospel judges the messenger.

We are not saved by knowing everything about Christ.

But we cannot be saved by trusting a different Christ.

This is why doctrine matters.

Doctrine means teaching.

Sound doctrine is healthy teaching that agrees with God's Word and produces godly living.

Some people hear the word doctrine and imagine a cold classroom.

Paul connected doctrine with salvation, worship, conduct, families, churches and daily holiness.

Doctrine tells us who God is.

Doctrine tells us who we are.

Doctrine tells us what sin has done.

Doctrine tells us what Christ accomplished.

Doctrine tells us how a sinner is reconciled to God.

Doctrine tells us how redeemed people should live.

Wrong doctrine can injure people because wrong beliefs eventually shape wrong worship and wrong conduct.

Yet Scripture itself treats different errors differently.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul speaks of matters "first of all."

In Matthew 23 Jesus speaks of "the weightier matters of the law."

Romans 14 speaks of "doubtful disputations."

Second Peter 2 warns about "damnable heresies."

The Bible does not respond to an incomplete understanding, a disputable matter and another gospel in exactly the same way.

We need Biblical discernment.

First, there are foundational truths.

These identify the one true God, the Biblical Christ and the saving Gospel.

They include the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

They include His sinless life, His death for our sins and His bodily resurrection.

They include salvation by grace through faith.

They include the necessity of repentance and the authority of Scripture.

To deny such truths may place a person outside Biblical Christianity.

Second, there are doctrines necessary for life together in one local church.

Two people may both be saved and still disagree about baptism.

One may baptize believers by immersion.

Another may baptize infants.

Both cannot practice their convictions in the same congregation without the church deciding what it will do.

Christians may disagree about church government, the Lord's Supper, pastoral leadership or spiritual gifts.

Those disagreements may prevent them from joining the same church without proving that one is lost.

Third, there are serious errors that require correction.

Peter's conduct in Galatians 2 endangered the truth of the Gospel.

Paul confronted him.

Yet correction did not require declaring Peter an unbeliever.

We should be able to say, "I recognize you as my brother, but I cannot endorse what you are teaching."

Fourth, there are disputable matters and questions of conscience.

Romans 14 describes believers who disagreed about food and the observance of days.

One believed that he might eat all things.

Another ate herbs.

One esteemed one day above another.

Another esteemed every day alike.

Paul did not tell them to pretend that they agreed.

He told them to receive one another.

The strong were not to despise the weak.

The weak were not to judge the strong.

Why?

Because God had received them.

Romans 14:4 asks, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?"

Every Christian belongs to the Lord.
Every Christian will give account to God.
Paul also tells believers not to use liberty in a way that harms another person's conscience.
The kingdom of God is not meat and drink.
We are to follow the things that make for peace and edification.
But Romans 14 cannot be used as a bag into which we throw every controversy.
Paul never called idolatry a doubtful disputation.
He never called sexual immorality a matter of private conscience.
He never treated denial of the resurrection as an acceptable alternative.
He never received another gospel as one more denominational perspective.
A doctrine does not become disputable merely because Christians dispute it.
How should we weigh a disagreement?
Ask whether it changes who God is.
Ask whether it changes who Jesus is.
Ask whether it changes what Christ accomplished.
Ask whether it adds anything to the conditions of salvation.
Ask how clearly Scripture addresses it.
Ask what effect it has upon worship, church leadership and the lives of believers.
Ask whether the person is confused but teachable or determined to spread division.
Every doctrine matters because every word God has spoken matters.
But not every disagreement carries the same consequence.
Now we must define fellowship.
The New Testament word translated fellowship is koinonia.
It speaks of sharing, participation, partnership and communion.
Fellowship is more than being polite.
But fellowship is also not one single activity with one single level of agreement.
I can show kindness to someone who does not believe the Gospel at all.
Jesus commanded us to love our enemies.
Human kindness does not require doctrinal agreement.
Churches may cooperate in community service.
They may help families after a disaster.
They may feed hungry people.
They may defend the lives of unborn children.

Such cooperation requires agreement about the work being done, but it does not necessarily mean full spiritual partnership.

Recognizing someone as a Christian requires agreement about the Biblical Christ and Gospel.

Joint evangelism requires clear agreement about the message being preached.

We cannot stand before a lost person and offer two contradictory answers to the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

Shared worship requires greater agreement because the service teaches through prayer, music, testimony and practice.

Sharing a pulpit requires still greater agreement.

Inviting a preacher communicates trust and gives that person authority before the congregation.

Local church membership requires agreement about the doctrines that govern worship, ordinances, discipline and leadership.

Pastoral leadership requires the greatest doctrinal agreement because a pastor is charged to teach sound doctrine and protect the flock.

Here is a helpful principle.

The closer a partnership comes to representing Christ, preaching the Gospel and exercising spiritual authority, the greater the doctrinal agreement must be.

Christian love may cross some boundaries that church leadership cannot cross.

Amos 3:3 is often quoted at this point.

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

That verse is sometimes used as though two Christians must agree about everything before they can cooperate in anything.

In context Amos is explaining God's covenant controversy with Israel.

The surrounding questions show that effects have causes.

The verse is not a command that every Christian must reach identical conclusions on every doctrine.

The underlying practical principle is still reasonable.

People walking toward a shared purpose must agree about that purpose.

They do not need agreement about everything, but they need sufficient agreement for the work they undertake.

Now let us return to our Baptist and Pentecostal.

We must begin by refusing to judge people only by labels.

Not all Baptists believe exactly alike.

Not all Pentecostals believe exactly alike.

Ask what the person actually believes.

The common Baptist position is that every believer receives the Holy Ghost at conversion.

Romans 8:9 says, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body."

Ephesians 1 says that after believing, Christians are sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.

Many Baptists also believe that miraculous sign gifts ceased after serving their apostolic purpose.

Other Baptists leave room for certain gifts to continue but reject tongues as a required sign.

The common Trinitarian Pentecostal position also teaches salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

It commonly distinguishes conversion from a later baptism in the Holy Ghost for power and service.

Many Pentecostals teach that speaking in tongues is the initial physical evidence of that experience.

They appeal especially to Acts 2, Acts 10 and Acts 19.

We must separate three questions.

Do tongues continue today?

Are tongues the initial evidence of baptism in the Holy Ghost?

Are tongues necessary for salvation?

Those are not the same claim.

A Baptist and Pentecostal may disagree about the first two while still confessing the same Gospel.

The third question directly affects the Gospel because it makes a particular experience a condition of salvation.

First Corinthians 12:30 asks, "Do all speak with tongues?"

The expected answer is no.

Pentecostals commonly answer that Paul is discussing the congregational gift of tongues while initial evidence is a separate use.

That distinction should be heard fairly.

Then it should be tested from Scripture.

Acts does not record tongues in every conversion account.

The epistles do not command every believer to demonstrate salvation by speaking in tongues.

Paul's question shows that the gift is not possessed by every member of the Body.

First Corinthians 14 also regulates public tongues.

There must be interpretation.

Speakers must take turns.

The number must be limited.

If there is no interpreter, the speaker is to keep silence in the church.

"Let all things be done decently and in order."

Even Christians who believe tongues continue must submit the practice to Paul's commands.

Speaking in tongues does not save a person.

The absence of tongues does not prove that the Holy Ghost is absent.

The Gospel calls sinners to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does that mean every group called Pentecostal presents only a secondary disagreement?

No.

Trinitarian Pentecostalism must be distinguished from Oneness Pentecostalism.

Trinitarian Pentecostals confess one God and the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as distinct divine Persons.

They may share the foundational Christian Gospel with Baptists while differing about gifts and Spirit baptism.

Oneness teaching denies the eternal personal distinction of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Some Oneness groups also connect salvation with baptism using a particular formula and receiving tongues as evidence.

That is not merely a disagreement about whether a gift continues.

It raises questions about the nature of God, the identity of Christ and the conditions of salvation.

We must not say that all Pentecostals are unsaved.

We must not say that every Pentecostal difference is secondary.

We must open the Bible and examine actual beliefs.

Can a Baptist and a Trinitarian Pentecostal both be saved?

Yes, if both are trusting the Biblical Christ through the Biblical Gospel.

Can they call each other brother?

Yes, if Christ has received them, they should not deny each other the love owed within His family.

Can they pray for one another?

Yes, while remaining honest about their differences.

Can they serve the suffering together?

Often they can, when the purpose and boundaries are clear.

Can they teach one position on tongues together?

No, not while they continue to hold contradictory conclusions.

Can they operate one congregation together?

That may be difficult because their beliefs affect worship, teaching and pastoral care.

Could they share a pulpit?

That requires careful judgment because the pulpit communicates endorsement and carries responsibility for the congregation.

The answer to fellowship is not a careless yes to everything.

It is not an angry no to everything.

It is a Biblical answer shaped by the Gospel, the doctrine involved and the purpose of the partnership.

Acts chapter 15 gives us another important example.

Some teachers came from Judaea and told Gentile believers, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

That was not a disagreement about preference.

It changed the answer to the question of salvation.

Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension with them.

The apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem and examined the issue.

Peter testified that God purified Gentile hearts by faith.

He warned against placing a yoke upon them.

James appealed to Scripture.

The church sent a clear written answer.

Notice the pattern.

They did not call a Gospel issue unimportant for the sake of peace.

They listened to testimony.

They examined Scripture.

They reached a doctrinal conclusion.

Then they gave pastoral instructions that would help Jewish and Gentile believers live together without needless offense.

Acts 15 holds conviction and consideration together.

Later in the same chapter Paul and Barnabas disagreed about taking John Mark on another journey.

Their disagreement became so sharp that they traveled separately.

The Bible does not tell us that either man preached another Gospel.

It does not tell us that either man became an unbeliever.

Their ministry judgment produced separate teams.

Later Paul spoke of Mark as profitable to him for the ministry.

Sometimes Christians may serve Christ separately without declaring one another enemies.

Separation of ministry assignment is not always separation from the family of God.

Mark chapter 9 provides a warning against denominational ownership of God's work.

John told Jesus that the disciples had seen someone casting out devils in Christ's name.

They tried to stop him because, John said, "he followeth not us."

Jesus answered, "Forbid him not."

The man was not one of the Twelve, but he was acting in Christ's name and was not speaking evil of Christ.

The disciples confused following Jesus with belonging to their immediate circle.

We can make the same mistake.

We may begin to think that if someone does not follow our group, use our vocabulary or share all our customs, he cannot belong to Christ.

Jesus did not teach that every ministry claim should be accepted without examination.

He did correct the possessive spirit that assumed all legitimate service had to pass through the disciples' circle.

Philippians chapter 3 offers another useful word.

Paul wrote, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Then he said, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

Paul expected mature believers to share a direction while recognizing that God was still teaching them.

They were to walk faithfully in the light already received.

They were not to stop pursuing truth.

They were also not to abandon every relationship the moment understanding differed.

This gives us a practical picture of fellowship.

We walk together where we share Biblical conviction.

We keep studying where we differ.

We refuse to make progress in one area an excuse for pride in another.

We give God room to correct us as well as the other person.

There is also a difference between fellowship and endorsement.

Eating lunch with a preacher does not mean you approve every sermon he has preached.

Praying for a church after a disaster does not mean you have adopted its entire statement of faith.

Allowing someone to teach your congregation carries a different message because a pulpit conveys trust.

Putting a ministry's name on a joint Gospel campaign communicates more than working beside its volunteers at a food distribution.

Wisdom asks what the partnership will communicate to those who observe it.

Paul was concerned not only with personal intention but also with the effect of conduct upon others.

We should avoid dishonest fellowship that conceals major disagreements.

We should also avoid guilt by association that treats every ordinary contact as complete endorsement.

The New Testament shows believers eating together, receiving travelers, cooperating in relief, sending missionaries and guarding pulpits.

Those activities do not all require the same degree of agreement.

Correction also belongs within fellowship.

Aquila and Priscilla corrected Apollos.

Paul corrected Peter.

Second Timothy 2 says the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach and patient.

Correction should be Biblical.

It should be specific.

It should seek restoration.

It should distinguish confusion from rebellion.

It should not exaggerate what the other person believes.

Proper correction does not always destroy fellowship.

It may protect and deepen fellowship.

Yet there are times when Scripture commands separation.

Another gospel must be rejected.

Those who deny the doctrine of Christ must not be treated as authorized Christian teachers.

Romans 16 tells believers to mark those who cause divisions contrary to apostolic doctrine.

Titus 3 says a persistent heretic is to be rejected after admonition.

First Corinthians 5 shows that open, unrepentant conduct can also break fellowship.

Separation should have a Biblical reason.

It should not be driven by personality, jealousy, rumor or competition.

We must not reject someone Christ has received.

We must not receive a teaching Christ has condemned.

There is another danger we must face.

Sometimes our arguments are not really about truth.

They are about pride.

First Corinthians opens with believers forming parties around favorite leaders.

One said, "I am of Paul."

Another said, "I am of Apollos."

Another said, "I am of Cephas."

Paul asked, "Is Christ divided?"

Denominational history can help us identify convictions and organize churches.

But denominational identity must never replace identity in Christ.

Ask yourself whether you are defending Scripture or defending your reputation.

Ask whether you have accurately understood the other person.

Ask whether you have mistaken tradition for a command of God.

Ask whether you have turned your preference into a test of salvation.

Ask whether you are minimizing a serious error because you are afraid of conflict.

Ask whether you want restoration or merely want victory.

James 3 describes the wisdom from above as pure, peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated.

Biblical conviction is not threatened by humility.

Biblical love is not threatened by honest disagreement.

Can I correct someone without despising him?

Can I receive correction without resenting it?

Can I recognize a brother without endorsing every belief?

Can I establish a boundary without becoming hateful?

Those questions reveal the condition of our hearts.

Return with me to Ephesians 4.

There is one body.

There is one Spirit.

There is one hope.

There is one Lord.

There is one faith.

There is one baptism.

There is one God and Father of all.

That unity does not mean every believer has already reached the same maturity.
God gave teachers because believers still need to learn.
He warned about winds of doctrine because believers can be deceived.
He commanded truth in love because truth and love must remain together.
I will not demand perfect knowledge from my brother because I do not possess perfect knowledge myself.
I will not sacrifice Biblical truth for superficial peace.
I will hold firmly to Christ and His Gospel.
I will receive those whom Christ has received.
I will establish necessary boundaries with humility, courage and love.
Before asking whether you have fellowship with a Baptist or Pentecostal, ask whether you have fellowship with God.
First John 1:3 says, "And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."
You are not saved because you belong to the correct denomination.
You are not saved because you speak in tongues.
You are not saved because you reject tongues.
You are not saved because you know more doctrine than someone else.
You are saved only through Jesus Christ.
He died for your sins.
He was buried.
He rose again.
He offers forgiveness and eternal life.
Turn from your sin.
Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
Call upon Him today.
If Christ has received someone, be careful before you reject that person.
If Christ has condemned a teaching, be careful before you receive it.
Open your Bible.
Examine every doctrine.
Listen carefully.
Correct humbly.
Receive correction graciously.
Love every genuine brother and sister.

Protect the Gospel.

Speak the truth in love.

Seek unity in Christ without compromising the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the Gospel by which sinners are saved.

Thank You for every brother and sister whom You have received through Jesus Christ.

Forgive us when pride turns a disagreement into contempt.

Forgive us when fear causes us to remain silent about serious error.

Give us wisdom to distinguish foundational truth from matters of conscience.

Give us courage to defend the Gospel.

Give us gentleness when we correct one another.

Give us humility when we need to be corrected.

Protect this church from false doctrine and from needless division.

For anyone who has never trusted Jesus Christ, bring that person to repentance and faith today.

May our fellowship be with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

As we close, remember that Christian fellowship is not built upon pretending that differences do not exist.

It is built upon belonging to the same Savior and submitting ourselves to the same Word.

We may not agree about every doctrine today.

But we can open the Bible together.

We can speak honestly.

We can listen humbly.

We can defend the Gospel without treating every difference as another gospel.

We can love one another without calling error truth.

We can remain faithful to Christ while remembering that He is the Head of His church.

Aloha Nui Loa.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

Can Christians With Different Doctrines Have Biblical Fellowship

Commentary

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Introduction

This commentary examines the principal passages governing doctrinal unity, disagreement, correction and separation. Ephesians 4:1 through 16 supplies the controlling text. John 17, Romans 14 and 15, First Corinthians 12 through 14 and the warning passages define the boundaries of fellowship.

The Biblical conclusion is neither unlimited cooperation nor separation over every difference. Believers share fellowship through Christ and His Gospel. They pursue doctrinal maturity, receive one another in disputable matters, correct harmful error and refuse fellowship that endorses another Christ or another Gospel.

Ephesians 4 1

Paul identifies himself as the prisoner of the Lord and beseeches believers to walk worthy of their calling. Doctrine and conduct are joined. The first three chapters describe God's saving work and the creation of one new people in Christ. Chapter 4 calls that redeemed people to live consistently with what God has done.

Worthy does not mean earning salvation. It describes a life fitting the grace already received. The discussion of fellowship therefore begins with shared calling rather than denominational achievement.

Ephesians 4 2

Lowliness opposes the pride that often inflames doctrinal disagreement. Meekness is strength governed by submission to God. Longsuffering remains patient with immature and difficult people. Forbearing in love means bearing with real weaknesses rather than demanding immediate perfection.

These virtues do not require tolerating false gospels or abuse. They govern the character of believers as they pursue truth and unity.

Ephesians 4 3

Endeavouring indicates diligent effort. Unity is valuable enough to protect. Paul calls it the unity of the Spirit because the Holy Ghost creates it among those joined to Christ.

The bond of peace is not peace at any price. It is the relational bond appropriate to those reconciled to God and one another through Christ. Believers preserve unity by humility, patience, forgiveness and truth.

Ephesians 4 4 to 6

The repeated word one gives Christian unity objective content. One body identifies the church. One Spirit identifies its divine source. One hope identifies the shared destiny of believers.

One Lord centers unity upon Jesus Christ. One faith may refer to shared faith in Christ and the apostolic content believed. One baptism marks union and confession. One God and Father places the entire confession under the one true God.

Paul's unity is therefore doctrinal without demanding exhaustive agreement. The foundation is specific, but believers within the one body still need growth and teaching.

Ephesians 4 7 to 10

Unity does not erase diversity. Grace is given according to Christ's gift. The ascended Christ distributes gifts to His people. Different gifts and ministries should serve one body rather than become grounds for rivalry.

This principle is relevant to debates about spiritual gifts. Diversity is governed by Christ, exercised for others and accountable to apostolic instruction.

Ephesians 4 11 to 12

Christ gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, ministry and edification of the body. The existence of teachers assumes believers have not reached complete doctrinal maturity.

Teaching is not a weapon for creating personal followers. Its purpose is to equip saints and build the body. Pastors must therefore correct error while seeking the good of the people they teach.

Ephesians 4 13

The goal is unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. Paul describes movement toward maturity. Present differences do not justify complacency, but neither do they prove that unity is impossible.

The measure is the fullness of Christ rather than the customs of one group. Churches should seek conformity to Christ through Scripture.

Ephesians 4 14

Children are vulnerable to instability. Winds of doctrine, human trickery and calculated deception threaten the church. Unity cannot mean openness to every teaching.

Doctrinal discernment protects believers from exploitation. A teacher's sincerity, popularity or claimed experience cannot replace examination by Scripture.

Ephesians 4 15 to 16

Speaking the truth in love describes both content and manner. Truth without love violates the command. Love that conceals necessary truth also fails the passage.

Growth comes from Christ the Head. Every part contributes to the body's edification in love. Denominational leaders and gifted teachers remain subordinate to Christ.

John 17 17 to 23

Jesus prays, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." He then prays that His followers may be one. Truth and unity are joined within the same prayer.

The unity reflects the relationship of the Father and Son and serves as witness to the world. The passage cannot support a unity that ignores Christ's identity or contradicts His Word.

Acts 18 24 to 28

Apollos is described positively as eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent and diligent. His knowledge is also incomplete because he knows only John's baptism.

Aquila and Priscilla take him aside and explain the way of God more perfectly. The response combines discernment, hospitality and correction. Apollos then continues fruitful ministry. The passage demonstrates that incomplete doctrine may be corrected within fellowship.

Galatians 2 11 to 14

Peter withdraws from Gentile believers under pressure. His behavior leads others into hypocrisy and contradicts the truth of the Gospel. Paul withstands him publicly.

The issue is not a private preference because conduct is obscuring justification and Gentile inclusion. Public harm requires public correction. Yet the confrontation occurs between recognized apostles and does not imply Peter was never saved.

Romans 14 1 to 4

The church is to receive the weak in faith without turning reception into a forum for quarrels. The examples concern food and conscience. The one who eats must not despise the one who abstains, and the one who abstains must not condemn the one who eats.

The decisive statement is that God has received the believer. Verse 4 reminds each person that the other is the Lord's servant. This limits human judgment without eliminating all doctrinal discernment.

Romans 14 5 to 9

Believers differ regarding the estimation of days. Each is to be fully persuaded in his own mind and act unto the Lord. Conscience is personal but not autonomous. It remains accountable to Christ.

Christ's lordship over living and dying supplies common ground deeper than the disputed practice.

Romans 14 10 to 12

Both contempt and condemnation are forbidden because all will stand before Christ's judgment seat. Each will give account of himself to God.

The passage does not say doctrine is private or correction is wrong. It rebukes the attempt to occupy God's final judgment seat in matters He has left to conscience.

Romans 14 13 to 23

Paul redirects judgment toward self-examination. Believers must not place a stumbling block before a brother. Liberty is governed by love and the spiritual welfare of another person.

The kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Believers pursue peace and edification. Faith concerning liberty may be held before God, but action that violates conscience is sin.

These verses cannot be extended to another gospel or conduct Scripture explicitly condemns. The matters in view permit faithful believers to honor the Lord from different conscientious positions.

Romans 15 1 to 7

The strong bear the infirmities of the weak and do not please themselves. Christ provides the supreme pattern of self-denial. Scripture produces patience and hope.

Verse 7 commands, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God." Reception rests upon Christ's gracious reception and aims at God's glory. It does not require agreement on every conscience question.

First Corinthians 1 10 to 13

Paul rebukes factions built around Paul, Apollos, Cephas and Christ. Loyalty to respected leaders has become a source of boasting. The question "Is Christ divided?" exposes the contradiction.

Denominational names may identify real convictions, but they must never displace allegiance to Christ or become proof of spiritual superiority.

First Corinthians 12 13

Paul states that by one Spirit all believers were baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, bond or free. The repeated all supports a common work of the Spirit shared by every Christian.

Baptist theology commonly understands this as Spirit baptism occurring with conversion. Pentecostal theology often distinguishes incorporation into the body from an empowering experience described in Acts. The interpretation must account for Paul's universal language and the narrative passages together.

First Corinthians 12 29 to 30

Paul asks a series of questions: Are all apostles, prophets or teachers? Do all work miracles, heal or speak with tongues? The expected answer is no. The body needs diverse members and gifts.

Pentecostals who teach initial-evidence tongues distinguish that manifestation from the gift Paul discusses. The distinction is a theological inference rather than an explicit distinction stated in this verse and should be evaluated accordingly.

First Corinthians 14

Paul values intelligible edification in gathered worship. Uninterpreted tongues do not edify the congregation because hearers do not understand. Interpretation permits the church to receive the benefit.

Verses 27 and 28 limit public speakers, require orderly turns and require silence when no interpreter is present. Verse 33 grounds order in God's character. Verse 40 concludes, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

The chapter does not teach that tongues save, prove conversion or belong to every believer. It regulates a gift within the body.

First Corinthians 15 1 to 4

Paul identifies the Gospel preached, received and believed. Christ died for sins, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures. These facts stand at the center of saving proclamation.

Doctrinal fellowship must preserve this Gospel. Disagreement that changes the identity of Christ, the meaning of His death, the reality of His resurrection or the reception of salvation cannot be treated like a Romans 14 matter.

Galatians 1 6 to 9

The Galatians are moving toward a different message that is not truly another gospel. Paul pronounces judgment even upon an apostle or angel who preaches contrary to the received Gospel.

The severity demonstrates that Gospel error requires a different response from disagreement over food or days. Personal warmth and institutional cooperation cannot legitimize another gospel.

Second Corinthians 11 3 to 4

Paul warns about another Jesus, another spirit and another gospel. Religious vocabulary alone does not establish common faith. The content attached to Jesus and salvation must be examined.

This passage supports asking what a person actually believes rather than relying on Baptist, Pentecostal or Christian labels.

First John 4 1 to 3

Believers must test the spirits because false prophets have entered the world. Confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh is a central test.

Spiritual experience is not self-authenticating. Claims of prophecy, tongues, revelation or power remain subject to the apostolic confession of Christ.

Second John 7 to 11

John addresses deceivers who do not confess Jesus Christ come in the flesh. The command not to receive or endorse such teachers protects the church from participation in their evil work.

The passage should not be expanded into a ban on hospitality toward every Christian who holds a secondary error. Its stated concern is denial of the doctrine of Christ and active support of deceiving teachers.

Romans 16 17 to 18

Paul commands believers to mark and avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to learned apostolic doctrine. The people described serve their own appetites and deceive the simple through persuasive speech.

The passage targets divisive false teachers rather than every believer who asks a sincere question or holds a correctable misunderstanding.

Titus 3 9 to 11

Foolish disputes and strivings that are unprofitable should be avoided. A heretical or factious person is admonished twice and then rejected if he persists.

The sequence includes patience and boundaries. The church does not separate at the first difficulty, but neither does it permit endless division.

Acts 15 1 to 35

Teachers from Judaea make circumcision necessary for salvation. Paul and Barnabas dispute the claim because it changes the Gospel rather than merely preserving a Jewish custom.

Peter testifies that God gave the Holy Ghost to Gentiles and purified their hearts by faith. He rejects placing upon them a yoke neither the fathers nor the apostles could bear. Salvation is through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

James reasons from the prophets and proposes a judgment that does not require Gentiles to become Jews. The letter combines doctrinal clarity with pastoral instructions for life between Jewish and Gentile believers. The church does not preserve unity by leaving the Gospel undefined.

Acts 15 36 to 41

Paul and Barnabas disagree sharply about taking John Mark. The dispute concerns a ministry judgment rather than the identity of Christ or the means of salvation. They travel separately and multiply missionary effort.

Later references to Mark show restored usefulness. The passage cautions against interpreting every ministry separation as proof that one participant is outside the faith.

Mark 9 38 to 40

John reports that the disciples forbade a man casting out devils in Christ's name because he did not follow them. Jesus commands, "Forbid him not." The disciples have confused allegiance to Christ with membership in their immediate group.

The passage does not make every religious claim legitimate. It does warn churches against acting as though Christ can work only through their circle or denominational identity.

Philippians 1 15 to 18

Paul distinguishes corrupt motives from the content preached. Some preach Christ from envy and strife, yet Paul rejoices that Christ is proclaimed. He does not approve selfish ambition, but he recognizes a true message despite an impure motive.

The passage shows that evaluation may require more than one question. A true Gospel does not excuse sinful motives, and sinful motives do not necessarily turn every true statement into false doctrine.

Philippians 3 15 to 16

Paul allows that mature believers may be otherwise minded and trusts God to reveal the matter. He then commands them to walk by the same rule according to what they have attained.

The verses support patience within continued pursuit of truth. They do not praise disagreement or permit rejection of the Gospel.

Second Timothy 2 23 to 26

Foolish questions that generate strife are to be avoided. The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but gentle, able to teach, patient and meek when instructing opponents.

The desired result is repentance and acknowledgment of truth. The manner of correction must therefore agree with its restorative purpose.

James 3 13 to 18

James contrasts bitter envy and strife with wisdom from above. Earthly wisdom produces confusion, while heavenly wisdom is pure, peaceable, gentle, approachable and full of mercy.

Correct words spoken from envy or selfish ambition do not display mature Christian wisdom. The passage examines the spirit and fruit of doctrinal controversy.

First Corinthians 5

Paul requires discipline for open, unrepentant immorality among those professing Christian identity. Fellowship may be broken by conduct as well as formal doctrine.

Biblical doctrine includes the moral implications of the Gospel. A verbal confession cannot be used to shield defiant sin from church discipline.

Amos 3 3

The question "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" appears in a series of cause-and-effect questions supporting the prophetic announcement of judgment. The immediate subject is God's covenant case against Israel.

The verse should not be made into a universal rule requiring total doctrinal agreement before any shared activity. It does illustrate that purposeful partnership requires agreement appropriate to the purpose.

Baptist and Pentecostal Application

The Baptist and Trinitarian Pentecostal may agree on Scripture, the Trinity, Christ's deity and humanity, His death and resurrection and salvation through repentance and faith. Such agreement can support Christian recognition despite serious disagreement about gifts.

Their differences may limit joint worship, pulpit exchange, pastoral leadership and local church membership. Cooperation in mercy ministry may require less agreement than joint evangelism. Joint evangelism requires a common answer concerning salvation.

A teaching that makes tongues necessary for salvation moves the issue from the operation of gifts toward the content of the Gospel. Oneness doctrine raises an additional foundational question concerning the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Each person and church should be evaluated by actual confession and practice.

Pastoral Synthesis

Christians should receive those whom Christ has received, correct one another from Scripture and refuse to treat personal preferences as tests of salvation. They should also guard the Gospel, protect congregations from harmful teaching and establish boundaries appropriate to the ministry involved.

The proper posture combines confidence and humility. Confidence rests in Scripture and the Gospel. Humility recognizes partial knowledge, personal fallibility and dependence upon grace. The goal is a church growing into Christ through truth spoken in love.

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