

# Working on Unity

Romans 14:1 – 15:13



Apostle Paul (~ 5 – 67 A.D.)  
By Andrei Rublev (1410)

Previously in Romans



# Previously in Romans

- Paul's goals:
  - To introduce himself to the Roman church in preparation for later mission work.
  - To encourage unity among Jewish and Gentile believers.
  - To thoroughly explain the gospel he preaches as the means to both of the above.

# Previously in Romans

- Key verses: **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

# Previously in Romans

- Key phrase: “the obedience of faith” (1:5, 16:26)
- Faith and obedience are *related* – *not rival* ideas.
- The gospel brings about **faith** which leads to **obedience**.
- This was Christ’s intention for Paul’s apostleship.

# Previously in Romans

- In **Romans 1 – 11**, Paul described right belief.
- In **Romans 12 – 15**, he describes right conduct.
- One of the key areas of right conduct he deals with is how to maintain unity in the church.

# Working on Unity Introduction

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- First a story:
- Training for a missions task.

# Working on Unity Introduction

- One of Paul's primary goals is to ensure unity among believers from various backgrounds.
- Today's passage will deal primarily with this point.

# Working on Unity Introduction

*The church in Rome consisted of converts from Jewish as well as Gentile backgrounds ... Different backgrounds can give rise to problems. As a sympathetic pastor who desires to welcome all groups into the church, Paul advises accepting those whose faith is weak without quarrelling over disputable matters.*

*– Ramesh Khatri, Association of Theological Education in Nepal*



# Working on Unity Introduction

- Big fancy word alert: **Adiaphoron** (pl. **Adiaphora**)
- From **Merriam-Webster**:
  1. In ***Stoic philosophy***: a matter having no moral merit or demerit.
  2. In ***Christianity***: a ceremonial or ritual observance that is held to be an affair of the individual conscience because it is neither forbidden nor enjoined by the Scriptures.

# Working on Unity Introduction

## Today's Passage:

1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12
2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23
3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7
4. Christ Our Hope 15:8-13

1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12



# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12

*Those weak in the faith felt that they must do some things and abstain from others to stay close to God. Because of the role of the law in their past, many Jewish believers probably fell into this group ...*

*– David M. Kasali, Bilingual Christian  
University of the Congo*



# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12

*Those who were 'strong' would argue that such scruples were unnecessary, and that what one eats or does not eat has nothing to do with one's relationship with God. In this context, the 'strong' were probably the Gentiles, who were the majority in the Roman church.*

*– David M. Kasali, Bilingual Christian  
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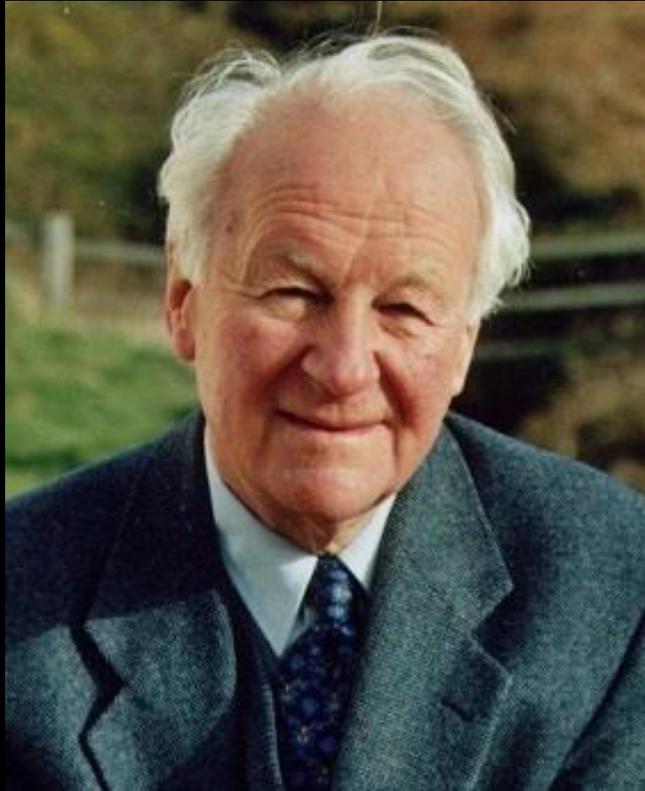
# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12

- People in our churches today still fit into these categories.
- One group might be those who grew up in more religious homes or who have gone to churches with many rules.
- The other group has less exposure to rules and feels more freedom in their Christianity.

# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12

- Some examples might be:
  - How one dresses for church.
  - Whether or not a Christian can drink alcohol.
  - Whether or not a Christian can watch an R-rated movie.
- The Bible is not perfectly clear on these things leaving room for personal convictions.

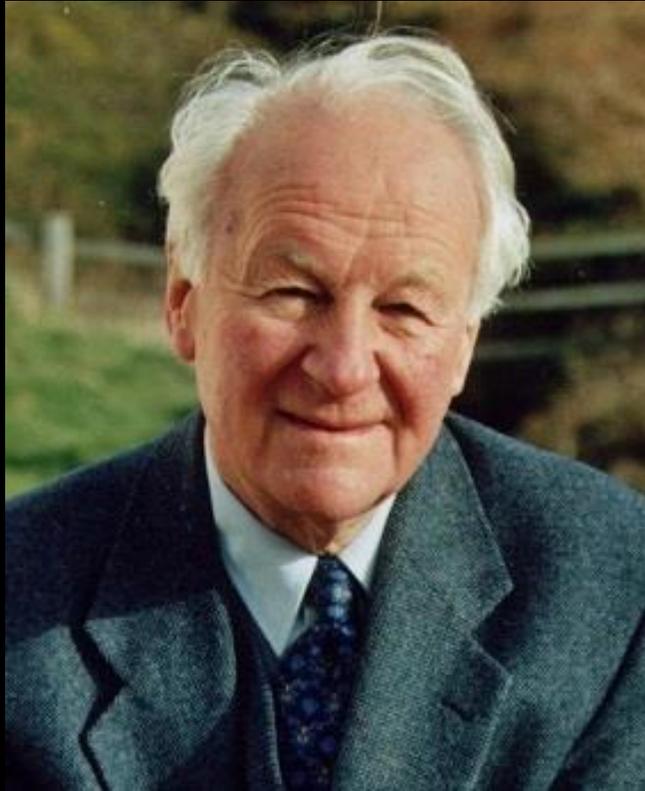
# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12



*We must not elevate non-essentials, especially issues of custom and ceremony, to the level of the essential and make them tests of orthodoxy and conditions of fellowship ...*

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),  
All Souls Church, London*

# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12



*Nor must we marginalize fundamental theological or moral questions as if they were only cultural and of no great importance. Paul distinguished between these things; so should we.*

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),  
All Souls Church, London*

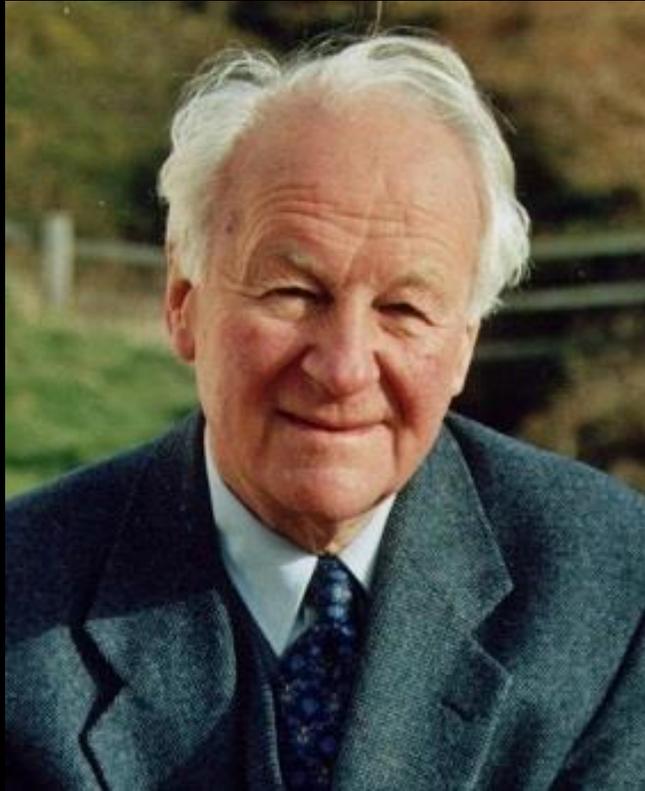
# 1. Strong and Weak 14:1-12

- Ultimately God will judge us all.
- This should be a sobering, corrective thought.
- It does not exempt us from the need to make moral assessments when they arise.

## 2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23



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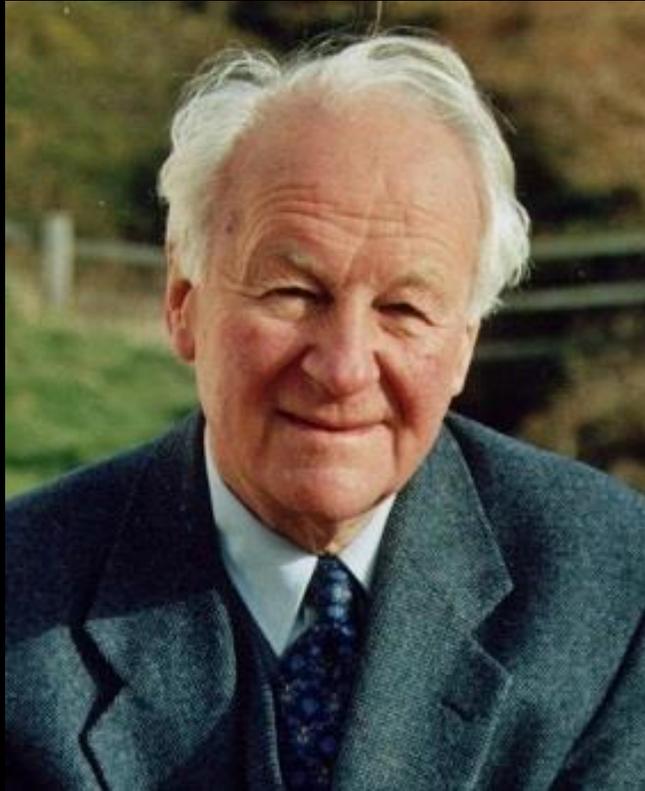
*Although the strong are correct, and [Paul] shares their conviction because the Lord Jesus has endorsed it, they must not ride roughshod over the scruples of the weak ... On the contrary, they must defer to the weaker brother's conscience (even though it is mistaken) and not violate it or cause him to violate it ... Love limits its own liberty.*

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),  
All Souls Church, London*

## 2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23

- 14:15, 20 Paul goes so far as to use the word “destroy” in this context.
- Right theology, when held with a wrong attitude, can be a powerful force for division in the church.
- Right beliefs are essential, but they are not enough.

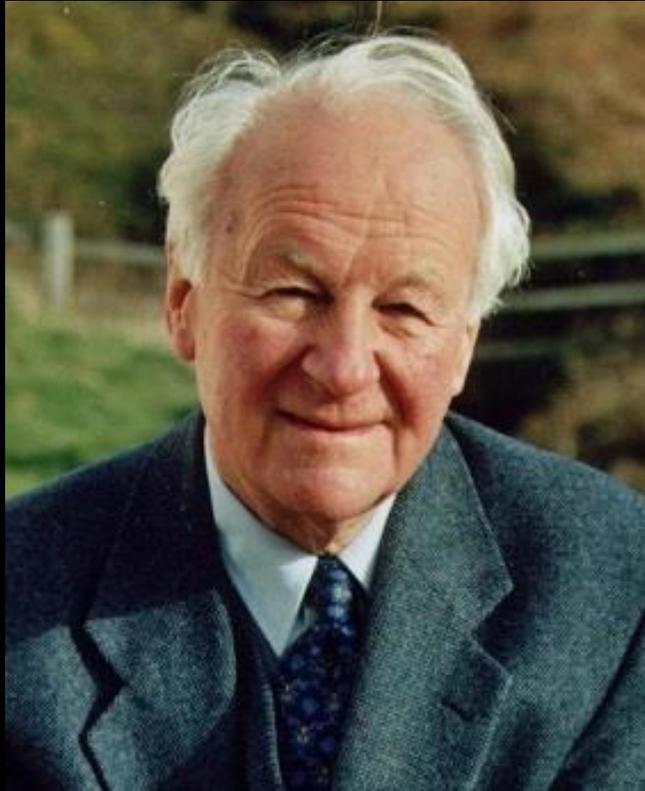
## 2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23



*In fundamentals, then, faith is primary, and we may not appeal to love as an excuse to deny essential faith. In non-fundamentals, however, love is primary, and we may not appeal to zeal for the faith as an excuse for failures in love ...*

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),  
All Souls Church, London*

## 2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23



*Faith instructs our own conscience; love respects the conscience of others. Faith gives liberty; love limits its exercise.*

*– John Stott (1921 – 2011),  
All Souls Church, London*

## 2. Causing to Stumble 14:13-23

- When our motivation is right, this can become one of our guiding verses.
- **Romans 14:21** (ESV)

It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

### 3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7



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- Paul uses deep theology for a very practical purpose.
- He appeals to no sentimental ideas of love, but the love exemplified by Christ on the cross.

### 3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7

- It is a love like Christ's that brings unity.
- Further, it brings the highest form of praise and glory to God.
- The idea is that every imaginable type of follower of Christ can unite in a perfect harmony of worship.

### 3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7



*Paul does not require absolute uniformity of thinking, as if Christians need to be clones, never disagreeing about anything. Rather, he refers to a unity in spirit and attitude, an underlying sense of belonging to each other and loving each other that creates a loving context for the differences that inevitably exist among believers ...*

*– Douglas Moo,  
Wheaton Graduate School*

### 3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7



*It is when we exhibit this kind of united spirit that the church is able to praise God as he desires to be praised (v. 6). God is especially honored when his people unite, “with one mind and one voice,” in their worship of him.*

*– Douglas Moo,  
Wheaton Graduate School*

### 3. Christ Our Example 15:1-7

- Christ accepts us in all our variety.
- We should do the same for one another.

## 4. Christ Our Hope 15:8-13



## 4. Christ Our Hope 15:8-13

- Referring back to **Deuteronomy**, **Psalms** and **Isaiah**, Paul ties his teaching solidly into Old Testament texts.
- He is reassuring the Jews and educating the Gentiles regarding the origins of the gospel and the Christian faith.

# Working on Unity **Conclusions**



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- Our Big Fancy Word: **Adiaphoron (pl. Adiaphora)**
- From **Merriam-Webster**:
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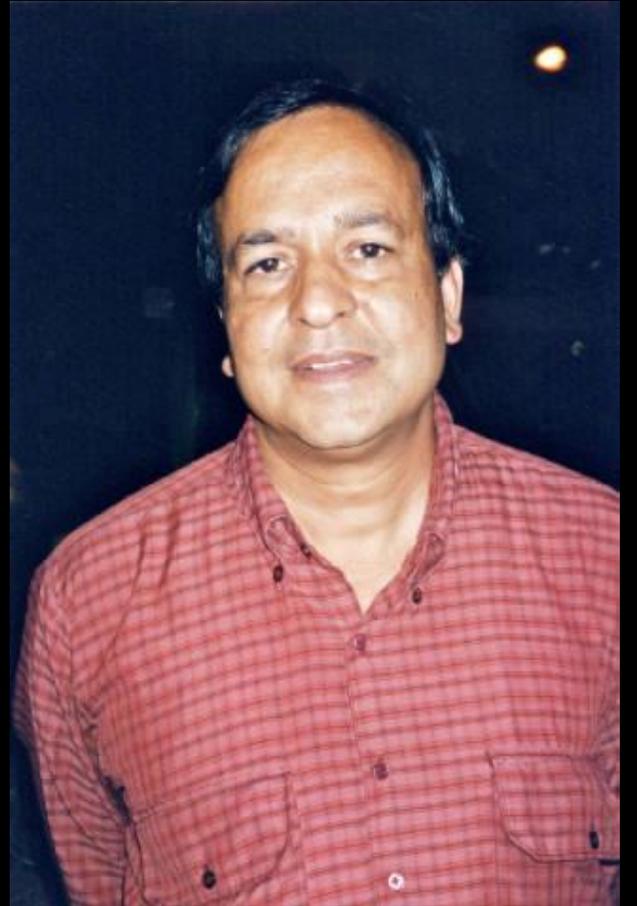
## **Two Big Lessons:**

1. Not everything related to our faith needs to be a big deal.
2. Things that are not a big deal can become a big deal if they lead to disunity in the church.

# Working on Unity **Conclusions**

*Paul's teaching here agrees with the old saying, "Love God and do what you like." Christians from all backgrounds, whether Jewish, Gentile or South Asian, should have full freedom in matters of food, drink, special days, clothes, hair styles, head coverings for women and the wearing of caps for men ...*

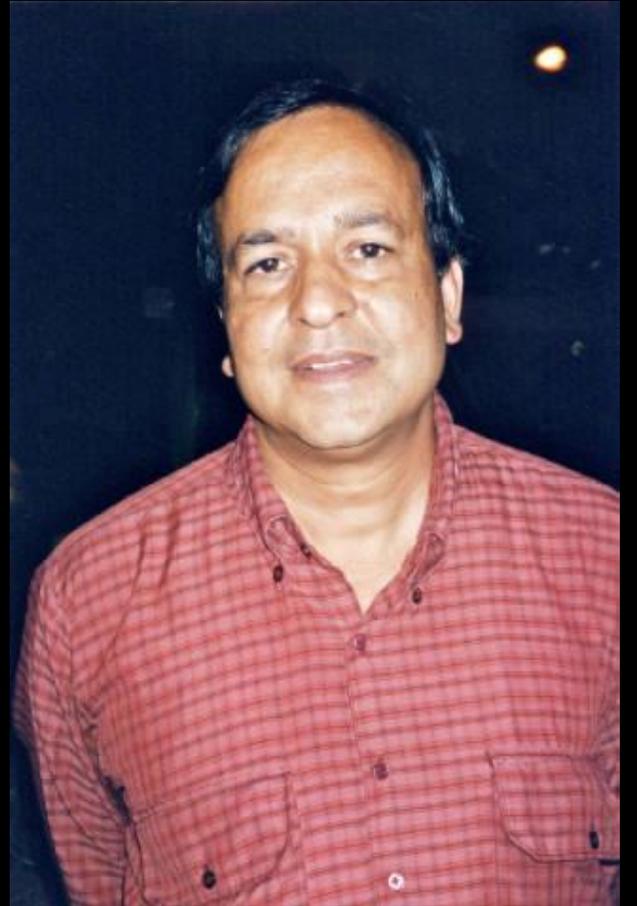
*– Ramesh Khatri, Association of Theological Education in Nepal*



# Working on Unity **Conclusions**

*These are cultural matters that do not affect salvation. Pastors should not be too picky about such things. Nor should churches split because of disputes about such trivial matters. Christians should curb their freedom only if their actions turn people away from the gospel.*

*– Ramesh Khatri, Association of Theological Education in Nepal*



# Working on Unity **Conclusions**

- The guiding principal in the areas that our indifferent to our faith needs to be **love**.
- When we step outside the boundaries of love, small things become bigger really fast.
- When we operate within the boundaries of love, the unity we can achieve results in worship and glory to Christ.

# Working on Unity **Conclusions**

*Believers, let us set aside our differences and proclaim the love of Christ through our unity. Our differences were meant to glorify God and not to tear us apart.*

*– David M. Kasali, Bilingual Christian University of the Congo*



# Working on Unity **Conclusions**

- Key verses: **Romans 1:16-17** (ESV)

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”