

# Letters to the Church



FEBRUARY '24

## DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

*Ugh, but still, why does that difficult person have to be in my church?*

It doesn't take being a local church member for very long before you discover that every Sunday morning, you assemble with other people who may rub you the wrong way. Maybe their social media posts make you cringe. Maybe their parenting choices make you concerned. Maybe their politics are the exact opposite of yours. In every church, clear differences in personal opinions which cause disagreements are inevitable.



We humans naturally associate with others whose opinions, preferences, and tendencies match our own. We even expect this sort of behavior in other social settings (sounds like middle school all over again), but do we have the courage of faith in Christ to build something better than that at 700 Market Street?

Instead of a cause for debate and discouragement, disagreements in the church are an opportunity to bear a beautiful testimony of the gospel's power to unite us in Christ. After all, if everyone in the church were just like you, unity might be easy, but it wouldn't be glorious! Therefore, the existence of all these matters of personal disagreement in a local church shouldn't be seen as an indicator that things have gone tragically *wrong*, but that things are going gloriously *right*! We don't want a church built on Christ and personal opinions - but Christ and Christ alone.

We live in a world that is infatuated with the idea of love but detests its biblical implications. We naturally love for selfish reasons. We love people like ourselves, and they easily love us in return. Christ has commanded us to love better than that. *If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (Luke 6:32)* Loving people who hold convictions that are opposing to yours is countercultural and, in the world's eyes, folly. There's no place for fraternizing with the enemy. Socially uniting with them and publicly identifying with them each week is contemptible. Laying those differences aside and calling them a brother or sister is incomprehensible. But the love that is difficult is the love that matters the most.

Christ has a way of doing this to people. Jesus brought Simon the Zealot (an insurrectionist who hated the Roman occupiers) onto the same team as Matthew the tax collector (a collaborator with the Romans). Following Christ, I'm sure many of their convictions were changed, but not all of their preferences disappeared. What a display of gospel glory for those two men to stand together! A unity that insists on uniformity isn't unity at all. It's a cheap counterfeit. Genuine and Biblical unity is found amid real and passionate differences that we set aside in the recognition that our differences are nowhere as important as the King we serve.

Some disagreements that fracture the world have no place in the church because the Scripture speaks so clearly to answer the matter. The world will always fight about those topics, and we will rejoice at the Word together. However, there are many issues on which Christians can legitimately disagree until Christ returns. Many of these things have to do with our individual lives, our personal conscience, and our own walks with God. Discerning between these takes gospel wisdom and grace.

So suppose a matter like this comes up between you and another member at 700 Market Street (of course, we're only speaking hypothetically); when it becomes clear that a legitimate matter of personal disagreement arises, what will you do? Will you press the matter? Will you make them listen to the whole speech you rehearsed in the shower this morning while you argue with them in your head? Or will you yield and love a difficult person, just as Christ commanded and loved you? And yes, they may even be *wrong*, but if they are *right* about the gospel - then that makes them *right* with God, and I hope with you.

**YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,**



SHAWN WEIR