

# When Christians disagree

## discussion guide

based on **Acts 15** and **Romans 14-15**

which can be accessed at [www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series](http://www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series)

*This was a two-part series. Dan preached on Acts 15 and Simon on Romans 14-15.*

Intro: Think of a discussion (disagreement!) you've had with someone (not necessarily in church) which has felt constructive rather than destructive. What made it so?

Are you the sort of person who loves a good debate, or hates disagreements and wants to keep the peace? Why? How might you also need people with the opposite temperament to help you?

**Read Galatians 2.11-16** (for some background) **and Acts 15.1-19**

The debate about whether or not Gentile believers needed to be circumcised to be full members of God's family was the hot issue, causing such deep divisions that Jewish Christians weren't eating with Gentile Christians. If they couldn't even share at the communion table together, where was their unity in Christ?!

Between them, Dan and Simon suggested a 5 step process to go through for when Christians disagree:

1. Stop and think – why do you believe what you believe?
2. Listen carefully to the other person – so you fully understand why they think and behave as they do
3. Look deeply at the Scriptures to see what they say on the matter – taking the whole sweep of Scripture into account, not just individual verses
4. Love liberally – even if you still disagree with the other person, how can you love them in practice?
5. Rejoice – for God wants to help us in our disagreements, giving us his Spirit of truth who will guide us into all truth (John 16.13)

How can you see these things being modelled in the Acts passage?

**Read Romans 14.13-21 and 15.2**

What practical instructions and reminders here help us work out how to 'love liberally'? Give some examples of how you've seen these happening?

Dan suggested 3 levels of disagreements – primary issues (where Scripture is clear about what Christians should believe), secondary issues (where Scripture is ambiguous, so it's ok to agree to disagree) and wisdom issues (where it's up to us). The key thing is to work out which level of issue is being discussed, and not escalate or relegate an issue.

Simon talked about disputable issues (adiaphora in the Greek of Romans 14) and undisputable issues.

What do you find helpful / unhelpful about those categorisations?

How does this passage speak to our desire to be a God-dependent, grace-filled, Bible-based, mission-focused, authentic community?

**Up (love God):** Spend some time praying for unity in our church, and in the worldwide church. Use Romans 15.5-6 as a prayer. Pray, too, for wisdom and grace to disagree well with others.

**In (love each other):** Share with each other which of the 5 steps mentioned above you find hardest? How can you help each other grow in these areas?

**Out (reach the world):** A non-Christian friend / colleague complains "You Christians are always disagreeing with each other!" How could you respond in such a way that is honest, yet also points to Jesus and the hope that we have in him?