

# Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON **XXX**: WHO ARE WE TO JUDGE ANOTHER MAN'S HOUSEHOLD SERVANT? — CHAP 14:1-23

“Paul wraps up his exhortations with a lengthy plea for mutual acceptance. The command to ‘receive’ fellow believers begins the section (14:1) and is repeated again at its climax (15:7). Paul accentuates the theme of mutuality sounded in this last verse — ‘receive one another’ — with three other ‘one another’ references:

‘do not judge one another’ (14:13);

‘let us pursue those matters that lead to peace and to edification for one another’ (14:19);

‘May the God of endurance and comfort give to you the power to think the same thing one another according to Christ Jesus’ (15:5).

These exhortations to mutual acceptance and concern are directed specifically to two groups of Christians: those who are ‘weak in faith’ (14:1; cf. 15:1) and those who are ‘strong in faith’ (15:1). Two, and probably three, issues divide these two groups:

(1) the ‘strong’ eat all kinds of food while the ‘weak’ eat only vegetables (14:2);

(2) the ‘strong’ make no distinction among days while the ‘weak’ value some days more than others (14:5); and

(3) the ‘strong’ drink wine while the ‘weak’ abstain (14:21; cf. 14:17; To be sure, Paul mentions ‘drinking wine’ only as an example and does not clearly identify it as an issue dividing the Roman Christians. But Paul probably brings it up precisely because it was another point of tension.)” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 826f]

**THE ISSUES** — “Two general issues must be cleared up before the details of Paul’s exhortation can be understood: (1) the reason why Paul includes this exhortation in his letter to the Roman Christians; (2) the underlying basis for the differences in practice between the two groups.

“With respect to the first issue, the most natural explanation for this extended pleas for mutual acceptance is that Paul knew of a division between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ in the Roman church and writes what he does to heal that division.... Romans 14:1-15:13, therefore, while naturally picking up themes from throughout the letter, is occasioned specifically by Paul’s need to address a current problem in the Roman community (this is not to say, however, that the dispute between the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ is *the* reason for the letter).

“Explanations of the root issue in Rom. 14:1-15:13 fall into six major categories.

- The ‘weak’ were mainly Gentile Christians who abstained from meat (and perhaps wine), particularly on certain ‘fast’ days, under the influence of certain pagan religions.
- The ‘weak’ were Christians, perhaps both Jewish and Gentile, who practiced an ascetic lifestyle for reasons that we cannot determine (see, e.g., Lenski, Murray).
- The ‘weak’ were mainly Jewish Christians who observed certain practices derived from the Mosaic law out of a concern to establish righteousness before God.
- The ‘weak’ were mainly Jewish Christians who followed a sectarian ascetic program as a means of expressing their piety. This program may have been the product of syncretistic tendencies (see, e.g., Hodge, Black) ... Strongest evidence for this identification comes from a comparison with the program of the apparently syncretistic (perhaps a mixture of Judaism and incipient gnosticism) false teachers that Paul combats at Colossae and Ephesus. The former advocated abstinence from food, drink, and the observance of certain days, while those at Ephesus demanded the avoidance of ‘foods’ (1 Tim. 4:3) and may have influenced Timothy to stop drinking wine (cf. 1 Tim. 5:23). Jewish sectarian asceticism is attested in many other places. The ‘therapeutae,’ a sect of Jews in Egypt, were vegetarians and drank only ‘spring water;’ and some early Christians were said to have abstained from eating flesh: James the brother of the Lord and the Ebionites....
- The ‘weak’ were mainly Jewish Christians who, like some of the Corinthians, believed that it was wrong to eat meat that was sold in marketplace and was probably tainted by idolatry.
- The ‘weak’ were mainly Jewish Christians who refrained from certain kinds of food and observed certain days out of continuing loyalty to the Mosaic law.... While always defended, this view has become the most popular in recent years (see, e.g., Calvin, Cranfield, Dunn).

**syn-cre-tism** (sīng-křī-tīzəm) noun — reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief, as in philosophy or religion, especially when success is partial or the result is heterogeneous

Four considerations make the sixth alternative the most likely. **First, there is abundant evidence that the dispute between the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ was rooted in differences between Jews and Gentiles.** The relationship between these two groups has

been a leitmotif of Romans since chapter 1; and the conclusion of this section, in which Paul emphasizes the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles into one new people (15:8-13), brings this motif into Paul's plea for reconciliation between the 'strong' and the 'weak.' Confirmation of a basically Jewish origin for the position of the weak comes from Paul's use of the term *koinos*, 'common,' 'unclean,' to describe (implicitly) the 'weak' Christians' attitude toward food (14:14). For this term had become a semitechnical way of describing food prohibited under the Mosaic law (see Mark 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14). Moreover, the NT provides abundant evidence that the OT food laws constituted a prime issue in the early Christian communities....

***Second, Paul's plea for understanding and acceptance of the 'weak' within the community makes clear that they were not propagating a view antithetical to the gospel.*** This makes it impossible to view them as Jews who believed that observance of the law was necessary for salvation. It also makes it unlikely that the 'weak' were sectarian Jews who adopted an ascetic regime under the influence of other philosophical and / or religious tendencies.... If a pre-gnostic or other pagan tradition lay behind the habits of the 'weak,' we would have expected Paul to be more harsh with them — as he is toward such people in Colossians and 1 Timothy....

***Third, Paul's failure to mention 'food sacrificed to idols' (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1) and his reference to the observance of special days and abstention from wine make it unlikely that the dispute in Romans can be confined to the issue of food offered to idols.***

***Fourth, positively, the practices Paul attributed to the 'weak' can be explained as a result of concerns to observe certain requirements of the Mosaic law.*** Abstention from meat and wine is, of course, not required by the Mosaic law [the law prohibited Israelites from eating certain kinds of meat (cf. Lev. 11; 20:25; Deut. 14:3-21) and any meat 'with the blood in it' (cf. Lev. 17:10-16; 19:26; Deut. 12:15-25), while only Nazirites were required to abstain from wine (cf. Num. 6:2-4; Judg. 13:4-5; 16:7; Amos 2:11-12)]. But scrupulous Jews would sometimes avoid all meat in environments where they could not be sure that the meat had been prepared in a 'kosher' manner (see especially the example of Daniel, who 'resolved that he would not defile himself with the royal rations of food and wine,' Dan. 1:8; cf. also Dan. 10:3). And Jewish Christians in Rome, who were perhaps ostracized from the Jewish community because of their faith in Christ and had been forced to settle in strange parts of the city after their exile (by the decree of Claudius), may have been in precisely this kind of environment. Similarly, Jews would sometimes abstain from wine out of concern that it had been tainted by the pagan practice of offering the wine as a libation to the gods. Finally, of course, the Mosaic law stipulates the observance of many special religious days: the weekly Sabbath and the major religious festivals. And many first-century Jews also observed weekly fasting and prayer days.

***These considerations suggest that the 'weak' were Jewish Christians (and probably also some Gentile 'god-fearers') who believed that they were still bound by certain 'ritual' requirements of the Mosaic law. Paul's exhortation in 14:1 to the Roman community to 'receive' these who are 'weak in faith' makes clear that this group was in the minority. And, typical of such scrupulous minorities, these 'weak' Christians were 'condemning' those other Christians who did not follow their rules (14:3). This other group, who perhaps called themselves 'the strong,' was probably composed mainly of Gentile Christians, along with some more 'liberated' Jewish Christians, such as Paul himself (cf. 15:1). They believed that the coming of Christ had brought an end to the ritual requirements of the Mosaic law; and, like many such 'enlightened' majorities, they tended to 'despise' and look down on the 'weak' (14:3)....***

***Paul agrees in principle with the 'strong': 'I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself' (14:14a; cf. also 14:20; 15:1). But he spends no time developing this point. His concern is not so much with the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of this particular issue but with the 'peace' and 'mutual edification' of the body of Christ (cf. 14:19). And he makes clear that those who pride themselves on being the 'strong' have a special responsibility toward this end. It is they, those who truly sense their liberty on these matters, who are to put their exercise of that liberty in perspective and to subordinate it to the far more important 'good' of their fellow believers' edification and salvation (14:15-21). In this they are to imitate their Lord, who subordinated his own interests for the sake of those — both circumcised and uncircumcised — that he came to redeem (15:3, 8-12).'*** [Moo, *Romans*, pg 827ff]

"Paul's call for mutual acceptance in the Roman community falls into four larger sections. Each combines exhortation with theological rationale.

- 14:1-12 — both 'strong' and 'weak' Christians need to stop condemning each other because it is the Lord, and he alone, who has the right to assess the believer's status and conduct
- 14:13-23 — the 'strong' Christians must be careful not to cause the 'weak' Christians to suffer spiritual harm by their insistence on exercising their liberty on disputed matters. For such insistence violates the essence of the kingdom, which is to manifest love and concern for one another.
- 15:1-6 — the 'strong' Christians should willingly tolerate the tender consciences of the 'weak' Christians, seeking thereby to foster unified praise of God in the community. Christians should exhibit such concern for others because of the example set for them by their Lord.
- 15:7-13 — both 'strong' and 'weak' Christians should receive each other as full and respected members of the Christian community, for God himself has shown, in fulfillment of Scripture, that he accepts both Jews and Gentiles as his people." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 832f]

## Do Not Condemn One Another! (14:1-2)

*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. (Rom 14:1-12 KJV)*

*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live, says the Lord, every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:1-12 NIV)*

*And him who is weak in the faith receive ye — not to determinations of reasonings; one doth believe that he may eat all things — and he who is weak doth eat herbs; let not him who is eating despise him who is not eating; and let not him who is not eating judge him who is eating, for God did receive him. Thou — who art thou that art judging another's domestic? to his own master he doth stand or fall; and he shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One doth judge one day above another, and another doth judge every day [alike]; let each in his own mind be fully assured. He who is regarding the day, to the Lord he doth regard [it], and he who is not regarding the day, to the Lord he doth not regard [it]. He who is eating, to the Lord he doth eat, for he doth give thanks to God; and he who is not eating, to the Lord he doth not eat, and doth give thanks to God. For none of us to himself doth live, and none to himself doth die; for both, if we may live, to the Lord we live; if also we may die, to the Lord we die; both then if we may live, also if we may die, we are the Lord's; for because of this Christ both died and rose again, and lived again, that both of dead and of living he may be Lord. And thou, why dost thou judge thy brother? or again, thou, why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand at the tribunal of the Christ; for it hath been written, 'I live! saith the Lord — to Me bow shall every knee, and every tongue shall confess to God;' so, then, each of us concerning himself shall give reckoning to God; (Rom 14:1-12 Young's Literal Translation)*

“This paragraph divides into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-9, and 10-12. The divisions between the sections are marked with similar rhetorical questions, each using the second person singular: ‘Who are you who is judging the servant of another?’ (v. 4a); ‘Why are you judging your brother?’ (v. 10a). It is evident, then, that Paul has arranged the three sections in a classic ‘ring composition.’ The first (vv. 1-3) and the third (vv. 10-12) state in almost identical language the main point of the paragraph: the ‘strong’ are not to ‘despise’ the ‘weak’; the ‘weak’ are not to ‘judge’ the ‘strong’ (cf. vv. 3a and 10a). In the central section, vv. 4-9, Paul provides the theological foundation for these commands: every Christian is a servant of the Lord; and it is to that ‘master,’ and not to any other fellow servant, that the believer must answer.” [Moo, Romans, pg 834f]

**v 1** — “Paul concludes his exhortation to the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ with a plea for mutual acceptance (15:7). But he begins by urging that the community ‘receive the one who is weak with respect to faith.’ *By making the ‘weak’ in faith the object of this command, which appears to be directed to the community as a whole, Paul implies that the ‘strong’ were the dominant element in the Roman church* (for convenience’ sake, we are using the term ‘strong’ to describe those Christians in Rome who held the view opposite to the ‘weak,’ even though Paul does not himself use this terminology until 15:1). This fits with our identification of the ‘strong’ as mainly Gentile Christians, since Paul treats the church in Rome as predominantly Gentile.” [Moo, Romans, pg 835]

**RECEIVE THE WEAK** — “To ‘receive’ the ‘weak’ is not simply to accord them official recognition as church members. The verb means ‘receive or accept into one’s society, home, circle of acquaintance,’ and implies that the Roman Christians were not only to ‘tolerate’ the ‘weak’ but that they were to treat them as brothers and sisters in the intimate fellowship typical of the

**people of God.** ... The verb is προσλαμβάνω [proslambanō] (lit., ‘take alongside oneself’). It occurs eight other times in the NT, but the closest parallels to Rom. 14:1 are in Acts 18:26; 28:2; and Philm. 17 (the only Pauline occurrence outside of these chapters; cf. also Matt. 16:22; Mark 8:32; Acts 17:5; 27:33, 36). The present tense of the imperative might suggest a continuing attitude of acceptance.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 835]

**THE “WEAK IN RESPECT TO FAITH”** — “Paul’s description of those who are to be received, ‘the weak with respect to faith,’ obviously carries a pejorative connotation: it is certainly better to be ‘strong’ than to be ‘weak’! It was probably the ‘strong’ in Rome who described those with whom they disagreed in this way. Yet the phrase is not as negative as it may seem at first sight. Crucial here is the meaning of the word ‘faith’ in this description. Paul uses the language of faith to describe the dispute between the two groups at both the beginning (vv. 1, 2) and end (vv. 22, 23) of chap. 14. The words certainly have some reference to that basic response to God in Christ demanded by the gospel which ‘faith’ and ‘believe’ have denoted throughout Romans. Yet this distinctively Christian notion of faith has (at least implicitly) the person of Jesus Christ as its object: to ‘believe’ is to entrust oneself to a person. Explicitly in v. 2, however, ‘believe’ has the notion ‘believe that something is legitimate.’ **Paul is not therefore simply criticizing these people for having a ‘weak’ or inadequate trust in Christ as their Savior and Lord. Rather, he is criticizing them for lack of insight into some of the implications of their faith in Christ. These are Christians who are not able to accept for themselves the truth that their faith in Christ implies liberation from certain OT/Jewish ritual requirements. The ‘faith’ with respect to which these people are ‘weak,’ therefore, is related to their basic faith in Christ but one step removed from it. It involves their individual outworking of Christian faith, their convictions about what that faith allows and prohibits. Paul’s decision to use the pejorative phrase ‘weak in faith’ makes clear where his sympathies lie. We cannot avoid the impression (though his pastoral concerns lead him to keep it implicit) that Paul would hope that a growth in Christ would help those who were ‘weak’ become ‘strong.’** [Moo, *Romans*, pg 835f] “To be noted at once is the characterization of those who feel the traditional Jewish customs to be too important to give up, as ‘weak.’ They might well feel somewhat insulted by the label. Were they not rather demonstrating the strength of their principles? — the same strength of devotion as had been shown by Daniel and the Maccabees. But Paul is quite clear that the position they hold to is one characterized by a deficiency in faith. By implication they are putting too much weight on the outward form of the covenant people (2:17-29); too much weight on their physical (fleshly) membership of Israel (13:14); they are not living out of complete dependence on God like father Abraham (4:19-21). Paul is in no doubt: the attitude thus expressed is deficient, ‘weak.’” [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 812]

**NOT FOR THE PURPOSE OF QUARRELS** — *In the meantime, however, Paul is concerned with the unity of the church. This is why he not only urges the ‘strong’ to ‘receive’ the ‘weak’ but to receive them with the right motivation and in the right spirit. Don’t, Paul says, welcome the ‘weak’ simply ‘for the purpose of quarrels over disputed matters.’ The ‘disputed matters’ are those differences of opinion respecting the eating of meat, the observance of days, and the drinking of wine that Paul mentions later in the chapter (vv. 2, 5, 21). Paul wants the ‘strong’ to receive the ‘weak’ into full and intimate fellowship, something that could not happen if the ‘strong,’ the majority group, persist in advancing their views on these issues, sparking quarrels and mutual recrimination.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 836f]

**v 2** — “Paul now cites one of the ‘disputed matters’: ‘One person believes he can eat all things, while another eats vegetables.’ In light of v. 21 (‘it is good not to eat meat’) ‘eats vegetables’ must mean ‘eats *only* vegetables,’ that is, is a ‘vegetarian,’ a person who eats no meat. As we have suggested in the introduction to 14:1-15:13, the ‘weak in faith’ probably decided to avoid meat altogether out of a concern to maintain OT laws of purity in a pagan context where ‘kosher’ meat was not easily obtained. Other believers, however, did not share this concern to maintain purity, no doubt because they were convinced that, as New Covenant Christians, they were no longer obligated to the OT laws involved. When Paul therefore says that these Christians ‘believe to eat all things’ (a literal translation), he is using ‘believe’ in an unusual way. It may mean simply ‘have confidence,’ but the probable connection with the word ‘faith’ in v. 1 (cf. also vv. 22-23) suggests that we should not eliminate all connotations of specifically Christian believing. The word probably, then, combines the connotations of ‘believe’ and ‘believe that’: this Christian, Paul is saying, has the kind of (‘strong’) Christian faith as to lead him or her to think that it is legitimate to eat anything. REB captures the sense well: ‘one person may have faith “strong” enough to eat all kinds of food’ (cf. also NIV; TEV).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 837f]

**v 3** — “Paul has begun by urging the ‘strong’ to accept the ‘weak’ (v. 1). But he is well aware that both groups are at fault. He therefore rebukes each side in the dispute, continuing to use the generic singular as a way of particularizing his concern. ‘The one who eats’ (that is, ‘the one who eats all things’ [v. 2] = the ‘strong’) is not to ‘despise’ the one who does not (the ‘weak’). And the ‘one who does not eat’ (the ‘weak’) is not to ‘judge’ the one who does (the ‘strong’). Paul’s choice of verbs to describe the attitudes of each group is no doubt deliberate. **‘Despise’ connotes a disdainful, condescending judgment, an attitude that we can well imagine the ‘strong’ majority, who prided themselves on their enlightened, ‘liberal,’ perspective, taking toward those whom they considered to be foolishly ‘hung up’ on the trivia of a bygone era. The ‘weak,’ Paul suggests, responded in kind, considering themselves to be the ‘righteous remnant’ who alone upheld true standards of piety and righteousness and who were ‘standing in judgment’ over those who fell beneath these standards. Paul calls on each side to stop criticizing the other.**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 838]

*“At the end of the verse Paul states the ultimate reason why such mutual criticism is out of place: ‘God has received him.’ Here we find Paul’s theological ‘bottom line’ in this whole issue, one that he elaborates in vv. 4-9 and states again at the*

*climax of his argument (15:7). Christians have no right to reject from their fellowship those whom God himself has accepted.* They must ‘receive’ those whom God has ‘received.’ In 15:7, Paul uses this principle to urge both the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ to ‘receive one another.’ Here, however, he uses the principle specifically to undergird his command that the ‘weak’ stop standing in judgment over the ‘strong.’ ... In the interests of guarding against an illegitimately broad application of this principle, it is vital to stress that *Paul commands us here to receive those whom God has received. In other words, Paul limits his plea for tolerance to those who can rightly claim a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, involving all those doctrinal and practical requirements that Paul and the NT elsewhere insist must be present for such a genuine saving relationship to exist.*” [Moo, Romans, pg 838f]

“The close connection (see the γάρ [gar], ‘for’) between the last clause of v. 3 and the command that the weak stop judging the strong requires that the αὐτόν [auton, ‘him’] in this last clause refer to the ‘strong’: *the weak is to stop judging the strong because God has received him (the strong).*” [Moo, Romans, pg 839]

**v 4** — “Paul elaborates this critical theological foundation of his exhortation to the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ in vv. 4-9. *‘God has received him’; it is God to whom each believer must answer, and God whom each believer must strive to please.* This point is obviously applicable to both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’; the ‘you’ whom Paul directly addresses in diatribe style in v. 4a may, then, represent both ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ believers. But the description of this person as ‘the one who judges’ picks up the language Paul used to rebuke the ‘weak’ believer in v. 3. Moreover, the beginning of v. 4 sounds a great deal like Paul’s rebuke of the self-satisfied Jew in 2:1 — ‘Therefore you are without excuse, O human being, whoever you are, who is judging’ (cf. also v. 3). This makes it likely that Paul in v. 4a is addressing the Jewish-oriented ‘weak’ believer, whose attitude toward Christians who do not follow the law’s ritual guidelines is similar to that of many Jews toward ‘law-less’ Gentiles.” [Moo, Romans, pg 839]

**NO MAN HAS THE RIGHT TO JUDGE ANOTHER MAN’S HOUSEHOLD SERVANT** — “The very wording of the opening of the rhetorical question reveals the heart of Paul’s concern: ‘Who are *you* who is judging...?’; that is, ‘Who do you think you are, you who are putting yourself in the position of judge over another believer?’ No one has the right to judge a fellow believer because each believer is a ‘household slave’ [οἰκέτης, oiketēs, used only here in Paul; cf. also Luke 16:13; Acts 10:7; 1 Pet. 2:18], one who belongs to ‘another.’ It is ‘with reference to’ that ‘other,’ ‘his own master [kyrios],’ that he must ‘stand or fall.’ The slavery imagery makes clear that *kyrios* has its normal secular meaning of ‘master.’ But Paul undoubtedly expects his Christian readers to see also an allusion to their ultimate Lord. This title, indeed, is central to the theological argument of vv. 4-9.” [Moo, Romans, pg 839f] *“The echo of 2:1, 3 is probably deliberate.... [krinō, ‘judge’] is used twice as often in chaps. 2 and 14 as in any other chapter of the NT. Paul has in view the attitude of the Jew(ish Christian) who is confident that conduct falling outside the rules and boundaries laid down by the law ipso facto puts the individual concerned outside the covenant, ‘without God in the world’ (Eph 2:15). The [oiketēs] is the house or domestic slave, with the implication of a more immediate relationship between slave and particular master, the slave answerable only to his own master.”* [Dunn, Romans, vol 2 pg 803]

**STAND OR FALL OUT OF FAVOR** — “The issue is ... whether the master regards the slave’s conduct as acceptable or unacceptable. In the case of a personal house slave the master’s approval or disapproval counts for everything, and the judgment of others on the slave’s behavior is irrelevant. Moral failure is not in view. The imagery of standing or falling clearly expresses the alternatives of a harmonious relationship (between master and slave) maintained or breached, or, in larger terms, preservation and / or persistence in some responsibility over against some failure in discharging that responsibility.” [Dunn, Romans, vol 2 pg 804] “The use of ‘stand’ and ‘fall’ metaphorically elsewhere and the application of the terms here to the relationship of slave to master suggest that they refer to approval / disapproval; we may compare the English ‘stand in favor with’ / ‘fall out of favor with.’ It is the Lord, not the fellow Christian, whom the believer must please and who will ultimately determine the acceptability of the believer and his or her conduct.” [Moo, Romans, pg 840f]

**THE LORD’S GRACE TO STAND** — “In the last clause of v. 4, the ‘secular’ meaning of *kyrios* gives way to its theological use: the believer whose behavior is being judged ‘will stand, for *the* Lord is able to cause him to stand.’ ‘The Lord’ may here refer to Christ, although this is not certain. Paul here expresses confidence that the ‘strong’ believer will persist in the Lord’s favor. Perhaps Paul’s intention is to suggest to the ‘weak’ believer that the Lord’s approval is attained not by following rules pertaining to food but by the Lord’s own sustaining power: ‘is able’ ‘points both to the possibility and the power of grace.’” [Moo, Romans, pg 841] “To be noted at once is the characterization of those who feel the traditional Jewish customs to be too important to give up, as ‘weak.’ They might well feel somewhat insulted by the label. Were they not rather demonstrating the strength of their principles? — the same strength of devotion as had been shown by Daniel and the Maccabees. But Paul is quite clear that the position they hold to is one characterized by a deficiency in faith. By implication they are putting too much weight on the outward form of the covenant people (2:17-29); too much weight on their physical (fleshly) membership of Israel (13:14); they are not living out of complete dependence on God like father Abraham (4:19-21). Paul is in no doubt: the attitude thus expressed is deficient, ‘weak.’ ... [Paul calls] for a genuine recognition and acceptance of the other’s status as a Christian (cf. 14:4). This is addressed particularly to the traditionalists. For ‘the weak’ are traditionalists precisely because they regard these traditions as fundamental to their faith. They cannot conceive of that faith without or apart from these traditions. That is why their natural inclination is to ‘condemn’ the liberal — because their understanding of Christianity is more tightly defined and because the liberal falls outside Christianity as they understand it. For the more traditional Christian, the more liberal Christian is not actually to be reckoned as a Christian. Paul’s response is to challenge just that presupposition, to challenge the traditionalists to recognize

that Christianity is larger than their definition of it, to recognize that God accepts people whose views and practices they think are unacceptable. With repeated emphasis Paul presses home the point: ‘God has welcomed him ... he is God’s servant ... he will stand because it is precisely and solely God’s prerogative and power to make him stand’ (vv. 3-4). This is a crucial step in Paul’s pastoral tactic: to get the traditionalists actually to accept that someone who differs from them, and differs from them in something they regard as fundamental, is nevertheless acceptable to God and accepted by God.” [Dunn, *Romans*, vol 2 pg 812f]

**v 5** — “Paul interrupts his theological argument to cite another point on which the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’ disagree: the evaluation of ‘days.’ Paul does not explicitly relate this dispute over days to the ‘strong’ and ‘weak.’ But we may be relatively certain that the ‘weak’ believer was the one who was ‘judging’ ‘one day to be more important than another day,’ while the ‘strong’ believer was ‘judging each day to be the same.’ Pinning down the exact nature of this disagreement over ‘days’ is difficult since Paul does not elaborate. Some expositors trace the problem to the influence of the pagan environment, which might have led some Roman Christians to distinguish ‘lucky’ and ‘unlucky’ days, or to practice days of abstinence in accordance with certain Greco-Roman religious cults. But we have seen good reason to trace the root issue between the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ to Jewish concerns about the law. And the observance of days was, of course, important in the OT and in Judaism. Whether the specific point at issue was the observance of the great Jewish festivals, regular days of fasting, or the Sabbath is difficult to say. But we would expect that the Sabbath, at least, would be involved, since Sabbath observance was, along with food laws (cf. vv. 2-3), a key Jewish distinctive in the first century, and surfaced as a point of tension elsewhere in the early church (see Gal. 4:10 [?]; Col. 2:16). *It is typical of Paul’s approach to the dispute in Rome that he does not commend, or command, one practice or the other, but exhorts each believer to be ‘thoroughly convinced in his own mind.’*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 841f]

**THE DAYS BEING DIFFERENT / SAME** — “The Greek is ἡμέραν παρά ἡμέραν [hēmeran par’ hēmeran], with παρά [para] meaning ‘more than;’ the weak believer ‘prefers [one] day more than [another] day.’ ... The Gk. κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν [krinei pasan hēmeran] is elliptical: ‘judges every day’ (lit.) must mean ‘judges every day to be the same.’ Almost all commentators assumed that it was the ‘strong’ who were treating every day the same. However [a few commentators] thinks that it was the ‘weak’ who were treating every day the same, refusing to join the ‘strong’ in their observance of festive occasions.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 842]

**INTERESTING OBSERVATION IF THE “DAY” CONTROVERSY CONCERNED THE SABBATH** — “As Stuhlmacher correctly notes, *inclusion of Sabbath observation among the matters of dispute in Rome demonstrates that it was not considered by Paul to be an obligation binding on Christians*; this suggests, further, that the early church did not take over the Decalogue as a whole. Reference to early Christian observance of ‘the Lord’s Day,’ on the other hand, is almost certainly not present.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 842]

**v 6** — “Paul now uses this dispute about days to launch back into the theological rationale for his rebuke of judgmental attitudes. Verse 4, where Paul began his rationale, came in a context where Paul was criticizing the ‘weak’ believers. Now, however, *by citing examples of the behavior of both the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong,’ Paul makes clear that his argument applies equally to both.* The first example Paul cites could refer to both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak,’ if we were to give the verb *phroneō* a general or neutral meaning: ‘The person who *holds an opinion about* the day, *holds that opinion* to the Lord.’ But the word probably here means ‘to be concerned about,’ ‘observe,’ in which case the reference will be to the ‘weak’ believer. Paul then returns to the issue with which he began, referring first to the ‘strong’ believer — ‘the one who eats’ — and then to the ‘weak’ again — ‘the one who does not eat.’ *In each of these instances, Paul notes, the believer — whether ‘strong’ or ‘weak’ — does what he or she does ‘to the Lord,’ that is, ‘in the interest of,’ ‘for the benefit of,’ the Lord. The believer who sets aside certain days for fasting, or who observes the Sabbath, does so because he or she sincerely believes this honors the Lord. Similarly, both the believer who eats anything without discrimination and the believer who refuses to eat certain things ‘give thanks’ to God at their mealtimes and are motivated in their respective practices by a desire to glorify the Lord.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 842f]

**v 7** — “In v. 4 Paul compared the Christian to the slave who is dedicated ‘to his or her own master (or lord).’ He applies this comparison to specific activities of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ Christians in v. 6 — observing days ‘to the Lord’; eating and abstaining ‘to the Lord.’ Now, in vv. 7-9, Paul gives a general theological explanation for this comparison. *Christ’s death and resurrection have established him as Lord over all believers; and believers must therefore recognize that all their activities are done ‘for the benefit of’ that Lord — and not for the benefit of any other Christian who may presume to judge us or any of our actions.* These verses are therefore the heart of Paul’s rebuke of the Roman Christians for their judgmental attitude (vv. 1-12).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 843f]

“Paul begins with a negative point: ‘For no one of us lives to himself and no one dies to himself.’ *Paul probably uses both ‘live’ and ‘die’ to make the point as comprehensive as possible: nothing at all that a Christian does is done ‘with reference to himself alone’ or ‘for his own benefit.’ The implicit comparison is not with other human beings — as if Paul were thinking, in the words of John Donne, ‘No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main....’ Rather, as the context makes clear, the comparison is with the Lord.* Paul develops this point in v. 8, the positive counterpart to v. 7.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 844]

**v 8 — CHRISTIANS LIVE OR DIE WHOLLY IN THE HANDS OF THE LORD** — “That no Christian lives or dies ‘to

himself' is clear from the truth, which Christians confess, that 'if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord.' ***We can easily understand how Christians 'live to the Lord': all parts of believers' lives — their thoughts, actions, ambitions, decisions — are to be carried out with a view to what pleases and glorifies the Lord. But what does it mean to 'die to the Lord'?*** A few interpreters think that Paul might be using 'die' in a spiritual sense, as in Rom. 6:3-6. But nothing in the context would suggest such a nuance. Paul must be referring to physical death. In this regard, he probably has in mind the fact that ***the circumstances of the believer's death, as of his life, are determined not by his will or in consideration of his own interests, but are wholly in the hands of the Lord, who sets the time for death in accordance with his own interests and purposes.***" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 844]

**CHRISTIANS' UNION WITH CHRIST IN LIFE OR DEATH** — "The last sentence of the verse summarizes: 'Therefore whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.' The change in grammatical structure (from 'to the Lord' to 'of the Lord') broadens the idea: not only does the believer live and die 'in the Lord's interests'; in both life and death he or she also belongs to the Lord. The union with the Lord Christ, with all its benefits that the believer enjoys in this life will continue after death with, indeed, an even fuller measure of blessing (cf. 8:18, 31-39)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 844f]

**v 9** — "Paul's theological reasoning continues: whether we live or die, we 'belong to the Lord,' because it was this for very reason that Christ died and 'came to life,' namely, to 'become lord' of both the dead and the living. Paul is reminding the Roman Christians of a well-known truth; see 2 Cor. 5:15: 'And he died on behalf of all, in order that those who live might live no longer to themselves but to the one who died on their behalf and was raised.' Here also Christ's death and resurrection stimulate Christians to live 'for the Lord' rather than 'for themselves.' But Paul tailors the tradition for its particular function at this point in Romans. For one thing, he departs from the more customary 'Christ rose and was raised' (cf. 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Rom. 8:34) to use a formula unique in the NT: 'Christ died and came to life.' Presumably Paul does this in order to forge the closest possible link between Christ's redemptive acts — his death and 'coming to life' — and the two most basic parts of Christian experience — life and death. The same purpose explains the unusual word order 'the dead and the living' at the end of the verse: Paul simply maintains the order that he used in depicting Christ's work on behalf of Christians (v. 9a). This is not to say, however, that Paul intends Christ's death to have particular relationship to his lordship over the dead and his 'coming to life' over the living. ***It is Christ's death and resurrection together that establish his lordship over all people, including especially here Christians, whether they are living or dead.*** In teaching that Christ's redemptive work established his lordship, Paul is not of course denying that Christ has eternally exercised his lordship. But, as usual, Paul's focus is on that unique exercise of 'kingdom' power and rule that were established only through Christ's death and resurrection and the appropriation of the benefits of those acts by individual persons in faith." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 845f]

**v 10** — "With the emphatic return to the second person diatribe style — 'you' — Paul signals his return to exhortation after the theological rationale of vv. 7-9. He first rebukes the representative 'weak' Christian in the same terms he used in v. 4a (and cf. also v. 3b): 'Who are you who is judging your brother?' He then adds, for the first time, a direct rebuke of the 'strong' Christian, again duplicating the language he used to describe the 'strong' Christian's attitude in v. 3: 'Or you also, why are you despising your brother?' Paul's direct and lively style creates the picture of the apostle shifting his gaze from the 'weak' to the 'strong' as he publicly chastises these representative Christians from the Roman community. ***Each, Paul suggests by using the term 'brother' (which becomes central to the argument of vv. 13-23), is guilty of casting doubt on the status of a fellow member of the spiritual family. No believer has such a right. For, in an extension of the central theological argument of vv. 7-9, Paul reminds the Roman Christians that 'we all must appear before the judgment seat of God.'*** Paul may be warning the believers that they stand in danger of suffering God's judgment for their sinful criticism of one another. But, in light of vv. 7-9, we think it more likely that he is reminding them that it is God, and not other Christians, to whom each believer is answerable. ***In 'judging' and 'despising' others, therefore, they are arrogating to themselves a prerogative that is God's only. He will pronounce his judgment over every believer's status and actions on that day when 'each will receive good or evil according to the things that he or she has done in the body' (2 Cor. 5:10).***" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 846f]

**JUDGMENT SEAT** — "Gk. βῆμα [bēma]; it denotes a secular scene of judgment in Matt. 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 7:5; 12:21; 18:12, 16, 17; 25:6, 10, 17. Paul is the only NT author to appropriate the term for theological purposes; cf. also 2 Cor. 5:10.... Some MSS assimilate this verse to 2 Cor. 5:10 — which speaks of the 'judgment seat of Christ' — by reading Χριστου [Christou] in place of θεου [theou, 'God']. The shift in terminology does not imply that Paul conceives of two separate 'judgment seats' but that he views God and Christ as so closely related that he can shift almost unconsciously from one to the other — a noted feature of these verses." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 846]

**v 11** — "In confirmation that God, and God alone, will judge all people and their actions on the last day, Paul cites Isa. 45:23: 'As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow and every tongue will praise God.' The appropriateness of the application of this text to the matter discussed in 14:1-12 is enhanced when we note that it is surrounded by statements of the Lord's unique sovereignty: 'I am God, and there is no other' (v. 22b); 'Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength' (v. 24a)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 847]

**CONFESS TO GOD OR PRAISE GOD?** — "The Greek word here is ἐξομολογέω [exomologeō], which usually means 'confess,' a meaning some commentators want to give the word here (cf. Phil. 2:11, where it seems to have this meaning also). But

the word is used in the LXX ... to mean 'praise' (cf. 2 Sam. 22:50; 1 Chron. 29:13; Ps. 85:12; 117:28, etc.)." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 847]

**v 12** — "Paul summarizes vv. 10c-11: 'Therefore each of us will give account of himself to God.' '*Each* of us' carries on the universalistic emphasis of the previous verses: 'we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of God' (v. 10c); '*every* knee will bow'; '*every* tongue will confess' (v. 11). But, as the first person plural ('we') of v. 10c and the 'us' here indicate, Paul is especially concerned to remind Christians that they will be among those who must 'give an account' of their behavior before the sovereign and all-knowing judge of history. *This reminder, with which Paul concludes this part of his exhortation, is two-pronged. On the one hand, as Paul has emphasized earlier (vv. 4, 10), it shows why it is wrong for a Christian to stand in judgment over another: 'Do not judge your brother, for God will judge him.'* But the fact of judgment to come also reminds believers that they will have to answer before the Lord for their own behavior: '*Do not judge your brother (and so sin), for God will judge you.*'" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 848]

## **Do Not Cause Your Brother to Stumble! (14:13-23)**

*Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* (Rom 14:13-23 KJV)

*Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.* (Rom 14:13-23 NIV)

*no longer, therefore, may we judge one another, but this judge ye rather, not to put a stumbling-stone before the brother, or an offence. I have known, and am persuaded, in the Lord Jesus, that nothing [is] unclean of itself, except to him who is reckoning anything to be unclean — to that one [it is] unclean; and if through victuals thy brother is grieved, no more dost thou walk according to love; do not with thy victuals destroy that one for whom Christ died. Let not, then, your good be evil spoken of, for the reign of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit; for he who in these things is serving the Christ, [is] acceptable to God and approved of men. So, then, the things of peace may we pursue, and the things of building up one another; for the sake of victuals cast not down the work of God; all things, indeed, [are] pure, but evil [is] to the man who is eating through stumbling. Right [it is] not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to [do anything] in which thy brother doth stumble, or is made to fall, or is weak. Thou hast faith! to thyself have [it] before God; happy is he who is not judging himself in what he doth approve, and he who is making a difference, if he may eat, hath been condemned, because [it is] not of faith; and all that [is] not of faith is sin.* (Rom 14:13-23 Young's Literal Translation)

“Although Paul begins vv. 1-12 with a plea to the ‘strong’ and quickly moves on to address both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ (v. 3; cf. also v. 10), his focus is on the ‘weak’ (vv. 3b-4; and the argument of vv. 7-9, while relevant to both groups, is especially applicable to the ‘weak’). Paul balances this focus by concentrating in vv. 13-23 almost exclusively on the ‘strong.’ On the negative side, Paul exhorts the ‘strong’ not to use their liberty in such a way that they would cause their weaker brothers to suffer spiritual harm (e.g., ‘stumble’; cf. vv. 13b, 20b-21; cf. also vv. 15a, 15c, and 20a). Positively, Paul urges the ‘strong’ to recognize that their freedom on these matters (‘their good’ in v. 16) must be governed by love for their fellow believers (v. 15) and concern for the ‘building up’ of the body of Christ (v. 19). Structurally, Paul’s exhortation to the ‘strong’ takes a form that resembles the one he has used in vv. 1-12. Again his basic exhortation is found at the beginning and at the end of the text — ‘don’t cause a weaker Christian to stumble’ (vv. 13b-16 and vv. 19-23) — while a central section sets forth the basic theological rationale for his exhortation — the nature of the kingdom of God (vv. 17-18). Further, the basic points Paul makes in the two exhortation sections are in chiasmic order:



- A Warning about stumbling blocks — v. 13b
- B Nothing is ‘unclean’ in itself — v. 14a
- C Do not ‘destroy’ one for whom Christ died — v. 15b
- C’ Do not tear down ‘the work of God’ — v. 20a
- B’ All things are ‘clean’ — v. 20b
- A’ Don’t do anything to cause the fellow believer to stumble — v. 21” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 849f]

**v 13** — “Let us no longer be judging one another’ is transitional. The exhortation sums up vv. 1-12 while preparing for the new focus in vv. 13-23. Both the ‘strong’ Christian and the ‘weak’ Christian, Paul has made clear, are to stop standing in judgment over one another; for God has accepted each one, and it is to their master, the Lord who has redeemed them, and not to any fellow servant, that they are answerable.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 850]

**JUDGE ... JUDGE** — “In the second half of the verse, however, Paul turns to the ‘strong’ in faith, using a play on the word *krinō* to forge his transition. In the first part of the verse, this verb means ‘condemn’; in the second half, however, it means ‘determine,’ ‘decide.’ Rather than ‘judging’ (condemning) others, the ‘strong’ in faith are to ‘judge’ (decide) ‘not to place a stumbling block or cause of offense before their fellow believer.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 850f]

**STUMBLING BLOCK ... OCCASION TO FALL** — “‘Stumbling block’ translates a word that refers to that which causes a person to trip or stumble. The word took on a metaphorical sense and is always used in the NT with reference to spiritual downfall. Similar is the origin and use of *skandalon*, ‘cause of offense.’ It, too, originally denoted a literal ‘trap,’ but it came quickly to have a metaphorical meaning, ‘occasion of misfortune,’ ‘cause of ruin.’ The words are essentially synonymous here.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 851]

**USING OUR LIBERTY TO CAUSE OTHERS TO SIN** — “Paul neither here nor anywhere in this paragraph delineates the exact manner in which the ‘strong’ believer might cause ‘spiritual downfall’ to the ‘weak’ believer. But Paul’s concern to remind the ‘strong’ believers that food, while in theory ‘clean,’ might be ‘unclean’ to the ‘weak’ believer (v. 14), coupled with his concluding assertion that a person who acts against ‘what he believes’ commits sin, suggests that he is thinking of the possibility that the ‘strong’ believers’ exercise of liberty might create pressure on the ‘weak’ believers to do what their consciences were telling them not to do and so fall into sin and potential spiritual ruin.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 851f]

**v 14** — “In this verse Paul lays the groundwork for the suggestion, implicit in his exhortation of v. 13b, that the behavior of the ‘strong’ could bring spiritual harm to the ‘weak.’ Paul begins by stating a fundamental principle — one to which the ‘strong’ would no doubt give an enthusiastic ‘Amen!’ : ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself.’ ‘Unclean’ translates a word that means ‘common.’ But Jews began using the word to denote those things that, by virtue of what they considered inappropriate contact with the ordinary, secular, world, were ritually defiled or unclean. Paul clearly uses the word here in this sense, as the antonym ‘clean’ in the parallel v. 20 makes clear. This connotation of the word ‘common’ or ‘unclean’ also makes clear that Paul is not here claiming that there is nothing at all that is absolutely evil or sinful. His statement must be confined to the point at issue: ritual defilement as defined by OT / Jewish law.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 852]

“The ‘strong’ in faith would certainly agree with this declaration of liberty; indeed, their position may well be the result of their acquaintance, directly or indirectly, with Paul’s own bold stance on these matters. But, as he does in the very similar Corinthian situation (see 1 Cor. 8:4-7), Paul quickly adds a complementary and qualifying truth: ‘But to the one who reckons something to be unclean, to that person it is unclean.’ *What Paul wants the ‘strong’ to realize is that people differ in their ability to internalize truth. The fact that Christ’s coming brought an end to the absolute validity of the Mosaic law (cf. 6:14, 15; 7:4), and thus explicitly to the ritual provisions of that law, was standard early Christian teaching. And, at the intellectual level, the ‘weak’ Christians may themselves have understood this truth. But Paul wants the ‘strong’ in faith to recognize that people cannot always ‘existentially’ grasp such truth — particularly when it runs so counter to a long and strongly held tradition basic to their own identity as God’s people.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 853]

**v 15** — **BREAKING THE LAW OF LOVE** — “Verse 14, supplying the theoretical basis for Paul’s use of the language of spiritual downfall in v. 13, is somewhat parenthetical. Verse 15, accordingly, probably relates especially to v. 13: *Don’t put a stumbling block in the way of a brother (v. 13b), ... ‘for’ this is just what you are doing — by insisting on exercising your freedom to eat food, you bring pain to your fellow believer and thereby violate the cardinal Christian virtue of love.* The ‘pain’ that the ‘strong’ believer causes the ‘weak’ believer is more than the annoyance or irritation that the ‘weak’ believer might feel toward those who act in ways they do not approve. Its relationship to the warnings about spiritual downfall in vv. 13b and 15b show that it must denote the pain caused the ‘weak’ believer by the violation of his or her conscience. *The eating of the ‘strong,’ coupled with their attitude of superiority and scorn toward those who think differently, can pressure the ‘weak’ into eating even when they do not yet have the faith to believe that it is right for them to do so. And by doing what does not come ‘out of faith,’ the ‘weak’ sin (v. 23) and suffer the pain of that knowledge. In behaving as they are, then, the ‘strong’ are ignoring what Paul has set forth in 12:9-21; 13:8-10 as basic to Christian conduct: love for ‘the neighbor.’*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 853f]

**SHARPENING THE POINT IN TWO MANNERS** — “Paul sharpens his point by issuing an apostasy command: ‘Do not because of food destroy one for whom Christ died.’ This command raises the stakes in two ways. *First, instead of speaking*

generally about the ‘spiritual harm’ (v. 13b) and ‘pain’ (v. 15a) that the ‘strong’ might cause the ‘weak,’ Paul stresses that their actions can ‘destroy’ them. ‘Destroy’ might refer to the spiritual grief and self-condemnation that the ‘weak’ incur by following the practices of the ‘strong’ against their consciences. But Pauline usage suggests rather that Paul is warning the ‘strong’ that their behavior has the potential to bring the ‘weak’ to ultimate spiritual ruin — failure to attain final salvation. If Paul is not simply exaggerating for effect, perhaps he thinks that the ‘weak’ in faith might be led by the scorn of the ‘strong’ to turn away entirely from their faith. **Second, Paul accentuates the matter by reminding the ‘strong’ in faith about the tremendous sacrifice that Christ had already made to provide for the salvation of that ‘weak’ believer. If, Paul implies, Christ has already paid the supreme price for that ‘weak’ Christian, how can the ‘strong’ refuse to pay the quite insignificant price of a minor and occasional restriction in their diet?”** [Moo, *Romans*, pg 854f]

**DESTROY THE BRETHREN** — “Every time Paul uses the verb ἀπόλλυμι [apollumi, ‘destroy’] with a personal object, it refers to spiritual ruin (with three possible exceptions): Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 1:18; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10; the possible exceptions are 1 Cor. 10:9, 10; 2 Cor. 4:9. See also the use of the cognate noun (e.g., Phil. 1:28; 3:19). He uses the verb with an impersonal object only in 1 Cor. 1:19. Two theological nonimplications of taking ἀπόλλυμι [apollumi, ‘destroy’] to refer to ultimate spiritual destruction should be noted. First, the word is applied to the spiritual realm as a metaphor; it does not suggest the annihilation of the person. Second, Rom. 14:15 does not refute the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints because (1) Paul does not make clear that the person who might be destroyed is genuinely regenerate (although this conclusion must be drawn by those who adhere to limited atonement since the person is one ‘on whose behalf Christ died’) since the NT can use [brother] of one who appears to be a believer; and (2) Paul does not say that the destruction will actually take place — he warns that this would be the ultimate consequence if the sin goes unchecked. As Hodge puts it: **‘Believers (the elect) are constantly spoken of as in danger of perdition. They are saved only, if they continue steadfast unto the end. If they apostatize, they perish.... Saints are preserved, not in despite of apostasy, but from apostasy.’**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 854f]

**v 16** — “The prohibition in the verse is a conclusion that Paul draws from what he has just said in vv. 14-15. Freedom from the dietary laws is a ‘good’ thing, a legitimate implication of the coming of Jesus the Messiah and the New Covenant. But if the Christian were to use that freedom in such a way that a fellow believer was put in spiritual danger, that ‘good’ would quickly become something that would be ‘blasphemed’ — that is, it would become the cause of other people reviling and defaming that which is a divine gift.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 855]

**v 17** — “In verses 17-18 Paul provides the theological underpinnings for his imperatives in vv. 13-16 and 19-23. The ‘strong’ need perspective; and this is just what Paul tries to give them here. **For the ‘strong’ are placing too high a value on Christian freedom from ceremonial observances. By insisting that they exercise their liberty in these matters, they are causing spiritual harm to fellow believers and are thereby failing to maintain a proper focus on what is truly important in the kingdom of God. Theirs, paradoxically, is the same fault as that of the Pharisees, only in reverse: where the Pharisees insisted on strict adherence to the ritual law at the expense of ‘justice, mercy, and faith’ (Matt. 23:23), the ‘strong’ are insisting on exercising their freedom from the ritual law at the expense of ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ For these are the qualities, Paul reminds the ‘strong,’ that are what the kingdom of God is all about — not ‘eating and drinking.’ At the same time, of course, while not explicitly directed to them, this theology would be important for the ‘weak’ also to hear — and act upon.**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 856]

**v 18** — “Paul now underscores the point that he has just made: ‘righteousness, peace, and joy’ are central to life in the kingdom, ‘for the one who serves Christ in this’ both pleases God and is ‘esteemed by people.’ ... Paul’s description of the believer as one who is ‘serving Christ’ reminds us of his characterization of the believer as a servant who is required to satisfy the demands of his or her master (vv. 4, 7-8). And by making the believer’s service of Christ the means of honoring God, Paul places Christ and God in a relationship that is typical of this whole section. It is only as the ‘strong’ submit to Christ and the demands of his kingdom in this matter of ceremonial observances that they will meet with God’s approval. At the same time, by following Christ in love and putting ‘righteousness, peace, and joy’ ahead of ‘eating and drinking,’ the ‘strong,’ rather than being ‘blasphemed’ by the ‘weak,’ will be esteemed by them.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 857f]

**v 19 — THE “STRONG” SHOULD MAINTAIN BEHAVIOR WHICH PROMOTES PEACE** — “After his ‘indicative’ interlude, Paul turns back to ‘imperative,’ exhorting the Roman Christians to put into practice in their relationships with each other the principles of the kingdom that he has just set forth (vv. 17-18). This verse, then, introduces the concluding section of commands in this paragraph (vv. 19-23), a section that matches, in both structure and, to a lesser extent, content, the opening series of exhortations (vv. 13-16). Having made ‘peace’ a basic feature of the kingdom of God (v. 17), Paul now exhorts the Roman Christians to ‘pursue’ ‘those things that make for peace.’ This ‘peace,’ more clearly here than in v. 17, is horizontal: peace with other Christians. **As v. 20 makes clear, Paul is still addressing the ‘strong’: he calls on them to maintain the kind of attitude and behavior with respect to the matters of dispute in the Roman church that will foster harmony between the two factions.** Paul exhorts them also to pursue ‘those things that make for edification of one another.’ Paul probably is thinking more of the edification, or ‘building up,’ of the church as a whole than of the edification of individual believers. ‘Those things’ that edify the church are probably, then, a more specific way of describing ‘those things’ that lead to peace. **The strong believers will foster peace in the community by making the interests of the church as a whole their priority.**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 858f]

**V 20 — WARNING TO THE STRONG: DO NOT DESTROY THE WORK OF GOD (THE CHURCH)** — “Paul now uses a more direct and forceful style to urge a representative ‘strong’ believer not to ‘tear down the work of God.’ This prohibition is the flip side of the positive exhortation to ‘pursue ... those things that make for edification’ (v. 19b); for ‘tear down’ is a natural antonym of ‘build up.’ *‘The work of God,’ accordingly, probably refers to the Christian community rather than to the individual ‘weak’ believer. Paul is warning ‘strong’ believers that they can seriously damage the church — destroy its unity and sap its strength — through their attitudes and actions towards the ‘weak.’ And they cause this damage ‘for the sake of food’ — because they persist in behaving in a certain way in a matter that is peripheral, at best, to the kingdom of God.*” [Moo, Romans, pg 859f]

**CHRISTIANS HAVE FREEDOM, BUT THIS FREEDOM IS CONSTRAINED BY LOVE FOR OTHERS** — “*To be sure, Paul admits, the strong believers are right to think that they possess the freedom as the New Covenant people of God to eat and drink without any restriction from the Old Covenant law — ‘all things are clean.’ But, as he did earlier when making the same point (v. 14), Paul immediately qualifies this assertion of liberty. In the former verse, Paul’s qualification had to do with the perception and attitude of the ‘weak’ believer: ‘to the one who reckons something to be unclean, to that person it is unclean.’ ... But context and grammar [suggest] the ‘person who eats’ here is the ‘strong believer.’ Paul is therefore warning the ‘strong’ believer that it is wrong for him or her to eat ‘while causing offense’ or ‘if it causes [another] to stumble’; cf. NRSV: ‘it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat.’*” [Moo, Romans, pg 860]

**V 21** — “As v. 17 sums up the central theological point, so this assertion states the basic practical point that Paul makes in vv. 13-23. The ‘stumbling’ will again (cf. vv. 13b, 20b) consist in the ‘weak’ in faith, under pressure from the arguments and example of the ‘strong,’ doing what they still think is wrong. The issue of ‘eating’ has been central to the argument from the beginning, but this verse clarifies what is meant in v. 2 — ‘eats vegetables,’ that is, ‘is a vegetarian, abstaining from meat’ — and elaborates the brief references to ‘food’ and ‘eating’ throughout this paragraph (vv. 15, 17, 20)... [T]he ‘weak’ probably abstained from meat because they feared that it would not meet the ritual requirements of the OT law. Paul’s reference here to ‘drinking wine’ probably implies that the same believers avoided wine out of similar concerns: for wine was widely used in pagan religious libations. But Paul clearly intends to make the principles he states here as widely applicable as possible by adding ‘or anything else.’ *The believer who seeks the peace and edification of the church should gladly refrain from activities that might cause a fellow believer to suffer harm.*” [Moo, Romans, pg 861]

**V 22 — TO THE “STRONG”: DO NOT PUSH YOUR FREEDOM ON THE “WEAK”** — “Paul continues to address the representative ‘strong’ Christian. ‘You’ is emphatic: *‘as for you, the faith that you have, keep to yourself before God!’* This is the first time since the beginning of the chapter that Paul has used the language of faith to characterize the parties in dispute. As in v. 1, ‘faith’ does not refer to general Christian faith but to convictions about the issues in dispute in Rome that arise out of one’s faith in Christ. Paul is not, then, telling the ‘strong’ Christian to be quiet about his or her faith in Christ — a plea that would be quite out of place in the NT! Nor is he necessarily requiring ‘strong’ believers never to mention their views on these matters or to speak of their sense of freedom before others. As the context suggests, *the silence that Paul requires is related to the need to avoid putting a stumbling block in the way of the ‘weak.’ This will mean that the ‘strong’ are not to brag about their convictions before the ‘weak’ and, especially, that they are not to propagandize the ‘weak.’*” [Moo, Romans, pg 861f]

**BE CONTENT WITH YOUR BLESSING WITHOUT FLAUNTING IT** — The blessing Paul gives at the end of the verse probably has the sense of commendation to those believers who have no reservations concerning the “eating of foods” and therefore have no cause to “reproach” themselves for their conduct. See TEV: “Happy is the person who does not feel guilty when he does something he judges is right.” *“Paul’s point, then, is that the ‘strong’ should be content with the blessing God has given them in enabling them to understand the liberty that their faith provides them, without feeling it necessary to flaunt that liberty before their ‘weaker’ brothers.”* [Moo, Romans, pg 862]

**V 23 — TO VIOLATE OUR CONSCIENCE IS SIN** — “In contrast to the Christian who acts from conviction is the ‘weak’ Christian ‘who has doubts’ or ‘who wavers.’ The doubts of such Christians arise from the fact that they do not have a strong enough faith to believe that they can ignore the ritual elements of the OT law. Doubters such as this, Paul says, are ‘condemned’ when they eat. *This is not simply a subjective self-condemnation; as the reference to sin later in the verse makes clear, Paul refers to God’s disapproval of such an act. Condemnation comes not because of the eating itself; as Paul has already explained (vv. 14, 20), eating anything one wants is quite all right for the believer. Rather, what brings God’s condemnation is eating when one does not have the faith to believe that it is right to do it. This, Paul claims, is ‘sin.’ Why? Because, Paul goes on to explain, ‘everything that is not out of faith is sin.’* Paul here asserts a general theological principle. But it is necessary to describe accurately just what that principle is. Most important is to realize that ‘faith’ here almost certainly has the same meaning that it has elsewhere in this chapter (vv. 1, 22): ‘conviction’ stemming from one’s faith in Christ. Paul is not, then, claiming that any act that does not arise out of a basic trust and dependency on Christ is sinful, true as that may be. *What he here labels ‘sin,’ rather, is any act that does not match our sincerely held convictions about what our Christian faith allows us to do and prohibits us from doing. ‘For a Christian not a single decision and action can be good which he does not think he can justify on the ground of his Christian conviction and his liberty before God in Christ.’ Violation of the dictates of conscience, even when conscience does not conform perfectly with God’s will, is sinful. And we must remember that Paul cites this theological*

*point to buttress his exhortation of the 'strong.' The 'strong,' he is suggesting, should not force the 'weak' to eat meat, or drink wine, or ignore the Sabbath, when the 'weak' are not yet convinced that their faith in Christ allows them to do so. For to do so would be to force them into sin, to put a 'stumbling' block in their way (cf. vv. 13, 20-21). First, their faith must be strengthened, their consciences enlightened; and then they can follow the 'strong' in exercising Christian liberty together."*

[Moo, *Romans*, pg 863f]