

The Book of Romans Study Guide

Chapter 14 part 2

Note: Read first the handout—“Paul’s Teaching on Unclean Food in Romans 14:14”

14:15-23

- v 15 Paul shows that the ultimate motive for adopting this practice of not judging one another is the love of fellow believers, punctuated with the phrase, “Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died.’ So we can rightly ask, “If Yeshua was willing to give up His life for the sake of a particular believer, what can I give up in order to maintain love and fellowship with that person.
- v 16 Having given believers latitude in gray or disputable matters, including the freedom to maintain personal convictions that your view is correct, Paul gives an exhortation not to let what is good for you to become evil. The implication is that insisting on others to think and act as you do in regard to disputable matters is wrong.
- v 17-18 The reason is that the kingdom of God is not about superficial behavior, like dietary matters, but about things of an inner nature, like righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This does not negate the validity of our behavior, which Scripture emphasizes in great detail, and thus does not give us an excuse to ignore God’s commandments. But, the Bible has demonstrated that humanity is prone to engage in the observance of religious practices, while having a heart that is far from God.
- So, Paul is making a key point about what our priority needs to be. And when we do that, we will be serving, not working against Messiah and His kingdom. And, practically speaking, having this kind of focus on righteousness, peace and joy is what truly pleases God and earns the respect of others.
- v 20 Paul repeats his warning in verse 15 about causing destruction with a particular opinion about food, while using the same term *koinos* from verse 15, showing that he is not talking about the abolishment of clean or kosher animals.
- v 21 He points out that it is not good to allow anything in our life that will cause another person to stumble. In addition to the specific issues of dietary purity and the observance of certain days addressed in this chapter, applying this principle practically today requires giving our attention to all disputable matters that may be biblically permissible but culturally or personally sensitive to others.

Examples include:

- Showing consideration to dietary preferences of people that are unrelated to spiritual matters.
- Practicing discretion in regard to alcohol.
- Filtering social media posts and pictures that may be controversial.

- Avoiding aggressive theological debates over secondary doctrines, such as end-times timelines, specific worship styles, or political alignments in a way that fractures relationships

To apply this verse accurately, we must be continually motivated by love for others, and a willingness to make a voluntary, temporary sacrifice of your rights in a specific moment to protect a weaker person's relationship with God.

- v 22-23 Paul concludes the chapter by emphasizing that personal convictions should be kept private and that acting against one's conscience is a serious spiritual failure. He states that a person is "blessed" if they can exercise their freedom without feeling a sense of self-condemnation. But if someone eats (or acts) while doubting whether it is okay to do, the act is wrong because it does not come from faith (or a clear conscience).

Paul's final statement sums up the principle by which we can judge "gray areas" – if we can't do it in faith, then it is sin.