

Bible Study: Rom 14 Weak Brothers

Author: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ

Audience: the church at Rome

Date: approximately 57 A.D.

Location: Corinth

Theme: The righteousness of God

Genre: epistle/prose

Outline

Do not judge a weaker brother (14:1-4)

Live for the Lord in everything (14:5-9)

Let God be the judge (14:10-12)

Don't be a stumbling block (14:13-23)

Observation (14:1-23)

Christians should avoid disputes over "opinions"

Not weak in faith = eats "all things" (i.e., an omnivore)

Weak in faith = eats only vegetables (i.e., no meat)

Another area of conscience involves observing a day for the Lord

Interpretation (14:1-23)

Does Rom 14 authorize the eating of unclean meats?

Rom 14:14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

Paul was most likely talking about meat sacrificed to idols in Romans 14

- Paul's used very similar language to discuss sacrificial meat in 1 Corinthians
- 1 Corinthians and Romans were written at about the same time (approx. 56-57 AD)

Rom 14:1 Now accept the one who is weak	1Cor 8:7 their conscience being weak
Rom 14:2 he who is weak eats vegetables	1Cor 8:9 a stumbling block to the weak .
Rom 14:13 an obstacle or a stumbling block	1Cor 8:9 a stumbling block to the weak.
Rom 14:15 walking according to love .	1Cor 8:1 but love edifies.
Rom 14:15 Do not destroy (<i>apollumi</i>) with your food him for whom Christ died .	1Cor 8:11 he who is weak is ruined (<i>apollumi</i>), the brother for whose sake Christ died .
Rom 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.	1Cor 8:8 But food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat.
Rom 14:19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up (<i>oikodome</i>) of one another.	1Cor 8:1 Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies (<i>oikodomeo</i>).
Rom 14:20 they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense .	1Cor 10:32 Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God
Rom 14:21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or <i>to do anything</i> by which your brother stumbles .	1Cor 8:13 I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble .

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The context of Romans 14 involves disputes over “opinions” rather than matters of doctrine or biblical law (cf. Rom 14:1 NKJV, NIV, ESV).

NKJV: Receive one who is weak in the faith but not to disputes over doubtful things.

NIV: Accept him whose faith is weak without passing judgment on disputable matters.

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

The apostles in the first century (i.e., those not weak in faith) did not believe that they could eat “all things” in a universal sense. In 49 AD, the Jerusalem Council confirmed restrictions against the eating of things sacrificed to idols, blood and things strangled (Acts 15:28-29).

Acts 15:28 "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:

Acts 15:29 that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."

The issue of sacrificial meat was a hot topic up to the end of the first century (Rev 2:14, 20).

Rev 2:14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of immorality*.

Rev 2:20 'But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols.

In Rom 14:14, the Greek term for “unclean” is actually *koinos* (common) rather than *akatharos* (unclean). *Koinos* refers to biblically clean foods that were defiled by some contamination.

Rom 14:14 I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean (*koinos*) in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean (*koinos*), to him it is unclean (*koinos*).

In Rom 14:20b, the term “things” is not in the original, and in this context, the adjective “all” (*panta*) must refer back to food (*broma*); therefore, Paul is saying that biblically sanctioned foods can actually be bad (not unclean) if they are used to cause a brother to stumble.

Rom 14:20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food (*broma*). All [foods] indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

The same man who said, “All things indeed are clean” (Rom 14:20), also told Christians not to touch (i.e., physical) anything unclean (2Cor 6:17-7:1); the only way to define what is physically unclean is through the biblical laws given in the OT (cf. Isa 52:11, Deut 23:12-14).

2Cor 6:17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN (*akatharos*); And I will welcome you.

2Cor 6:18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

2Cor 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse (*katharizo*) ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Application (14:1-23)

An error to avoid: do not hassle another Christian over questionable issues