

The teachFASTly.com resources are not intended as a complete curriculum. The activities are designed to be woven into your existing teaching. This Quick Stop Lesson Plan is therefore not a single lesson plan, but rather a quick way of exploring the themes of an activity map. It includes one Discover activity, one Delve activity, and one Debrief activity. Together, these may take more than a class period, and you may want to add other activities between them. For more information visit www.teachfastly.com.

Unity and Diversity

Cultural debates around controversial issues, including those focused on faith and science, often present a stark choice between pursuing truth and condemning those who disagree or engaging graciously with others and letting truth slide. Controversial issues within the church also cause fear and division and it is tempting to imagine “unity” and “diversity” as mutually exclusive options. Yet the Christian gospel announces that we can be both reconciled to God and reconciled to each other without erasing our individual differences. This gospel offers and promises unity that is found in Christ and grounded in love.

This activity map helps students see how an emphasis on reconciliation-with-diversity helps us learn to live with disagreements, tensions, and uncertainties. It explores this question in relation to several biblical themes before connecting what has been learned with the way we interact at the intersection of faith and science. Is diversity of viewpoints on faith and science inherently a bad thing? How can we engage with tensions in contemporary faith and science discussions without sacrificing Christian unity and the call to reconciliation? What practices should we adopt as we seek truth and peace? How do we need to be formed in order to handle disagreement well?

Teaching FASTly involves focusing not only on right answers in faith and science discussions, but also on what virtues are lived out or abandoned along the way. It means affirming that both truth and grace, both faith and love, are relevant to these discussions. This activity map explores how thinking well about unity and difference can help us with this challenge when learning about the Bible.

It is recommended that work on this topic be coordinated between science and Bible teachers, and that good communication with parents be practiced.

This Quick Stop Lesson Plan on **Unity and Diversity** contains the following activities and attachments from www.teachfastly.com, which are combined for your ease of use in a downloadable ZIP file:

DISCOVER Activity: A Good Debate

No Activity Attachment Required

DELVE Activity: The Jerusalem Council

Activity Attachment

- *The Jerusalem Council PowerPoint*
- *The Jerusalem Council Handout*

DEBRIEF Activity: Christian Differences Today

Activity Attachment

- *Christian Differences Today PowerPoint*

DISCOVER

Activity: A Good Debate

Time: 25 Minutes

In Brief

Students debate a random topic together and then step back to consider how we engage with one another about areas of disagreement.

Goals

Students will reflect on whether engagement between people who hold differing views has to be seen in terms of a winner and a loser.

Thinking Ahead

This activity is designed to engage students in debating a topic of their choice, and then challenges them to discover a different, better way of dialoguing with people who disagree. Teaching FASTly involves considering not only what ideas are at stake in faith and science conversations, but also the manner in which we engage with others when we disagree. What do our practices when we engage with others say about our values? A discussion and evaluation of what makes a debate good or bad and whether certain disagreements should or will eventually have a “winner” and “loser” follows. Note that the debate itself is not the real focus and should not be allowed to run for too long; the goal is to help students to see that there is more than one way to engage with different views.

Preparing the Activity

Set up desks or tables to be conducive toward a whole class debate involving at least two separate “sides.”

Teaching the Activity

Tell students that this is an introductory activity that begins an exploration of how the Bible views unity and difference. Either informally by a show of hands, or by using an online polling activity such as www.socrative.com, have students nominate and vote on a particular topic that they would like to debate. The topic does not matter but it should be one that interests and is desired by a majority of students. It could be something as trivial as “What is the best part of an Oreo cookie? The cookie or the cream part?” The activity will be better if the topic is not too serious, since the goal is to move quickly from the debate itself to discussing how we debate. Conduct a debate around the topic for five to seven minutes, selecting a student on each side to give a strong, short opening statement of their side’s position before allowing free debate between the

two sides. Since the debate is designed to engage students in inconsequential argument, be careful not to let it run on too long; move on to the next steps when you think enough debating has occurred to make the following discussion meaningful.

After closing the debate, ask students to form smaller groups and discuss what made the debate a good or bad one. Ask them to consider:

- Was there a clear “winner” or “loser”?
- Was having a winner or loser necessary for the debate to be a success, or for us to learn from it?
- How respectful were students when disagreeing with others?
- What makes a particular topic good for debate?
- What kinds of topics lend themselves less well to debate? Why?
- What sorts of topics are worth debating?
- What does love have to do with debating?

Ask students to use these questions as a guide for reflecting on the overall success of their debate. Let students know that they will be moving on to explore debates and differences of viewpoint on important topics in the Old and New Testaments. Use their evaluation of their own debate to point out that it will be necessary to consider not only who is right, but also how well people treat one another amid disagreements.

Optional extension

If time permits, repeat the initial activity with the same or a different topic, but this time frame it explicitly as a dialogue in which students are to look for the good in their opponent’s view, with the goal of mutually understanding the strengths and weaknesses in each other’s positions. Close with a brief discussion of how this version went differently from the first, and what was gained or lost.

DELVE

Activity: The Jerusalem Council

Time: 35 Minutes

In Brief

This activity focuses on a key disagreement in the early church about the basis for belonging in the Christian community. It engages students in viewing the debate from both sides to see how the concerns of the side that “lost” the argument were taken into account. The activity aims to help students see the argument about more than winners and losers, since both sides will have to live together in community. After the Jerusalem Council the church officially included both Jewish and Gentile believers who were called to unity, but not to uniformity.

Goals

Students will learn how diversity and significant disagreement were handled in the early church.

Students will reflect on how this could inform present day Christian debates.

Thinking Ahead

This activity focuses on the early church’s decision to welcome Gentiles into “the Way” of Christ without demanding either circumcision or strict Torah observance, resulting in diversity of religious practices within the church. Consider whether the maturity of your students will make circumcision an awkward topic. It will be helpful as you prepare for this activity for you to work through the questions and notice how the passage balances the need to arrive at a true answer with the need for both parties to remain in fellowship while the matter is being resolved, as well as afterwards. Consider how this relates to your own classroom practices as you teach controversial issues — do you imply that the goal in debate is only to establish the correct answer, or do you also emphasize that how we treat one another as we disagree and whether we can live well together as we process disagreements are also important? How do you work to keep everyone included?

Preparing the Activity

Students will need Bibles and you will need to provide the presentation slide in **Jerusalem Council PowerPoint** and the **Jerusalem Council Handout**.

Teaching the Activity

If possible have students read Acts 13–15 for homework to give them a sense of context before using this activity in class. Read Acts 15 aloud together at the start of the activity.

You may need to explain to the students why circumcision was such an important symbolic issue, referring them back to Genesis 17:10.

Divide the class into two groups, assigning one group to take the perspective of the pro-circumcision group and the other to take the perspective of the anti-circumcision group.

Have both groups complete the following tasks which are provided as a presentation slide and handout in **Jerusalem Council PowerPoint** and the **Jerusalem Council Handout**.

- State clearly the terms of the disagreement in Acts 15. What exactly is at stake? What arguments are used? What does each group care about?
- Read Matthew 5:1–20 and find any ways in which your group might draw support for its position from the teaching of Jesus.
- Examine the decision reached by the Jerusalem Council and the way it was communicated to the church. In what ways did the Council take your group's concerns into account?

Circulate the classroom and make sure that the pro-circumcision group is able to identify verses 20–21 as showing concern for the sensibilities of Jewish believers as Gentiles are admitted. After students have had ten minutes to take notes as a group on these questions, have the two groups switch roles so that each group now takes the opposite perspective from their first assignment. Have them repeat the exercise with the same questions. This may go a little quicker than the first time due to growing familiarity with the passages.

Finally draw the class together for a discussion of what they have learned about how this strong disagreement in the early church was handled and resolved.

- Discuss with students how Matthew 5 (as an example of Jesus' teaching that might have been referred to in the early church debates) could have been used in support of both sides. It includes an emphasis on not setting aside even the least of the commandments, yet it also emphasizes showing mercy and loving enemies even at the expense of familiar commands. Talk about the kind of conversation that would have been needed to discern the intent of Jesus' teaching.
- Draw students' attention in particular to how, after the decision has been made, believers will coexist in the church with different cultural identities and sets of religious practices, because the Council does not require Gentile believers to become in every way like Jewish believers. Both parties to the disagreement will have to live together in community after the debate,

so winning or losing is not the only concern. Focus on this question of how to disagree and take seriously the issues at stake, yet still aim for continued fellowship.

How do truth and love relate? How do these debates offer us a model? Give some time to discuss whether the early church's approach to this disagreement resembles or differs from common Christian approaches to disagreements today. This may be a good time to begin to consider faith and science disagreements as examples. Ask students to consider the parallels to current debates about faith and science issues within the church, and how what they have learned might apply to how these debates should be conducted.

Optional extension

Have students research the viewpoints and reasoning of early Christians who disagreed over whether to emphasize the humanity or the divinity of Jesus Christ. How was this diversity of opinion resolved at the Council of Chalcedon?

DEBRIEF

Activity: Christian Differences Today: Creation and Evolution

Time: 25 Minutes

In Brief

This activity connects what students learned about difference and unity from previous activities to a contemporary faith and science controversy. It engages students in actively thinking outside their own assumptions and challenges them to see the views of others with patience and humility. Students are asked to reflect on how differences in the early church relate to present-day struggles over differing Christian perspectives and on the question of Christian unity.

Goals

Students will reflect on the challenges of respecting those who hold different views. Students will understand the connections between the early church disputes studied in previous activities and current faith and science debates.

Thinking Ahead

Up to this point this activity map has focused on building understanding of how differences were handled in the early church, with a focus not only on true belief as a way of stating the correct answer, but on lived truth exemplified by living well with one another amidst difference in order to maintain both truth and unity. The goal of this activity, which focuses on origins, is to use this learning to expand students' focus from the question of whose view of origins is correct to the question of how we live with difference and honor those with whom we disagree. It uses the simple practice of requiring students to voice a position they do not hold, and to attend to their implicit attitudes as they do so. Consider how this relates to your own teaching and what you model in your teaching practices. Are you careful to speak respectfully of positions you do not share? Teaching FASTly challenges us to model how to live well while engaging in the big questions at the intersection of faith and science.

Preparing the Activity

You will need to create a blank Google Presentation titled "What we believe about origins" and share it with all students in the class. You may wish to use **Christian Differences Today PowerPoint**.

Teaching the Activity

Before class discussion ask students to share anonymously in a sentence or two their personal, present view of creation/evolution and/or their interpretation of Genesis 1-2

which will be included in a Google Presentation. Either be sure that the settings allow anonymity when sharing the Presentation for editing, or have students send you their sentences before class. Each student's views should be on a single slide. If the views presented are homogeneous, you may need to seed the slide show with some contrasting Christian viewpoints. Let students know that you are doing so. Some examples of differing viewpoints can be found in the **Christian Differences Today PowerPoint**.

In class give students time to read over the responses from their fellow classmates. Ask students to choose one view that they in particular *disagree* with, and make a list of *positive* features of that view. Ask them to consider what elements of the view make sense of some aspect of faith or science and show signs of taking both faith and science seriously. Ask students to consider what seems important to those who hold that view.

Next divide the class into groups. Ask each student to present to their group the view they have chosen to disagree with, and to do so in a way that honors its positive features. Ask them to be careful not to imply dismissiveness in their tone.

Finally debrief together:

- Was this exercise challenging?
- What made it difficult or uncomfortable?
- Why is it easier to defend our own positions than to find any good in those of others?

Ask students to reflect and perhaps journal on:

- In what ways did this activity shed light on how early Christians had to struggle to see the good in each other, especially as they dealt with important issues with people from a great variety of backgrounds and viewpoints?
- How does what we learned from studying early church encounters with differences, and the way they were dealt with, shed light on our approach to differences, including those over faith and science issues?
- How could differences like this provide opportunities to grow in faith and in love as we interact with one another?

Optional extension

This same approach could be used with other difficult scientific topics where Christians disagree, such as genetic engineering, in vitro fertilization, climate change, etc.