

To the Strong:



**Implications and
Applications**

Romans

14:19-23

Romans

14:18



**The
Kingdom
Lived Out -
Horizontally**

18For the one who serves [as a slave] to the Christ in this [is] well-pleasing to God and tested and approved by people.

Sadly, and all too often, Christian conduct toward those within and among various churches has been sorely lacking throughout history. It has been replaced, instead, by slandering one another within the Church universal (v.16) and, then, as a result, by *“the name of God...being blasphemed”* (2:24) by unbelievers. Paul is pointing the Christians in Rome and those at Shepherd of the Springs to a different and better way!

Romans

14:19



*Pursuing
Peace and
Building
Up*

¹⁹Consequently then, we are pursuing the things of **peace** and the things of the **building up** for one another.

Those who have “*peace*” with God in His kingdom (v.17) pursue the same with one another. We also pursue things which build others up in their faith. The image of construction, “*building up*,” appears notably elsewhere in Scriptures. It’s a favorite picture for Paul who uses it broadly to describe the purpose of his own ministry (15:20; 1 Cor 3:9-10; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:10), for the joining of Jews and Gentiles into one spiritual house (Eph 2:19-21), and for the building up of other believers within the community of faith (Eph 4:12, 16, 29). The latter example forms the emphasis here. This picture stands as the antithesis to the command which will open verse 20.

Romans

14:20-22a



A Series of Assertions

²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, tear down the work of God. On the one hand, all things are [ritually] clean, but [they can be] a bad thing for the person who eats through stumbling. ²¹[It is] better not to eat meat or to drink wine nor [to do anything] in which **your** brother stumbles. ^{22a}[As for] **you**, [the] faith which **you** have in accord with **yourself**, have before God.

Paul now will make a series of seemingly disconnected authoritative assertions that seems to be out of character for him. He will also switch to the second person singular (“*you*”) forms in vv. 20 and 21, followed by three more in 22a. Therefore, the interpretation that Paul is addressing the “*strong*” stands to reason, since they, indeed, have been the primary target of Paul’s admonitions beginning in 13b.

Romans

14:20a



The First Assertion

²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, **tear down** the work of God.

The second person singular imperative “**tear down**” (κατάλυε) expresses the antithesis of “**building up**” in the previous verse. The specific cause under consideration is emphatically placed and remains “food.” “**Tearing down**” would involve the “*strong*” eating previously “*unclean*” foods in the presence or within the knowledge of the “*weak*” and, thus, injuring them. It could also include the “*strong*” urging the “*weak*” to join with them in consuming such foods contrary to their conscience (14:1).

Romans

14:20a



The First Assertion

²⁰Do not, for the sake of food, tear down the work of God.

“The work of God” is equivalent to His kingdom work in Christ Jesus (v.17; cf. St. John 6:29). John Chrysostom affirms that *“...here the work of God means the salvation of a brother.”*¹ Thus, *“the work of God,”* His kingdom, and the body of Christ in each and every place exists as a collective entity which is impacted by the spiritual health and well-being of each of its members (12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12-17).

¹Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans*, 26 (Bray, *Romans*, ACCS NT 6:350).

Romans

14:20b-21



The Second Assertion

^{20b}On the one hand, **all things are [ritually] clean**, but [they can be] a bad thing **for the person who eats through stumbling**. ²¹[It is] better not to eat meat or to drink wine nor [to do anything] in which your brother stumbles.

Paul restates the matter at hand in regard to food (and drink) and then gives a word of advice primarily to the “*strong*.” Paul states that “*all things are [ritually] clean*.” Both “*unclean*” and “*clean*” is a reference to foods, and these verses do not provide overarching moral statements.

Yet, what does Paul mean by “*for the person who eats through stumbling?*” And what is the sense of “*stumbling?*” As you may recall from v.13, the noun πρόσκομμα “*a [cause for] stumbling,*” is used for the strong offending the weak by eating what the weak considers “*unclean*.” The cognate verb προσκόπτει in v.21 similarly depicts the “*weak*” brother who “*stumbles*” because he sees the strong eating foods and drinking wine.

Romans

14:20b-21



The Second Assertion

^{20b}On the one hand, all things are [ritually] clean, but [they can be] a bad thing for the person who eats through stumbling. ²¹[It is] better not to eat meat or to drink wine nor [to do anything] in which your brother stumbles.

Therefore, context and grammar make it more likely that “*the person who eats*” here is the “*strong believer.*”

Paul is therefore warning the “strong” believer that it is wrong for him to eat “*while causing offense*” or “*if it causes [another] to stumble*” it is wrong for you to make others stumble by what you eat or drink.

Romans

14:22a



The Influence of Faith

^{22a}[As for] you, [the] faith which you have in accord with yourself, have **before God**.

The grammar that Paul uses seems to be idiomatic; that is, very natural and, possibly, Greek “*slang*.” The translation of this verse is quite difficult since it is “*slang*” and, therefore, rather disjointed. In any case, Paul seems to be applying his instructions once again to the “*strong*.” Thus, the relative clause “*which you have in accord with yourself*,” refers to the faith that the strong have which recognizes their Christian freedom to eat all foods. This conviction should not only be in agreement or “*in accord*” with one’s faith but should also be consistent with one’s standing before God.

Paul is urging the “*strong*” to keep their knowledge of their freedom, as well as their exercise of it, “*before God*.”

While they do remain free to eat all foods, they ought not to exhibit this publicly before the “*weak*.” In other words, the inward freedom does not have to be expressed outwardly in order to be enjoyed. This aligns with the tension Paul maintains between the liberty of personal conviction (vv.5, 14a, 22-23) and the exercise of liberty through love.

Romans

14:22b



Concluding
Words to
the Weak
and Strong:
A Blessing

^{22b} **Blessed** is the one who is not **judging** himself in what he approves.

Paul now makes a sudden change from the second person singular (you) to the third person singular (he). The use of “*blessed*” (μακάριος) indicates that Paul is now going to make a general assessment. Paul’s use of “*judging*” (κρίνω) indicates that he is now addressing the “*weak*” since they were specifically admonished not “*to judge*” the strong earlier (vv.3-4).

Romans

14:22b



Concluding
Words to
the Weak
and Strong:
A Blessing

^{22b}Blessed is the one who is not judging himself in what he approves.

The verb “approves” (δοκιμάζω) entails that they have examined or tested these issues for themselves, reached a conclusion, and now abide in it by their behavior. This would include both the “*strong*,” which have the faith to eat all things and do so, as well as the “*weak*,” which adhere faithfully to their convictions not to eat meat prohibited by the OT as “*unclean*.” In both cases, the person is not judging himself based upon what he does or does not eat since he is acting in accord with the Word of God. Thus, each Christian is “*free*” to follow his practice. And both ought to also be free from “*judging*” others as well.

Romans

14:23a



Concluding Words to the Weak and Strong:

A Dire Warning

^{23a}But the one who makes a distinction, if he eats, he has pronounced a sentence upon himself and remains under judgment because [the eating is] not from faith.

The assumption of the protasis (a clause that expresses a condition) in the phrase: “*if he eats,*” could become a reality for a number of reasons. The “*weak*” might eat what they still deem “*unclean*” at the insistence of the “*strong,*” though such external pressure is not evident in what Paul has written. It seems more likely that a “*weak*” person might succumb to a subtler peer pressure and eat in order to fit in or to appear “*strong.*” The underlying issue is that the “*weak*” do not have a strong enough faith to believe that they can ignore the ritual elements of the OT.

Romans

14:23a



Concluding Words to the Weak and Strong:

A Dire Warning

^{23a}But the one who makes a distinction, if he eats, he has pronounced a sentence upon himself and remains under **judgment** because [the eating is] not from faith.

The problem is that if the Christian eats while still convinced in his own faith that the OT distinction between foods should be maintained. Such eating, therefore, does not merely place one outside the boundary marking off the people of God, as was true for Israelites who ate unclean foods in the OT era. If a Christian eats even though he believes his own action is contrary to the will and Word of God, this casts doubt on his faith and without faith in Christ he stands under Divine judgment. So the result of such eating is indicated by another compound verb of the root verb: κρίνω, “to judge,” namely, the perfect middle/passive: κατακρίνεται. Its force involves both pronouncing a sentence upon oneself (middle voice) by acting contrary to one’s assessment of God’s will in the matter and then being under the resulting condemnation of God (passive voice).

Romans

14:23b



Conclusion

^{23b}And everything which is not from faith is sin.

Paul then explains the reason why in that last half of v.23; as the Rev. Dr. Martin Franzmann recognized:

“If it is true that our only righteousness is the ‘righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ’ (3:22), then all that does not flow from this our faith in Him is sin. If an act ignores and overrides the redeeming death of Christ (v.15), if it withdraws from the royal reign of God which gives men righteousness and peace and joy (v.17), if it contradicts the lordship of the Christ, who died and rose for us that He might be our Lord in life and death (vv.7-9), if it forgets that what we have received from God we have received in trust and that ‘each of us shall give an account of himself to God’ (vv.10-12) – any act that forgets all this is sin.”²

² Franzmann, *Romans*, 254.

PEACE
IN CHRIST
JESUS

