

AGREE — T O — DISAGREE

By Dr. Stephen G. Tan | 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

DISCUSS

Like with all people, Christians have disagreements over things like vaccines, mask mandates, politics, political candidates, and many other hot-button issues on top of the general things we already fight over like family issues, work issues, educational issues, interpersonal issues, and relationship issues. When these disagreements turn to vicious fights, it gives us a bad testimony as the unbelieving world wonders why Christians are willing to cut lifelong friendships and family ties, when they talk about love all the time, specifically Christ's love. How should we handle disagreements, especially over differences of opinions? Read 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.

DIFFERENCES IN CONVICTIONS VS. DIFFERENCES IN PREFERENCES

- Read Galatians 2:11-14. What did Peter and Paul fight about? Was Paul justified in rebuking Peter? Why?
- Read Acts 15:36-41. What was the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas? Were these two perspectives valid?
- Based on these two biblical accounts, can you differentiate between truth convictions and preferences? Give examples and discuss.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER TO AVOID DIVISION AND MAINTAIN UNITY IN THE CHURCH EVEN WHEN WE DISAGREE IN OUR PREFERENCES.

1. We don't know everything, so be humble (v. 1-3).

- The context of this chapter is that the Christians in this church were divided because some thought it was ok to eat meat offered to idols, while other Christians believed it was wrong. This is a "gray

area" issue, not specifically affirmed as right or wrong. What are some gray areas that cause division in an area of your life?

- Think about someone you had a disagreement with recently. Can you honestly say that you know 100% about the subject being discussed, or that you perfectly understand the motivations and intentions of the other person? Identify the things you probably do not know about.
- Discuss how being humble can help avoid disagreements over gray areas.

2. Everyone's experience is different, so be gracious (v. 4-8).

- How did their exposure to Greek and Roman culture affect the perspective of the Corinthian Christians with regards to eating food offered to idols?
- Did Paul say who is better between the one who is at liberty to eat meat offered to idols and the one whose conscience doesn't allow him to eat meat offered to idols?
- What are the things you can do to show grace to another person who you disagree with or who disagrees with you?

3. It's not a competition, so be understanding (v. 9-10)

- Through Jesus Christ, we have gained the freedom to do (or not do) many things. But what did the apostle Paul say about how the exercise of these freedoms may affect the Christian walk of someone who is weak?
- In exercising your freedoms—including the freedom to vote—have you considered how it may affect someone who differs from you? Discuss how your choices may stumble a fellow believer.
- Disagreements often escalate to vicious fights because our goal is to win an argument instead of to understand each other. In arguments about politics, examine what is your goal and ask yourself what you can do to show more understanding to people you disagree with.

4. Choose love over rights, so love one another (v. 13).

- Even having the freedom to eat whatever he wanted, Paul was willing to give up eating meat if it would cause a brother/sister in the faith to stumble and sin. As a follower of Jesus, what are you willing to give up if it would cause a brother or sister in the faith to sin, so that you can demonstrate the love of Christ?

REFLECT

Jesus said that unity amongst Christians is one of the strongest evidence to the world that testifies of who He is. Read the following verses: 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Peter 3:8, Colossians 3:14, Psalm 133:1, Philippians 2:2, Ephesians 4:3. During this election season, as someone who was saved by the blood of the lamb, what are you doing to keep the unity in the church even as you disagree over political preferences? Do you find yourself struggling with your relationships over these differences? How can you apply the principles discussed so that you can keep your Christian testimony even while disagreeing with someone?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me through Your word that even though I disagree with my brothers and sisters in the faith over many differences in preferences, we can still be united because we have something in common: we are sinners forgiven and saved through Jesus Christ. Forgive me, Lord, for the pride I cultivate when I refuse to show humility and empathy. Forgive me for the times I failed to understand where someone is coming from because I refused to listen. Forgive me for having a know-it-all attitude and failing to show grace. Forgive me for not considering how my actions may affect my testimony and the Christian walk of others. Enable me, Lord, to walk humbly, to be gracious and understanding, and to love others as like You want me to love them. I don't want to be the person who causes others to stumble or turns people away from You. Give me the wisdom to choose my fights (differentiate between what is worth fighting for or not), the ability to keep my temper in check, and allow me to be a channel of Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.