SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Romans

Chapter Fourteen, Verses 1–23

The Weak, the Strong, and the Lord — Welcoming the Brother Who Differs, and Loving the One Who Could Fall

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

A church in Rome split over meat, wine and holy days. Paul does not pick a winner; he puts both sides in front of the same Master and the same judgment seat, and teaches strong and weak alike how to live together when the Bible leaves a matter open. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Romans 14:1–23

receive · to the Lord · don't stumble · faith

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Disputable matters, a judgment seat, and a kingdom that is not food and drink

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"For if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." — Romans 14:8

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Romans 14:1–23

The Weak, the Strong, and the Lord — receive the weak, stop judging, don't trip your brother — for the kingdom is not food and drink

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Romans 14 in 5 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

- DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
- R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
- C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
- MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 14:17

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

† Before the Passage

Romans 12 began the "therefore" of the letter: in view of the mercies of God, present your bodies a living sacrifice (12:1). Chapter 13 ended with love as the fulfilling of the law and a call to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh" (13:14). Chapter 14 asks what that love looks like in a mixed congregation, where believers who all trust the same Christ still disagree about what they may eat, drink and keep. The argument runs on into 15:13 — "Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength" (15:1) — and closes with Jew and Gentile glorifying God "with one voice" (15:6).

The background is the church Paul had not yet visited. Rome had Jewish believers raised on the food laws of Leviticus 11 and the feasts and Sabbaths of Israel, and Gentile believers who had come out of pagan temples whose meat filled the city's markets. Some, to be safe, ate "vegetables only" (14:2); some still honored particular days (14:5). Matthew Henry reads it as a quarrel between Jewish and Gentile Christians, and he sets

it beside Galatians: the Romans erred from weakness, the Galatians from willfulness — at Rome no one was saying the food laws saved you.

That distinction governs the whole chapter. Romans 14 is about *disputable matters* — Paul's phrase is "opinions" (14:1) — things Scripture neither commands nor forbids, which Sproul calls *adiaphora* and Guzik "doubtful things" — matters indifferent in themselves. It is not about sin the Bible names plainly. Paul himself has just said in the same letter that drunkenness and sexual immorality have no place in the believer's life (13:13). Wine appears in 14:21; drunkenness is already settled in 13:13. Both facts matter for every man in recovery who reads this chapter.

Watch the two verbs in verse 3. The strong are tempted to **despise**; the weak are tempted to **judge**. Paul answers both with God: God has accepted him (v. 3), the Lord is able to make him stand (v. 4), we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (v. 10), and Christ died for him (v. 15). The chapter is less about food than about who is Lord.

FIGURE · WHERE ROMANS 14 APPLIES

DISPUTABLE MATTERS Romans 14 applies — "opinions" (v. 1)	WHAT GOD HAS NAMED SIN Romans 14 does not apply — obey
• Meat from the idol market, or vegetables only (v. 2) • Keeping one day above another (v. 5) • Wine for a man who is free to drink it and stay sober (v. 21) • Today: diet, holidays, music styles, entertainment the Bible doesn't name	• Drunkenness — "do not get drunk with wine" (Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13) • Sexual immorality, idolatry, strife, envying (Gal 5:19–21) • Anything God's Word plainly forbids • Conscience is never "an excuse for obviously sinful behavior" (Guzik)

FOR THE MAN IN RECOVERY

The first drink is not a "liberty" question for him — "I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor 6:12).

The strong brother at his table puts the glass down: "It is good not to … drink wine" (v. 21).

And the sober man doesn't judge the brother who can drink: "God has accepted him" (v. 3).

Romans 14 governs the left column only; the right column was settled before the chapter began (13:13). Wine sits on the left for a man free to drink it — not for a man it has mastered.

I
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 14:1–4

Receive the One Who Is Weak

Two kinds of believers, two temptations — and one God who has accepted them both

> [1] *Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.* [2] *One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.* [3] *The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.* [4] *Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*
>
> ROMANS 14:1–4

FIGURE · WEAK AND STRONG

THE WEAK (“weak in faith” (v. 1))	THE STRONG (“we who are strong” (15:1))
PRACTICE Eats vegetables only; regards one day above another (vv. 2, 5)	**PRACTICE** Eats all things; regards every day alike (vv. 2, 5)
TEMPTED TO **JUDGE** the one who eats (v. 3)	**TEMPTED TO** **DESPISE** the one who abstains (v. 3)
TOLD Don’t judge — God has accepted him; he stands or falls to his own Master, and the Lord will make him stand (3–4)	**TOLD** Accept him; don’t despise him; don’t trip him or destroy him with food; bear his weakness (1, 13, 15; 15:1)

BOTH WILL STAND BEFORE THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF GOD (v. 10)

“God has accepted him” (v. 3) · each will give an account of himself to God (v. 12)

Read across: each side has its own practice, its own temptation (judge or despise, v. 3) and its own instruction — and both end up before the same judgment seat.

προσλαμβάνεσθε

PROSLAMBANESTHE · “ACCEPT, RECEIVE” · G4355

Not “tolerate” but “take to yourself” — the word for welcoming someone into your home and your company. Paul uses it of the believer (v. 1) and of God (v. 3, *proselabeto*, “God has accepted him”), and he will close the argument with it: “Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us” (15:7). The standard for receiving a brother is how Christ received you. The purpose clause sets a limit: *mē eis diakriseis dialogismōn* — “not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.” *Diakrisis* (G1253) is a sifting or deciding; *dialogismos* (G1261) is a reasoning or scruple. Don’t bring him in to put his conscience on trial.

ἐξουθενείτω · κρινέτω

EXOUTHENEITŌ · "DESPISE" G1848 · KRINETŌ · "JUDGE" G2919

Verse 3 gives each side its own sin. *Exoutheneō* is to treat as nothing, to look down on — the strong brother's eye-roll at the man who still won't touch the meat. *Krinō* is to judge, to pass sentence — the weak brother's verdict that the man who eats is compromised. Both reappear in v. 10, "why do you judge your brother? … why do you regard your brother with contempt?" In v. 4 Paul answers with a picture of a household: the slave stands (*stēkei*, G4739) or falls to his own master, "and he will stand" (*stathēsetai*, G2476), for the Lord is able to make him stand. SBLGNT reads *kyrios*, "Lord" (NASB95); the Textus Receptus behind the KJV reads *theos*, "God."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik's first surprise is who the weak brother is: not the man who is lax, but the stricter one — the believer who eats only vegetables to avoid idol-market meat or to keep the Jewish food laws. Such men, he says, "were weaker because of their legalistic attitudes and lack of love towards others," and he lists why a Christian stays weak — a babe in Christ, sick with legalism, poorly fed on bad teaching, short of exercise. But the command is to receive him anyway: "Paul warns us to not make spiritual maturity a requirement for fellowship." He adds two cautions. The weak are not the *rebellious*, and "Legalism has a way of making us think that we are strong and those who don't keep the rules the way we do are weak."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul frames the chapter between two distortions of the Christian life: antinomianism, which uses grace as an excuse to ignore God's law, and "legalism, which seeks to bind us where God has left us free." Romans 14 deals with *adiaphora* — "that which has no inherent ethical bearing," like eating meat or, in his own example, playing ping-pong. The vegetarians at Rome are "weaker" because "they did not understand the fullness of the biblical concept of Christian liberty." Paul's word to the free is direct: "The one who manifests liberty ought not to despise the one who has unusual scruples of conscience." But Sproul is just as careful with the other edge — this is no cover for real sin, and the weak brother's scruple does not become the rule for the church.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon, preaching this passage at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1881, describes the quarrel as running both ways: the strong despised the scruples of the weak, and "the weak condemned the strong, almost charging them with turning their liberty into licentiousness." His verdict is Paul's: "They were both wrong, for they were judging one another." He notes that the same habit is common among believers in his own day, and asks the question this whole movement turns on: "Shall a brother condemn a brother?"

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry calls the chapter "the sovereign balm of Gilead" for a divided church, and he finds the trouble not in the disagreement but in how it was handled: "It was not so much the difference itself that did the mischief as the mismanagement of the difference." The strong despised, the weak judged. Paul, like a wise physician, uses reasons rather than excommunications. The weak are to be welcomed warmly and not dragged into arguments: "Receive him, not to expose him, but to instruct and strengthen him." And no one may judge another man's servant — God "never cast off any one that had true grace, though he was but weak in it," and He is able to hold him up.

II
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 14:5–9

Fully Convinced, and for the Lord

Days, food and thanksgiving — every believer's life belongs to the Lord who died and lived again

> [5] *One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.* [6] *He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.* [7] *For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;* [8] *for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.* [9] *For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.*
>
> ROMANS 14:5–9

πληροφορείσθω

PLĒROPHOREISTHŌ · "BE FULLY CONVINCED" · G4135

A present passive imperative: "let him be fully assured," filled up to the brim with conviction. *Hekastos en tō idiō noi* — "each in his own mind." Paul does not tell the man who keeps a day to stop keeping it, or the man who doesn't to start; he tells both to settle it before God. The same root describes Abraham, "being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform" (4:21). The opposite of this word comes at the end of the chapter: *diakrinomenos*, "he who doubts" (v. 23).

κυριεύσῃ

KYRIEUSĒ · "THAT HE MIGHT BE LORD" · G2961

"For to this end Christ died and lived again" — *apethanen kai ezēsen* — "that He might be Lord (*kyrieusē*) both of the dead and of the living" (v. 9). The verb means to rule as owner. The noun *kyrios*, "Lord" (G2962), is the hinge of vv. 4–9, where it comes eight times. Every "for the Lord" in v. 6 and every "we are the Lord's" in v. 8 rests on the cross and the empty tomb: He bought the right to be the Master of both the man who eats and the man who doesn't.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notices that Paul moves from food to days, which tells us he is "talking more about principles than specific issues" — the teaching reaches far beyond first-century menus. On "fully convinced" he says Paul "is willing to leave it up to the conscience of the individual," but the test is whether it is done "to the Lord," and he warns that conscience cannot become "an excuse for obviously sinful behavior." Verses 7–9 widen the lens: "We must understand that from beginning to end our life is connected to other lives." No man is an island — and because Jesus is Lord, everything we do, eating or abstaining, we do to Him.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul insists the days of verse 5 are not the weekly Sabbath: "Paul is not talking here about the Sabbath, but about certain holy days that were observed among the Jews." Either way, each person may act "to the Lord," and each should be fully convinced. The strong must not pressure the weak to violate even a mistaken conscience — and yet the weak may not make their scruples binding on everyone, which is why Paul refused the Judaizers on circumcision. And "to the Lord" is never a license: "There is no occasion where it is okay for the weaker brother to be involved in adultery."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon reads verse 9 as the key to the judgment seat that follows. Christ "both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" — and when Paul then says we will stand before the judgment seat "of God," Spurgeon argues: "Paul did not say 'Christ,' but 'God,' but by that word he meant the same person." The Lord who owns the living and the dead is the Judge; for Spurgeon the passage is a plain testimony that Jesus is Jehovah.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry reads the days as the Jewish festivals — some Romans still honored them, others knew they were abolished in Christ — while all alike kept the Lord's day. Each must be "fully persuaded in his own mind": we are not to copy another man's practice as our rule, but "First be persuaded that what you do is lawful, before you venture to do it." He notes that giving thanks at meals was an ancient Christian practice, and that both eater and abstainer aim at God. Then he gathers vv. 7–9 into one line: "Christ is the centre, in which all the lines of life and death do meet."

III
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 14:10–12

Before the Judgment Seat of God

Why do you judge? Why do you despise? Every knee will bow, and each will answer for himself

10 *But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with*
contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 *For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE*
LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12 *So then*
each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

ROMANS 14:10–12

"I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance."

ISAIAH 45:23

τῷ βήματι τοῦ θεοῦ

TŌ BĒMATI TOU THEOU · "THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF GOD" · G968

The *bēma* was the raised platform where a magistrate sat to give verdicts — Pilate sat on one (John 19:13), and so did Gallio at Corinth (Acts 18:12). *Parastēsometha*, "we will stand beside," is the word for appearing before a court. SBLGNT and NASB95 read *tou theou*, "of God"; the Textus Receptus behind the KJV reads *tou Christou*, "of Christ," the wording of 2 Corinthians 5:10. Spurgeon, preaching from the KJV, still argued the two are one: the Judge is Christ, and Christ is God.

ἐξομολογήσεται

EXOMOLOGĒSETAI · "WILL CONFESS, GIVE PRAISE" · G1843

Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23 from the Greek Old Testament: "every tongue shall give praise (*exomologēsetai*) to God." The word means to confess openly, to acknowledge out loud — the same verb Paul uses in Philippians 2:11, where every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord. Then v. 12 draws the line: "each one of us will give an account (*logon dōsei*) of himself." Not of his brother. Of himself.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sees both parties in the dock: the strict man judges, the free man shows contempt, and Paul rebukes them in the same breath. His counsel is blunt: "Stop worrying about your brother. You have enough to answer for before Jesus." Quoting Smith, he reads the judgment seat as the *bema* where believers are assessed: it "is only concerned with a Christian's rewards and position in the kingdom, not with his salvation." Isaiah 45:23 means everyone will give account to God, so we can leave our brother with Him.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul's point is short and pastoral: every believer is Christ's servant and answers to Him, and the day is coming when "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (in the wording he read). That coming day is precisely why we stop sitting on one another now. It cuts both ways: the brother with scruples is still family whom God has received, and the brother with liberty is still a servant who must answer to his Master. He closes the sermon warning against lifting matters God left indifferent into tests of righteousness.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In "The Judgment Seat of God" (No. 1601, May 1881) Spurgeon gives four reasons why judging a brother is wrong: it is "unnatural"; "it is an anticipation of the judgment day"; "we impudently intrude ourselves into the office and prerogative of Christ when we condemn the saints"; and "your judgment is unprofitable." Then he presses the text: the judgment is universal, personal and divine — "We shall then have to give an account of our judgments of others." Unlike Guzik, he lets the seat hold saints and sinners together, and ends with Isaiah 45: "you must either break or bow."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry keeps it plain: "Christ will be the judge," and "every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The man who is busy judging others has forgotten that he must give his own account. The judgment seat should not make us more severe toward our brother but more searching toward ourselves — it is the strongest reason in the chapter to examine our own lives first. And the Judge is the same Christ who died, rose and revived to be Lord of the dead and the living.

IV
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 14:13–18

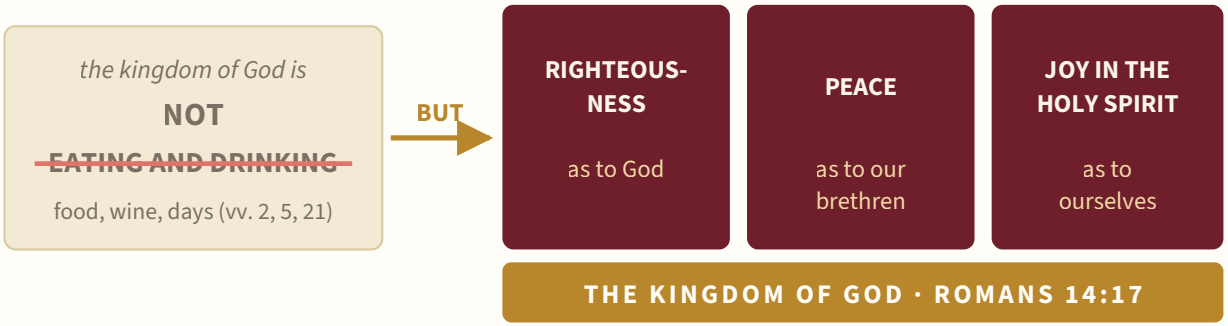
The Kingdom Is Not Eating and Drinking

Judge this instead — not to trip a brother for whom Christ died

13 *Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this— not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.* 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.* 15 *For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.* 16 *Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil;* 17 *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* 18 *For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.*

ROMANS 14:13–18

FIGURE · NOT EATING AND DRINKING



the three "as to" labels: Matthew Henry

v. 18 — he who serves Christ this way is acceptable to God and approved by men

v. 19 — so pursue what makes for peace and the building up of one another

The quarrel was about the menu; Paul points to the three things the kingdom is actually made of, and to what they produce between brothers (vv. 18–19).

πρόσκομμα · σκάνδαλον

PROSKOMMA · "OBSTACLE" G4348 ·
SKANDALON · "STUMBLING BLOCK" G4625

Verse 13 plays on one verb. "Let us not judge (*krinōmen*) one another anymore, but rather judge (*krinate*) this" — NASB95 "determine this." Turn the judging on yourself. *Proskomma* is something you strike your foot against; *skandalon* is the trigger of a trap, the thing that springs and catches. In this chapter the brother "stumbles" when he is drawn to do what his own conscience condemns — "he who doubts is condemned if he eats" (v. 23). Grieving him is serious (v. 15, *lypeitai*, "is hurt," G3076); ruining him is worse (*apollye*, "do not destroy," G622).

κοινόν

KOINON · "UNCLEAN, COMMON" · G2839

"Nothing is unclean (*koinon*) in itself." *Koinos* means "common," the word Jews used for food not set apart for God — Peter's word on the rooftop at Joppa: "I have never eaten anything unholy (*koinon*) and unclean" (Acts 10:14). Paul's certainty is "in the Lord Jesus," who declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19). Yet the same verse holds the other truth: "to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." The food is clean; the man's conscience is not yet free — and you don't overrule a conscience by bullying it.

βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ

BASILEIA TOU THEOU · "THE KINGDOM OF GOD" · G932

Paul's only use of "the kingdom of God" in Romans. It is not *brōsis kai posis* — eating and drinking, the acts, not just the menu — but *dikaiosynē kai eirēnē kai chara en pneumati hagiō*, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Those three words have carried the letter: righteousness (1:17; 3:21), peace with God (5:1), joy in hope (5:2; 12:12). Whoever serves Christ "in this way" is *euarestos*, "acceptable," to God (G2101) and *dokimos*, "approved" — tested and found genuine — by men (G1384).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik draws the line he keeps all through the chapter: admonition and rebuke belong to "clear Scriptural principles"; doubtful things call for advice, never judgment. We can trip a brother two ways — by beating him down with our legalism, or by luring him into sin with careless liberty. Paul knew the meat was clean, yet there was "nothing that could justify the destruction of a Christian brother over food." His line on v. 15 is the one to remember: "If Jesus was willing to give up His life for the sake of that brother, I can certainly give up my steak dinner." And to put food above righteousness, peace and joy is to be "hopelessly out of touch with God's priorities and His heart."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul gives Paul's "nothing is unclean" the weight of apostolic authority, then walks Israel's food laws — Daniel, Peter's vision, the Jerusalem Council — to show how hard the change was. His core principle is Luther's: "To act against conscience is neither right nor safe." Even if the act is not evil, "you acted against your conscience" — yet conscience is no infallible guide, for "Our consciences … can be seared." On v. 17 he does not mince words: "The kingdom of God is not about eating, it is not about drinking, it is not about lipstick." "The goal of the Christian life, beloved, is righteousness."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry names two harms in v. 13: a stumbling-block brings grief, an occasion to fall brings guilt. "Now walkest thou not charitably" — and the brother is one for whom Christ died. Good things can be "evil spoken of" when we mismanage them, so guard the name of your liberty. Then v. 17: "Nothing more destructive to true Christianity than placing it in modes, and forms, and circumstantials, which eat out the essentials." He divides the kingdom's three words beautifully: "As to God, our great concern is righteousness"; "As to our brethren, it is peace"; "As to ourselves, it is joy in the Holy Ghost."

V
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 14:19–23

Whatever Is Not from Faith

Build up, don't tear down — hold your liberty before God, and never act against your conscience

19 So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20 Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21 It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

ROMANS 14:19–23

"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

1 CORINTHIANS 6:12

FIGURE · A DECISION GRID FOR DISPUTABLE MATTERS



Start at the gate: only if Scripture leaves a matter open do the four questions of Romans 14 apply — and a single "stop" answer is enough to hold back.

οἰκοδομή · κατάλυε

OIKODOMĒ · "BUILDING UP" G3619 · KATALYE · "TEAR DOWN" G2647

Verses 19–20 are a construction site. *Diōkōmen*, "let us pursue" (G1377), is a hunter's word — chase peace down. *Oikodomē* is house-building, "the building up of one another." *Katalyō* is the wrecking crew — to loosen a building stone from stone, the word Jesus used of the temple (Mark 13:2). And the thing at risk is "the work (*ergon*) of God" — your brother, whom God Himself is building. Then v. 21: *kalon*, "it is good," not to eat meat or drink wine (*oinon*, G3631) or do anything by which your brother stumbles (*proskoptei*, G4350). Many later manuscripts, followed by the KJV, add "or is offended, or is made weak."

διακρινόμενος

DIAKRINOMENOS · "HE WHO DOUBTS" · G1252

The chapter ends where it began. Verse 1 warned against *diakriseis*, "passing judgment" on a brother; verse 23 uses the same root of a man divided inside himself — *diakrinomenos*, wavering, of two minds, the opposite of "fully convinced" (v. 5). If he eats, he "is condemned" (*katakekritai*, G2632, perfect tense: the verdict stands), because his eating is not "from faith" (*ek pisteōs*, G4102). "Faith" here is not saving faith but settled conviction before God. In many later manuscripts the doxology of 16:25–27 stands right after this verse; NASB95 and KJV print it at the end of chapter 16.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik turns vv. 19–21 into tests: does it make for peace, does it build up, or does it tear down God's work for the sake of food? The food is clean, but "there is nothing pure in causing a brother to stumble." "Even if we have the personal liberty, we do not have the liberty to stumble, offend, or weaken a brother." He sets a limit too: Paul "speaks about the stumbling of a sincere heart, not catering to the whims of someone's legalism." Verse 23 is "a wonderful check on our tendency to justify ourselves in the things we permit": "If we are troubled by something, it likely isn't *of faith* and likely *is sin* for us."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul hears "pursue" as a call to earnest action and warns against the counterfeit — "not a carnal peace, a false peace, a Neville Chamberlain kind of peace." "It is so much easier to destroy your brother than it is to edify your brother," he says, and he names slander and gossip as wrecking tools. On v. 22: "do not flaunt your liberty in front of your weaker brother. … Have it in private. Have it before the Lord, who sees all things." Yet he also told of a hostess who waved off a waitress's cocktail with "We're Christians" — a scruple worn in public that misrepresented the faith.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In a piece on the parallel text, 1 Corinthians 8:11–13, Spurgeon faces the drink question of v. 21 head on. Some men "cannot take a glass without taking two, three, four, five, or six glasses." "You can stop, you know; but if your example leads them to start, and they cannot stop, is it right to set them going?" He pictures himself on the Dover cliffs with his sons — steady-headed enough to stand on a ledge, but not willing to, lest they copy him and fall. "Let us treat men as we would treat our sons." He abstained, and added: "I never have asked God to forgive me for my sin in going without strong drink."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry calls the work of God the thing to weigh: "Think what thou destroyest—the work of God, whose work is honourable and glorious." Meat and wine are "things lawful indeed and comfortable, but not necessary to the support of human life," so "we may, and must, deny ourselves in them, rather than give offence." The faith of v. 22 "is not meant of justifying faith" but "of a knowledge and persuasion of our Christian liberty in things disputed" — enjoy it "in thy own bosom." And because a doubting conscience condemns, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

Liberty, love and the weaker brother across Paul's letters

> *"But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 8:9

> *"Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 8:13

> *"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

> *"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."*
>
> GALATIANS 5:13

> *"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."*
>
> COLOSSIANS 2:16–17

> *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:10

> *"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,"*
>
> EPHESIANS 5:18

> *"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves."*
>
> ROMANS 15:1

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry commends the old rule that sums the chapter: "in things necessary let there be unity, things unnecessary let there be liberty, and in both let there be charity." Romans 14 guards the middle clause without ever loosening the first or forgetting the last.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four teachers, five movements. Guzik walks the text and draws the line between clear sin and doubtful things; Sproul presses the doctrine of conscience and liberty; Spurgeon preaches the judgment seat and the strong man's self-denial; Henry gathers it all into counsel for a divided church. Spurgeon's one sermon on this chapter covers vv. 10–12, so his column is empty in movement IV.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Receive	The weak brother is the stricter one; don't make maturity a condition of fellowship.	Adiaphora: legalism binds where God left us free; the free must not despise.	Both sides were wrong, for they were judging one another.	Not the difference but the mismanagement of the difference did the mischief.
II · To the Lord	Principles, not just menus; conscience is never an excuse for obvious sin.	Jewish holy days, not the Sabbath; act to the Lord, fully convinced.	The Lord of the dead and living is the Judge — Jesus is God.	Be persuaded before you act; Christ is the centre where life and death meet.
III · Judgment seat	Stop worrying about your brother; the bema weighs rewards, not salvation.	We all answer to Christ, so we stop sitting in judgment now.	Judging is unnatural, premature, intrusive and unprofitable — break or bow.	Each gives account of himself; examine yourself, not your brother.
IV · Kingdom	If Jesus died for that brother, I can give up my steak dinner.	Never act against conscience; the kingdom is not about lipstick — its goal is righteousness.	—	Forms eat out essentials; righteousness toward God, peace toward brethren, joy within.
V · Faith	No liberty to stumble a sincere heart — but no catering to legalism.	Pursue real peace; easier to destroy than to edify; keep liberty before the Lord.	Treat men as your sons — the steady man stays off the cliff edge.	Lawful but not necessary — deny yourself rather than give offence.

ROMANS 14:1–23 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The weak brother is the strict one.** In Romans 14 "weak in faith" describes the believer whose conscience is still bound by rules God has lifted — not the careless one. The strong are the ones who know they are free, and they carry the greater burden (15:1). GUZIK
- **Two temptations, two sins.** The strong despise (*exoutheneō*); the weak judge (*krinō*). Paul forbids both in v. 3 and again in v. 10. Each side usually sees only the other side's sin. THE GREEK
- **Romans 14 is for disputable matters, not clear sin.** "Opinions" (v. 1) are things Scripture leaves open. Drunkenness and immorality were settled one verse before the chapter began (13:13). Conscience is never "an excuse for obviously sinful behavior." GUZIK
- **The text says "of God"; the KJV says "of Christ."** Verse 10 reads *tou theou* in SBLGNT and NASB95, *tou Christou* in the Textus Receptus. Spurgeon, reading the KJV, still argued that the Judge is one Person: Christ is God. THE TEXT
- **The teachers read the judgment seat differently.** Guzik, quoting Smith, sees the believers' *bema* for rewards; Spurgeon preaches one universal, personal, divine judgment of saints and sinners and closes with a gospel call. Both agree it ends our judging now. SPURGEON

- **"Judge this rather."** Verse 13 turns the verb around: stop judging your brother and judge your own path — is there a trap in it for him? THE TEXT
- **To act against conscience is neither right nor safe.** Luther's words, in Sproul. The weak brother sins if he eats while doubting — not because the meat is unclean but because he acted against what he believed God required (vv. 14, 23). SPROUL
- **The kingdom has three marks.** Righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (v. 17) — as Henry put it, righteousness toward God, peace toward our brethren, joy within ourselves. Food and drink are real questions, but they are not the kingdom. HENRY
- **Love may set down what liberty may pick up.** Spurgeon could stand on the cliff edge, but would not with his sons beside him. "It is good not to … drink wine" (v. 21) when a brother's footing is at stake. SPURGEON
- **Doubt is a stop sign.** *Diakrinomenos* (v. 23) is the man of two minds. "If we are troubled by something, it likely isn't of faith and likely is sin for us." GUZIK

† Questions for the Table

1 **Which comes more naturally to you — despising the brother who is stricter than you, or judging the brother who is freer than you? Where did you last do it?**

Verse 3 names both sins; most of us only see the other man's.

14:3; 14:10

2 **What is one matter you have treated as clear sin that Scripture actually leaves open — and one you have treated as "liberty" that Scripture actually names as sin?**

Romans 14 is for "opinions" (v. 1); drunkenness was settled in 13:13.

14:1; 13:13

3 **"Each one of us will give an account of himself to God." How would it change your next conversation about a brother if you believed that literally?**

Spurgeon: we will even give an account of our judgments of others.

14:10–12

4 **Is there something you are free to do that you should quietly stop doing because of a particular brother at your table?**

"Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died."

14:15; 14:21

5 **For a man in recovery, is the first drink a "disputable matter"? What does verse 21 ask of the strong brother who sits beside him — and what does verse 3 ask of the recovering man toward the brother who drinks?**

"I will not be mastered by anything" (1 Cor 6:12) — and "God has accepted him" (v. 3).

14:3; 14:21; 1 COR 6:12

6 **Where are you acting while doubting — doing something you have not settled before God?**

"Whatever is not from faith is sin." Settle it, or stop.

14:5; 14:22–23

The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking. It is a crucified and risen Lord who owns the man who eats and the man who doesn't, and who will hear from each of us about himself. So we receive the brother

He received, we lay down what might trip him, and we live — fully convinced, giving thanks — for the Lord.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; the Romans volume of his *Commentary* was completed by his successors (John Evans) from his notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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