

Torah Observant “SHOMER MITZVOT” שומר מצות

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
By Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy

Romans 14 Unplugged: Feasts and Fasts and Food, Oh My!

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1. Scope and Style of this Study

I would like to wade into the fray surrounding interpreting select passages from Romans Chapter Fourteen as a whole, with specific attention paid to the following sections and topics:

- 14:1 – Who are the “weak in faith”?
- 14:2-4 – What is the contrast between “anything” and “vegetables”?
- 14:5-9 – Are Christians free to worship God any day of the week?
- 14:10-13 – Who is the “brother”?
- 14:14-18 – What exactly does “nothing is unclean in itself” imply?
- 14:19 – How can we make for “peace and for mutual upbuilding”?
- 14:20, 21 – What does “everything is indeed clean” mean?
- 14:22, 23 – How do we “keep the faith we have between ourselves and God”?

As a Messianic Jewish man who lives a Torah-submissive life, to the best of my ability and under the power of the Ruach HaKodesh, I am particularly interested in the various ways in which to answer the questions posed by the chapter as a whole, notably the ones about the “special days,” the “preferences for certain types of foods,” and the overall judgmentalism that was apparently present in the communities that Paul was addressing. Also, who exactly were the “weak,” and by implication, who were the “strong”? (The “strong” are unnamed in Chapter Fourteen until Paul gets to Chapter Fifteen) And of course, of primary importance in relation to a potential Sabbath vs. Sunday debate is the question surrounding Paul’s meanings behind “the day” referenced in verses 5 and 6. Is this truly a Sabbath vs. Sunday passage? And if it is, doesn’t it lay to rest the age-old question of whether Gentile Christians are obligated to keep a seventh-day Sabbath like the Jews were already known to be keeping?

The study will not be exhaustive. To be sure, it is likely that I will continue making edits to it, adding new material for each topical section, as time and research allows. However, in the absence of a comprehensive verse by verse commentary for the students to follow along with at times (some select sections will be much more comprehensive than others), I will instead provide an informal “unplugged” style of running audio commentary on each passage as we encounter it along the way, stopping long enough to address each one of the bullet-point topics mentioned earlier. The interested reader is advised to make use of the accompanying Tetze Torah Ministries-produced YouTube videos and iTunes podcasts that this written study will eventually generate. Lastly, since at least one of the verses in this chapter is represented by a significant variant in the family of available Greek manuscripts, we will insert a short excursus on that verse long enough to give it special attention in this discussion.

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2. Introduction: Background and Historical Audience

Allow me to begin this brief commentary to Romans Chapter 14 by quickly surveying the background to the letter as a whole. A few quotations from select biblical authors will suffice for our interest:

Esteemed biblical professor and scholar Dr. Craig S. Keener writes:

PAUL, JUDAISM, AND THE LAW

When we speak of Paul and “Judaism,” we are usually thinking in anachronistic terms. Paul, like most of the earliest Christian movement even in the Diaspora, was Jewish. Modern Western readers distinguish “Judaism” and “Christianity” as distinct religions, but the Christian movement, as it came to be called, viewed itself as carrying on the biblical faith of patriarchs and prophets in view of end-time fulfillment in Christ, demonstrated by the eschatological gift of the Spirit.

As scholars today emphasize, first-century Judaism was itself highly diverse; some even speak of “Judaisms” (though emphasizing the wide variation in Jewish practice should make the point sufficiently). Its rabbinic form (which evolved into traditional Orthodox Judaism as we know it today) evolved from Pharisaism, but that evolution postdates Paul’s ministry. Paul’s faith is, in a sense, an earlier development of Pharisaism (albeit a minority one) than rabbinic Judaism is, as some Jewish scholars have recently pointed out. Jews as a people affirmed circumcision, the temple, the Torah, and other traits (many of these, like distinctive food customs, highlighted over the previous two centuries as costly marks of distinctive Jewish identity). Yet some (more often in the Holy Land) expected the imminent end of the age, whereas others denied it. The degree of Jewish Diaspora assimilation to the surrounding culture varied from one place to another and according to the attitudes of their host cultures. Views about messianic figures varied more widely than we have space to narrate here. Paul has been compared to apocalyptic, mystic, and Pharisaic streams of Judaism, among others.¹

In similar fashion, Messianic author Tim Hegg adds these historically important insights:

Recipients: “to all who are beloved of God in Rome” (1:7). But who were these addressed as “beloved?” Did Paul write to a group of believers who viewed themselves as a synagogue within the larger community of 1st Century Judaisms, or did he write to a congregation who considered themselves a breakaway from the synagogue?

We may first question how we should understand the word “church” (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*) in the epistle of the Romans (cf. 16:1, 4, 16, 23). The word *ekklesia* did not take on a technical meaning until much later. In the pre-

¹ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, (Lutterworth Press, 2011), pp. 78-80 (ePub edition).

destruction era, *ekklesia* simply was a convenient word to describe any group that formed around common identity and purpose. Thus, in Acts 19:32, the angry mob that gathered at the theater to lynch Paul is called an *ekklesia* by Luke, showing that the word carried no special meaning at this early stage. When the followers of Yeshua, known as the people of “The Way,” are called an *ekklesia*, this simply marks them as a group identified by common beliefs and religious practices. Likewise, the word “synagogue” (*sunegoge*) was another Greek term defining an assembly or gathering of people. In the 1st Century, a synagogue was used to define a group of people more than a building. The place where a synagogue met was called a προσευχή, *proseuxe*, “house of prayer.” There is every reason to think, then, that Paul was writing to a synagogue community in Rome that saw themselves as within the larger community of Judaism. “The Way” was considered, both by those “inside” and those without, as a sect of Judaism. There is no reason to think that the congregation in Rome to whom Paul wrote was anything but a synagogue community.²

Indeed, like Tim Hegg just referenced, that the Christian Church in Rome was likely very closely connected to existing Jewish synagogue communities as opposed to operating completely independent of them like modern Christianity teaches, is also expressed in the works of Mark Nanos, a modern Reform, non-Christian Jewish historian who specializes in New Testament studies, particularly those that involve the Apostle Paul. He writes:

Romans 16 appears to indicate that there were already a number of small groups of Christ-followers, although only one household “gathering [*ekklēsia*]” is specifically noted (16:3-5). The total number of people addressed might have been as few as fifty based on Paul’s greetings to less than thirty specific individuals. Even if there were several hundred, whether spread throughout the city in small gatherings with some level of independence, as many suggest, or not, they would easily fit within the larger (yet still overall minority) Jewish communities of Rome as subgroups. They may have still been largely unnoticed and probably not well understood, however different they might have begun to be on some topics and in some behavior. Their subgroup identity is suggested all the more if most or all of the members of the groups confessing Christ were composed of the non-elite, and thus likely dependent upon rather than independent of existing Jewish communal leadership, organizational legitimacy, tradition including adjudication of conflicts, meeting places, and access to other communal resources. In other words, when we think about the “churches” of Rome we can think in terms similar to those of the “synagogues” of Rome, as “house-churches” in keeping with “house-synagogues.” That remains the case whether or not there were other more formal buildings in addition to such groups or subgroups meeting in spaces adapted as needed, and whether they were referred to as *synagoge* or *proseuche*, since all of these terms were interchangeable until much later than Paul’s letter. But this still does not tell us

² Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 1*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 1.

much about the relationships between the Christ-following subgroups and the larger Jewish communities of Rome.³

Regarding the well-known fact that the Jews in Rome were handed an edict of expulsion by Claudius Caesar (likely in AD 49), a fact recorded for us by ancient Roman historians Seutonius, Cassius Dio, Paulus Orosius, and the Apostolic Scriptures writer Luke (see Acts 18:1, 2), I felt it was necessary to include some admittedly lengthy resources concerning the impact this event likely had on the Jews in Rome and the effect it may have had on Paul's audience. To be sure, according to my own personal research and experience with fellow Christians, depending on how one interprets the following background and historical information in this section, your interpretation and subsequent modern implementation of Paul's instructions in this chapter of Romans 14 (and 15 to follow) will either take on what Bible students like to term a "pro-Torah" aspect, or they will reflect its "practical opposite": what some term a "Law-free" gospel aspect.

Acts 18:1-4 (ESV) reads, *"1 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, 3 and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."* Historians are divided as to the importance of this tragic social event, particularly as to how it bears relevance for understanding the audience to whom Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. After all, since the expulsion was (approximately) 5 or so years prior to him writing the letter (recall that Emperor Claudius was murdered in AD 54, thus bringing his decree to an end and allowing the Jews to return to Rome in great numbers), and since Paul went on to actually visit Rome a short 5 years later (approximately AD 60), it is of no small importance that once he got to Rome, he met with non-Christian Jewish synagogue leaders to discuss his trial:

Acts 28:17, "After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans."

Thus, in view of the important background to the book of Romans, some questions that often come to my mind are: If, according to popular Christian teaching today, the Gentile Church at Rome represented a sizeable and autonomous religious organization, separate and distinct from the Jewish synagogue this early on (made all the more obvious by the Jewish expulsion just

³ Mark Nanos, *Romans: To the Churches of the Synagogues of Rome* (an essay accessed from marknanos.com, published by the author on 8-31-10), pp. 8-9.

mentioned), then why does Paul (per Acts 28 just referenced), after briefly visting some of the brother Christians on arrival to Rome proceed to go to the mainstream Jewish community for ostensible legal counsel? The Gentile Church at Rome definitely had Messianic Jewish leadership in its ranks (see the end of Romans at chapter 16). Couldn't they have better assisted him in these matters as a "brother Christian"? To be sure, according to the popular reading of Galatians 1:13 and Phil 3:7, 8⁴, hadn't Paul already "made a break" with his Judaism by this time?

Wikipedia supplies a basic account of Emperor Claudius' order on their page to this topic, stating the following:

References to an expulsion of Jews from Rome by the Roman Emperor Claudius, who was in office AD 41-54, appear in the Acts of the Apostles (18:2), and in the writings of Roman historians Suetonius (c. AD 69 – c. AD 122), Cassius Dio (c. AD 150 – c. 235) and fifth-century Christian author Paulus Orosius. Scholars generally agree that these references refer to the same incident.⁵

I have found that most Christian authors tend to prefer to "play up" the expulsion by Claudius allowing it to define the audience in Romans in a Gentile majority and Jewish minority sort of way, resulting in the Gentiles turning out as the strong (i.e., the "powerful" and the Jews turning out as the weak (i.e., those without "power"). I don't deny this basic premise, and it is historically accurate to describe the Gentile Christians as the majority and the Jewish Christians as the minority (especially if the snapshot of individual greetings provided by Paul at the end of Romans is any sort of "representative sampling" of the groups he was writing to). However, in my own limited personal research, I have learned that it is possible that the edict did not result in as many Jews being expelled as previously thought, and that those remaining Jewish communities actually very likely had an important impact on Paul's ideological framework from which to construct his letter (assuming we are correct in that Paul wrote the letter shortly after the Jews began to return back to Rome, which itself was after the death of Claudius in AD 54, making the exile last a mere short 5 years or so). Indeed, even mainstream Christian authors will readily admit that Jewish and Gentile social tensions and struggles represent some of the foremost concerns to our famous Apostle to the Gentiles.

⁴ Galatians 1:13, "For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it." Phil 3:7, 8, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."

⁵ www.wikipedia.org, see article: *Claudius' expulsion of Jews from Rome* (accessed February 6, 2021).

Wikipedia again makes careful note:

A brief statement in Divus Claudius 25 mentions agitations by the “Jews” which led Claudius (Roman Emperor from AD 41 to 54) to expel them from Rome:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [the Emperor Claudius] expelled them from Rome.

The expulsion event Suetonius refers to is necessarily later than AD 41, and earlier than AD 54. The expulsion is mentioned in the last quarter of a list of Claudius’s actions during his reign. However, precisely dating the expulsion from Suetonius provides some challenges because Suetonius writes in a topical rather than chronological fashion, necessitating the use of other texts to pinpoint the time. The dating of the “edict of Claudius” for the expulsion of Jews relies on three separate texts beyond Suetonius’ own reference, which in chronological order are: the reference to the trial of Apostle Paul by Gallio in the Acts of the Apostles (18:2), Cassius Dio’s reference in History 60.6.6-7, and Paulus Orosius’s fifth century mention in History 7.6.15-16 of a non-extant Josephus reference. Most scholars agree that the expulsion of Jews mentioned in the Book of Acts is consistent with this report by Suetonius. Donna Hurley notes that Acts provides a date of 49, but adds that neither Tacitus nor Dio “reports an expulsion in 49 or 50 as would be expected if there had been a large exodus of the Jewish community”, concluding that “all” is probably a hyperbole.’

The passage may suggest that in the mid-first century the Romans still viewed Christianity as a Jewish sect. Historians debate whether or not the Roman government distinguished between Christians and Jews prior to Nerva’s modification of the Fiscus Judaicus in AD 96. From then on, practising Jews paid the tax, Christians did not.

Cassius Dio makes a comment in 60.6.6-7 regarding an action early in the reign of Claudius:

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city [Rome], he [Claudius] did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings.

The similarities are noteworthy, for both Suetonius and Cassius Dio deal with Jews, tumult, Claudius, the city and expulsion, and Cassius Dio does provide a chronological context that points to the year AD 41. However, Cassius Dio does not mention Chrestus or any cause for the emperor’s actions. Moreover, Cassius Dio says that Claudius did not drive the Jews out of the city, which prompts Slingerland to conclude that “Suetonius Claudius 25.4 does not refer to the event narrated in Dio 60.6.6-7.” Rainer Riesner states that ancient historians generally hold that Cassius Dio here may have referred to an earlier, more limited action against some Jews, which was later expanded by Claudius to the expulsion of a larger group of Jews.

The 5th-century Christian writer Paulus Orosius makes a possible reference to the event, citing two sources:

Josephus reports, 'In his ninth year the Jews were expelled by Claudius from the city.' But Suetonius, who speaks as follows, influences me more: 'Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews constantly rioting at the instigation of Christ [Christo, or rather xpo].' As far as whether he had commanded that the Jews rioting against Christ [Christum] be restrained and checked or also had wanted the Christians, as persons of a cognate religion, to be expelled, it is not at all to be discerned.

The first source used by Orosius comes from a non-extant quote from Josephus. It is this which provides the date of AD 49. His second source is Suetonius Claudius 25.4.⁶

Why bring all of this up at all if Paul was, in the end, strongly pushing for Jewish and Gentile equality in the early Roman Church? What difference does it make how many Jews were actually expelled or not? Perhaps, if we can allow that enough of the non-Christian Jewish community was present during Paul's penning of the letter then we can begin to appreciate the very real socio-religious dynamic that the predominantly Gentile Christian Church at Rome had to contend with as they sought to implement Paul's life-changing gospel message and put into practice in a very real, practical way that produced both spiritual and natural growth for both Jews and Gentiles in the "household of faith" (cf. Galatians 6:10).

Quoting Keener once again, we read concerning the expulsion:

Jewish and Gentile Elements in the Church

The church's origins in Rome probably stemmed from Jewish believers there (cf. Acts 2:10), but clearly it spread beyond them. Paul's audience was "among the Gentiles" (Rom 1:5); they were least partly Gentile (11:13) and probably mostly Gentile (1:13; cf. 16:4). Many contend that Jewish believers and God-fearing Gentiles remained in the synagogues in Rome for some time, explaining why Paul can presuppose so much knowledge of Scripture and Jewish perspective in the letter (cf. 7:1). At some point in the 40s CE the Jewish community in Rome was apparently divided over questions of the identity of the Messiah, probably Jesus. As a result, the emperor Claudius followed the precedent of the earlier emperor Tiberius and banished the Jews from Rome (cf. the garbled account in Suetonius Claud. 25.4). Given the context in our sources, this may have happened in about the year 49 CE.

Scholars debate whether the entire Jewish community actually left; it would be difficult to reclaim property, hence difficult to imagine generations of Jewish occupation coming to a complete end, then resuming their lives in Rome after

⁶ Ibid.

Claudius's edict was repealed (on his death in 54 CE). Certainly the many Jews who were Roman citizens would not have been expelled. Nevertheless, Luke, like Suetonius, speaks of Jews being expelled (Acts 18:2, though prudently omitting the cause). Whether all were expelled (and whether all who were officially expelled actually left), at least those visible in the original conflict must have left. Luke indicates that Priscilla and Aquila, Jews in Rome who were apparently already believers (and possibly church leaders) when Paul met them, had left. It is likely that a substantial number of Jewish Christians, and perhaps all their leaders, left Rome at this point. This means that Gentile Christians had probably constituted the bulk of the Roman church and its leadership for at least five years, and may represent a number of the house churches greeted in Romans 16. (Those with Jewish leaders, as in 16:5, 7, may have organized after many Jews returned.)

Given the different cultural orientation of congregations in the same city, probably at least as loosely connected as the different synagogues, it is not surprising that misunderstandings would arise between groups with a predominantly Jewish ethos. Some Gentiles (especially former adherents of the synagogue) may have held the "Jewish" position, and some especially culturally sensitive Jews (probably including Aquila and Priscilla) may not have insisted on Gentiles observing the whole law, but at least two basic "sides" seem to have existed nonetheless.⁷

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3. Introductory Conclusions

In the end, the exact amount of Jewish and Christian socio-religious and communal involvement in ancient Rome may remain a mystery until we are able to one day have a long-awaited conversation with Priscilla and Aquila (smile). But until that time, as Bible students and as historians we can in fact gain a more well-rounded approximation of the situation by doing our due diligence when it comes to historical research—both Christian as well as secular. Indeed, as a conclusion to this section on **Background and Historical Audience**, Nanos poses this timely and important question with regards to properly appreciating the historical issues as they apply to Romans: "Would the Christian *gentiles* of Rome have sought association with the synagogue as the "righteous gentiles"? And, if so, why?" I imagine that his answer might surprise some. In his book *The Mystery of Romans* he states,

Josephus indicated that Julius Caesar's decree forbid the assembly of foreign religious societies other than Jewish ones in the city of Rome, and according to Suetonius Caesar had "dissolved all guilds, except those of ancient foundation." How would Christians, outside association with the synagogues,

⁷ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, (Lutterworth Press, 2011), pp. 100-04 (ePub edition).

obtain the right to congregate for fellowship and worship, even in their own homes or tenement rooms,” unless they petitioned for designation as a “private club”? Not only do we not have any evidence of such an effort, but we have good reason to believe they did not pursue such a course, as they found the authority of the synagogue sufficient (and they probably did not even consider the question!).⁸ Further, even if they sought and were granted the rights of assembly of a “private club,” this would not have extended to the free practice of their religion without harm or interference (e.g., they still would not have had the right to observe the Sabbath, they would not have been free from serving in civic cults), nor to the right to refrain from the mandatory practice of declaring Caesar as their god (Jews were exempt from this practice only by the institution of a special substitutionary sacrifice), nor to the exclusion of military service and other public responsibilities with their concomitant idolatry.

There is good reason then, historically, to suggest that Paul’s instructions in Romans may have been directed to Christian gentiles who were in need of being “reminded” boldly of their obligation to “subordinate” themselves to the “governing authorities” of the synagogues to which they were attached, including such matters as obedience to the operative halakhot for defining proper behavior for “righteous gentiles” (i.e., the apostolic decree, Noahide Commandments), and the payment of taxes and other community obligations. That is, Paul and the Christian Jews and gentiles of Rome both understood their community(s) as part of the Jewish community(s) when Paul wrote Romans, with Christian gentiles identified as “righteous gentiles” who were now worshiping in the midst of Israel in fulfillment of the eschatological ingathering of the nations (15:5-12).⁹

In addition, writing about the details surrounding Claudius’ expulsion, Nanos reminds us in this lengthy quote from a free essay he provided to his own website,

In the past forty years or so, the traditional interpretations of Romans have developed a new historical construct that supposedly explains how it came to be

⁸ “Regarding legal status see the discussions of Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen*, in part 5, chap. 3, “The Fractionation of Roman Christianity,” concerning the private rather than public nature of the property and possessions during the first and second centuries, hence, the lack of evidence for legal status suggested: “For lack of evidence [that the Christian groups had organized themselves as *collegia tenuiorum* or *collegia funeraticia*] the hypothesis has long been abandoned. That the groups of Christians were not *legalized as corpora* or *collegia* is one of the more certain statements which we can make.” Wright, *NT*, p. 355, says there is no evidence they appealed to “private club” status in their defense. Dunn, *Romans*, p. lii: “The Christians were not yet clearly distinguished from the wider Jewish community. . . . Insofar as they had any legal status, they would meet presumably as a “collegium” or under the auspices of a synagogue. Here the fact that Paul never speaks of the Christians in Rome as a church (‘the church of Rome’) may well be significant, especially since it is so out of keeping with Paul’s usual practice (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 4:15; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; cf. Gal 1:2).”

⁹ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 73-75.

that the Christ-followers Paul addressed in the mid- to late-50's CE were (presumably) already meeting separately from the Jewish communities of Rome. This was the natural result of an expulsion of the Jews from Rome during the reign of Claudius (usually dated to 49 CE, although some date this to 41 CE). According to the construct, this expulsion was supposedly precipitated by conflicts between Christ-followers and the larger Jewish community.

This construct is based upon a reading of two early second century CE accounts. Suetonius briefly mentions a conflict regarding someone named Chrestus (Suetonius, Claudius 25.4), which led to an expulsion of the Jews for turbulence within their communities (disturbing the Pax or "peace" so central to Roman imperial rule), and in Acts 18:2, Luke notes that Aquila and Priscilla were expelled from Rome along with "all" the Jews. The conclusion is then drawn that since the Jews were forced to leave Rome under Claudius, the only (or, at least, most of the) Christ-followers who remained were non-Jews. Even if some Jews remained, the Christ-following communities were no longer a part of the Jewish community, by choice or default, being responsible for such a cataclysmic disruption of life for, if not the expulsion of, some estimated 20,000 to 50,000 Jewish people. It is maintained that the Christ-followers who remained developed their own identity as "Christians," however labeled, and their ethos in the natural direction of "gentile" in contrast to "jewish" values to define communal life. Thus, a few years later, when Jews began to return under Nero (beginning in 54 CE, based on the assumption that upon his death Claudius's policy was allowed to terminate, although there is no evidence that Nero reversed any such exile of Rome's Jews as a policy decision), those who were Christ-followers, including those who were formerly in leadership roles within the Christ-following subgroups of the Jewish community, were not being welcomed back without reservations. Rather, they were being greeted, if at all, with the proposition that they needed to adopt a more "strengthened" (i.e., non-Judaism based) approach to Christian values, such as Paul is generally imagined to have upheld, e.g., in Romans 14. This new lifestyle revolved around rejection of the Torah-defined ways of life that distinguished Jews from non-Jews, such as circumcision, Sabbath and other calendrical observances, kosher dietary customs, and so on. There are many reasons to be suspicious of this construction: the sources are unclear and conflict with each other, and it is doubtful that Paul would have approached that level of ethnicity-based discrimination already being expressed in communal policies legitimated in the name of Christ or Christ-following leaders (all the more if they have appealed to Paul as if that was what he upheld) with the arguments we meet in Romans. Let us examine a few details.

First, it is highly unlikely that all or even much of the Jewish community was expelled from Rome by Claudius. Suetonius's report can be understood to indicate an expulsion pertaining only to those Jews who were involved in a disturbance, in direct conflict with the statement in Acts 18:3 that all the Jews were expelled. That neither Jewish authors such as Josephus and Philo, nor Roman historians such as Tacitus reported the event suggests there was at most a limited action. This fact is all the more suggestive when it is noted that citizens, which at least a number of Jews in Rome were, could not be expelled without due process, and either way, if expelled, it would have constituted significant news to report. Indeed, it would have supported Tacitus's negative description to

note that even when citizens, Jews and converts were a threat to Roman political order (Hist. 5.4-5). Moreover, Dio Cassius writes specifically that Claudius did not expel the Jews of Rome but only restricted their meetings, and the rationale he supplies is that there were too many Jews to do so without creating a crisis (Rom. Hist. 60.6.6-7). If perhaps Dio was referring to a different incident in the reign of Claudius, as some suggest, then he skipped over this cataclysmic incident when Jews were expelled—making the construct all the more suspect. That the author of Acts can also observe that the Jewish leaders in Rome have little first-hand knowledge of the Christ-followers but understand this to be a sect of Judaism that is spoken against elsewhere (28:17-22) suggests that, although he also mentions the wholesale expulsion, Luke does not link this to a disturbance over Christ or with Christ-followers--and in fact, he does not state why the Jews had been expelled, including Aquila and Priscilla (18:1-4)...

Second, it is unlikely that the expulsion mentioned was precipitated by disputes about Jesus Christ. Suetonius elsewhere discusses the christiani under Nero rather than the chrestiani (Nero 16.2), following Tacitus, who already knew of the christiani...

Third, it is curious to suppose that Romans would have expelled Jews, perhaps citizens, at least those with longstanding traditions which were generally respected, but not also expelled the non-Jews meeting in their midst, perhaps many not citizens, even slaves, who could not similarly appeal to previous latitude based on observing ancient traditions. Would they be left in Rome to carry on meetings involving the name Christ if already groups associated with that name had provoked sufficient disturbances of the peace to have led to the expulsion of the Jewish community in the first place?

Fourth, most importantly, Paul's approach to the non-Jews in Romans is not what one might expect if they were in fact in positions of power and using that power to exclude or discriminate against Jewish Christ-following brothers and sisters within their small groups.¹⁰

So much for the “boring” history lesson today... Let us now turn to a scriptural representation of the main topics of our study.

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4. 14:1 – Who are the “weak in faith”?

Romans 14:1	
ESV	SBLGNT
1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.	1 Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει προσλαμβάνεσθε μὴ εἰς διακρίσεις

¹⁰ Mark Nanos, *Romans: To the Churches of the Synagogues of Rome* (an essay accessed from marknanos.com, published by the author on 8-31-10), pp. 13-16.

διαλογισμῶν

***Notes:**

These first few verses help to set the context of the entire chapter since it establishes the identity of the original recipients of the letter. So that we may utilize their identity to frame our interpretation of Paul's instructions, we will spend a bit more time examining the possibilities of exactly who we are dealing with here. Indeed, the "weak" and the "strong" are the two primary addressees, and yet the "strong" are not mentioned by name until we get to Chapter Fifteen. Some initial yet brief biblical Greek language and grammar observations from the first few verses will hopefully be helpful before we compare differing Christian and Messianic Jewish authors on who exactly were the "weak" and "strong."

It's all Greek to me!

The Greek word translated "weak" is rooted in the verb ἀσθενέω *astheneo*, meaning "to be weak, feeble, to be ill, without strength, to languish."¹¹ The verb is rooted in ἀσθενής *asthenes* (an adjective, derived from A "without" and *sthenos*, "vigor, strength") – properly, without vigor, living in a state of weakness (depletion). *Arotrioo* refers to a lack of necessary resources ("insufficient") – literally, "without adequate strength" and hence "frail, feeble (sickly)."¹² In fact, according to the same online Strong's Concordance that I referenced from BibleHub.com, the verbal form is found 33 times in the New Testament of which the NASB translates into English as "am weak (1)," "becoming weak (1)," "fell sick (1)," "sick (18)," "weak (12)."

The Greek of the first clause of verse 1 from the ESV "As for the one who is weak in faith," Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει, could be read literally as "the [one] now being weak in the faith,"¹³ owing to the fact that the word "weak" "ἀσθενοῦντα" is a masculine, singular verb in the present tense, participle mood, active voice, and accusative case, while the dative case, feminine, singular noun "faith" is preceded by a dative case, feminine, singular definite article "τῇ"—i.e., yielding "the faith" as opposed to simply "faith." This exact same Greek construction, "the [one] being weak" (albeit, minus τῇ πίστει, "in the faith," and existing in a different case simply because of the differences between Koine Greek subjects and objects), is repeated by Paul in the very next verse where he states "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables" (the Greek of Rom 14:2 has "ὁς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν λάχανα ἐσθίει"). We will comment a bit more on the importance of

¹¹ Strong's Concordance <https://biblehub.com/greek/770.htm>

¹² *Ibid.*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/772.htm>

¹³ <https://biblehub.com/text/romans/14-1.htm>

the Greek constructions a bit later on, but for now let us ascertain what we can gather about the identity of these quarrelling parties from researching the various Christian and Jewish perspectives on them. I personally do not believe it seriously changes the central message of the passage whether we translate the noun with or without the article (“in the faith” vs. “in faith”) however, at least one well-known Christian author disagrees with me (as we shall shortly see).

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5. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 vs. Romans 14

Switching gears from looking at the Greek for now, it is fair to say that it is no secret that many Christian commentators spend quite a bit of time comparing the context of Romans 14 to that of 1 Corinthians 8 and parts of 10. For our study, I take note that at least one well-known Messianic Jewish website believes that the “weak” and “strong” of Romans 14 are the same “weak” and “strong” of 1 Corinthians 8 and 10. Redacted by me to remove the lengthy scriptural quotes for space, Tom Martincic of Elijah.com opines,

So who is the one who is “weak in faith?”

In the 8th chapter of 1st Corinthians we read about a situation where they were dealing with weak brethren in relation to food as well:

*Citation from 1Co 8:10-13

The subject matter of 1 Corinthians 8 is whether or not it is appropriate to eat food that was offered to idols. The weak brother was one who had not yet overcome the temptation to worship idols. Let’s look at these verses in full context:

*Citation from 1Co 8:1-13

If you didn’t read the above chapter, please read it fully.

Notice that the strong brother is one who has knowledge that an “idol is nothing” whereas a weak brother is still being faced with temptations that the idol might actually be something deserving of honor or worship. The advice Paul gives in this situation is identical to the advice he gives in Romans 14. Namely, that while an idol is nothing, we should not do anything to cause another person to stumble. Consider the parallel here:

Rom 14:15 - Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Messiah died.

1Co 8:11-12 - And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Messiah died?

12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Messiah.

And again:

Rom 14:21 - It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.

1Co 8:13 - Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

So we have almost identical statements coming out of both chapters. The verses in 1 Corinthians are more descriptive in that he is specifically speaking of food offered to idols, but Romans 14 is a bit more vague and open to interpretation.

Since [Romans 14:22] is exactly what was taught in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, and the striking parallels between what [Paul] said to Corinth and what he said to Rome, it seems very obvious to me that both are speaking of the same things. But in Rome, there were more Jews and we have both Jews and Gentiles bringing their “baggage” and thought patterns into the true faith, both of which were based on traditions and ideas of men. The Jews had their fast days and concerns about otherwise clean meats becoming “common,” and Gentiles had their tendencies toward idolatry. The stronger believer had fully cleansed their minds of these patterns, but they were warned to walk in love, and not do things to cause weakness in others.¹⁴

As we have just seen, to be sure, there indeed exists many valuable parallels in the applications and admonitions between the two Pauline writings, and yet I am not yet fully convinced like some commentators that the “weak” and the “strong” of Romans 14 are the same “weak” and “strong” in 1 Corinthians. A few bullet points will highlight some of my own personal and observable differences between the Corinthian chapters and the passage here in Romans 14:

- The primary context of the Corinthian passages deals with eating “food offered to idols” (cf. 1 Cor 8:1) and how that impacts the conscience of the “weak” and the “strong.”
- The passage here in Romans 14 mentions nothing about idols or food offered to them (by comparison, the Corinthian passages use Greek words rendered into idol/idolatry nearly a dozen times).
- The careful Bible student will also instantly notice that, unlike the 1 Corinthians 8 chapter, the 1 Corinthians 10 chapter does not utilize either the Greek (or English) terms “weak” and “strong,” and yet between the two chapters, Paul uses Greek terms that are translated into English as “conscience” up to eight times.

¹⁴ <https://www.elijah.com/romans14.html>

- Comparatively, our Greek of Romans 14 does not contain any words that could be translated into English as “conscience.”
- Additionally, as can be observed by comparing the two letters and their addressees, the Corinthians seem to comprise a majority Gentile population with familiar ties to their former pagan lifestyle and it’s instant access to pagan temples and meat markets. Indeed, the church at Corinth included some Jews (1Cor 7:18-19), but it was largely composed of Gentile converts to Christianity (1Cor 6:9-11, 1Cor 8:7, 1Cor 12:2).
- These Corinthian Christians likely would not have had strong compulsions to retain supposed ties to the heritage religious practices of the (minority) Jews (feasts and fasts and Sabbaths and other special days), etc.
- In point of fact, the opposite was probably true: the church at Corinth was much too cozy with the dominant culture for Paul’s liking. By engaging in litigation, patronizing prostitutes, and participating in pagan cultic meals, the Corinthians were conforming to the behavior patterns of the larger society. In this first letter, Paul urges them to foster a sense of being at odds with the world.
- Lastly, “food offered to idols” was something that was known to be quite abhorrent (on multiple levels and for multiple reasons) to religious Jews of the 1st Century.
- While it might be plausible that secular Jewish members of the congregations either at Corinth or Rome would have engaged in eating food offered to idols, it is highly unlikely that any religious Jewish addressees of Paul’s letter to Corinthians or Romans would have done the same, and the differences between these places and the behaviors of their citizens helps to determine the identity of the “weak” and “strong” in Romans 14.

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6. Who are the “weak in faith”? – Christian Perspectives

Now that we have briefly addressed the popular “1 Corinthians 8 and 10 vs. Romans 14” issue we can turn our attention to focus on Romans Chapter 14 in specific. Germane to our study of this chapter as a whole is the well-established fact that most historical Christian commentaries believe Paul to be referring to 1st Century Christians who are “weak” (whether “in faith” or in “the faith”), and most importantly in the opinions of traditional Christian interpretations is that these “weak” 1st Century Christians were obviously and most likely the 1st Century Jewish Christians—as indicated by their “weakness for maintaining a connection to 2nd Temple Judaic ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law.” As esteemed Christian author and theologian F.F. Bruce notes, “*Weak in faith*. Not yet mature enough to grasp that all kinds of food are equally kosher (‘fit’), all days equally

holy.”¹⁵ Likewise, Mark Nanos quips, “There is almost universal agreement (it appears to be an almost unquestioned fact) that the “weak” were Christian Jews who still practiced the Law and Jewish customs (with most maintaining that this group would have included “God-fearing” gentiles as well), and that the “strong” were Christian gentiles (as well as Christian Jews like Paul who have supposedly abandoned Jewish practices).”¹⁶ D. Martin Lloyd-Jones’ commentary to Romans 14 is also representative of the popular Gentile Christian interpretation and, as mentioned earlier when discussing the Greek nuances of this chapter, he feels that the definite article before “faith” in verse 1 warrants careful attention in identifying those labelled by Paul as “weak.” He notes:

To begin with, notice that Paul does not say, ‘weak in faith’. There is a difference between the two phrases. Being weak in faith means that you do not have power in your faith. You believe things but you are not so ready to trust yourself to them. A man like George Muller had a very strong faith. He could believe and trust God in spite of all appearances. There are others, however, who have weak faith.

But here in verse 1 Paul is not talking about weak faith, but about being weak ‘in the faith’, which is very different. It means being weak with respect to the faith, having a weak understanding of the teaching concerning Christian salvation. The Apostle is referring to men and women who get into trouble and are confused and in a muddle over the outworking of their faith.

Then what is the meaning of the term ‘weak’? Here again, it is very important that our translation should be correct. The Apostle is thinking of a person who is weak for the time being. Not permanently. He is saying, ‘Now you must deal with people who, at the moment, or up to this present point, have been rather weak or feeble in the faith. They may become strong, and so they should, let us hope they will, but the point is that at the moment they are weak in the faith.’ The way in which the Apostle puts it in the Greek compels us to interpret his meaning in that way. He does not use an adjective, he does not say the believers are weak. They are weak at the moment, they are in difficulties, and are somewhat feeble in this matter of the faith.

Looking now at the whole phrase, ‘weak in the faith’, we see that Paul means that these people are truly Christian - there is no doubt about that. They are in the faith; they are born again; they are members of the church, and have every right to be...

Where, then, have these people gone wrong? In this way: though they have clearly seen the great central matter of salvation, when it comes to particular details of life and living, quite unconsciously, they have dropped back from the faith position into an old legalistic, pre-Christian way of thinking, and have begun to think in terms of justification by works. Now the Jews had been brought up under the law, and one of their great problems when they became Christians was the failure to think in a consistently Christian manner, the failure

¹⁵ F.F. Bruce, *Romans (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, (IVP Academic, ePub edition, 2008), section 54.9.

¹⁶ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), p. 87.

to think right through in terms of faith. It was the difference between believing the truth about salvation, and applying that truth all along the line in all their conduct and in all their daily life and living as they met particular questions and problems.¹⁷

No doubt Lloyd-Jones' perspective is well-meaning and carefully considered in light of the historic Christian opinions that have survived down through history, and his instructions could legitimately be applied in certain Christian contexts. However, based on further information that I will share later on in this commentary I am going to have to disagree with his concluding opinions on who exactly were the "weak" and "strong" in this chapter of Romans.

Another well thought out opinion that I want to examine is that of Douglas J. Moo. He is a New Testament scholar who, after teaching for more than twenty years at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois, has served as Blanchard Professor of New Testament at the Wheaton College Graduate School since 2000. According to Wikipedia, "He has published several theological works and commentaries on the Bible; notable among them are *An Introduction to the New Testament* (with D.A. Carson and Leon Morris) and *The Epistle to the Romans* (part of the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* series). His current research interests are Romans, Pauline theology (and exegesis) and environmental theology. He has been a member of the translation committee that produced the NIV and TNIV since 1996, and is its current Chair. He previously edited *Trinity Journal*."¹⁸ In my estimation, Moo's understanding of this section of Paul's letter is nearly identical to that of Lloyd-Jones:

A few scholars think that 14:1–15:13 continues Paul's outline of basic gospel demands. They note that his discussion parallels at many points what he says in 1 Corinthians 8–10.1 The parallels are obvious, but there are differences too. Moreover, most scholars agree that Paul writes 14:1–15:13 because he knows that the Roman church is divided. Why this church was divided is more difficult to determine, for Paul is not specific about the issues between the strong and the weak. He mentions debates about eating meat (14:2–3, 6; cf. 14:20–21) and observing some kind of holy days (14:5), and he alludes in passing to drinking wine (14:21), but that is all.

Differences over these matters may have arisen for a number of different reasons (see *Bridging Contexts* section). Most commentators conclude that the core of the dispute has to do with observance of the Jewish law. The weak were those—mainly Jewish Christians—who could not bring themselves to abandon the requirements of the law they had observed all their lives. They could not, as Christians, simply ignore the food laws, Sabbath observance, and so on. The strong, by contrast, felt no need to observe these laws. Most of them were undoubtedly Gentile Christians, although a few, like Paul himself (see the "we" in

¹⁷ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 14:1-17 Liberty and Conscience*, (Banner of Truth, ePub edition, 2004), section 4.31-4.

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_J._Moo

15:1), were Jewish Christians. The weak condemned the strong for cavalierly dismissing God's laws, while the strong pooh-poohed the weak, looking down on them for clinging to the old ways when the new had come. Paul sides with the strong on the basic issues involved, but his main concern is to get each group to stop criticizing the other and to accept each other in a spirit of love and unity.¹⁹

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7. Who are the “weak in faith”? – Messianic Perspectives

As with Lloyd-Jones, I am going to reserve agreeing with Moo as it seems to simply share the popular views on a Christian relationship to the Law and its supposed freedom from having any obligation to keeping those ceremonial aspects of it for Gentile Christians, a view that, in my estimation, finds no sustainable support from the TaNaKH, the Apostolic Scriptures, or the Bible as a whole. Thus, having just represented two mainstream Christian perspectives, let us examine a few of the opposing opinions that usually come from the Messianic side of this “mini-debate.” Messianic Jewish author David H. Stern takes pointed differences with the historic Christian assertion that the “weak” were Messianic Jews still “clinging” to their heritage religion after coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua. Writing in his Jewish New Testament Commentary he articulates a very valuable context of Romans 14 along with his own understanding of the identity of the “weak” and “strong” thusly:

14:1-15:6 Among believers there are two groups, those with “strong trust” and those with “weak trust.” The latter are depicted in this passage as feeling they must abstain from meat or wine and/or observe certain days as holy, while the former feel no such compunctions.

On the basis of this passage Messianic Jews are sometimes asked by Gentile Christians to stop observing Jewish holidays or keeping kosher. Or they are criticized as having “weak faith” if they adhere to Jewish practices. But the specifics of the passage are clearly in a Gentile cultural and religious context, not a Jewish one. It does not teach that following Jewish practices is a sign of “weak faith.” Rather, it exhorts believers, Jewish or Gentile, whose trust is “strong” not to look down on those whose trust they consider “weak” — precisely the opposite of the behavior described above.

The weak are believers, either Gentile or Jewish, who have not yet grown sufficiently in their faith to have given up attachment to various ascetic practices and calendar observances. Their tie to these activities, however, is not supported by a rational though mistaken ideology, as with the legalists, either Gentile or Jewish believers, either Judaizers or of some other stripe, who believe they earn a righteous status before God by their works. Rather, it is irrational and emotional, linked to psychological needs, social pressures or superstition, or it

¹⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, (Zondervan, ePub Edition, 2009), section 55.13.

may simply be a matter of habit. When their activities in these areas are questioned in “arguments over opinions” (v. 1), they are not “fully convinced in their own minds” (v. 5), not “free of self-doubt” (v. 22), but rather easily “upset” or even “destroyed” (v. 15) and thus able to “fall away” or “stumble” (vv. 20-21). This is why Sha’ul calls them “weak.”

In any case, it is clear from the passage itself that the “weak” cannot be equated with observant Messianic Jews. For nothing in Judaism requires a Jew to be a vegetarian (v. 2). It is argued that kosher food might not have been available. But Rome had a large Jewish colony (Ac 28:17); it is unthinkable that it would not have had a shochet (ritual slaughterer). It is argued that the shochet might have been unwilling to sell to Messianic Jews. But this is a gratuitous assumption for which there is no evidence, and the willingness of the Jewish leaders of Rome to come and listen to Sha’ul (Ac 28:17ff.) argues against it. Also nothing in Judaism requires a Jew to refrain from wine (v. 21); the only exceptions are Nazirites during the period of their vow and cohanim on duty. On the contrary, wine-drinking is so much a part of Jewish ritual that it is lent an aura of sanctity which, at least until recently, made alcoholism very uncommon among Jews.

For these many reasons we conclude that the “weak” cannot be Messianic Jews who are “not yet free from the Law.”²⁰

Without fully revealing who I believe the true addressees of the letter are just yet, Stern, nevertheless, points us in the right direction by refuting the popular Christian opinion that the “weak” and “strong” were Messianic Jews and Christian Gentiles respectively. To be sure, Stern goes on to say in that same commentary,

Many interpreters bring to this passage a presupposition that the New Testament abrogates the ceremonial and ritual details of the Jewish Law, such as kashrut and the Jewish holidays. They see the weak as Messianic Jews who still observe these “Jewish details” because they have not yet realized that there is no longer any need to do so. According to this understanding Gentile Christians, along with Jewish believers who have “freed themselves from the Law,” are not to look down on their “weaker brothers” for abstaining from pork, celebrating Passover or fasting on Yom-Kippur. On the other hand, Messianic Jews who do practice these customs have no ground for a “holier-than-thou” attitude toward those who do not. Quite the contrary: not only have they a direct command not to pass judgment on their brothers who do not keep the Law, but there is implicit in this interpretation an indirect, subliminal message to aspire to the “strong faith” that will “free them from the Law.”²¹

At this point it might be helpful to know that Mark Nanos has identified a fatal “weakness” (pun intended) of the mainstream Christian church position on the “weak” and “strong” by zeroing in on what he calls “Luther’s trap.” So defined,

²⁰ David Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Jewish New Testament Publications, JNTC 1992), p. 432-33.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Nanos states, “Luther recognized that Paul was clearly instructing the ‘strong’ not to judge the opinions of the ‘weak’; however, Luther tripped into the very trap of judging them and then read this judgment as Paul’s. That is, Luther was tripped by the faulty assumption (1), that the ‘weak’ were Christian Jews, into the trap of assumption (2) with its inherent, inescapable contradiction wherein he indulges in the very same kind of judging Paul warned the ‘strong’ (which Luther considered himself) to avoid.” (The Mystery of Romans, p 92) The truths of these facts is where Stern’s Messianic Jewish perspective on the identity of the “weak” and “strong” will lead us if we follow their logical conclusions: that the “weak” are Christian Jews cannot be sustained from the scriptures in general and from the letter as a whole, for the simple fact that Paul himself was a lifelong Torah-observant Christian Jew (cf. Acts 18:18; 21:17-26; 21:39; 22:3; 23:6; 24:14-18; 25:8-11; 26:4, 5 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-23) and he most certainly included himself among the “strong” in Romans. Notice the personal possessive pronoun nominative 1st person plural “we” in the following verse:

Rom 15:1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (ESV)

Rom 15:1 Ὁφείλομεν δὲ ἡμεῖς οἱ δυνατοὶ τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ἀδυνάτων βαστάζειν, καὶ μὴ ἑαυτοῖς ἀρέσκειν. (SBLGNT)

Thus, launching from this perspective that the “weak” cannot in all likelihood be Torah-submissive Jews (or even Torah-respectful Gentiles for that matter), we can observe that the Messianic-orientated writers over at YashaNet.com also make a break from normative Christianity by taking a strikingly different approach to this opening section from Romans 14. Adopting the “weak” and “strong” view made popular by Nanos, —the very thesis I personally hold to at this moment— they elaborate on it thusly:

- The idea of someone following God’s Torah as being “weak” in faith is inconsistent with what Paul actually believed and taught regarding Torah. Paul himself said that the Torah is confirmed by our faith (Romans 3:31). The concept of “weak faith” was not one of being graded on some type of “scale.” Rather, as we shall discuss, those “weak” in faith were those Jews who still walked in the faith of Israel, but did not accept Yeshua as Messiah. The “measure of faith,” (mentioned in the previous chapters earlier), that makes one “strong,” is knowledge and acceptance of Yeshua.
- Paul continues to view the faith of his Jewish brethren who do not yet follow Yeshua as a valid faith. What they practice was given by God and is approved by Him. The “strong” in this section are not to judge the opinions of the “weak,” but rather are to accommodate them. These Jews are the ones who are “weak” in that they are lacking the knowledge of Yeshua as Messiah (Romans 10:2), not because they keep the Torah. If Paul truly believed that followers of Yeshua were to no longer be concerned with the Torah, (and if this is the identity of the “weak”

in this section), then he would instruct the “weak” to change their behavior. As we will see, this is not the case.²²

So there you have it. Who are the “weak”? They are Jews who have not yet made a full (and likely public) community confession that Yeshua is the Messiah of Isra’el and the only hope of personal salvation in this world. They have a genuine faith in the God of their fathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, but it is not yet saving faith. By comparison, the “strong” are most definitely Gentiles (as well as Jews) who have made a personal (and likely public) community confession that Jesus is the Christ. This is the identity of the “weak” and “strong” that I believe Paul is writing about in this part of his letter to the Church at Rome. In Nanos’ own words,

Paul was not concerned with distinguishing between Christian Jews/gentiles who practiced (“weak”) or did not practice (“strong”) the Law and customs, with the hope that all would eventually abandon the Law and customs as they grew stronger in their faith in Christ. His concern was rather that all the non-Christian Jews (“stumbling” in faith toward Christ) in Rome would recognize that Jesus was the Christ of Israel, their Savior, and that they would thus believe in Christ and become Christians (“able” to have faith toward Christ) — Christian Jews. As Christian Jews they would indeed continue to be Jews in that they continue to practice the Law and Jewish customs in faith, not in order to justify themselves, but because they are Jews justified by the Jewish Savior/Messiah/Christ, thus joining with gentiles who are Christians in giving glory with “one accord” and thus “one voice” to the One Lord: “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (15:6).²³

Indeed, commenting directly on Nanos’ invaluable work ‘The Mystery of Romans,’ Neil Elliott writing for The Journal of Beliefs and Values shares:

Nanos brilliantly critiques the ‘almost universal agreement’ that both weak and strong were Christians, and that the ‘weakness’ in question was an inadequate appreciation on behalf of Jewish Christians of their freedom from Torah observance. In a telling survey (pp. 92-94), Nanos shows how Christian interpreters have routinely fallen into ‘Luther’s trap’, characterizing the Torah observant ‘weak’ in patronizing or pejorative terms. This interpretation completely ignores Paul’s clear acknowledgment that the weak are ‘fully convinced’ that their observance is ‘for the Lord’ (Rom. 14:5), and contradicts Paul’s instruction that the strong not judge the weak. The result is ‘a theological double standard’: Gentiles may come to faith in Christ without becoming Jews, but Jews must give up Jewish identity to become Christian.

The ‘weak’ of Romans 14 are not Jewish Christians who keep the law. Showing that in the Septuagint and Qumran literature alike, ‘weakness’ was parallel to ‘stumbling’, Nanos concludes that ‘the “weak” of 14:1—15:12 are the

²² <http://www.yashanet.com/studies/romstudy/text14.htm>

²³ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), p. 154-55.

“stumbling” of 9:30-32’ (Mystery of Romans, p. 123). They are clearly Jews, though not Christians; indeed, they are Jews who have ‘stumbled’ over the confession of Jesus as messiah. Nevertheless Paul insists they have faith that must be respected by the strong, ‘even if that faith is characterized as “weak”’. The ‘strong’ on the other hand, hold ‘the kind of gentile prejudices toward Jews’ that were prevalent in Rome (p. 100). The result of Nanos’ argument is a truly ‘new perspective’ which respects ‘the integrity of Paul as a Jew’ (p. 154), and reveals how the paraenesis of 12:1 to 15:14 coheres with the theological argument of the letter (pp. 159-165).

Nanos has done much more than present a remarkable series of new readings for future interpreters to take into account. The Mystery of Romans contributes to the demolition of the already crumbling ‘Lutheran interpretation’ of Paul, but also provides a viable alternative to the ‘New Perspective’ reading. The result is a coherent and persuasive new vision of both the letter and of Paul’s theology.²⁴

Returning to our initial evaluation of some of the Greek that we highlighted earlier, Tim Hegg of TorahResource.com supplies us with some furthering remarks on these somewhat subtle Greek details and how they may drive a more precise understanding of the recipients of Paul’s letter. We will examine the additional points of Rom 14:2-3 a bit later in my own commentary here, but since Hegg’s thoughts are also relevant to the Greek of verse 1 and how the Greek might elaborate on the identity of the “weak” and the “strong,” let us sneak a peek at his Messianic commentary to Romans 14:2 at this moment. Speaking on Rom 14:2-3 Hegg states:

One should also note how the two parties are described in these verses by the Apostle: “One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.” Here, those willing to eat meat (all things) are described as “having faith” (ὃς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα, literally, “On the one hand he who is believing to eat all things . . .”) while those “weak” (ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν) must be understood as referring to the former “weak in faith” (Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει), v. 1. What is interesting is that “he who is believing” incorporates the present indicative verb while the “weak” is defined using a participle.

What might this suggest? It could be that the use of the present indicative points to a specific “confession of faith,” i.e., confessing Yeshua as Messiah, while the participle (describing a present characteristic) points to a condition of weakness which the Apostle considered to be current but not necessarily permanent. Those weak in faith were viewed by the Apostle as those still in the process of declaring their faith in Yeshua.

This viewpoint is confirmed later on in the chapter when the Apostle states: (v. 15), “Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died.” In

²⁴ Elliot, N. (1997). The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter. *The Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 18.1, 103-07.

other words, do not allow your halachah to turn away someone who is otherwise seeking to know the truth of Yeshua as Messiah.²⁵

And in case you did not catch it in the above citation, Hegg clearly adopts Nanos' viewpoints on the identity of the "weak" and the "strong," as can be observed from this additional, lengthy quote from Hegg's commentary to Romans:

Mark Nanos has made another suggestion, one that I think fits the context and the message of Paul. He suggests that those weak in faith are the Jewish members of the synagogue who had demonstrated a genuine faith in the God of Israel, but who were still in the process of being convinced that Yeshua was the promised Messiah. Their genuine faith had been demonstrated within the community but they were still considering the evidence regarding whether Yeshua was, in fact, the promised Messiah of that faith. In one sense, the genuine character of their faith would be confirmed by their confession of Yeshua as Messiah, but until that time came, they could not be charged with faithlessness. Their faith was weak only in the sense that it was not as strong as it would be when they fully espoused Yeshua.

Thus, these who were not yet confessors of Yeshua may have held more strictly to the Oral Torah of the sages, Oral Torah that the followers of Yeshua had come to realize was, in some cases, to be discarded in favor of unity with the non-Jewish members of The Way. For while a clear distancing from idolatry was to be the perspective of all those who were God's children, the Sages had built fences which actually separated Jew from non-Jew on the basis that all non-Jews were suspect of idolatry. This simply could not "work" in the emerging Messianic congregations, where a growing majority of Gentiles were being added on a regular basis. Yet for those who had not yet confessed Yeshua as Messiah, their allegiance was still to the prevailing halachah. Rather than separate from their Gentile brothers, they chose the more difficult road of eating no meat at all for fear that it might be contaminated by the pagan, idol cults. They were willing to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle in order to remain within the community.

Yet it appears that the followers of Yeshua, perhaps the majority of whom in the Roman synagogue were Gentiles, instead of appreciating the extra efforts these Jewish members were exerting for the sake of unity, were accusing them of failing to measure up to the full maturity that was available in Yeshua. It seems to me that this scenario, while not without its difficulties, best fits the context as well as Paul's admonitions.²⁶

In hindsight after hearing all of the carefully reasoned arguments both from a few Christian perspectives as well as from various Messianic perspectives, we can now begin to see that a natural place to begin investigating Paul's context for using this Greek word in Rom 14:1, 2 is to search internally within the letter itself. Earlier at Romans 4:19, 20 Paul referenced Father Abraham, stating specifically in verse 19 that "He did not weaken in faith," (Greek=καὶ μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῆ

²⁵ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), pp. 410-11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

πίστει, literally “and not having become weak in the faith”). Indeed, the writers over at YashNet also take notice of Paul’s earlier usage of this key term and reference Nanos’ once again in support of his understanding of the relationship between Abraham, the father of faithful Jews and Gentiles in Romans Chapter 4 and the Jews and Gentiles referenced here in Romans Chapter 14:

The term “weak” must be understood in its Hebraic sense, where it carries the meaning of “unable” or “not strong,” with regard to their measure of faith. “Weak” in Hebrew Biblical literature has to do with “stumbling.”

Paul actually introduced this concept back in chapter 4 of this letter, when he explained how Abraham’s faith was considered “strong” when he trusted in God’s promise even when the circumstances seemed otherwise. This principle is important to understand when considering why Paul considers his Jewish brethren who do not yet accept Yeshua to be “weak” in faith. Their faith is valid (as was Abraham’s prior to the binding of Isaac), but is “weak” in that they have not yet taken the step in trusting God by accepting Yeshua, who is the “measure of faith.”

This “measure of faith,” has nothing to do with the 613 commands of the Torah, since (as Paul teaches in chapter 4), it was present with Abraham -- before the giving of the Torah and circumcision. The “strong” in faith are both Jews and gentiles who are of the faith of Abraham, whose “strength” was shown long before the revelation given at Mount Sinai. 3

Similar usage is found in translations of the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴ Thus, there is a connection between the “weak” in this section, and the Synagogue Jews who are “stumbling” over the issue of Yeshua.²⁷

Likewise, Tim Hegg, commenting on the passage in Romans about father Abraham, offers these insightful thoughts for us to consider,

*“And without becoming weak in faith – What are the means by which one “grows weak in faith?” The only other time that Paul employs the phrase “weak in faith” in Romans is at 14:1-2, admonishing the congregation to receive those “weak in the faith,” but not to pass judgment on their opinions. 14:2 uses the same Greek word for “weak” (ἀσθενέω, *astheneo*) but does not specifically add “in faith.” However, those “weak” are those who feel they must only eat vegetables and is put in contrast to the one who has faith that he can “eat all things.” “Weak in faith” here seems to imply that the person restricts himself unduly, unaware of the broader horizon. The same could apply to Abraham’s example, that he did not limit himself to the human horizons set before him, but, laying hold by faith upon what God had said, he was able to do what otherwise would have been (and always is) humanly impossible.”²⁸*

²⁷ <http://www.yashanet.com/studies/romstudy/text14.htm>

²⁸ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 97.

Lastly, an online sermon transcript by Pastor David B. Curtis of Berean Bible Church lends additional support for the view that the “weak” were most likely unsaved Jews who were, nevertheless, counted by Paul as part of the larger, comingling Jewish and Gentile synagogue and Torah communities that Paul had influence over as a Messianic Jew at Rome. Commenting on the Romans Four Abrahamic passage, as well as Paul’s instructions to arrogant Gentiles in Chapter Eleven, Curtis states:

We learn from this that being weak in faith, for Paul, had nothing to do with Torah-observance but rather a doubt in God’s ability to give life to the dead. Just as Abraham was strong for believing that Isaac would be born from a dead womb, the Romans are strong for believing that Yeshua was raised from a dead corpse. The strong are believers, the weak unbelievers, by definition.

Paul is a Torah-observant Jew who desperately wants his Jewish brothers to see who Yeshua is-the Jewish Messiah. So Paul asks Gentiles to live as “righteous Gentiles” so that the Jews might come see the truth in Christ. The “strong” (those who know Yeshua as the Messiah) are responsible for the salvation of the “weak” (those who have yet to accept Yeshua as the Messiah) by the way that they live.

Remember what we have learned so far about the situation at Rome. I suggested to you that in Rome the church met in a synagogue. Both Jews and Gentiles meet in the synagogue to worship Yahweh.

In Rome, Jew and Gentiles are meeting in the synagogue and Gentiles are being tempted to consider unbelieving Jews excluded from God’s purposes. So Paul tells the Gentiles:

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. Romans 11:17-18 NASB

They were being arrogant toward the unbelieving Jews. This is the main point of this section; it is a warning to Gentiles about the dangers of pride. At the heart of his concern is that the Gentile believers were beginning to look at the unbelieving Jews in the synagogue with disdain, because they rejected and crucified the Messiah.

In Chapters 12-15 it seems that Paul is specifically addressing the Gentile believers. He wants them to treat the non-believing Jews in the synagogue with love that they may be won to Christ... The “weak in faith” in Rome were non-Christian Judeans, weak because they lacked faith in Yeshua as the Messiah, not because they followed the law. Paul wanted the Gentile Christians in Rome to accommodate the weak and “not please themselves” (Rom. 15:1), as a means of attracting them to Christianity.²⁹

²⁹ http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/romans_new/14_01.htm

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8. Conclusions

What have we learned by perusing differing Christian and Messianic perspectives on the identity of the “weak” and “strong”? We discovered that mainstream Christian perspectives on the identity of the “weak” and “strong” are heavily influenced by the historic Christian bias that can rightly be described as a “Law-free gospel.” In this view, the “weak” and “strong” are two groups of people in the Church, both of whom are Christian, and yet one feels a compulsion to keep the Law of Moses (the “weak”) and one feels no such compulsion (the “strong”). According to this view, Paul (one of the non-compulsive “strong”) must caution these two groups to avoid passing judgment on one another since each must be “fully convinced in his own mind” as to what is the right lifestyle to lead as a Christian. What is more, in this view, since it is assumed that Paul must have also abandoned compulsion towards (at least) the ceremonial aspects of the Torah when he came to faith in Yeshua, then it only follows that he would obviously side with the “strong” that the “weak” should not remain in their “weakness” but instead, in time, join the “walk of the strong” where instead of focusing on special days and select food and drink, all who are “strong” can declare like Paul, “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

Indeed, if according to traditional Gentile Christianity Paul abandoned his Torah-keeping stance in favor of becoming “all things to all men” (cf. 1 Cor 9:19-23)—a position that, in my opinion as a Messianic Jewish believer in Yeshua, suspiciously seems to always default back into some semblance of a Torah-less/non-Jewish form of Gentile Christianity—then it naturally follows that he would not wish to have “strong” Christian community members at Rome (be they Jewish or Gentile) retaining any loyalty to ceremonial aspects of the (ostensibly cancelled) Law of Moses. In such a scenario, such Law-keeping Jews and Gentiles must be “weak in faith” as evidenced by their continuing dependency upon shadows, instead of relying fully upon the finished work of Messiah—the Body who is casting those shadows in the first place.

We also found that by going back to the original context of Paul’s letter and searching within passages where he already utilized “weak” and “strong” language, we are better able to connect the context of the earlier parts of his letter to his overall audience in Rome in the latter parts of the letter. Thus, as Nanos once again reminds us:

The “strong/able” are Christians. They include Jews, like Paul and a small group of Christian Jews in Rome; and gentiles, like the majority of the audience he is addressing in Rome, that “follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham” (4:12) in that they believe (are “able” and “strengthened” to recognize)

that Jesus, by his resurrection from the dead, has been demonstrated to be the promised “seed,” the Christ of Israel and the Savior of the world (1:4, 16; 3:21-26). They too had been “weak” before believing in Christ: “For while we were still helpless [ἀσθενῶν], at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (5:6). Thus it is to the “strong” that Paul directs most (perhaps all) of his instruction throughout chapters 12-15, for while they are “able” to “hold up” those in the process of stumbling as they exercise their gifts and “respect what is right in the sight of all men,” they are, however, also “able” to throw down the stone that will “destroy” them.³⁰

In the end, instead of wresting the context of Paul’s letter in this important section away from letter as a whole, we can instead begin to encounter in today’s modern commentaries to this chapter in Romans, a perspective that makes a break from the popular yet ill-suited theology that pits Paul against the Judaism that he formerly practiced as a non-Christian Jew. It is in this vein that a better and more balanced view of Paul and his addressees emerges, usually in the form of commentaries put out by those in the emerging Torah/Messianic Movement.

Jews and Gentiles who embrace a Torah-respectful and Torah-observant lifestyle—all the while retaining their conviction that Yeshua is the exclusive means of salvation and ongoing sanctification in their lives—feel that Paul would not have to characterize Torah-pursuant people as “weak” merely due to their preferences and convictions for keeping a Torah-based lifestyle. Instead, the fact that Jewish people living in and among the various 1st Century Christ-believing communities in Rome would have had ample opportunity to hear about Yeshua as the Messiah of their TaNaKH and begin to explore his role as their personal savior, seems highly plausible from an historic point of view. And that these non-Christian Jews should yet be counted as having genuine faith in the God of Isra’el—while contemplating Yeshua’s role as Messiah—is all the more reasonable to assume given the truth that Gentiles with faith in Yeshua as Messiah are in fact joined to the Commonwealth of Isra’el at the Remnant level, and thus are also shown to profess genuine faith in the God of Isra’el.

At this point in my research into the identity of the “weak” and “strong”, I can confidently say that while agreeing with the central tenet of Stern’s perspective that the “weak” cannot in all probability be Messianic Jews still leading a Torah-submissive lifestyle after coming to faith in Yeshua HaMashiach (viz, their walk of faith as Torah-keeping covenant members has no biblical basis to be regarded by their Gentile Christian counterparts as “weak”), nevertheless, my own personal interpretation of the identity of the “weak” and “strong” is most closely aligned with the opinions of YashNet and Hegg where the “weak” are most likely Jewish members of the faith community who are still in “decision mode” as to

³⁰ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), p. 144.

whether or not Yeshua is the long-awaited Messiah promised in the TaNaKH. In Hegg's own words, "[The non-Christian Jewish person's] faith was genuine, because they believed that the Messiah promised by the Prophets would affect atonement for their sin. What remained was for them to be convinced regarding Yeshua, and to confess Him as their Messiah. Thus, even though their faith may have been considered "weak," they were still to be received as genuine covenant members by the synagogue community of The Way."³¹

Indeed, a concluding remark by James Pyles of Morning Meditations drives home one of the central points that Nanos is attempting to convey in his book:

According to Nanos, the "strong," the believing Gentiles in the synagogue, should have known better than to try to "gentilize" the non-believing Jews and thus damaging relationships not only with them, but with the believing Jews who were also continuing to observe Torah and the Jewish customs. The Gentiles were cheapening their own "freedom" in Yeshua-faith by suggesting that the Torah devotion of non-believing Jews was a "weakness" on their part. However, Paul was actually saying that where they were weak was not in their faith in God and observance of the mitzvot, but their faith in Yeshua as Messiah. The Gentile "strong" were greater in that faith but ironically, they weren't that strong either, for they became arrogant in their new status and in lacking love, I suspect they were also "weak" themselves.³²

After reading Nanos' book for myself, I can honestly say that I do not espouse to every conclusion he arrives at. However, I can say that one of the sticking points about this paradigm-challenging book is his refreshing take on Paul's positive attitude towards the Torah and continued pathos for his fellow countrymen, even though most remained in a state of unbelief in Yeshua as the Messiah of the TaNaKH. Thus, in conclusion to this section of my commentary, I will allow this quote from Nanos himself to highlight some of the important aspects of why we as believing Jews and Gentiles united under the unifying banner of our LORD Yeshua need a perspective such as his driving our understanding of Romans:

We gain a new perspective on Paul's deep commitment to the Law, nuanced by his uncompromising concern to maintain the universal salvation that was at the heart of monotheism, for he regarded his Jewish brothers and sisters as fellow believers in the One God, though, not yet in God's Christ, the promised "seed." Rather than focusing on the assumption that "weak" is a pejorative or patronizing reference to Christian Jews who practice the Law with its arrogant assumption that this is a failure to have complete faith apart from Torah, we spring Luther's trap and instead focus on Paul's continuing respect for keeping the Law as an act of faith that leads to and continues to manifest the very love of God demonstrated in Christ. And we see Paul wrestling with the tensions created

³¹ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 409.

³² <https://mymorningmeditations.com/2013/12/05/the-mystery-of-romans-who-are-the-weak-and-the-strong/>

by maintaining that the Law continued to be operative for Jews but was not necessary for gentiles to become coparticipants in Israel's blessings (for the blessings were actually for the whole world equally), and yet the need for gentiles to live as "slaves of righteousness," which meant in love they fulfilled the Law as they maintained the intentions of the apostolic decree—the halakhah governing the behavior of "righteous gentiles" loyal to the One Lord. Together, these observations allow us to see Paul as a faithful Jew, in fact, as a champion of Israel's historical faith, in his bold "reminder" to those in Rome whom he understood to be "righteous gentiles" through their new faith in Christ Jesus.³³

Being a longtime student of Tim Hegg myself, I can see that YashaNet, Hegg, and Curtis were obviously influenced by Mark Nanos. In the end, after putting all of the data on the table to work from, I believe that Nanos' view allows for the best reading of the context of the rest of the passage (which is one of genuine, Christ-empowered servitude: Rom 14:13 "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother"), all the while retaining a picture of a Paul who himself was both a Christian (i.e., one of the "strong") as well as a lifelong Torah-submissive Jew (i.e., one who could readily appreciate the Torah-based lifestyle choices of the "weak").

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9. 14:2-4 – What is the contrast between “anything” and “vegetables”?

Romans 14:2-4	
ESV	SBLGNT
2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.	2 ὃς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν λάχανα ἐσθίει
3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.	3 ὁ ἐσθίων τὸν μὴ ἐσθίοντα μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐσθίων τὸν ἐσθίοντα μὴ κρινέτω ὁ Θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν προσελάβετο
4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to	4 σὺ τίς εἶ ὁ κρίνων ἀλλότριον οἰκέτην τῷ ἰδίῳ κυρίῳ στήκει ἢ πίπτει σταθήσεται δὲ δυνατεῖ γὰρ ὁ Κύριος στήσαι αὐτόν

³³ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), p. 164-65.

make him stand.

*Notes:

Tim Hegg's brief remarks are fitting for this part of my own commentary:

Romans 14:2 *“One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.”*

- “faith to eat all things”
 - By “all things,” Paul cannot mean that the Torah food laws have been abolished for the person with faith.
 - The Torah food laws are not a matter of “opinion”!
 - “All things” must therefore mean “all foods allowed by the Torah” without consideration for the many additional laws formulated by man.
- “he who is weak” = “he who is weak in faith”
 - The one who has not yet fully accepted Yeshua as the promised Messiah in whom he believes, continues to follow additional food laws.
 - These probably related to:
 - ~ meat handled or prepared by Gentiles
 - ~ meat purchased from the common market
- “regard with contempt”
 - to treat the person as though they have been rejected by the community
 - to create division in the community based upon man-made laws or halachah
- “to judge the one who eats” as having sinned³⁴

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10. 14:5-9 - Are Christians free to worship God any day of the week?

Romans 14:5-9	
ESV	SBLGNT
5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.	5 Ὅς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ' ἡμέραν ὃς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῦ πληροφροεῖσθω
6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives	6 ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν Κυρίῳ φρονεῖ {καὶ ὁ μὴ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ οὐ φρονεῖ} ὁ ἐσθίων Κυρίῳ

³⁴ Tim Hegg, *A Study Through Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Romans 13:1-4] (TorahResource), p.3

<p>thanks to God. (ESV)</p> <p>7 For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.</p> <p>8 For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.</p> <p>9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.</p>	<p>ἐσθίει εὐχαριστεῖ γὰρ τῷ Θεῷ καὶ ὁ μὴ ἐσθίων Κυρίῳ οὐκ ἐσθίει καὶ εὐχαριστεῖ τῷ Θεῷ</p> <p>7 Οὐδείς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἑαυτῷ ζῆ καὶ οὐδείς ἑαυτῷ ἀποθνήσκει</p> <p>8 ἔάν τε γὰρ ζῶμεν τῷ Κυρίῳ ζῶμεν ἔάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν τῷ Κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκομεν ἔάν τε οὖν ζῶμεν ἔάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν τοῦ Κυρίου ἐσμέν</p> <p>9 εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἔζησεν ἵνα καὶ νεκρῶν καὶ ζώντων κυριεύσῃ</p>
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*Notes:

-----Excursus: Romans 14:5, 6 "The long and short of it"-----

Firstly, while perhaps not central to addressing the immediate Romans 14:5, 6 question at hand (*"Are Christians free to worship God any day of the week?"*), nevertheless, one of my keen, long-time Torah "study-buddies" is fond of pointing out that many Bible readers may not be aware of the fact that in verse six there is a significant variant in the Greek manuscripts when comparing the 16th century Textus Receptus (and other related Byzantine-type manuscripts such as the Stephanus, the Scrivener, the Byzantine Majority, and the GNT) with the older, yet, more-recently-discovered "minority" Alexandrian Texts (such as the Nestle-Aland/UBS, the Wescott and Hort, and the Tischendorf types of manuscripts).

Regarding textual traditions, Wikipedia comments that the Textus Receptus constituted the translation base for the translation of the New Testament into English by William Tyndale, the King James Version, and most other Reformation-era New Testament translations throughout Western and Central Europe (such as the King James Version, the Darby Version, and Young's Literal Translation). Comparatively, the Alexandrian Text stands behind most modern English translations of the New Testament including the American Standard Version, New International Version, Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New American Standard Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, English Standard Version, and others.³⁵

³⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_major_textual_variants_in_the_New_Testament

The SBLGNT Greek version of this passage above shows the **variant in red brackets** { }. Notice the **red part** of the KJV below which translates the extra Greek phrase, i.e., the variant:

Romans 14:6, KJV: “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.”

Basically, some bibles show a shorter reading for verse six and some bibles show a longer reading for verse six, but, in my opinion as a Bible student, the overall general message that Paul was trying to convey to his original audience seems largely unaffected no matter which manuscript representation we believe to be the original version of his letter.

While not a “King James-only” advocate, nevertheless, Dr. James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries makes a conclusion to this verse that supports the longer reading. He states, “The verse’s second section contains a balanced statement by the apostle, while the first contains only one side of the argument. The added material “balances” out the entire passage.”³⁶ Indeed, a plausible conclusion that can be drawn, as to whether we should prefer the longer Textus Receptus (Majority Texts) versions to the shorter Alexandrian (Minority Texts) version, can be found on Herman Grobler’s BibleDifferences.net blog article on the passage in question. I quote him here at length for the reader’s review:

In this paragraph Paul gives direction concerning two areas of dispute, and that one should not judge the other. First he handles the eating of meat or not, and emphasizes that God accepted both. Then he considers those who keep certain days in a special way, and emphasizes that everyone should be convinced in his own mind. And then our sentence of investigation is found. In this sentence Paul stresses that our conduct should honour God. If the shorter version is accepted, then Paul is making an obvious but conflicting conclusion concerning regarding or not regarding the day. The shorter version says that regarding the day is to the honour of God. But then it does not say anything about not regarding the day. Obviously not regarding the day would then not be to the honour of God!

Yet both eating or not eating, are to the honour of God! This difference between the two areas of dispute is illogical and cannot be defended. Therefore the longer version where Paul treats both aspects of dispute equally must be accepted as what Paul had written in the first place.

Someone else might reason that Paul wanted to write “word economical” and make the one applicable to the other. But then why wouldn’t he rather make the first statement the complete one and the second dependent on the first. This

³⁶ James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Baker Books, 1995), p. 226.

would then force one to back – interpret the first statement from the second. Again this is illogical.

Both these intrinsic criteria strongly appeal for the longer version to be the logic choice to render the original autograph.

Conclusion: That the shorter version is found in the older manuscripts cannot be the only decisive criterion, since any mistake could have happened at any time, even with a copy made from the original autograph. Also applying the tool of text criticism, *lectio brevoir* (the shorter reading is preferable), could not be decisive.

The work done by Nestle and Aland, and also by the committee of the United Bible Societies does present the Bible translator with an excellent well researched Greek text. But their focus is mainly on the manuscripts where the Egyptian documents and the Alexandrian text type take preference. Yet the other text critical tools like internal and intrinsic criteria with prayer should be equally valued. Nestle-Aland or the UBS-text is not supposed to be a rule book, but a guide or help to be considered among other works

In our verse of investigation both the internal and intrinsic criteria make a very strong appeal towards the longer version found in the Byzantine manuscripts to be in agreement with the original and not the version found in the Alexandrian manuscripts.

Bruce Metzger, an expert in textual critique pointed out that one should be aware that the original might sometimes be preserved in the Byzantine manuscripts. I believe that this is one of the more prominent cases.³⁷

-----End of excursus-----

So, the immediate, oft-asked question related to these two verses is, “*Are Christians free to worship God any day of the week?*” In one sense, believers ARE free to worship God any day of the week—and we SHOULD be worshipping him EVERY day of the week, right? However, our Messianic freedom should not separate us, but cause us to “pursue what makes for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19).

I can say that I have studied many varied commentaries on this passage (Calvin, Murray, Dunn, Lloyd-Jones, Bruce, Barth, Hendrickson, Stuhlmacher, Cranfield, Nanos, Hegg, MacArthur, Stern, Lancaster, Janicki, and others), and in my estimation as a Bible student, Rom 14:5 does not seem like a likely passage teaching freedom from Sabbath worship (viz, Sabbath vs. Sunday).

I feel the best way to interpret verse 5 is within the larger context (read with Rom 14:6), and that would make it a verse about voluntary fast days. I base my position on a number of historic and textual clues:

³⁷ <https://bibleifferences.net/2016/04/10/137/>

- The Sabbath is God's covenant sign to Isra'el (Ex 31:13; Ez 20:12). The Gentiles grafted into Remnant Isra'el would have had natural association with seventh day Sabbath worship (Acts 14:1, 15:21).
- At the time the book of Romans was written (around 55 to 56 CE), official "Sabbath vs. Sunday" debates were not extant. Sunday would not become the established Christian day of worship until a few hundred years later.
- For Paul to casually recommend in one verse, the personal choice to give up seventh day Sabbath in favor of Sunday worship seems highly unlikely, given the weight of received Torah passages (Ex 31:16, 17, etc.), and the establishment of Sabbath in the Jewish communities—of which the sect known as The Way was a part (Acts 24:14).
- Thousands of Jews believed in Yeshua by the 1st century, and many were zealous for the Torah (Acts 21:20), making a purported "personal allowance to switch from Sabbath to Sunday worship via this verse" a virtual historical improbability.

In my estimation, if the verses in question were truly about Sabbath vs. Sunday, then a number of problematic details begin to arise:

- To leave the decision in the hands of those who are "fully convinced in their own mind" appears to be a weak way to establish congregational bylaws for a leader the likes of Paul.
- Jewish and Gentile believers are to rejoice together (Rom 15:10). How could the newly emerging messianic communities maintain any unity and group cohesion (Eph 4:13) if we had some folks choosing Sabbath, and others choosing Sunday? How could genuine fellowship form in such a setting? And what if the majority is "convinced" Sabbath is correct? Should those "unconvinced" leave and go elsewhere? Or should they ignore their conscience, stay, and yield to the majority "vote"?

How one answers this question depends on who the "we" are in this question, and what is meant by "a certain day." If the "we" are Gentile Christians, I can only say that the early Messianic communities were a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:14). This means the Gentile members must have been quite familiar with and most certainly respectful of Torah, even if they did not fully embrace it as Gentile believers (Acts 15:19-21). Indeed, the evidence from extant 1st century rabbinic writings (i.e., Mishnah) indicates Gentiles without legal Jewish status were forbidden from embracing Torah. Thus popular opinion today would say "no" to this question, citing the "Christian freedom" themes taught in the NT.

However, if the "we" is Jewish people, and the "certain day" implies Sabbath, then the answer is an emphatic "yes," for indeed Jews are covenantally bound by God and Torah to worship on seventh day Sabbath (Ex 19:8; 20:8; 31:13, 15, 16

Acts 21:20). This most naturally includes we Messianic Jews, since, like Paul himself, we are 100% Jewish (Acts 22:3), we are 100% Messianic (Acts 24:14), and we are 100% a part of Isra'el (Rom 11:1). What is more, even the popular opinion teaches that the Torah is for Jews.

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11. Conclusions

There is no historical evidence or theological support from the 1st century to suppose that Rom 14:5 should be interpreted as a freedom to choose worship days. The early Messianic communities were a sect of Judaism (Acts 24:14). Even a surface level examination of the chapter will show that food and eating topics were the primary context (Rom 14:2, 3, 6, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23). This would make Rom 14:5, 6 about voluntary fast days that some were esteeming, with others not obligating themselves to those voluntary fast days. And within the sometimes-heated social setting of the 1st century Judaisms, issues related to food, special days, and ritual purity were a natural flashpoint for friction between the merging of the Jewish culture and those from the nations who were grafted into Remnant Isra'el (Rom 11:17; 15:5-7).

In this day and age, believers are free to worship on whatever day the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) leads them to worship on. However, it would be wise to at least establish a regular scheduled pattern and location of worship so that one can become accountable to a local congregation if at all possible. Biblical freedom is not a license to “Church hop” as often as one pleases. To this degree, there may be no rigid “right or wrong answer” to this question. I don’t personally agree with using Rom 14:5 to justify a choice in worship days, since I believe the context to be that of voluntary fast days instead.

Lastly, regardless of how one interprets Rom 14:5, we can be assured that Paul forbids the weak and strong from judging and despising each other, since they constitute one viable community and are in need of one another (Rom 14:1-4, 10, 13). Also, Paul definitely admonishes the strong to welcome (Rom 14:1) and bear with the failings of the weak and accommodate their opinions (Rom 15:1), while each is to build the other up (Rom 15:2, 7), and avoid destroying the work of God for the sake of food (Rom 14:2).

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12. 14:10-13 – Who is the “brother”?

Romans 14:10-13	
ESV	SBLGNT
10 Why do you pass judgment on your	10 Σὺ δὲ τί κρίνεις τὸν ἀδελφόν σου

brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? 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 confess to God.”

12 So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

13 Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

ἢ καὶ σὺ τί ἐξουθενεῖς τὸν ἀδελφόν σου πάντες γὰρ παραστησόμεθα τῷ βήματι τοῦ Θεοῦ

11 γέγραπται γὰρ Ζῶ ἐγὼ λέγει Κύριος ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται τῷ Θεῷ

12 Ἄρα οὖν ἕκαστος ἡμῶν περὶ ἑαυτοῦ λόγον δώσει τῷ Θεῷ

13 Μηκέτι οὖν ἀλλήλους κρίνωμεν ἀλλὰ τοῦτο κρίνατε μᾶλλον τὸ μὴ τιθέναι πρόσκομμα τῷ ἀδελφῷ ἢ σκάνδαλον

***Notes:**

I believe that the best way to understand Paul’s use of the term “brother” here in Romans 14 (Greek=ἀδελφός, adelphos) is to interpret it along the very same ecclesiological lines that mainstream Christianity has been doing all along: the “brothers” to who Paul writes are those Christian brothers who openly profess Yeshua as LORD. Paul is writing to believing communities, albeit, ones made up of both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah. Thus, brotherhood is primarily “internal.” However, owing to the truth that Paul was obviously aware of his ethnic and familial ties to his “external brotherhood”—i.e., the People of Israel, he does at times address fellow, non-Christian Jews as brothers within this letter as well, a fact that we as Christians should never lose sight of.

To be sure, Tim Hegg reminds us concerning this original Greek word “adelphos” (brother):

Paul now takes up the theme with which he began in v. 3. His pointed questions are to both the weak and strong in faith: how can you judge one another? He describes what he means by “judge” with the amplifying phrase which uses the word “contempt” (ἐξουθενεῖω, exoutheneto), “regard with contempt,” “to despise.” Thus, the judging Paul is here reproving is not attempting to scrutinize behavior against the Torah, but the kind which selfishly despises the other because he does not agree with one’s personal “opinions,” v. 1.

Note also that in this verse Paul utilizes the word “brother” (ἀδελφός, adelphos) twice, a word he has not mentioned since 12:1. Paul recognizes that both the one weak in faith as well as the one strong in faith are “brothers.” Here

we find the term “brother” used to identify covenant members in the broadest sense. Even those who had not yet confessed Yeshua as Messiah, but who are nonetheless covenant members in the covenant of Israel, are referred to as “brothers.” While this may offend the systematic theologians who think it necessary to define “brother” on strictly theological grounds, Paul once again displays his awareness of the covenant which functions on two levels: this world, and the world to come. The covenant has real and viable reality in this world, but it also pertains to the world to come. Submission to the Torah no doubt afforded a place in the visible community of Israel (whether for the native born or the non-Jew who attached himself to the community of Israel). The eternal aspects (world to come) required faith in Yeshua—a circumcision of the heart. But both “layers” may be identified as “brothers.”

stand before the judgment seat of God The Greek manuscripts show a variant, Χριστοῦ, christou, “Christ,” “Messiah,” no doubt in an attempt to parallel this text with 1Corinthians 5:10 where Χριστός, Christos is used. The use of “stand” (παρίστημι, paristemi) in the sense of “stand before a judge” has clear technical usage in the Greek of Paul’s day.³⁸

Likewise, Mark Nanos the non-Christian, Reformed Jewish historian we have been frequently quoting throughout this study states,

Paul regards non-Christian Jews as his “brethren” throughout this letter. One of the most direct examples is 9:3-5, where he explains his pathos for Jews who do not yet believe in Jesus as the Christ of Israel:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

But does Paul regard non-Christian Jews as “brethren” to the “strong” in Rome who consist primarily of Christian gentiles? Certainly. Conceptually, Paul did not see faith in Jesus Christ as a break with Israel and his fellow Jews of the Diaspora. He certainly had not left the Jewish faith. Jews were the historical community of the One God, whether they believed in Jesus as the Christ or not. Thus to be a Christian, whether Jew (which would be natural to Paul) or gentile (which was a wonderful new reality that had always been part of Israel’s eschatological expectation), would have immediately made one a “brother” to all Jews, whether they were Christians or not.” We see this through the illustrations of the dough and olive tree of chapter 11, where Paul clarifies just how necessarily the faith of Christian gentiles is inextricably linked with historical Israel. And we see it dramatically in Paul’s summary statements of 15:7-13, where he quotes from various Scriptures to demonstrate that the eschatological salvation of the gentiles, and thus naturally of Israel, has come—for the gentiles

³⁸ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 417-18.

are now praising God in the midst of the congregation of the Jews as they praise God...³⁹

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13. 14:14-18 – What exactly does “nothing is unclean in itself” imply?

Romans 14:14-18	
ESV	SBLGNT
14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.	14 Οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν Κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι ἐκείνῳ κοινόν
15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.	15 εἰ γὰρ διὰ βρῶμα ὁ ἀδελφός σου λυπεῖται οὐκέτι κατὰ ἀγάπην περιπατεῖς μὴ τῷ βρώματι σου ἐκείνον ἀπόλλυε ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν
16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.	16 Μὴ βλασφημείσθω οὖν ὑμῶν τὸ ἀγαθόν
17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.	17 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ βρῶσις καὶ πόσις ἀλλὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ
18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.	18 ὁ γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ δουλεύων τῷ Χριστῷ εὐάρεστος τῷ Θεῷ καὶ δόκιμος τοῖς ἀνθρώποις

*Notes:

A knowledge of the social setting as well as the original Greek words will unlock the secrets to a proper understanding of this passage. In a commentary to Acts

³⁹ Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letters*, (Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 110-11.

10 and Peter's vision of the sheet with all manner of animals, I explained some of the Greek terms that are helpful in appreciating these sometimes-confusing social situations where food and animals are involved. Allow me to share an excerpt from that Acts 10 commentary in this Romans teaching.

Acts 10:14 in the KJV reads, *"But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean."* Q: Why does Kefa make the dual distinction of "common" and/or "unclean" foods in verse 14 (rendered from the KJV)? What do these words convey in their original languages?

A: "Common" in the English of verse 14 is the Greek word *koinos*. It refers to biblically defined and permitted food (beef, chicken, lamb, etc.) that has been rendered profane, for instance, by contact with that which the Bible forbids and does not define as food (pork, shellfish, shrimp, buzzards, spiders, mouse, etc.). The force of this word, when compared to *akathartos* is that *koinos* connotes that which man declares unclean, whereas *akathartos* connotes a God-given declaration of uncleanness. This Greek word *koinos* is not found in the Septuagint (LXX) reading of Leviticus chapter 11, the Greek version of the TaNaKH. Kefa cannot comply with the LORD's request because the sheet clearly contains both food and non-food items, of which the food items have now been declared by himself as contaminated (common "*koinos*") by contact with the non-food items ("...I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" KJV). The English term "unclean" in this verse is the Greek word *akathartos*. This word is a composite of the article "a" plus the word "kathairo." *Kathairo* means "to cleanse, of filth or impurity," and the article "a" is used to negate the meaning, that is, give the opposite significance, thus, *akathartos*=unclean. However, this time, we have the equivalent Hebrew term of this word showing up in the LXX version of Leviticus chapter 11. Everywhere the Hebrew word *tamei* is found, the LXX chooses *akathartos*. To fully grasp Kefa's choice of wording, we must understand that a Jewish definition of applying *akathartos* to that which the Torah describes as non-food stems from the conclusion that HaShem created certain animals with observable traits and behaviors that warrants their biblical label "*tamei*" (unclean), and others without certain observable traits and behaviors that warrants their biblical label "*tahor*" (clean). This is not a defect in the animals themselves. This speaks of the superior intellect of a Creator that is in control over the ecosystem that he created.

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14. Conclusions

How has the technical information from my commentary to Acts 10 been helpful at this point? When examining Romans 14 firstly we must admit that the Greek word *ἀκάθαρτος* "*akathartos*" is not found in this passage at all. Remember, *ἀκάθαρτος* *akathartos* conveys that which is declared by God as unclean. Thus, it is safe to say that Sha'ul is likely not discussing the issue of pork vs. lamb. The word Sha'ul opts for when confessing that "nothing is unclean in itself" (Greek=*οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ*) is *koinos κοινός*. Sha'ul is discussing matters of

biblically defined food being declared by one man as “okay to consume” versus another man declaring it “not okay to consume.”

Professor Craig S. Keener of whom we quoted at the onset of this commentary believes that Paul is indeed admonishing his readers to consider at times laying aside “rituals” and “external rules” in favor of the “true righteousness he has been discussing throughout the letter.” Keener writes,

“Paul’s agenda in this chapter is not to denigrate the keeping of these food customs, but to keep those who viewed themselves as “strong” from looking down on the “weak.” Paul does not want stumbling blocks placed before those who continue to keep kosher by others eating non-kosher food in front of them (14:13–21). Although Paul spent much of the letter establishing from Jewish Scripture that God welcomed Gentiles into the covenant, he is now emphasizing his central issue for the Gentile majority among Roman believers, namely, that they should not look down on Jews (11:18–21) or on those who keep the laws (ch. 14).”⁴⁰

Keener’s final comments on this section of verses can be observed as stating,

“Food is a secondary matter not worth risking anyone’s salvation over (14:13, 15). For Paul, foods are neutral, neither clean nor unclean (14:14; Paul is speaking ritually, according to Lev 11, not equating all food hygienically or nutritionally). The issue is how one views the food (14:14), because one must eat “to the Lord” (14:6; cf. 1 Cor 10:31). To risk grieving or even “destroying” another believer over food is to fail to walk in love (14:15), hence to violate the true heart of the law (13:8–10). What the eater may intend as good (affirming freedom in Christ) may be viewed by others as evil (as disobeying Scripture, 14:16)... Paul applies to Christians who do not observe the law the very critique against strict Jews they may have earlier applauded: in view of God’s judgment (14:10–12; cf. 2:3–5), they must not judge (14:13; cf. 2:1), nor dare they let what they mean for good cause ill speaking (*blasphēmeō*, 14:16; cf. 2:24).”⁴¹

While perhaps not championing a Torah-based lifestyle for Gentile believers in Jesus, as a Torah-keeping Messianic Jewish man myself, I must, nevertheless, admit that I believe that Keener does in fact tap into the greater “messianic” message of Paul’s letter to the Romans, putting table fellowship and food matters into their proper perspective in light of our eternal redemption in Christ and our biblical duty to practice deference and serve one another, putting the other brother’s sensibilities before our own. However, I also believe that Tim Hegg’s brief comments on Romans 14:14 equally serve to demonstrate Paul’s primary thoughts on the matter without having to sacrifice the “ritual aspect” of the written Laws of Moshe for believers in Yeshua. Hegg notes,

⁴⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, (Lutterworth Press, 2011), p. 435 (ePub edition).

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 441.

Understanding Romans 14:14

- First, Paul is convinced that his teaching is correct because it agrees with Yeshua's teaching and manner of living.
- Second, we know from v. 20 that Paul refers to food when he says "nothing is unclean of itself."

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. (Rom 14:20)

- Third, the added "... in itself" means that meat designated by God as clean cannot be made unclean by man-made laws or traditions.
- Thus, Paul's meaning is: "nothing God has declared to be clean is unclean in itself."
- Paul does not want those strong in faith to coerce those weak in faith through pressure of rejection.
- Rather, he wants each person to be fully convinced in his own conscience as an exercise of genuine faith.
- Thus, if one cannot eat a particular food because they lack assurance that God permits it, then it is better for them to abstain – to consider it unclean for himself.
- What he is not allowed to do is to make his own opinion or preference the rule for others.⁴²

And so in conclusion, after disambiguating the technicalities behind the Greek terms "clean" and "unclean" from a 1st century Jewish perspective, we will pleasantly discover that the remaining verses of this section are self-explanatory:

15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

16 So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil.

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

18 Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

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⁴² Tim Hegg, *A Study Through Paul's Epistle to the Romans* [Romans 14:14-19] (TorahResource), p.2

15. 14:19 – How can we make for “peace and for mutual upbuilding”?

Romans 14:19

ESV	SBLGNT
19 So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.	19 Ἄρα οὖν τὰ τῆς εἰρήνης διώκωμεν* καὶ τὰ τῆς οἰκοδομῆς τῆς εἰς ἀλλήλους

*Notes:

Let us start this section by reviewing Mark Nanos’ historical perspective on the rhetorical implications from the letter:

In the formal opening of the letter, Paul introduces himself in language that would make little sense to a Greco-Roman person apart from learning the story of Christ within the context of the Jewish communal narrative, one that can be developed from Jewish Scriptures but not elsewhere. He not only cites Jewish Scriptures, which he will continue to do in the letter more than any other extant letter, some fifty-plus times, but he alludes to these Scriptures many more times--apparently assuming that the recipients would be competent to follow his line of thought. Yet copies of these Jewish texts, at this time written on scrolls that were expensive to acquire and apparently not well known outside of Jewish communities, would presumably not be readily available. Moreover, most of his audience would probably only know the letter when read aloud, since most people of Paul’s time, some eighty to ninety percent being the normal estimates, could not read. How then would they know the Scriptures upon which his arguments were based--apart from being socialized into Jewish communal life and its symbolic system for making sense of reality, or for that matter, of spirituality?

If these non-Jews attended Jewish communal meetings, they would hear the Scriptures read, translated, and interpreted in sermons, a regular, weekly event based on cycling through the Pentateuch and texts linked to it from the Prophets and other Writings...

Although we cannot be certain of the historical audience’s relationship to the larger Jewish community from the fact that many of his arguments require at least some familiarity with the Jewish community’s master narratives, Paul’s audience is approached throughout the letter as if familiar with many concepts that would be foreign to non-Jews.⁴³

By the revelation of the power of the Risen Messiah within him, and by studying his TaNaKH carefully and afresh—with eyes opened by the Holy Spirit—Paul had come to the realization that the Kingdom of God was much bigger than just

⁴³ Mark Nanos, *Romans: To the Churches of the Synagogues of Rome* (an essay accessed from marknanos.com, published by the author on 8-31-10), pp 17-18.

native-born sons of Jacob. God was bringing those from the Nations not just into a very special unity with his Only Unique Son, but also into a practical, working relationship with the People of Isra'el. The high moral standards of the Kingdom of God would require that believing Jews and Gentiles put aside their “petty” differences over table fellowship and come together to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” Contrary to popular Christian opinions today, this does not require the setting aside of the ritual aspects of Torah (such as the dietary laws of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14) so that “everyone at the local Church potluck can now have ham sandwiches with their crawdad gumbo and enjoy them without feeling judged.” Hitting the “reset button” on HaShem's standards of “clean and unclean” animals cannot be the solution that Paul is suggesting. Nor is he advocating a congregational superficiality in regards to “accommodating” other people’s dietary scruples, all the while harboring distain and resentment against the “other” for making you “go out of your way” just to meet their special culinary needs. Paul doesn’t want the Jews and Gentiles of Rome to just “put up with one another” merely for the sake of “saving face.”

No, a careful study of the overall context of Romans Chapter 14, with its examples drawn from everyday eating examples of the 1st Century, reveals that what Paul has in mind is a deeper, more foundationally grounded peace that starts from the power of God working in the Community of Faith to bring about a genuine appreciation for the “unity within diversity” of Jewish to Gentile interpersonal relationships, and works itself out in sitting down and sharing a meal together with loved ones who are like-minded. Indeed, the truths of this union between Isra'el and the Nations have been expressed by Paul in his letter to the Church of Ephesus:

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:14-16, ESV, emphasis, mine)

-----Excursus: Ephesians 2:15 “Jesus broke down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile”-----

How are we to understand Paul's words in regard to the “dividing wall of hostility” and the “Law of commandments expressed in ordinances” which were somehow “abolished by Christ”? And, germane to our study here on Rom 14:19, how would the theology of Ephesians 2 help Paul's communities in Rome “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding”?

I will start with Eph 2:14 to build context, then work towards Eph 2:15.

“For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...”

It is commonly taught that the “dividing wall of hostility” being broken down was the Law of Moses, the Torah. In my study and teaching of the Bible I firmly maintain that the barrier being destroyed cannot possibly be the Torah because the Torah NEVER commanded a “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles. It is true that Isra'el was singled out by God to be a nation separated unto himself (Ex 19:6; Amos 3:2), but this separation is the paradigm presented to demonstrate the basis for a unique covenant relationship in which the Husband would love and cherish his Bride with a unique love not intended for other “women” (Is 54:5).

Moreover, this separation did not forbid those from the Nations (Gentiles) from attaching themselves to Isra'el, to her God, and thus by covenant, to Isra'el's Torah (Ex 12:49; Lev 24:22; Num 15:29). In fact Isaiah says the coastlands (Gentiles) would be eagerly waiting for the Servant of the LORD (Messiah) to bring this Law to them (Is 42:4). Jew and Gentile coming together under one identifier called “Isra'el” is clearly shown in the TaNaKH.

So, if the Torah cannot be the dividing wall, what WAS it? Whatever it was, it created the “enmity/hostility” (Greek= ἐχθρὰν echthran) mentioned in both Eph 2:15 and in Eph 2:16.

By the 1st century, Jews outnumbered Gentiles in national Isra'el. But more importantly, Jewish Isra'el forgot that Gentiles in Isra'el were to be counted as equal covenant members, and instead imposed a manmade proselyte ceremony upon them if new prospects wished to join Isra'el. This was wrong. God commanded Isra'el to practice communal ritual purity. The practical outworking of the Oral Torah and Rabbinic laws of purity, however, raised a strong wall of jealousy, shared resentment, and separation between the Jews in Isra'el and the Gentiles outside of Isra'el, even if this was not the original intent.

The “dividing wall of hostility” in Eph 2:14 was the vile, man-made social class/caste system set in place by Oral Torah and Jewish leaders seeking to keep a social and religious difference between Jews and Gentiles. Jewish religious pride and Gentile resentment of that pride fostered the shared social hostility. Jesus came to establish once and for all that Jews and Gentiles in Him constituted a “spiritual Isra'el within national Isra'el” (Rom 9:6-8; Rom 9:23, 24 Rom 11:1-7)—the Remnant of Isra'el. In the Remnant, Jews and Gentile believers were equal, something Paul states later in Eph 2:18-22.

Using the whole context of Eph 2 to bolster my argument, I would paraphrase Eph 2:14, 15 thusly,

“For he himself is our peace, who has made both Jews and Gentiles in Messiah into fellow citizens with one another and both into members of Isra'el, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility created by the class/caste system, by abolishing the laws of oral commandments found in manmade dogma, that he might create in himself one new, redeemed humanity in place of the fractured and separated two, so making peace...”

-----End of excursus-----

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16. Conclusions

And so, while it was natural that Paul would expect both Spirit-filled Jews and Gentiles to continue to have their socio-religious differences and challenges, particularly in regards to food and table fellowship, nevertheless, because both Jew and Gentile have been brought together in the salvific plans of the Kingdom of God, Paul expected each person to live by the power of the Ruach HaKodesh in order that the “deeds of the flesh” might be “put to death” and that they might “walk in newness of life.” Barnes’ comments on Romans 14:19 are timeless and appropriate for my commentary, and so I will quote him at length to close out this section of my notes:

The things which make for peace - The high purposes and objects of the Christian religion, and not those smaller matters which produce strife. If men aim at the great objects proposed by the Christian religion, they will live in peace. If they seek to promote their private ends, to follow their own passions and prejudices, they will be involved in strife and contention. There "are" great common objects before "all" Christians in which they can unite, and in the pursuit of which they will cultivate a spirit of peace. Let them all strive for holiness; let them seek to spread the gospel; let them engage in circulating the Bible, or in doing good in any way to others, and their smaller matters of difference will sink into comparative unimportance, and they will unite in one grand purpose of saving the world. Christians have more things in which they "agree" than in which they differ. The points in which they are agreed are of infinite importance; the points on which they differ are commonly some minor matters in which they may "agree to differ," and still cherish love for all who bear the image of Christ.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/romans/14.htm>

17. 14:20, 21 – What does “everything is indeed clean” mean?

Romans 14:20, 21	
ESV	SBLGNT
20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.	20 μὴ ἕνεκεν βρώματος κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ πάντα μὲν καθαρὰ ἀλλὰ κακὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῷ διὰ προσκόμματος ἐσθίοντι
21 It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.	21 καλὸν τὸ μὴ φαγεῖν κρέα μηδὲ πιεῖν οἶνον μηδὲ ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἀδελφός σου προσκόπτει ἢ σκανδαλίζεται ἢ ἀσθενεῖ

*Notes:

This set of verses continues Paul's thoughts from verses 14-18 above. There we learned that “the word Sha’ul opts for when confessing that “nothing is unclean in itself” (Greek= οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι’ ἑαυτοῦ) is *koinos* κοινός! Sha’ul is discussing matters of biblically defined food being declared by one man as “okay to consume” versus another man declaring it “not okay to consume.” His conclusion to this passage is found near the final verses:

17 for the Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, shalom and joy in the Ruach HaKodesh. 18 Anyone who serves the Messiah in this fashion both pleases God and wins the approval of other people. 19 So then, let us pursue the things that make for shalom and mutual upbuilding. 20 Don’t tear down God’s work for the sake of food. True enough, all things are clean; but it is wrong for anybody by his eating to cause someone to fall away. 21 What is good is not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22 The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. Happy the person who is free of self-condemnation when he approves of something! 23 But the doubter comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin (Emphasis, mine).

The word I underlined above in verse 20 (“clean”) is the Greek word καθαρός *katharos*, defined as “clean, pure, blameless, or innocent.”⁴⁵ Once more Tim

⁴⁵ TSBD, καθαρός.

Hegg's comments on this Pauline passage are invaluable. In his lengthy commentary to Romans he states,

The definition of clean and unclean comes from Torah, not from man. Therefore, any meat declared edible by God should not be ruled unclean by man. It is on this basis that Paul emphatically declares that nothing is unclean in and of itself. That is, if God has declared it clean (and therefore edible) it should not be otherwise considered. That this viewpoint is correct will be seen in v. 20 where Paul includes the word "food": "Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean...." Paul's point must be that everything that qualifies as food (i.e., everything God permits to be eaten) is clean.⁴⁶

Again, just to be absolutely clear, I maintain that Sha'ul is not teaching us that the dietary list of Leviticus 11 has been discarded. In fact, Sha'ul is really reiterating what his Teacher, the Master, taught him: all is clean!... that is, until a man comes along and declares it otherwise. In the end, it is our petty differences and pride that eventually divides us. Food simply becomes the "innocent" medium that we fight about. Sha'ul states that food should not be the point of contention. This sounds amazingly like Sha'ul's instructions to Timothy in his first letter:

1 The Spirit expressly states that in the acharit-hayamim some people will apostatize from the faith by paying attention to deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come from the hypocrisy of liars whose own consciences have been burned, as if with a red-hot branding iron. 3 They forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods which God created to be eaten with thanksgiving by those who have come to trust and to know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing received with thanksgiving needs to be rejected, 5 because the word of God and prayer make it holy (1 Timothy 4:1-5, CJB).

What we see is foolish men within the Torah communities were found to be pushing their foolish agendas on everyone around them, judging those who didn't hold the same opinions as them. Are we to imagine that Sha'ul's solution is to simply yield to these apostates and accept anything and everything under the guise of ecumenism and love? Are we to now accept that homosexuality is okay? How about adultery and fornication? If you have answered "NO!" to these questions, because the Word of God will not allow you to answer otherwise, then you must follow through with your hermeneutic principle and apply the same answer to the question of whether or not everything is now to be considered food and ostensibly received with prayer and thanksgiving! This passage is not suggesting a situation where Jewish Christians are telling Gentile Christians that pork and shellfish are forbidden, with the Gentile Christians arguing that pork and shellfish are now okay in Jesus. Sha'ul's definition of food is the very same definition that his Master held to. Summing up both the Romans passages and this passage here in Timothy: Sha'ul is not suggesting a "vote-based"

⁴⁶ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 423.

righteousness. Man cannot vote on which days we are to worship (cf. Romans 14:5, 6) any more than he can vote on what defines marital fidelity or what is food! The passages in question from Sha'ul cannot be saying that we should apply one standard of righteousness to worship days and marital relations while simultaneously applying a different standard of righteousness to food. We cannot have it both ways. Either God's complete Word is our standard of righteous living or it is not! Picking and choosing has never been the allowable vote.

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18. 14:22, 23 – How do we “keep the faith we have between ourselves and God”?

Romans 14:22, 23	
ESV	SBLGNT
22 The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves.	22 Σὺ πίστιν ἣν ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ μακάριος ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτὸν ἐν ᾧ δοκιμάζει
23 But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.	23 ὁ δὲ διακρινόμενος ἐὰν φάγη κατακέκριται ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως πᾶν δὲ ὁ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἁμαρτία ἐστίν

*Notes:

Earlier in this chapter we saw Paul appealing to the foundational gospel truths of *what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding* between Messianic communities of faith where Jews and Gentiles were coming together (14:19). In my notes I showed how it is entirely plausible that Paul was appealing, not to human strength and ingenuity, as clever and ingenious as those may be at times, but instead to the true inner peace won for us by our Messiah Yeshua when he gave his life to not only *rescue us from the domain of darkness and bring us into his marvelous light* (recall 1 Pet 2:9), but also when he *tore down the walls of separation and animosity between Jews and Gentiles by knitting us together, in the Holy Spirit, as a unified new humanity in the Body of Messiah* (cf. Eph 2:14-18)!

Our new identity is as fellow saints and fellow members, not merely of the larger community of faith in National Isra'el (see Eph 2:19-22), but specifically we are grafted into the believing branches of Remnant Isra'el resulting in Jews and Gentiles in Christ as belonging to the same Body—which ultimately takes precedence over the outward differences often raised by our socio-religious and

ethnic upbringings (read Rom 11:17-32). **Love and service to one another is now the rule of the Kingdom** (a rule that the LORD Messiah Yeshua himself demonstrated by becoming a servant to the Jewish people, an example Paul will appeal to in Chapter 15 using the first thirteen verses):

1 We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Christ the Hope of Jews and Gentiles 8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, 9 and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." 10 And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him." 12 And again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Thus, the lasting solution to settling petty food-related issues that might occur in our communities is to live lives consistent with Messiah's perfect example of love and humility, and to not focus on our own "smallness" in light of the surpassing Glory of God our Father, but to continually yield to and allow the Ruach HaKodesh to transform us by the *renewing of our minds so that we might prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (read Rom 12:1, 2).

But we must be reminded that in our communities there are strong people and there are weak people. Indeed, coming full circle from where Paul began this chapter, the first few p'sukim (verses) are worth recalling:

1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. 2 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Not everyone will be able to adequately grasp the foundational truths of the spiritual concepts detailed in Ephesians Chapter Two (and elsewhere in Paul's letters). What can Paul offer us that can be used in everyday settings and

situations? What can be applied across the board no matter your spiritual prowess?

In Paul's concluding thoughts on this sensitive food and table fellowship issue we encounter our final, somewhat practical, down to earth solution for avoiding the kinds of judgmental and condescending attitudes that might crop up between the Christian communities there in Rome, communities likely made up of a majority of Gentiles and a minority of Jews—both under the banner of the Lordship of Yeshua the Messiah of Isra'el and Savior of the world. Once again, Barnes' Notes on the Bible states this pragmatic solution quite succinctly so I will insert his comments for us here to ponder. Speaking about Rom 14:22 he writes:

Hast thou faith? - The word "faith" here refers only to the subject under discussion - to the subject of meats, drinks, etc. Do you believe that it is right to eat all kinds of food, etc. The apostle had admitted that this was the true doctrine; but he maintains that it should be so held as not to give offence.

Have it to thyself - Do not obtrude your faith or opinion on others. Be satisfied with cherishing the opinion, and acting on it in private, without bringing it forward to produce disturbance in the church.

Before God - Where God only is the witness. God sees your sincerity, and will approve your opinion. That opinion cherish and act on, yet so as not to give offence, and to produce disturbance in the church. God sees your sincerity; he sees that you are right; and you will not offend him. Your brethren do "not" see that you are right, and they will be offended.⁴⁷

And lastly, since Tim Hegg of TorahResouce.com quite often supplies practical truths that are so vital for us to properly understand the apostle Paul from a 1st century Messianic perspective we will draw this Romans 14 study to a close by supplying one final quote from him as well. Addressing verses 22 and 23 he writes in his lengthy Romans commentary,

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.

In the context, "faith" means the conviction that one has the God-given right to a particular halachah. Paul is not exhorting the Roman believers to hide their confession of Yeshua! But his point is that one may possess an inward freedom without having to express it outwardly. What is more, this inward freedom allows for one to bend in order to accommodate the other person. This is not bending in issues of morality or ethics, but in matters of personal choices, and in this case, conflicting halachah. One may retain and enjoy one's freedom inwardly without having to express it to others.

⁴⁷ <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/romans/14.htm>

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.

...in matters of personal halachah, to go contrary to one's conscience constitutes sin: "whatever is not of faith is sin." If one slips and slides with the prevailing halachah without recourse to one's own convictions, he has adopted a pattern of life that is foolish. Such undisciplined living will inevitably result in sin, for it takes its cue from man rather than from God. What is more, to coerce someone to go contrary to their conscience in matters of personal halachah is to encourage them to sin. The oft told tale of offering a Jewish person who has recently come to faith in Yeshua some non-kosher food, just to prove to him his new found "liberty," not only flies in the face of Torah, but entirely disregards the teaching of Paul in this text as well.

...the categorical statement that "whatever is not of faith is sin" should be understood to mean that in matters of personal halachah, one must be convinced on the basis of one's conscience in the realm of faith in God, and that if one acts contrary to this, one is sinning.⁴⁸

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman yeshua613@hotmail.com

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⁴⁸ Tim Hegg, *Paul's Epistle to the Romans Volume 2*, (TorahResource, 2005), p. 427-28.