

NO

GRAY

VGROUP STUDY



VINTAGE PRESS

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SELFISHNESS VS. SELFLESSNESS

In Romans chapters 12–16, Paul draws upon everything he has written in the letter to make final applications; these chapters are a bow on a theological package. God's family is not an exclusive Jews-only club. Through Jesus, God has adopted men and women from every tribe and nation. Therefore, all the benefits of Christ's kingdom extend to every member. But such a diverse family is bound to have differences (different backgrounds, situations, convictions, etc). This is why, in chapter 14, Paul applies the principle of love to his Roman setting. In Christ's kingdom, no one lives for himself; Paul wrote earlier in the letter that our lives model Christ's death and his life—we have died with Christ and we live like him (Romans 6:8–11). Living our life according to this pattern excludes selfishness.

- What is selfishness? Is it always wrong to have self-interests, and when does self-interest become characterized as selfishness?
- How might our own culture promote selfishness? Perhaps think of some mottos that might promote selfishness.
- What is selflessness? How do you distinguish it from self-deprecation?

¹As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.

²One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. ³Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. ⁴Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

⁵One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Romans 14:1–5

Scholars are not certain about the circumstances behind this verse. We do know that Jews had holy days (the Sabbath and festivals) but Jews weren't normally vegetarian. It is likely that the Jews in this church created dietary restrictions based on the kosher diet. Regardless of the exact circumstances, however, Paul is pointing out a tension that existed between Jewish and Gentile believers.

- What would you say Paul's point is in these verses?
- How do we often treat those we disagree with?
- How might the church model healthy disagreement?

⁶The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; ¹¹for it is written,

*"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall confess to God."*

¹²So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Romans 14:6–12

- Read these verses closely. What reason does Paul give for why we should not judge each other's differences?
- What type of differences does Paul have in mind?

• Does Paul think we can disagree on anything whatsoever? Why or why not?

• How should we tell the difference between important and unimportant church matters?

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:12–14

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:1–6

¹³Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Romans 14:13–19

• Based on these readings, why does Paul say to avoid stumbling blocks? (Hint: the answer is in 1 Corinthians 13:1–6).

Love keeps self-interests from being selfish because love helps us to not only seek out our good, but also the good of others.

- What are some ways in which we often fail to think of others? Think about some concrete examples.
- How might love shape the way we respond to differences?

²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. ²¹It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. ²²The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. ²³But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

Romans 14:20–23

- In summary, how should we live our lives in order to keep our brother from stumbling? Try to list some characteristics that we should have as believers.

For Paul, what these Roman believers were doing was immaterial; what was more important was the why. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–6 again.

⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:4–6

When what we do is motivated by love, we live our life in a way that models Christ's selflessness.

- Once more, what should motivate Christian selflessness? (Answer: love).
- Why does love promote selflessness?

- How does love promote selfishness? Think of some ways in which Vintage church might model how we love each other despite disagreements.

Remember that the Apostle Paul spoke about disagreements in a concrete situation. His setting was Jewish and Gentile relations, and the specifics were over food and certain holidays. While we can extend principles here to our contemporary setting, Paul is not saying that we can disagree over all matters. For example, sexual immorality is not a minor thing that Christians can disagree over (see 1 Corinthians 5:1–2). There are matters we can disagree over, and matters we should not. A helpful way of distinguishing important matters from unimportant matters is a doctrinal taxonomy that arranges important doctrines from most important to those of less importance. Below is a model with a selection of examples:

DOGMA

These beliefs are what every Christian should believe.

- The Trinity
- Jesus is truly God and truly man
- Everyone is made in the image of God

DOCTRINE

These are beliefs that churches can disagree over, yet need to separate over to honor differences in worship.

- The nature of faith (this separates Roman Catholics from Protestants)
- The nature of the Lord's Supper
- The nature of baptism

PERSONAL CONVICTION

These are beliefs that individuals within a church can disagree over but should not separate over.

- Our interpretation of certain books of the Bible (like Genesis or Revelation)
- Worship styles (hymns vs. contemporary music)
- What you eat or drink
- Political positions

In summary, regardless of differences, our differences should always be characterized by love.