Agree To Disagree

**Introduction:** As a congregation of saints we are to be perfectly joined together in the same mind and same judgment (I Cor. 1:10). Christ prayed that all believers be one, that the world might believe that He was indeed the Christ (John 17). Many other passages such as Acts 4:32, teach that ideally a collectivity of saints should be of one heart and soul...to be of one accord. But, does this mean that the members of a congregation must agree on everything? That they must have the same interpretation of every Scripture? Or are there some things in which they can agree to disagree? That is what I wish to discuss with you in this sermon. I do not believe there is any congregation in the world that every single member agrees 100% on every single thing. Unless it is a congregation of two. Ha! And even those two probably disagree on something. -- But seriously, a congregation will typically be comprised of a mixed bag of folks....some full grown, some “babes”...some who have progressed nicely in faith, while others have failed to grow...some have won significant battles of the flesh, while others are still in the heat of battle with Satan over bad attitudes...some are loving and generous and hospitable, while others are selfish...and on and on we go.

Before I go any further, may I say that oneness or unity may be maintained with such diversity...and let me illustrate. A husband and wife are said to be ONE and must act like it as well, right?...but does this mean that they see eye to eye on everything? Well, that question need not be answered. Ha! Does it even mean they cannot be outspoken in expressing such differences? Absolutely not. But, they are still united...or at least can be and should be. -- And when children are brought into the picture, you will likely find all kinds of differing opinions, but the family stay intact. The father might even say, “we have to all stick together...we
are family” when things become strained. -- The church is a family...the household of God...we are brothers and sisters. I trust you can already see the application. But, let me specifically speak to it.

An eldership needs to be two or more...God has taught us by example His desire for such...but has not said why. Why might you think it wise? Most popular answer: “Two heads are better than one.” Right? What are you saying? That it is GOOD to have varying ideas...checks and balances...etc. Will a plurality of bishops ever have differing ideas pertaining to the operation of the congregation? Of course. But, must they always go forward unified in their decisions and leadership? Of course. When we had business meetings, we often had lots of ideas floated on some topic, but then a consensus was reached so that the church remained united in its collective action.

Now, this can be expanded to the entire fellowship...and SHOULD be. But, in what things can we agree to disagree? Or have opposing viewpoints and even convictions and still remain united in faith and practice? Well, I could give you a short answer, but let me develop it with you and it may then make better sense. -- First of all, I think we already practice agreeing to disagree. But does that make it right? Never! Is it pleasing to God must be settled FIRST, then, if so, in what things are we permitted to do so. Did churches discussed in the New Testament withdraw for every “error”? Absolutely not...there were saints in Corinth who had disagreements over meat sacrificed to idols... or bought in the marketplace possibly having been sacrificed to idols...or eaten at a supper, where the host may or may not have offered it earlier to an idol (I Cor 8 & 10)...but no instructions to disfellowship. Some had serious doubts about the resurrection (I Cor 15)...no instructions about breaking off ties with such...there were even abuses of the communion
(I Cor 11)...and still no talk about removing such from their number! These problems were not ignored, but at least for awhile their presence did not compromise other brethren. Generally, the severing of ties would be when and if behavior became destructive. More on this as I go along.

I know it scares some people to differ. I am not sure I know why that is. Maybe it is due to thinking if I allow for a difference, then I might be allowing for the possibility of me being wrong...Or maybe it is because we feel it will appear weak to allow for such...Or maybe something else. -- Raise your hand if you have ever changed your mind on the meaning of any passage of Scripture over the years since your baptism. Does that mean that back then you were a pagan and should have been removed from the church? Of course not! Well, someone now might be you back then...and YOU might even change again in the future. We just are not static in spiritual learning and neither is anyone else...we are all at various measures of faith and growth. It is actually God’s will that we have a sort of one room school house, wherein we have spiritual growth at various grades all under one roof for mutual edification. But, allowances have to be made for that...agreeing to disagree on some things. Like what?

I) **Accepting a new convert.** I recall Ed Harrell one time saying...”The way some people are talking about drawing lines of fellowship, they are going to eventually baptize someone and then disfellowship him!” -- He might be very carnally minded...have all kinds of vices and habits...know practically nothing about the Bible, yet we embrace him gladly and for possibly a long time. This is the way it ought to be. Now, some might say, but after awhile that can’t just be allowed to continue. And who is going to be the one to decide when enough time has elapsed for growth? Not I. Read Hebrews 5:12-13...here we are told of some who had
continued as babes well past when they should...but notice two things...it is an in-
spired writer saying so and he also still recognizes them as saints in assembly
(10:25). So how long do we agree to disagree with babes in Christ with whom
more mature Christians differ in knowledge...and likely practice? I don’t have a de-
finite answer for that. No one does. We have no one inspired to make that
judgment...but I do recognize it can go on a long time. -- Anyway, most all have
no problem here. But, just be sure you register it...you are agreeing to disagree
with a brother in your fellowship. So it can be done.

II) Next, those weak in the faith? Romans 14 addresses this subject...Are we
permitted to agree to disagree here? Not only is it permissible..it is commanded!
Read 14:1...Receive...accept...If you consider yourself strong in the
faith...knowledgeable in the gospel...then one evidence is ability to bear with those
who are weaker. Does this mean we cannot discuss the differences? Under some
conditions I think further education can take place...but it will likely be very grad-
ual. The warnings are actually to the contrary...see 14:1 again...no continual
disputing...15:1 says BEAR with their scruples...Paul tells Timothy there are some
topics which need to be avoided...why? They only gender strife - II Timothy
2:23-24....they lead to quarreling...a no-no for saints. I will come back to this
later...the idea of causing discord among brethren.

Let me first dispel one idea some might have...Paul is not addressing the man who
is weak in his own faith...this might be the new convert or one who has just not
grown in the faith as he should...this we have already spoken about in the previ-
ous point...but this is one weak in THE faith. The man himself may be very
conscientious...very faithful...never miss a church service...be zealous for God.
Why weak? The inspired apostle lays down the law of Christ on the matter in
14:14...making food regulations is a weak position. He gives other examples ---respect of a holy day (5-6)...drinking no wine is implied (21)...something it seems Timothy was doing, I might add (I Tim. 5:23). -- From other places in the NT, circumcision was an issue, eating meat offered to idols potentially made for problems. Speaking of circumcision... it was only a problem when it was pushed on people or made a requirement of salvation. Otherwise, Paul says it matters not one way or the other. He even had Timothy circumcised for the expediency of it. -- Likewise foods...it became a huge problem when people began forbidding it (see I Tim. 4:3). Otherwise, it would have been fine.

Some of these had religious import to some folks...but none to others. I think today of things like participation in Christmas, Halloween, Easter, etc. Agree to disagree? Sure! BTW, Why do we disagree? Because we have differing brains. We do not all think alike. And why do we not all think alike? Cultural backgrounds may cause differences. Varying religious backgrounds may cause some to have differing views of these things. -- Some man-made religious bodies have tried to circumvent this “problem” and empower one or more leaders of all their churches to make rulings for every member...especially in all those many areas of judgment and application of principles. They write creed books spelling out what you must believe if you are a member of their church. You know the problem with all that? God does not allow for it. So, there are going to be differences...and we would do well to be okay with that and maybe actually see it as refreshing liberty in Christ....rather than a frightening disillusionment. We are all made priests, responsible for ourself before God.

But, he mentions wine in 14:21. So, there might be personal judgments about things which we may not normally associate with religion...questions of individual
conscience...things that do not affect anyone else whatsoever...but on which we differ with others. Along these lines might be questions concerning a Christian serving in the armed forces...smoking tobacco...what are acceptable lengths of hair on men...and women...the length of hemlines, and 101 other such matters. There may even be differences on questions such as abortion, euthanasia, and artificial insemination. Interpretations may differ...maturity levels may cause differences...applications of principles affect differences. -- But, Paul tells them how to deal with it. They are to receive each other WITH the differences and NOT to constant debate either. Chapter 15 says the same way Jesus has accepted us, so we do one another. Jesus has accepted us WITH all our faults...the ones we are working on correcting still...but it is seemingly taking years!

### III) What About Assembly Differences?

The things done in the church gatherings together must be agreed upon...for they have to be done together. Just as an illustration....you cannot have both instrumental accompaniment and accapela (vocal only) at the same time in the same place. But, there can even be disagreements in some areas along these lines, just so long as no one feels it must be done and respect is given for the direction the elders have set for the group. A new convert may take some time to appreciate why their new congregation does not use instrumental music, but have no problem worshipping without it (I have never met anyone who thought it wrong just to sing)...The same might apply to questions about the use of church funds for human organizations, social functions, etc. There have been and still may be those here who have those views, but do not have any qualms in us not doing so. I have asked a number of times when someone has requested membership here...do you have any problem in us not doing that here? Will you be causing problems over us not doing so? So far, so good. It might be of interest to you that I have done this
very thing myself...for 2 years while I lived in England I ate of one loaf and drank of one container...though I think it wrong to require it that way as others there thought. I agreed to disagree.

Speaking of the Lord’s Supper, there are those who think the Lord’s Supper should not be provided to only a few on Sunday evenings...but if the elders of the congregation see fit to do so, then no problem. They agree to disagree. They may choose not to participate themselves if unable to eat in the morning, but have no problem with others having the right to follow their conscience in doing so. They never raise a stink over it. -- There may be some who feel women ought to wear an artificial covering when in the church services and others who do not...I can sit beside my father, Jim Sasser, who has differs with me on this subject and embrace him not only as my dear old dad, but my beloved brother in Christ. And you know what else? If he should die before me and I eulogize him, I will speak with the greatest of confidence of him having gone home to be with Jesus. But, how can that be? He and you differ on the covering question? One of you has to go to hell over this. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong! No one is going to heaven because they have every passage understood right and practiced everything flawlessly. Anyone wanting to go down that path? Not me. Sinless living? No one will make it into eternal glory without mercy and forgiveness. Dad may need it for one thing and me for another, but I am certain both of us will need some....actually a whole LOT! I think this is one major reason why some have a hard time with differences...they think if you differ you are insinuating I am wrong...and if I am wrong, then I am made to feel guilty.
**IV) What Areas Can We NOT Agree To Disagree?**

1. One not abiding in the doctrine of Christ -- II John 9-11...I think this umbrella would include acceptance of those who have not correctly obeyed the gospel. On this we cannot agree to disagree.

2. Unrepentant immorality - I Cor. 5. On this we cannot agree to disagree. Fornication, adultery, homosexuality, drunkenness, idolatry, extortion, covetousness, etc. This brings shame and reproach upon the group...and it has a way of spreading like leaven to others. This cannot be permitted to abide in the group.

3. Sowing discord - Those factious, divisive and disruptive to the group - Romans 16:17-18...this is right after Romans 14! Also Titus 3:9-11. Even if a man is holding to the truth he can be excluded from the fellowship due to him jeopardizing the integrity and unity of the band of saints. It’s a judgment call...but one God enjoins upon the shepherds to make. On this there can be no agree to disagree.

4. Walking disorderly - II Thess. 3:6-15...Just as an earthly father may have to make a tough call on someone’s disorderly behavior being destructive to the others of the family, so in Christ’s family. Agree to disagree? Can’t do it and please God.

5. False teachers - Revelation 2:20-21; Titus 1:9-11...entire households may be subverted...maybe an entire household of God...and bishops must seek to stop it. Agree to disagree? No way.

**Conclusion:** This study has not been the exhaustive treatise on the subject. But, maybe less is more. Less is good. -- It is also not very scholarly...something I am not capable of anyway. But, maybe that is good, too. I do not wish to overlook anyone with profit from this. May God bless the preaching of His word. Amen.