

Romans 14

Pastor: Romans 14: God does not care about what days people celebrate or what food they eat.

“Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Messiah died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD’ [Isaiah 49:18; 45:23]. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Yeshua that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Messiah is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 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. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.*”*

ch 14 Romans 14 is a chapter that tends to receive very little attention from today's Messianic Believers, because it has been traditionally interpreted that the Apostle Paul is indifferent when it comes to matters of diet and sacred days.¹ Romans 14 can actually be one of the most ambiguous chapters of Scripture for not only today's Messianic Bible teachers, who largely ignore it, but at times, even some of today's Christian commentators. Everyone can easily agree upon a cursory reading of Romans 14:1-16 that some kind of issue regarding special days and eating is being addressed—but what those things specifically were, and how they divided the Believers in Rome, is something else. It is rightfully agreed that the Apostle Paul was warning the Roman Believers—a mixed group of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers—to not be divided over minor scruples, *but that might be about all we know for sure.* Romans 14:13 issues the instructive word, “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.”

The common conclusion drawn is that Paul in Romans 14 thinks that it is only the weak in faith, widely Jewish Believers, who eat kosher and keep sacred days like the seventh-day Sabbath. If people want to eat kosher and keep the Sabbath, that is fine—and if they do not, that is fine as well—as there are more important issues for Believers to focus their attention upon. Ben Witherington III's conclusion, in his Romans commentary, is that “Paul does not see the Mosaic requirements about such things as obligatory for Christians, even Jewish Christians.”² But as can be easily discerned, not enough attention is probably given to the First

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

² Witherington, *Romans*, 339.

Century Roman setting of Paul's words—even among some of the best interpreters—and with them the specific intention of Paul wanting to see a degree of unity restored to the Roman Believers. He wants the various “opinions” (Romans 14:1) held by some of the Roman Believers, causing unnecessary division, to be significantly moderated.

Far too frequently, the material in Romans ch. 14 has been concluded to support a Pauline philosophy of *adiaphora*,³ a term defined by the *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* to be “Elements of faith regarded as neither commanded nor forbidden in Scripture and thus on which liberty of conscience may be exercised (see Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor 6:12; 8:8; Gal. 5:6).”⁴ In his commentary on Romans, Martin Luther used Romans ch. 14 to not only speak out against the Torah-prescribed dietary laws and festivals, but against many of the customs, traditions, institutions, and cathedrals of European Catholicism.⁵ Today, with Romans ch. 14 principally approached as being an abstract essay by Paul on matters indifferent, various contemporary applications can range, as noted by Grant R. Osborne, to involve “legalistic divisions over movies, cards, dancing and social drinking...[and] quarrels over doctrines like the charismatic issue, the rapture/millennium and Calvinism-Arminianism.”⁶ We should think that anyone just skimming through Romans ch. 14, and then applying it in terms of whether contemporary Believers should read Harry Potter books or listen to rock music, **is something that is far removed from the circumstances which Paul originally addressed.**

Paul's Epistle to the Romans has widely been read as being mainly a theological treatise, since the Protestant Reformation, although the trend toward approaching Romans mainly as a letter written to First Century Believers, has shifted over the past fifty to sixty years. Looking at the material of Romans ch. 14, and what is communicated regarding eating and sacred days, the approaches to Paul's instruction have not shifted as much as they should, in terms of evaluating something that has been taking place among the Roman Messiah followers, requiring a Pauline admonition (cf. Romans 15:15). Among those who do feel that Romans ch. 14 is to be viewed more in terms of a letter to ancient Believers,⁷ and not some abstract essay, it is just assumed, though, that the eating and sacred days must be the kosher dietary laws, the Sabbath, and the appointed times of the Torah.

What the issues involving eating and sacred days actually involved for the Roman Believers may require a closer reading of Paul's admonishment than is commonly seen by many who encounter Paul's letter—precisely because “opinions” (Romans 14:1) are being addressed. These opinions may concern the Law of Moses, but not as directly as some may think. C.E.B. Cranfield issues a bit of caution in his Romans commentary, “Some recent commentators have exhibited great confidence in their approach to the interpretation of this section. This we find surprising; for it seems to us to be extremely difficult to decide with certainty what exactly the problem is with which Paul is concerned in this section.”⁸ Any examination needs to carefully review what is being stated, and most especially the larger themes seen in Paul's letter. And, it might be a bit hasty to automatically conclude that the dietary laws, Sabbath, and appointed times are being specifically considered—because they are commandments laid forth in God's Torah, and not “opinions” held by human individuals.

Romans ch. 14 is commonly approached from the perspective of the “weak” being Jewish Believers still observing things like the kosher dietary laws, Sabbath, and appointed times. There are, to be sure, alternatives to be considered regarding the fare being eaten (Romans 14:2) and the sacred days being observed (Romans 14:[3]5-6). When approached as a letter—and **not** as an abstract essay—the interpreter necessarily has to posit what situation may have arisen in Rome to require Paul to address this. Because of the wide number of theological and ideological hurdles any alternative view to Romans ch. 14 must jump over, such an alternative

³ Cf. Calvin, *Romans*, 289; F. Davidson and Ralph P. Martin, “Romans,” in D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1042; Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 434-435.

⁴ Donald S. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 4.

⁵ Luther, *Romans*, 195.

⁶ Osborne, *Romans*, 359.

⁷ Cf. Edwards, *Romans*, 317.

⁸ Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 690.

must be sustainable not only from the text of Paul's letter, but what would have been reasonably possible within a mixed community of Jewish and non-Jewish Messiah followers in the First Century Mediterranean.

Controversies erupting during mealtimes are not irregular to the Apostolic Scriptures, especially per the incident between Paul and Peter in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-14).⁹ Some, labeled by Paul to be "weak" brethren, were not confident enough to eat meat, and instead only ate vegetables (Romans 14:2). The reasons for this may have varied, but the fallout of the Edict of Claudius, and how it altered the availability and accessibility of meat for the Jewish community and the Messianic Jews, will need to be considered. Apparently, the "weak" choosing to not eat meat, merited some unfair criticism from the "strong" (Romans 14:4). Philip F. Esler describes how the scene depicted, is what was being served during Roman fellowship meals:

"Paul seemed to be responding to dysfunctional gatherings of the Christ-movement in Rome rather than the total isolation of one group from another. Perhaps we should imagine gatherings in a strong person's house where there is a meal with meat and vegetables, but the weak will only eat the vegetables and are abused by the strong for doing so."¹⁰

That such meal times could have involved various sub-assemblies or sub-groups of Roman Believers, deduced from the demographic list of greetings in Romans 14:16, also needs to be considered. It is not improbable by any means how certain fellowships of the Roman Believers were more conservative, and others less so, on issues like eating.

Consequently, Paul would then proceed to make a further statement on sacred days (Romans 14:5-6, or perhaps Romans 14:3-6 in total).

The scene of conflicts taking place at Roman fellowship meals requiring Paul's instruction in Romans ch. 14, and the "strong" judging the "weak," can all be posited on the customary assumption that the "weak" kept kosher and the "strong" did not, and that the sacred days are the Sabbath and appointed times.

Alternatively, if one assumes that during mealtimes between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome, that the stipulations of the Apostolic decree regarding meat were being observed (Acts 15:20, 29), then the meat being served would be *katharos* (καθαρός) or "clean" (Romans 14:20), but it might be regarded as *koinos* (κοινός) or "common" (Romans 14:14) due to where it could have originated, which may have been more from Roman rather than Jewish sources. Our proposed alternative to be evaluated, for interpreting the matter of eating and sacred days in Romans ch. 14, is that (1) unnecessary criticism has arisen during fellowship meals between Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, with some of the former not eating the *clean* meat provided. These people are not to be judged, (2) because many of the same hold certain days, days when they do not eat, in high regard. Such sacred days, as at least partially suggested by various Christian commentators, but also held by some early Christian leaders, would have been optional Jewish fast days. All of these actions are performed out of personal conviction to the Lord.

Today's Messianic people often do not know what to do with Romans ch. 14, for any number of reasons—and far too many still approach Romans ch. 14 as being an abstract essay on *adiaphora*. Having a First Century, Rome-specific setting in mind for Romans ch. 14, and being able to defend such a vantage point, is imperative, as various commentators holding to more customary interpretations regarding this section, may be seen to actually make a number of comparisons to today's Messianic movement. While it is not thought that the majority of Messianic people keep kosher or *Shabbat* out of some salvation-by-works praxis, it is believed that keeping these things as a matter of sanctification and holiness is unneeded. Osborne is one who makes a comparison and contrast between what he considers the issue of the "weak" in Romans 14 to be, and how Messianic assemblies today would similarly be "weak":

"Their observance [of Jewish ritual] was not salvific but cultic; that is, they followed such regulations as part of their worship of Christ. These regulations were not a basis of their Christian faith but part of their religious observance...[T]hey believed that they had to follow these practices in order to walk with Christ properly...[M]any Jewish-Christian congregations today would fit this scenario."¹¹

⁹ Consult the examination of Galatians 2:11-14 appearing in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹⁰ Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 350.

¹¹ Osborne, *Romans*, 357.

Craig S. Keener, an evangelical theologian who is more favorable than not to the Messianic Jewish movement, even concludes, “For Paul, foods themselves are religiously neutral; that is, one may keep food customs because of upbringing, cultural preference or ethnic attachment, but one who keeps them out of the belief that it is religiously profitable is ‘weak in faith’ (14:1).”¹²

To facilitate some better discussion and engagement, with the material of Romans ch. 14, the following commentary—while evaluating the positions and interjections of Christian commentators on Romans for sure—will consider some of the thoughts of various Messianic teachers who have written on Romans as commentaries (David H. Stern, Tim Hegg). The section which follows our examination of Romans 14:1-23, labeled “Romans 14 application,” will consider some of the proposals made in Messianic books written for wide distribution on the topic of kosher (none are presently extant for Romans 14 on the topic of the Sabbath).

14:1 The scene of Romans ch. 14 begins with a statement acknowledging how there have been various opinions, which have unnecessarily divided the Messiah followers in Rome. Paul says, “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of disputes about opinions” (Romans 14:1, TLV). The term *dialogismos* (διαλογισμός) relates to, “content of reasoning or conclusion reached through use of reason, thought, opinion, reasoning, design” (BDAG).¹³ This is variably rendered as “disputable matters” (NIV), “doubtful points” (NEB), “doubtful issues” (HCSB), “differences of opinion” (Common English Bible), or even “difficult points” (Kingdom New Testament). The thrust of this admonition is that born again Believers can hold to different positions, and it ultimately does not matter either way or another, as a particular action or practice is intended to glorify God. In the estimation of David H. Stern, from his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “Where Scripture gives a clear word, personal opinion must give way. But where the Word of God is subject to various possible interpretations, let each be persuaded in his own mind.”¹⁴

Romans ch. 14 is **traditionally** read from the vantage point that the disputable opinions or matters in view, are the kosher dietary laws, the seventh-day Sabbath, and the appointed times. The fact that what divided the Roman Believers is labeled as *opinion*, should cause all readers to slow down in quickly rushing to such a thought. Unless we are prepared to discount Paul’s previous word about Believers upholding God’s Torah in Messiah (Romans 3:31), the disputable matters in view would involve issues for which there was no definite Biblical solution—unlike the flesh of animals that was definitively declared “unclean” in the Torah (discussed further on Romans 14:20), or the Sabbath which was to be a sign between God and His people “forever” (Exodus 31:17). Tim Hegg is one who asserts,

“This in itself should...put to rest the notion that Paul is discussing issues of Sabbath and kosher food laws, for though in our times these might be considered matters of ‘opinion,’ they surely could not have been so construed in Paul’s day. What must fall under the category of ‘opinions’ are those things for which both sides could equally be considered righteous and worthy.”¹⁵

A theologian like John R.W. Stott, holding the more customary view of Romans ch. 14, would state that “questions of diet and days are precisely *non-essentials*”¹⁶—a statement which Torah observant Messianic people should be able to agree with, *when* it can be reasonably deduced that such diet is not *kashrut* and such days are not *Shabbat* and the *moedim*, but instead are differences of opinion in association with diet, and that other, extra-Biblical sacred days are in view.

While Romans 14:1 includes direction from Paul to the Romans “not to quarrel over opinions” (ESV), it has to be noted how Messianic interpreters are not always in agreement as to the identity of *Ton...asthenounta tē pistei* (Τὸν...ἀσθενούντα τῇ πίστει), “the one who is weak in faith” or “a person whose trust is weak” (CJB/CJSB). Customarily, it has been interpreted that the “weak” in view are various Jewish Believers, whose personal conviction is that they will only eat vegetables (Romans 14:2). Another thought, as indicated by

¹² Keener, *Romans*, 163.

¹³ BDAG, 232.

¹⁴ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 434-435.

¹⁵ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 408.

¹⁶ Stott, *Romans*, 358.

Hegg's commentary on Romans (following Mark Nanos), is that the "weak" were actually Jewish people in Rome who were non-Believers, but were on the road to Messiah faith. As he proposes,

"[There is] another suggestion, one that I think fits the context and the message of Paul. [Nanos] 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."¹⁷

The "weak in faith" are stated in the text of Romans 14:2 following, to be those who would only eat vegetables. While there might be some component of Jewish people in Rome on the road to Messiah faith involved in this, there is nothing which would definitively require the "weak in faith" to be such. The weak could be committed Jewish Believers or non-Jewish Believers who had been proselytes, or just Believers in general with what Paul personally considered an overly-conservative opinion. Their trust in Messiah, and in His Lordship of all things (Romans 14:9), was just not as fully encompassing or transcending as Paul's was, or those whom he would consider as not being "weak."

It is not necessary to conclude that the "weak in faith" are Jews in Rome on the way to fully trusting in Yeshua. Yet, Hegg is correct to broadly emphasize, though, "Paul's point here is that receiving one who is weak in faith should be demonstrated by a full reception, not a half-hearted one. The weak in faith are not to be received in order to convince them to change their current *halachah* regarding food or days, but they are to be received as genuine members of the body of Messiah..."¹⁸

14:2 Paul begins this vignette by contrasting the eating of meat versus only eating vegetables. He states, "One person has faith to eat anything, but the weak eats only vegetables" (Romans 14:2, TLV). Is this an abstract statement being made by Paul, meaning that "all things" (*panta, πάντα*) are unqualified, hence Paul considers the Torah's dietary code to be irrelevant? Or, is the "all things" something which would be considered qualified, meaning that it would be in alignment with the intention of the Apostolic decree, which included a prohibition "from blood and from things strangled" (Acts 15:29), as a part of concern for the sensibilities of Jewish Believers and non-Believers, among other things? When the situation of Romans 14 is viewed from the vantage point of Paul's instruction needing to be issued because of tensions that have arisen during fellowship meals—where publicly Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome would be able to have witnessed what various eating preferences of others were—then it is right to assume that the Apostolic decree was being followed, but that questions were being raised by those Paul considers "weak," when it came to eating meat. N.T. Wright will interject how,

"[T]he center of [this] lay[s] the centuries-old Jewish taboos regarding food, both what to eat, how to prepare it, and with whom and in what condition to eat it. Like any such deep-rooted culture issue, it would emerge in different forms in different situations, but with an underlying family resemblance; and it is not difficult to imagine the context of the present warning..."¹⁹

Keeping kosher in the Diaspora was not always easy for many Jewish people, especially in interacting with their neighbors. The ongoing challenge of not eating meat sacrificed to idols (cf. 1 Corinthians 8; 10), widely meant that Diaspora Jews would only procure meat and wine from their own sources. While there would be Jewish butchers and slaughterhouses, able to provide meat that was untainted by idolatry, and would not be strangled with heavy amounts of blood coagulated in the meat, as would often be seen in pagan sacrificial meat sold for popular consumption—Jewish butchers and slaughterhouses were not always

¹⁷ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 407.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 408.

He goes on to conclude that this is to take place "in anticipation of their faith through a confession of Yeshua as the Messiah."

¹⁹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:735.

available or accessible. In many cases, this meant that mainly, or even only, vegetables would be eaten by Jews. There is a wide array of attestations to a vegetarian diet being adopted by Jews intending to avoid idolatrous association, in the Tanach, Apocrypha, and Josephus:

“But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king’s choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself...and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.’...‘Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink.’...So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables” (Daniel 1:8, 10, 12, 16; cf. Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 10.190).

“Now when I was carried away captive to Nineveh, all my brethren and my relatives ate the food of the Gentiles; but I kept myself from eating it” (Tobit 1:10-11).

“And she gave her maid a bottle of wine and a flask of oil, and filled a bag with parched grain and a cake of dried fruit and fine bread; and she wrapped up all her vessels and gave them to her to carry...Then he commanded them to bring her in where his silver dishes were kept, and ordered them to set a table for her with some of his own food and to serve her with his own wine. But Judith said, ‘I cannot eat it, lest it be an offense; but I will be provided from the things I have brought with me’” (Judith 10:5; 12:1-2).

“But Judas Maccabeus, with about nine others, got away to the wilderness, and kept himself and his companions alive in the mountains as wild animals do; they continued to live on what grew wild, so that they might not share in the defilement” (2 Maccabees 5:27).

“These I was desirous to procure deliverance for; and that especially because I was informed that they {Jewish priests in Rome} were not unmindful of piety toward God, even under their afflictions; but supported themselves with figs and nuts” (Josephus *Life* 14).²⁰

Obviously in a city like Ancient Rome, not unlike Ancient Babylon for previous generations of Jews, the Jews of Rome would more often than not have been conscientious about the sources of the meat they would eat, and whether or not such meat would be tainted by idolatry. Among many of the Greco-Roman cities of the Mediterranean, animals would be improperly strangled in sacrifice, and then the meat butchered and sold to the public. Vegetarianism easily eliminated the threat of idol contamination or association.

There might, however, be more to be considered, contributing to the issue of why those in Romans 14:2 considered “weak” might have abstained from eating meat. The argument has been advanced that the Jewish butchers and slaughterhouses in Rome were unwilling to sell to many of the Messianic Jews, as a fallout of some of the controversies which had erupted in association with the expulsion of the Roman Jews by the Edict of Claudius. In his commentary, Witherington summarizes some of the factors which need to be weighed:

“After the debacle among Jews, apparently caused by the disputes over Jesus, and the expulsion of the Jews in A.D. 49, ‘the officials who controlled the meat market would have withdrawn the provision of “suitable food.” There may have been some in Rome who were no longer eating meat because kosher meat was not available in the markets. Given the official control of the market it would have required the action of a senior official, with the emperor himself giving his approval, for the reopening of the segment of the market for the Jews.’ [quoting: B.W. Winter, “Roman Law and Society in Romans 12-15”]...Then after the Jews’ return under Nero, the few Jewish butchers in Rome might have been unwilling to service Jewish Christians, and Jewish Christians might have avoided synagogues, which might have cut them off from sources of acceptable meat.”²¹

²⁰ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged, 2.*

²¹ Witherington, *Romans*, pp 334-335; also Osborne, *Romans*, 358; Kruse, *Romans*, 512.

If it can be recognized that there were dietary ramifications for the Messianic Jews of Rome—with few Jewish butchers being willing to sell meat to them—as a consequence of Claudius’ expulsion of the Roman Jews from the city, then such widescale inability to procure meat from Jewish sources would cause many to do what many other Diaspora Jews would do: eat vegetarian.

The implication, of the Apostolic decree, is that in abstaining “from what is strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20), the non-Jewish Believers would have to, in all likelihood, procure their meat from Jewish sources. This was not always possible, but such does not automatically mean that animals could not have been butchered in a non-strangled manner in the marketplace for them (that is, if the customer was just as right in the First Century as he is in the Twenty-First Century). It is not difficult to posit how wealthy persons among the Messiah followers in Rome—the probable hosts for various fellowship gatherings and meals—would have seemingly been able to make arrangements with Roman butchers or slaughterhouses, for a meat source compatible with the intentions of the Apostolic decree.

The meat being consumed, by those who were not weak, is labeled by Paul later in Romans 14:14 to be *koinos* (κοινός), which can notably regard “that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes” (BDAG).²² Meat that is *koinos* or “common” (Romans 14:14, LITV) need not be regarded as pork or shellfish, but could have been meat of Biblically clean animals (Romans 14:20) butchered in alignment with the intentions of the Apostolic decree, **not as a part of pagan sacrifice**, but procured from Roman and not Jewish sources. Yet, regarding whether such meat actually being *koinos*/common or not, is to Paul a personal value judgment to be made.

14:3 While Paul has mentioned how the “weak” among the Believers in Rome are vegetarian (Romans 14:2), their presence should not be the problem it has apparently become. He is clear to direct: “Don’t let the one who eats disparage the one who does not eat, and don’t let the one who does not eat judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him” (Romans 14:3, TLV). The main action to be avoided, by those who were not weak, is seen in the verb *exoutheneō* (ἐξουθενέω), “**to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth, disdain**” (BDAG),²³ variably rendered as “regard/treat with contempt” (NASU/NIV), “look down” (HCSB), “condemn” (Kingdom New Testament), or “look down upon” (Moffat New Testament). Here, it is worthwhile to note how Judean Jews often were highly suspicious of the kosher adherence of Diaspora Jews:

“R. Simeon b. Eleazar says, ‘Israelites who live abroad are idolaters. How so? A gentile who made a banquet for his son and went and invited all the Jews who live in his town—even though they eat and drink their own [food and wine], and their own waiter stands over them and serves them, they nonetheless serve idolatry’ (t.*Avodah Zarah* 4:6).²⁴

Here, it is actually depicted how even at a banquet hosted by a non-Jew, where the Jews present were served different, presumably acceptable kosher food—they were still thought to commit idolatry. The reverse kind of attitude, toward those choosing to eat vegetarian among the Roman Believers—that these people are somehow not godly or virtuous—is to be dismissed according to Paul.

Now while he notes it at the point of Romans 14:5, Douglas J. Moo draws our attention to how Paul’s discussion will not only be limited to eating preferences. He indicates, “Paul interrupts his theological argument to cite another point,”²⁵ and so he discusses the secondary issue of sacred days, to show the supposed “strong” why they should not be looking down upon those they considered “weak.” But does his discussion about eating meat get interrupted with the statements about sacred days in Romans 14:3 or 14:4, or even 14:5? Paul’s instruction does detail how for certain there is to be no judgment taking place between the Believers in Rome.

Against: Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 432-433, who argues on the basis of Paul’s seeming acceptance by the Jewish community in Acts 28.

²² BDAG, 552.

²³ Ibid., 352.

²⁴ Neusner, *Tosefta*, 2:1276.

²⁵ Moo, *Romans*, 841.

The issue that I would like to raise is whether Romans 14:3-4 are just a continuation of the remarks made in Romans 14:1-2, or if they actually help to introduce or bridge the statements about sacred days in Romans 14:5-6. Romans 14:3 employs the participles *esthiōn* (ἐσθίων) and *mē esthiōn* (μὴ ἐσθίων), referring to the “eater” and “non-eater,” the same terms also repeated in Romans 14:6. Is this referring to a person who eats all, versus one who does not eat all at the fellowship meals—or a person who eats, versus one who does not eat or fasts? Does this relate to the actions described in Romans 14:1-2 preceding about meals involving meat and vegetables, or the actions following in Romans 14:5-6 about sacred days and eating/not eating?

Not enough examiners probably consider that there is some relationship intended between the one who “eats” in Romans 14:3, with what is stated in Romans 14:6 regarding the sacred days. The people who do not eat meat (Romans 14:2), are most probably the same people who hold certain days in high regard (Romans 14:5-6). The point that is often not considered, by holding an entire day in high regard unto the Lord, **is much more serious than not eating meat** (Romans 14:7). And, we should think, Paul will use this to make an important rhetorical point to the Romans. The connection between eating and not eating (Romans 14:3) and sacred days (Romans 14:5), is why not all are convinced that such sacred days must be the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat* or appointed times/*moedim*.

14:4 Whether Romans 14:3-4 are taken as a preface to what will be detailed in Romans 14:5-6 or not, the point is that the actions being performed are not at all immoral and ungodly. Paul states, “Who are you to criticize someone else's servant? It is for his own master to say whether he succeeds or fails; and he will succeed, for the Master can make him do so” (Romans 14:4, Goodspeed New Testament). The actions that the “weak” are performing, are being accomplished as unto God, and it is God's business and not the business of human people to judge them.

14:5 With the discussion having started about eating meat and vegetables, or only eating vegetables (Romans 14:2), a point is raised about various sacred days, which it is safe to assume are days held in high regard by the same persons who will only be found eating vegetables. The Apostle Paul raises the point, “One person esteems one day over another while another judges every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5, TLV). It is most often witnessed by Christian examiners that the days in view are not only the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), but all of the Torah-prescribed appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים).²⁶ There are, however, some interpreters, who will at least be willing to concede that just automatically assuming that the sacred days referenced in Romans 14:5-6 are the Sabbath or appointed times, needs to be tempered.²⁷ It cannot go unnoticed how the term “Sabbath,” *sabbaton* (σάββατον), is notably absent from the Epistle to the Romans.

The challenge we have to consider is what Romans 14:5-6 meant to the Romans. While it is easy for many to just jump ahead and automatically conclude that the Sabbath, appointed times, and likewise kosher, are being discussed—this may be a little too convenient. While a Jewish orientation of things being eaten and sacred days is certain, keep in mind that what is in view concerns matters of disputable *halachah*: “opinions” (Romans 14:1). Lay readers, with a nominal understanding of the Torah and Second Temple Judaism, would assume that the Sabbath or appointed times are being targeted in Romans 14:5-6; academic Christian resources on Romans have to offer a wider array of possibilities, which notably mention how the sacred days in view need not (only) be the Sabbath or appointed times, but could also be various traditional days of fasting. The following is an encapsulation of the various options witnessed:

C.E.B Cranfield: “As to the nature of this disagreement about days to which Paul refers various suggestions have been made: that it was closely connected with the disagreement about foods referred to in v. 2 and related to the observance of particular days as days of abstinence (this was the view generally taken by ancient interpreters...); that it had to do with observance of the special days of the OT ceremonial law

²⁶ Osborne, *Romans*, pp 360-361; Witherington, *Romans*, 336.

²⁷ Cf. Moo, *Romans*, 842.

(possibly also with the change from Sabbath to Lord's Day); that it had to do with the distinguishing of lucky and unlucky days."²⁸

Everett F. Harrison: "Whether the question of regarding one day as more sacred than another refers to Sabbath observance or to special days for feasting and fasting is not easily determined. Since the early church in Jerusalem almost certainly observed the Sabbath (as well as the first day of the week) because of its Jewish constituency and the dangers of giving offense to non-Christian Jews, and since the Roman church presumably had a good-sized minority of Jews, it is not impossible that Paul has the Sabbath in mind."²⁹

James R. Edwards: "[W]e are probably correct in assuming that Paul is referring to Jewish calendric observations, perhaps the regular Monday and Thursday fast days, perhaps the Sabbath and various feast days."³⁰

N.T. Wright: "It is just possible that Paul has in mind the festival days of the wider pagan world, not least the Roman Empire; but it is far more likely that he is referring to the Jewish festival days, some of which, Acts implies he himself observed...It is interesting, if that is so, that he does not refer to the sabbath explicitly."³¹

Mark Nanos: "The *day* is not specified; it could be the Sabbath or other feast days, but also could be disputes about what day things should be observed based on differing calendars."³²

The observations of Keener on the sacred days mainly being the regular observance of the Sabbath, cannot go unmentioned. Although he seemingly holds to a position that the seventh-day Sabbath was mainly for those living in the pre-resurrection era, and he does mention some First Century Jewish variance on how Greek and Roman God-fearers attached to the Synagogue may have kept the Sabbath, he notably mentions how Yeshua the Messiah probably did not abolish *Shabbat*:

"[I]t would seem surprising if the Sabbath were less of a controversy than food customs, even if everyone believed that the law of Moses was no longer in effect. While God-fearing Gentiles who were not full proselytes might not be expected to keep the Sabbath, the Sabbath, in contrast to the food laws, was illustrated in creation before the birth of Israel (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11). Although Jesus countered a strict approach to the Sabbath, it is not clear that he did away with it, and early believers in Jesus continued to designate the seventh day by that term (Acts 1:12), albeit especially regarding conventional Jewish gatherings (e.g., Acts 13:44; 16:13)."³³

The fact that the sacred days, mentioned by Paul in Romans 14:5-6, are indeed "less of a controversy," as Keener puts it, should open up readers to the possibility that the sacred days **are not actually the Sabbath and appointed times**. Moo, who does think that the Sabbath is at the center of the sacred days of Romans 14:5-6, still notably hesitates, detailing,

"Whether the specific point at issue was the observance of the great Jewish festivals, regular days of fasting, or the Sabbath is difficult to say. But we would expect that the Sabbath, at least, would be

²⁸ Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 705.

²⁹ Harrison, in *EXP*, 10:145-146.

³⁰ Edwards, *Romans*, 322.

³¹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:736.

³² Nanos, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 282.

³³ Keener, *Romans*, 164.

Ibid., pp 164-165 where he goes on to discuss the challenges with implementing a Sabbath in the Roman world. This is evaluated more fully in the analysis, "How Did We Lose the Sabbath?", in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

It has also to be mentioned that even when assuming that the seventh-day Sabbath has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, Schreiner, in *ESV Study Bible*, 2181 still advises, "it is still wise to take regular times of rest from work, and regular times of worship are commanded for Christians (Heb. 10:24-25; cf. Acts 20:7)."

involved....The believer who sets aside certain days for fasting, or who observes the Sabbath, does so because he or she sincerely believes this honors the Lord.”³⁴

The major alternative to the sacred days of Romans 14:5-6 being the Sabbath or appointed times, which has the unique advantage of associating them with the topic of eating (Romans 14:2), having introduced this part of Paul’s discussion, is that they were **days of fasting**. Days of fasting have already been noted as within the scope of options, by Christian interpreters who would see this as a secondary option. But, there were some leaders in early Christianity, such as Augustine and John Chrysostom, who notably did appeal to Romans 14:3 and Romans 14:5, to address the issue of fixed days for fasting:³⁵

“In this question, however, of fasting or not fasting on the seventh day, nothing appears to me more safe and conducive to peace than the apostle’s rule: **‘Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth:’** [Romans 14:3] ‘for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse;’ [1 Corinthians 8:8] our fellowship with those among whom we live, and along with whom we live in God, being preserved undisturbed by these things. For as it is true that, in the words of the apostles, ‘it is evil for that man who eateth with offence,’ [Romans 14:20] it is equally true that it is evil for that man who fasteth with offence. Let us not therefore be like those who, seeing John the Baptist neither eating nor drinking, said, ‘He hath a devil;’ but let us equally avoid imitating those who said, when they saw Christ eating and drinking, ‘Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.’ [Matthew 11:19] After mentioning these sayings, the Lord subjoined a most important truth in the words, ‘But Wisdom is justified of her children;’ and if you ask who these are, read what is written, ‘The sons of Wisdom are the congregation of the righteous:’ [Ecclesiastes 3:1] they are they who, when they eat, do not despise others who do not eat; and when they eat not, do not judge those who eat, but who do despise and judge those who, with offence, either eat or abstain from eating” (Augustine *Letter* 36, to Casulanus).³⁶

“Here he seems to me to be giving a gentle hint about fasting. For it is not unlikely that some who fasted were always judging those who did not, or among the observances it is likely that there were some that on fixed days abstained, and on fixed days did not. Whence also he says, ‘Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.’ And in this way he released those who kept the observances from fear, by saying that the thing was indifferent, and he removed also the quarrelsomeness of those who attacked them, by showing that it was no very desirable...task to be always making a trouble about these things. Yet it was not a very desirable task, not in its own nature, but on account of the time chosen, and because they were novices in the faith” (Chrysostom *Homilies on Romans* 25).³⁷

With the option of the sacred days being times of fasting, the only Biblical time God’s people are explicitly commanded to fast is on *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 23:27 specifies, “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls.” It is clearly identified in Acts 27:9 as “the fast.” However, other than references in the Scriptures to *Yom Kippur*, there is not very much more that the Bible has to say about fasting.

The tradition of “Monday and Thursday are set aside for public fasts” (t.*Ta’anit* 2:4)³⁸ was established in Second Temple Judaism, because fasting was largely prohibited for the Sabbath and festivals (b.*Eruvin* 41a). The more likely, more serious days of fasting to be considered, though, were some fixed fast days established by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile, established to remember important events in Jewish history. Jacob Milgrom summarizes,

³⁴ Moo, *Romans*, pp 842, 843.

³⁵ Cf. Kruse, *Romans*, 515 fn#21.

³⁶ [BibleWorks 9.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers.](#)

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Neusner, *Tosefta*, 1:625.

It is to be noted how in the emerging Christianity of the late First Century, there were discussions about if and when Believers should fast: “But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week; but do ye fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday)” (*Didache* 8:1; [BibleWorks 9.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers](#)).

“Fixed fast days are first mentioned by the post-Exilic prophet Zechariah who proclaims the word of the Lord thus: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth..’ (Zech. 8:19; cf. 7:3, 5). Jewish tradition has it that these fasts commemorate the critical events which culminated in the destruction of the Temple: the tenth of Tevet (the tenth month), the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem; the 17th of Tammuz (the fourth month), the breaching of the walls; the ninth of Av (the fifth month), when the Temple was destroyed; and the third of Tishri (the seventh month), when Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah, was assassinated” (EJ).³⁹

When **optional fast days**, and not the seventh-day Sabbath or appointed times, are selected as being a matter of personal opinion on which to dedicate one’s practice unto the Lord, few of today’s Messianic people would take issue with Paul’s assertion, “say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience” (Romans 14:5, The Message).

14:6 As the CJB/CJSB renders Paul’s words of Romans 14:6, “He who observes a day as special does so to honor the Lord. Also he who eats anything, eats to honor the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; likewise the abstainer abstains to honor the Lord, and he too gives thanks to God.” There are two translation issues to be aware of in Romans 14:6, which often reflect decisions made regarding the scene in view.

The first translation issue surrounds the proper rendering of the participles *esthiōn* (ἐσθίων) and *mē esthiōn* (μὴ ἐσθίων), which appeared earlier in Romans 14:3. The Moffat New Testament actually renders these literally as “eater” and “non-eater”: “The eater eats to the Lord, since he thanks God for his food; the non-eater abstains to the Lord.” The NIV, however, has made a value judgment, in adding “meat” to its rendering: “He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.” And interestingly enough, on the other side, the Phillips New Testament reflects the interpretation that what is in view are days of fasting: “The man who eats, eats for the Lord’s sake, for he thanks God for the food. The man who fasts also does it for the Lord’s sake, for he thanks God for the benefits of fasting.” It is fair, in more formal equivalence rendering, though, to leave these participles by themselves: “and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat” (PME).

A second translation issue surrounds how to properly approach the verb *phroneō* (φρονέω), which in a selection of versions is rendered as “observe” or “observes” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, HCSB, CJB/CJSB, TLV). Some notable definitions of *phroneō*, as detailed by BDAG, include, “**to have an opinion with regard to someth., think, form/hold an opinion, judge,**” and “**to give careful consideration to someth., set one’s mind on, be intent on.**”⁴⁰ The two main alternative renderings for *phroneō* in Romans 14:6 would be “minds” (LITV, or “mindful”) and “regards” (NIV; “regardeth,” American Standard Version). Hegg’s thoughts on Romans 14:6 should be well taken:

“Since neither the Torah nor Yeshua prescribed weekly fast days, the issue was a matter of personal choice, and Paul was not willing to make specific *halachah* on it. This scenario fits the context well, and puts the matter of ‘days’ into the realm of choice for the followers of Yeshua. I am inclined to take this interpretation as fitting the overall context of Romans 14.

“In fact, the wording of v. 6...would best fit one who fasts in contrast to the one who does not. For the one who ‘eats’ give thanks to the Lord (i.e., says the *berachah* before eating) and the one who does not eat, fasts unto the Lord. This combining of ‘eating’ and ‘days’ fits the scenario of scheduled fast days and best explains why Paul would begin with issues of eating and move easily to matters relating to days for fasting.”⁴¹

³⁹ Jacob Milgrom, “Fasting and Fast Days,” in Encyclopaedia Judaica. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

⁴⁰ BDAG, 1065.

⁴¹ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 417.

The sacred days in view, regarded as days of fasting for the non-eater, would obviously be something practiced as a very beneficial spiritual procedure, the non-eating being performed for the Lord. Fasting on certain days are often times when each individual must be convinced in his or her own mind (Romans 14:5). Fasting is often a matter solely of individual choice and spiritual conviction, from which one can clearly benefit.

Having admonished the presumed “strong” in Rome for eating meat (Romans 14:2), Paul then admonishes them with how those who will not eat regard various days as special to the Lord (Romans 14:5). If these are days optional Jewish of fasting—which are definitely intended to be, decisions of conscience—then Paul has made an important rhetorical point to those “strong” who look down upon, or with contempt toward those who were only eating vegetarian. None of the Roman non-Jewish Believers, in their right minds, should have looked down with utter disdain on a Jewish Believer for fasting on a day like the Ninth of Av, remembering the destruction of the First Temple—so why would they look down on what might not be eaten by them during fellowship meals, something *far less* important?

Keeping these fasts would be something that was entirely optional as far as one’s faith practice was concerned. Yet remembering the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, by fasting and entreating the Lord for such events never to happen again, are worthy things to reflect upon—still largely observed in Judaism today. They may not be required, *per se*, but no mature Believer should ever look with contempt upon others who are convicted that these times are worthy moments to abstain from food and pray before God. *They are high convictions deserving of respect.*

Frequently in contemporary Christianity, the sacred days of Romans 14:5-6 are looked at in terms of Sabbatarianism observed by others, perhaps practiced by denominations such as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. While officially, many evangelical Christian leaders and teachers encourage a policy of *adiaphora* toward Christians who keep a seventh-day Sabbath—and by extension this would include Messianic groups who keep *Shabbat* and the appointed times—implementing a no-judgment policy is not at all easy. Perhaps the Christian academic is a bit more conscious of the tensions that can arise, than your average run-of-the-mill lay Believer. As Witherington points out, “What works to build community and what does harm are at the forefront of Paul’s discussion.”⁴² Moo, being among those who think that Romans ch. 14 treats the seventh-day Sabbath, appointed times, and dietary laws as being matters of indifference, also does acknowledge how such practices are to be performed as unto the Lord:

“The believer who sets aside certain days...or who observes the Sabbath, does so because he or she sincerely believes this honors the Lord. Similarly, both the believer who eats anything without discrimination and the believer who refuses to eat certain things ‘gives thanks’ to God at their mealtimes and are motivated in their respective practices by a desire to glorify the Lord.”⁴³

While neither Witherington or Moo, among others, thinks that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or dietary laws is necessary for today—I do not think that they would look down with resentment or harsh judgment toward those who do. They would consider it an issue of personal choice and preference, and hopefully wish today’s Messianics the best in their trying to honor the Lord. This does not mean that there are not Christians who look down with disdain at Messianics, because there are. And, much of this is reciprocated with some disdain toward Christians on the Messianic end, which is equally wrong and reprehensible, and needs to be remedied by Messianics who encourage their fellow Believers to change via a positive testimony.

14:7-9 Having just admonished various Believers in Rome, mostly non-Jewish Believers, about the need for them to not judge regarding the issues of eating and sacred days (Romans 14:2-6), Paul’s instruction about not looking down with disdain or contempt over opinions is noticeably intensified. He communicates, “This indeed is how matters stand. None of us lives to be his own master, and none of us dies to be his own master. When we live we live serving the Lord, and when we die we die serving the Lord. Whether we live, then, or whether we die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:7-8, God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). The whole spectrum of serving the Lord Yeshua, *from life to death*, is presented before the audience. The actions of conviction, held

⁴² Witherington, *Romans*, pp 325-326.

⁴³ Moo, *Romans*, 843.

Also Osborne, *Romans*, pp 361-362; Keener, *Romans*, 165.

by the presumed “weak,” are actions performed to the Lord. Further, it should be obvious with a spectrum of *from life to death* in view, how all of one’s opinions mean relatively little in comparison to the important good deeds of hard service of the Kingdom—which in many cases for the First Century Believers led to hardship, ostracism, harassment and imprisonment, or even martyrdom.

All of a born again Believer’s activities are to be conducted with Yeshua the Messiah as the central focus. Yeshua is the Lord of all who have acknowledged Him, as a result of His death and resurrection: “It was for this that Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:9, God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). The paraphrase offered by The Message for Romans 14:9 is worth noting: “That’s why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.” Differences of opinion, and worthwhile matters of conscience, mean very little in light of the ministry, example, and sacrifice of the Son of God.

14:10 Perhaps some of Paul’s word about judging another is rhetorical, and perhaps some of it is representative of how nasty a few things had gotten among the Roman Believers. He inquires, “But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14:10, Common English Bible). All Believers will have to give some account of their actions before the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), in an evaluation of their service to Him. Demonstrating a harsh attitude of contempt toward fellow brothers and sisters in the present, and having a less-than-positive evaluation of one’s service to the Messiah in the future, is not something that mature Believers should at all want.

14:11-12 The Apostle Paul highlights the importance of Believers’ works being evaluated in the future, by appealing to Tanach Scripture: “for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God’” (Romans 14:11, ESV). Romans 14:11 includes a quotation from Isaiah 45:23, with Isaiah 45:21-23 in total detailing how the Lord God of Israel is the only Savior, the only place in which true salvation can be found, and how all will be forced to acknowledge Him:

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*.”

The significance of Paul’s statement, for the situation in Rome, is of course highlighted in how all Believers will have to stand before the God of all Creation, for their works to be evaluated and eschatological rewards granted. In terms of the nature of the Messiah, there is excellent reason for us to consider “the Lord” of Romans 14:11 and Isaiah 45:23 to actually be Yeshua. Paul has stated in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah.” And in the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, the Lord to whom all must bow down, is certainly Yeshua the Messiah:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (PME).

Yeshua being “the Lord” (YHWH) of Isaiah 45:23 is notably highlighted by what is asserted in Isaiah 42:8, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.” Either Yeshua the Son is authentically and truly God, by the application of Isaiah 45:23—or Paul has committed blasphemy against the God of Israel (cf. Romans 10:13). Wright is entirely correct to state how this “indicates how strong and high Paul’s underlying christology is at this point.”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:738.

For the purposes of Paul’s admonition in Romans ch. 14, those who would unfairly judge others who hold to opinions regarding eating and sacred days, may be regarded as though they have usurped the position of the ultimate Judge Himself.⁴⁵ This is not something that the presumed “strong” in Rome needed to be doing, as “each of us will be answerable to God” (Romans 14:12, REB).

14:13 Paul’s discussion from Romans 14:13-23, having been purposefully interrupted by some statements about sacred days (Romans 14:[3]5-6), now returns to the original issue about eating (Romans 14:2). Whatever circumstances had caused the problem of the Roman Believers who ate meat looking down upon the other Roman Believers who were vegetarian—which we should think was most probably taking place at some kind of fellowship meal gatherings—is something that is crafted in terms of stumbling blocks or hindrances being placed in others’ path. Paul states, “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister” (Romans 14:13, TNIV). Paul is right to emphasize that there are things far more important than what one eats.

If, the largely non-Jewish Believers in Rome were not to look down on their, mainly fellow Jewish Believers, for remembering various extra-Biblical fast days as times for honoring God (Romans 14:5-6)—why would they criticize any Jewish Believers for not necessarily eating the meat available at some of their fellowship gatherings? What one chooses to eat, especially if food is being passed around at a table, or is laid out in a buffet, is entirely one’s personal preference. If you are not going to judge a brother or sister for a more significant matter, why would you judge a brother or sister on a much smaller matter? If a non-Jewish Believer chooses to be unfair to a Jewish Believer over what is eaten at a fellowship meal, what could that communicate to the same Jewish Believer’s other actions of faith? As the Phillips New Testament paraphrases Romans 14:13: “Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. Let us rather be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall.”

14:14 There is no statement more confusing for today’s kosher-friendly Messianics, than Romans 14:14. Properly examining what is communicated not only involves a correct translation of what appears, but also a right diagnosis of the setting to which Paul directed his evaluation. Far too frequently, Romans 14:14 has been mistranslated in most English Bibles, and Romans ch. 14 has been read from the incorrect point of view of an abstract essay, rather than circumstances in Rome needing to be admonished.

Paul says in Romans 14:14, *oida kai pepeismai en Kuriō Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di’ heautou, ei mē tō logizomenō ti koinon einai, ekeinō koinon* (οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι’ ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκεῖνῳ κοινόν). A Messianic version like the CJB is not too different from what appears in standard Christian versions: “I know—that is, I have been persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah—that nothing is unclean in itself. But if a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean” (CJB/CJSB). Apparently, Paul has just communicated that the meats classified as unclean according to the Torah (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), are in fact clean, and if anyone considers such meats to be unclean, then it is an issue of personal preference or choice, but one which is ultimately irrelevant.

The Hebrew term directly associated with unclean meats in the Torah is *tamei* (טָמֵא), “unclean,” or “ceremonially unclean: animals” (*HALOT*).⁴⁶ In the Greek Septuagint, *tamei* is rendered in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 as *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος), which as *Thayer* notes, “in the Septuagint equivalent to *טָמֵא* [*tamei*], not cleansed, unclean...of food.”⁴⁷ If the Apostle Paul intended there to be a direct abrogation of the Torah’s dietary code in Romans 14:14, reducing it from the level of Biblical commandment to that of personal opinion, then *akathartos* would have been the certain and unambiguous term to use in Romans 14:14. ***Akathartos* is not the Greek term which is used in Romans 14:14.**

What appears instead in Romans 14:14, being widely translated as “unclean,” is *koinos* (κοινός). Generally speaking, “This word means ‘common’...in the sense of common ownership, property, ideas, etc”

⁴⁵ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:809.

⁴⁶ *HALOT*, 1:376.

⁴⁷ *Thayer*, 21.

Consulting Hebrew translations of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, will not at all be helpful in evaluating Romans 14:14, as they tend to use *tamei* (טָמֵא; Delitzsch, Salkinson-Ginsburg, UBSHNT).

(TDNT).⁴⁸ Scholars William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, in their Greek-English Dictionary provided for *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)*, notably define *koinos* as “common, belonging equally to several,” “in the NT common, profane,” and “ceremonially unclean.”⁴⁹ AMG offers the description of *koinos* as “Defiled, common, unclean, to lie common or open to all, common or belonging to several or of which several are partakers...such as were common to other nations but were avoided by the Jews as polluted and unclean.”⁵⁰

There is enough reason to question whether *koinos* in Romans 14:14, should really be translated as “unclean,” or whether it should be more “lit., ‘profane/common,’”⁵¹ with some important nuance intended for the scene being addressed in Rome.

The following chart has assembled a selection of renderings seen for Romans 14:14, where *koinos* has notably been translated differently among some versions, and where *koinos* has been improperly extrapolated or paraphrased among some others:

| ΚΟΙΝΟΣ KOINOS IN ROMANS 14:14 | |
|--|---|
| GREEK | VARIED ENGLISH VERSIONS |
| <p><i>oída kai pepeismai en Kuriō Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di’ heautou, ei mē tō logizomenō ti koinon einai, ekeinō koinon</i></p> <p>οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι’ ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκεῖνῳ κοινόν</p> | <p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean” (RSV).</p> <p>“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean” (NIV).</p> <p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing by itself is common; except to the one deeming anything to be common, it is common” (LITV).</p> <p>“I know and have been persuaded by [the] Lord Jesus that nothing [is] common through itself; except to the [one] reckoning anything common to be, to that man [it is] common” (Marshall).⁵²</p> <p>“I know and have been persuaded in [the] Lord Jesus that nothing [is] common through(in) itself, except to the one counting anything common to be, to that man [it is] common” (Brown and Comfort).⁵³</p> |

⁴⁸ F. Hauck, “*koinós*,” in TDNT, 447.

⁴⁹ William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1098.

⁵⁰ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 872.

⁵¹ Nanos, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 283.

⁵² Marshall, 477.

⁵³ Brown and Comfort, 570.

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>“I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is profane in itself, except that to the one who reckons something profane, to that person it is profane” (<i>WBC</i>).⁵⁴</p> <p>“I know, and am persuaded in the Lord <i>Yeshua</i>, that nothing is unholy in itself; but it is unholy for the one who considers it unholy” (TLV).⁵⁵</p> <p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord <i>Yeshua</i> that nothing is of itself impure—except that to the one who concludes something is impure, to him it is impure” (The Messianic Writings).</p> <p>“Through my union with the Lord Jesus, I know and am persuaded that nothing is ‘defiling in itself.’ A thing is ‘defiling’ only to the person who holds it to be so” (<i>A New New Testament</i>).⁵⁶</p> <p>“I know and I'm convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is wrong to eat in itself. But if someone thinks something is wrong to eat, it becomes wrong for that person” (Common English Bible).</p> |
|--|--|

The most frequent alternative for *koinos* (κοινός) **not** being rendered as “unclean,” would instead be “**common**” (LITV, Marshall, Brown and Comfort), although “defiled” or “profane” would also be acceptable. It is notable, that nowhere in the Septuagint translation of the Torah or Pentateuch does the term *koinos* appear. In fact, *koinos* does not really start appearing in Greek Jewish texts, until the composition of the Apocryphal books, with some obvious linguistic influence from Hellenism. In terms of *koinos* as a classical Greek term, the *Liddell-Scott-Jones* lexicon includes the definitions of “*common, ordinary*” and “*common, of inferior quality,*” with at least some Biblical association stated: “of forbidden meats, *common, profane*.”⁵⁷ On the whole, theological resources—when choosing to acknowledge *koinos*—have tended to conclude that *koinos* is equivalent to *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος), and by extension also *tamei*. As concluded by James D.G. Dunn:

“κοινός [*koinos*] in ordinary Greek means simply ‘common, ordinary.’ The sense of ‘profane, unclean’ derives from the use of κοινός as equivalent to the biblical טָמֵא [*tamei*] (e.g., Lev 11:4-8; Deut 14:7-10; Judg 13:4; Hos 9:3) or חַל [cho] (Lev 10:10; Ezek 22:26; 44:23), a step taken subsequent to the LXX rendering of the OT, but reflecting the increasing purity concerns of the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period.”⁵⁸

Some of the main reasons for just translating *koinos* as though it were *akathartos*, as “unclean,” would pertain to various uses witnessed in the Apocrypha, regarding the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., and the defilement of the Temple Mount by Antiochus Epiphanes. The RSV Apocrypha renders *koinos* as “unclean,” but the NETS or New English Translation of the Septuagint, renders *koinos* as “common”:

⁵⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:815.

⁵⁵ The Phillips New Testament has the similar, “I am convinced, and I say this as in the presence of the Lord Jesus, that nothing is intrinsically unholy. But nonetheless it is unholy to the man who thinks it is.” The Wuest New Testament renders *koinos* as “unhallowed.”

⁵⁶ Hal Taussig, ed., *A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-First Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 259.

⁵⁷ [BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon \(Unabridged\)](#).

⁵⁸ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:818; also Moo, *Romans*, 852 who takes *koinos* as an antonym for *katharos* (καθαρός) or “clean” in Romans 14:20.

“[T]o build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals...But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food” (1 Maccabees 1:47, 62, RSV).

“[T]o build altars and sacred precincts and houses to idols and to sacrifice swine and common animals...But many in Israel remained strong and fortified themselves not to eat common things” (1 Maccabees 1:47, 62, NETS).

Koinos is employed in the Apocrypha where *húeia kai ktēnē koina* (ἕεια καὶ κτήνη κοινὰ) were sacrificed in the Temple precincts. There is little doubting that the pig as an unclean animal was sacrificed on the Temple Mount, and that Jews were forced to eat pork or die. But why are *ktēnē koina* or “common animals” also referenced? What animals other than pigs would have defiled the sacred space? This is where it can be frequently overlooked how Greco-Roman religion most definitely employed animals for sacrifice which would be considered technically clean on the lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Yet, any cattle, sheep, or goats sacrificed on the Temple Mount by the Seleucid Greeks, would not at all be considered being *tamim* (טָמִים) or fit for sacrifice in God’s holy place.⁵⁹ On the contrary, such animals would be regarded as *koinos*: “common,” “profane,” or “defiled.” Similarly, a common Greco-Roman Mediterranean diet would have involved the eating of cattle, sheep, goats, and various fowl, which are listed as “clean” on the food lists of the Torah.

Romans 14:14, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua, that nothing is common in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be common, to him it is common” (PME), with *koinos* inappropriately rendered as “unclean,” is frequently taken as a definitive statement of abrogation of the kosher dietary laws,⁶⁰ or at least a reduction of it to one of personal opinion. Furthermore, Romans ch. 14 in total is customarily read as an abstract essay on all matters of opinion. When read this way, a typical conclusion would be, as detailed in the *NIV Study Bible*, “Not to be generalized to mean that sin is only a matter of subjective opinion or conscience. Paul is not discussing conduct that in light of Scripture is clearly sinful, but conduct concerning which Christians may legitimately differ (in this case, food regulations).”⁶¹

Is the status of clean and unclean meats, as stated by God in the Torah (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), something to be regarded entirely as arbitrary for the post-resurrection era? If the Apostle Paul wanted to make this unambiguously clear, then as a scholar trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he could have used *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14), which he did not do in Romans 14:14.

Messianic handling, of what is communicated in Romans 14:14, has not been terribly impressive. Not noting the source text—meaning that issues pertaining to *koinos*, *akathartos*, or *tamei* are overlooked—all Stern can conclude in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* is, “The Bible does not always explain why some things are pure and others not...Since the laws of ritual purity apply to Jews only, the statement that nothing is unclean in itself should suffice to free any Gentile whose conscience still bothers him in regard to such matters. As for Jews, even in rabbinic Judaism most of the purity laws gradually fell into disuse.”⁶² However, thinking that non-Israelites in the Torah were exempt from the dietary laws, is something that can be disputed via the tenor of Leviticus 17:10-16 (among other passages), where the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel were only permitted to catch clean animals in the wild.⁶³

Hegg’s commentary on Romans likewise does not go into any discussion regarding *koinos*, but just jumps into talking about what is clean or unclean in Rabbinical estimation.⁶⁴

When Romans ch. 14 is read from the vantage point of Paul addressing his audience in terms of a circumstance which has arisen among them, suggested by this writer to be various controversies that have

⁵⁹ I.e., Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9, etc.

⁶⁰ Sometimes this is associated with various interpretations of Mark 7:19, which itself has translation issues regarding the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα).

Consult the previous examination of Mark 7:1-23, defending the translation of “purging all the foods” as excretion for Mark 7:19.

⁶¹ *NIV Study Bible*, 1768; also Osborne, *Romans*, 368.

⁶² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 435-436.

⁶³ Consult the examination of Leviticus 17:10-16 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶⁴ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, pp 422-423.

erupted during fellowship meals, then “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua, that nothing is common in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be common, to him it is common” (PME) is a remark made by the Apostle, with a real issue in mind. With some in Rome, labeled by Paul to be the “weak,” only willing to eat vegetables, it is important to recognize how *koinos* relates “**to being of little value because of being common, common, ordinary, profane,**” and can concern “that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes” (BDAG).⁶⁵ The discrimination of, mainly Jewish Believers, toward the clean meat that was being served at fellowship meals (discussed further for Romans 14:20), would have involved the source of where such meat was acquired.

Assuming that the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29) was being observed, we can safely conclude that the *koinos* meat was that of Biblically-clean animals. If the meat were butchered properly with the blood removed (perhaps procured by various wealthy Believers hosting a cross-gathering of Messiah followers, butchered to their specifications), but if it came from a Roman meat source, the “weak” could have chosen not to eat it, and out of conscience would have considered it *koinos*: “common,” “profane,” or “defiled.” *In Romans 14:14 Paul labels this to be a personal value judgment.*

Paul himself would have had no problem eating any of the “common” or “defiled” meat served at the Roman fellowship meals—and even appeals to his faith in Yeshua Himself for holding to such an opinion. But if this opinion would cause some to stumble, he later notes how he would gladly give up eating meat altogether (Romans 14:21).

14:15 That the issue of eating (Romans 14:2) and sacred days (Romans 14:5-6) are not to be viewed as abstract, or even hypothetical remarks by Paul—but instead are rooted in circumstances that have arisen among the Roman Believers—is evidenced by his admonition in Romans 14:15: “If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died” (NRSV). Paul’s reference to *tō brōmati sou* (τῷ βρώματί σου), “with your food,” was obviously directed to those who were being unfair about what or when others chose to eat or not to eat. With a scene of fellowship meals in view, one can easily envision Paul speaking to such a person, with a plate in hand, and with somebody having an utterly dumbfounded or bewildered look.

Paul is very serious about those who would look down upon others in the assembly, who were vegetarian, as their actions can have severe consequences. *If being a part of this community means having one’s convictions criticized, why be a part of it?* He employs the verb *apollumi* (ἀπόλλυμι) to describe this, a default rendering being “destroy” (NASU, ESV), but also seen as “ruin” (RSV, NRSV), “grieve” (Wuest New Testament), “tear down” (The Voice), or even “undo” (*Lattimore*). In the Mishnah, the thought is expressed, “whoever destroys a single Israelite soul is deemed by Scripture {Genesis 4:10} as if he had destroyed a whole world” (m.*Sanhedrin* 4:5).⁶⁶ Whatever scruples and criticism have arisen over the Believers in Rome and eating, Paul is clear *that it was not worth it!* The Message has a useful paraphrase to consider here: “Would you risk sending them to hell over an item in their diet?”

People who are treated unfairly in a larger group, if circumstances are not rectified, will often leave and find a place more welcoming of them. In this case, with the “weak” most probably being Jewish Believers, it would mean leaving the community of Messiah followers, and returning to a Messiah-less Synagogue.

14:16-17 The position of those who would hold to the opinion (Romans 14:1) that eating meat is fine (Romans 14:2) and that they did not necessarily have to observe days of fasting (Romans 14:5-6), is not one that the Apostle Paul has said is inappropriate or incorrect.

In a version like the NASU, the adjectival *to agathon* (τὸ ἀγαθόν), for Romans 14:16, is rendered as the noun “a good thing,” although *mē blasphemēisthō oun humōn to agathon* (μὴ βλασφημείσθω οὖν ὑμῶν τὸ ἀγαθόν), “let not be spoken against therefore your – good” (Brown and Comfort),⁶⁷ is best left in an adjectival sense: “So do not let your good be spoken of as evil (Romans 14:16, RSV) or “Therefore, do not let your good be slandered” (HCSB). That Paul speaks here in terms of “your good,” does place a burden of proof upon those

⁶⁵ BDAG, 552.

⁶⁶ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 591.

⁶⁷ Brown and Comfort, 570.

who have been criticizing others, perhaps to evaluate and reflect upon whether their convictions have been kept in line with a larger Kingdom ethic:

“[F]or the kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness and *shalom* [peace] and joy in the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* [Holy Spirit]” (Romans 14:17, TLV).

The focus of the Kingdom of God for redeemed Believers is not to be over what is consumed at mealtime, but is to be focused on the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives, to enact peace, and to enable men and women to have true joy. To an extent, one can see a parallel between what Paul says in Romans 14:17 and what Yeshua directed to the Pharisaical leaders in Matthew 23:23:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

What a person eats—especially at fellowship meals—is ultimately not as important as being united in the love and hope of the gospel. *Born again Believers are to be identified as changed people by the work of the Lord within them.* In this light, eating is a relatively minor matter, **even if all of the food available to be eaten is clean or “kosher”** (Romans 14:20), because there are other things that are far more important in the Kingdom of God.

14:18-19 Those who are able to keep a Kingdom ethic of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17) as being absolutely imperative, are described by Paul as follows: “The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval” (Romans 14:18, NRSV) or “deserves respect from other people” (Kingdom New Testament). Such acceptance and approval, both Divine and mortal—because the people of God are to be guided by the Spirit of God—is the result of acting and conducting oneself different from the world, which is a society of competition between people and which too widely demeans and disparages others. The redeemed in Yeshua are to, quite contrary to this, “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19, RSV). Psalm 13:14 had similarly directed, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”

14:20 The Apostle Paul is serious about how the issues regarding eating have caused unnecessary problems for the Believers in Rome. He admonishes, “Stop tearing down the work of God for the sake of food. Indeed all things are clean, but wrong for the man who by eating causes stumbling” (Romans 14:20, TLV). The verb *kataluō* (καταλύω), “to put down, destroy” (LS),⁶⁸ has been rendered as “overthrow” (American Standard Version), “destroy” (KJV, RSV/NRSV/ESV, NIV), “break down” (Moffat New Testament), and “pull down” (Kingdom New Testament). We do not know to what extent human ignorance and arrogance had been overcoming the better sense and judgment of the Believers eating meat, but Paul recognizes how negative attitudes—over a relatively minor issue—could do severe damage to others.

The assertion made by Paul in Romans 14:20, *panta men kathara* (πάντα μὲν καθάρᾳ), “Truly, all things are clean” (LITV), is something that tends to catch kosher-friendly Messianic people completely off guard. Paraphrased renderings that have “All food is clean” (NIV) or “All food indeed is ceremonially clean” (Montgomery New Testament) or “all foods are acceptable” (NLT), certainly do not help. Concurrent with this, if Romans ch. 14 is read as an abstract essay, as it frequently is, then *panta men kathara* is then taken as Paul’s personal abrogation of the Torah’s dietary laws. At least an interpreter like Cranfield, in noting how “all things indeed are clean,” can then be extrapolated to apply to things well beyond eating, is careful to advise a limited application of what is stated:

“[W]e have to understand this statement as intended in a restricted sense, the reference being not to such things as men’s thoughts, desires and actions, but only to the resources of the created world which are available and appropriate for human consumption.”⁶⁹

An even more limited approach to Paul’s statement *panta men kathara* is offered by Hegg, who sees it in terms of ancient Rabbinical debates over whether non-Jewish contact with foodstuffs, rendered them unclean:

⁶⁸ LS, 410.

⁶⁹ Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 723.

“[Paul’s] statement that ‘everything is clean’ (πάντα μὲν καθαρὰ) must be understood within the context of the debate about whether or not Gentile contact with food rendered it unclean. For Paul, this is wrong. That which God declared to be clean should not be considered unclean.”⁷⁰

When Romans ch. 14 is read as instruction issued because of circumstances that have arisen among the Roman Believers, then the statement *panta men kathara* should not be seen as some philosophical remark or observation, perhaps even in terms of non-Jewish contact with foodstuffs—but instead an actual assertion about the type of meat served at fellowship meals, where the whole issue regarding those who would eat, or who would not eat meat, likely arose.

While some could assume, based on customary interpretations of Peter’s vision (Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-18) or Yeshua’s words in Mark 7:1-23,⁷¹ that the statement “all things are clean” would mean that pork, in addition to beef, lamb, goat, or various forms of fowl, could have been served, this is by no means the only way of approaching “all things indeed are clean.” It is absolutely safe to recognize that at public fellowship meals between the Jewish and non-Jewish Believers in Rome, that the Apostolic decree regarding abstinence “from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication” (Acts 15:29) was being observed, to the best of the Believers’ ability. Stott, who certainly holds to the Torah’s dietary code being abolished for the post-resurrection era, still recognizes that Paul enforced the Apostolic decree, and even makes the note that non-Jewish Believers had to avoid non-kosher fare:

“Having stated categorically that circumcision was not necessary for salvation (the central theological principle in the debate), the Council not only (tacitly) gave Jewish Christians the freedom to continue their distinctive cultural-ceremonial practices, but asked Gentile Christians in certain circumstances to abstain from practices which would offend Jewish Christian consciences (e.g. asking them to avoid *eidōlothyta* [εἰδωλόθυτα] and non-kosher meat [referencing: Acts 15:19ff., 27ff.]). The apostle Paul evidently followed these guidelines in his own ministry...”⁷²

The statement *panta men kathara* or “all things indeed are clean,” should be viewed from the standpoint of the Apostolic decree and Jewish sensitivities being recognized. The Greek term *katharos* (καθαρός), or “clean,” was employed in the Septuagint to describe those animals considered ritually clean and acceptable for eating, widely rendering the Hebrew *tahor* (טהור).⁷³ Seeing this, it would be most unlikely that the meat served at the fellowship meals fell outside the guidelines of clean and unclean animals of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. But how acceptable would the meat be for some Jewish Believers, with clean meat possibly having to come from Roman sources?

If meat only from clean animals was being served at fellowship gatherings, then the previous statement about meat being *koinos* or “common,” “defiled,” or “profane” (v. 14) would have been a value judgment in the eyes of the beholder, as such meat served may have been procured from Roman sources. But, even with the meat being *katharos* or “clean” being served, this was not to be a means of judging others, whose sensitivities were heightened, and would hence only eat vegetarian.

14:21 Unlike, perhaps Romans 14:2-3 preceding, where the eating in view among the Roman Believers served as a prefacing remark to Romans 14:5-6 and various fast days, the eating in Romans 14:20 is specified immediately in Romans 14:21 following to be eating meat, which is also associated with drinking wine: “It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother stumbles” (TLV). Rather than being an offense, it might be better to just not eat meat, drink wine, or make a huge issue out of something small, but a large enough issue to cause another to stumble and find other people—*non-Believers*—to associate with. Understanding the more conservative dietary opinions of some of the Jewish Believers in Rome, and the required sensitivity that the non-Jewish Believers should have had toward fast days, should enable these “strong” to restrict themselves in disputable matters should the situation require it. The issues are just not big enough to require any (more) significant divisions in the *ekklēsia*.

⁷⁰ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 425.

⁷¹ Consult the previous analysis of Acts 10:1-48 and Mark 7:1-23.

⁷² Stott, *Romans*, pp 356-357.

⁷³ Genesis 7:2-3, 8; 8:20; Leviticus 4:12; 6:11; 7:19; Ezra 6:20; cf. Moo, *Romans*, 860 fn#63.

Romans 14:21, “It’s a good thing not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything that trips your brother or sister” (Common English Bible), given its expansion to include drinking, is frequently thought by Christian readers to be a Pauline support for a doctrine of *adiaphora* or things indifferent. In the words of Dunn, “Paul lays out the principle of self-restricted liberty in the most far-reaching terms: what applies to eating meat and drinking wine applies also to *anything* which causes a fellow believer to stumble and fall on his or her own pathway of discipleship.”⁷⁴ And it is true, as there is, to some extent, support for a doctrine of *adiaphora* that can be deduced from Romans ch. 14, but this cannot be something applying permissively as much as restrictively.

Drinking is added to the mix here, and it is notable that we consider how the Torah includes no general prohibition on consuming alcohol as a part of normal life. Many, however, could easily have held to the opinion that drinking alcohol was not for them, especially given the many abuses that can occur as a matter of drunkenness, and/or how alcohol was used in terms of pagan ritual and debauchery in Ancient Rome. A restrictive approach toward Romans 14:21, given social circumstances regarding food and drink, might find some justification in modern terms of adding usage of tobacco to the mix of what can cause someone to stumble. But leaping forward and making Romans ch. 14 about watching or not watching certain types of movies, listening or not listening to certain types of music, or reading or not reading certain types of books, would, we should think, be most outside of the venue by which people would be criticized for what they eat or drink.

14:22-23 The responsibility of the individual Roman Believers, who were largely non-Jewish, perhaps with some being Jewish as well, in regard to eating meat (Romans 14:2) and days of fasting (Romans 14:5-6), was to take noticeable care of their personal faith in the Lord: *su pistin [hēn] echeis kata seauton eche enōpion tou Theou* (σὺ πιστεῖν [ἦν] ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ), “you [the] faith which have by yourself” (Romans 14:22a, Brown and Comfort).⁷⁵ This can be taken as an emphasis of how each Believer is going to have their works evaluated by the Lord (Romans 14:10-12). The thrust of Paul’s admonition is, “Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve” (Romans 14:22b, TNIV). Perhaps it is unnecessary, to some degree, to consider meat served at fellowship gatherings to be *koinos* (Romans 14:14), but eating such meat in a manner that causes those who abstain from it, to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in the assembly, will cause the one eating meat to be condemned.

Recognizing the presence of those who will not eat meat at fellowship gatherings, such abstaining persons should not feel socially, and especially not spiritually, pressured, to forego their vegetarian preferences. Paul directs how “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” (Romans 14:23, CJB/CJSB). The faith of the presumed “strong” (Romans 14:22) will direct them to not care if the meat served at fellowship gatherings came from Jewish or Roman sources. The faith of the presumed “weak,” the doubter (Romans 14:23), will not permit them to eat meat. For them to eat the meat being offered, as a means of fitting in, will be contrary to their faith convictions, and actually be regarded as sin and in violation of their beliefs. What Paul says here is somewhat similar to a view expressed in the Talmud:

“Yes indeed, for has it not been taught on Tannaite authority: In respect to things that are permitted, treated by others as prohibited, you are not permitted to treat as permitted in the presence of those who regard them as prohibited, in line with the verse, ‘he shall not break his word’ (Num. 30:3)” (b.*Nedarim* 15a).⁷⁶

Romans 14 application There has not been a huge amount of Messianic handling of Romans ch. 14 witnessed in popular materials written on the topic of the kosher dietary laws (virtually none on the topic of the Sabbath or appointed times). To the credit of what has been witnessed in popular Messianic books on kosher, some attention has been given to various Greek terms like *koinos* (κοινός) in Romans 14:14, and also to some potential First Century background. However, framing Paul’s admonitions in terms of incidents

⁷⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:833.

⁷⁵ Brown and Comfort, 571.

⁷⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

arising from what was being eaten, or not eaten, at fellowship meal times among the Roman Believers, is unique to this writer.

The perspective offered regarding Romans 14:14, in the 2005 resource *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* by Hope Egan, is that meat which is labeled as *koinos* or common, might have been that which had been offered to idols, or was suspicious of being offered to idols:

“In Jewish estimation, any food that had been offered to an idol or as part of an idolatrous feast was regarded as ‘common.’ The Greek word is *koinos*. It means common, vulgar or profane. This is not the same as saying that it was ritually unclean in the biblical sense. The Greek word for biblically, ritually unclean is *akathartos*. The Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, translates ritual uncleanness as *akathartos*. It is critical that we understand the difference between these two Greek words....The word *koinos* (common) does not refer to impurity as defined by the Torah. The word *koinos* is reserved to apply to things made unfit through contact with idolatry or with Gentiles. Therefore, in Greek, pork would be *akathartos*. Wine poured out to an idol would be *koinos*.”⁷⁷

The discussion goes on to reference some of the Corinthian correspondence regarding meat sacrificed to idols (1 Corinthians 8:8; 10:25-26, 30-31), and Paul’s apparent “Don’t ask, don’t tell policy.”⁷⁸ The conclusion drawn is that *koinos* relates to meat or wine that had been potentially offered to idols or involved with idolatry, and that the conservatives or weak among the Roman Believers, would only eat vegetables, consistent with the Prophet Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1:8). As is concluded,

“Paul does not take a hard stand on the issue of foods that have only been potentially offered to an idol. The conservatives in Rome certainly considered foods prepared by Gentiles as *koinos* (common) because they were potentially defiled by idolatry. Rather than eat meat or drink wine that might have been associated with idolatry and thereby rendered *koinos*, those conservatives chose to refrain from meat and wine and ate only vegetables as Daniel did in Babylon. Paul regards this as a debatable matter and leaves it to the conscience of the individual. {quoting Romans 14:2-4}....

“Though he advocates tolerance of those who insist on regarding meat and drink potentially defiled by idolatry as *koinos*, he himself is convinced that no food is *koinos*. He says as much in Romans 14:14....

“Unfortunately, this passage is almost universally misapplied to laws of clean and unclean animals as if Paul said that ‘nothing is unclean (*akathartos*) in itself.’ He did not. He did not use the Greek equivalent for ‘unclean,’ he used the equivalent for ‘common.’ There is a huge difference between the two. His statement that ‘nothing is unclean in itself’ is completely unrelated to the laws of clean and unclean animals. It is a question of whether or not food is permissible when it might potentially have been offered to an idol.”⁷⁹

What is stated here in *Holy Cow!* would be compatible with our proposal on Romans ch. 14, in that the meat provided for fellowship meals being *koinos* or “common,” may have had to be procured from Roman slaughterhouses, and not Jewish slaughterhouses, which may not have sold to the Messianic Believers per the fallout of the Edict of Claudius and Jewish expulsion from Rome. If the flesh of Biblically clean animals (Romans 14:20) was that being served at the fellowship gatherings, but the meat had been slaughtered and butchered from a Roman source, albeit in line with the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29), then issues regarding such meat’s status as *koinos*/common/profane/defiled would have been one of personal conscience for Paul. Avoidance of such meat would have taken place because of the presumed potential of idolatrous contamination.

The 2005 resource *Holy Cow!* does not, however, go into any detail on the issue of the sacred days (Romans 14:5-6), and what they could be or could represent.

⁷⁷ Hope Egan, *Holy Cow! Does God Care About What We Eat?* (Littleton, CO; First Fruits of Zion, 2005), pp 118-119.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 120-121.

Gordon Tessler, *The Genesis Diet* (Raleigh: Be Well Publications, 1996), pp 101-108 has a similar position, advocating that potential association with idolatry, does not automatically render a meat defined by God as “clean” to be “unclean.”

More recently (2012), the book, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* by Aaron Eby, takes the view, quite contrary to most analysis, and associating the weak and the strong with those mentioned in 1 Corinthians 8, that instead of the weak being mostly Jewish Believers, they were actually non-Jewish Believers who could have been worried about some association with prior idolatry. Regarding Romans 14, Eby states,

“Paul uses the term ‘weak’ to describe people who were formerly associated with idol worship—individuals who are far more likely to be Gentiles than Jews. The reason that they abstain from meat is due to concern that it may be associated with idol worship, not because of kosher slaughter laws such as the species of animal, its method of slaughter, or its combination with dairy.”⁸⁰

In his estimation, the strong, who were not concerned about idolatrous contamination about meat, were admonished to be careful around the weak. Eby makes a comparison to this with a recovering alcoholic who is tempted by the presence of wine at a Sabbath table.⁸¹ Certainly, whether one considers the “weak” to be non-Jewish Believers worried about relapsing into paganism, or more customarily, mostly Jewish Believers worried about idol contamination, we are at least agreed with Eby that the abstinence from eating meat had had some worry about idol contamination involved.

Further on, in terms of the sacred days in view, it is not surprising that Eby does not at all take the position that the sacred days are the Sabbath or the appointed times, as laid forth in the Torah. But, neither does Eby think that the sacred days might be extra-Biblical Jewish days of fasting. He instead proposes that the sacred days are likely pagan observances, noting some of the issues in translating the verb *phroneō* (φρονέω), “to think, to have understanding, to be sage, wise, prudent” (LS),⁸² commonly rendered in English versions as “observe(s)” (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU). Eby thinks that *phroneō* is better rendered as “mindful”⁸³ (the LITV has “minding”). In his estimation,

“It should be noted that certain things are *not* stated in this passage. First, there is no distinction that these are days of the week, of the month, of the year, or if they are one-time events. Second, there is no mention as to whether these days are major Jewish holy days, minor Jewish fasts or observances, civil events, or pagan holidays. Third...there is no indication that either the ‘strong’ or the ‘weak’ looks at these days in a positive way at all, only that some are ‘mindful’ of them, whereas others are apparently not.

“Paul inserts this mention of days into a larger discussion about food and through the parallelism draws a comparison between the days and the food. This means that our explanation for the days has to correlate to the explanation for food. Given that the topic at hand is the question of eating food offered to idols and that the ‘weak’ represent people with former association with idolatry, it makes sense that the ‘days’ at hand also relate to idol worship. This is not to say that anyone condoned celebrating a pagan holiday, but in a community saturated with foreign religion, their holidays and observances would loom over the believers. Should one modify their behavior on these idolatrous days so as to avoid association with them (i.e., be mindful of the day), or would it be better to ignore their existence all together (i.e., treat every day alike)?”⁸⁴

While Eby has some interesting thoughts about Romans 14, and what the eating involves and what the sacred days could have been, much of it hinges on the suggestion that Romans 14:6a, “The one minding the day, he minds it to the Lord. And the one not minding the day, he does not mind it to the Lord” (LITV), involves no positive dimension to it. If this is a negative, or at least a neutral action, then it would imply that for various Believers, when a pagan day arrived on the calendar, those minding it to the Lord would have to recognize His

⁸⁰ Aaron Eby, *Biblically Kosher: A Messianic Jewish Perspective on Kashrut* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2012), 57.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 58 makes note to a variety of Talmudic references to support not putting a temptation to relapse into forbidden behavior before someone: b.*Avodah Zarah* 6b; b.*Pesachim* 50b-51a; b.*Megillah* 5b; b.*Nedarim* 15a; 81b.

⁸² LS, 872.

⁸³ Eby, 61.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 61-61 goes on to reference some discussion in m.*Avodah Zarah* 1:1-3 on what the Jewish community was to do during the observance of pagan holidays.

supremacy over the pagan principalities and powers. But if the “minding” or “regarding” of the days in Romans 14:6 is a positive action, then this has to give way to them being some sort of Jewish observances, positive and edifying practices for sure, but ones which would have been relatively optional for the Believers.

The proposal for Romans ch. 14, which has been represented here, obviously does have points of agreement with others who have written on this chapter, either in commentary or in various books, within the Messianic movement. The biggest difference by far, though, is that it has been strongly asserted that Romans ch. 14 **is not an abstract essay** to be applied to things today like: the books people read, the movies they watch, playing cards, listening to music, video games, dancing, social drinking, modesty and grooming practices, homeschooling versus public or private school, or any number of other debates. It has instead been strongly asserted that Romans ch. 14, as part of a larger letter, addressed some real First Century circumstances among the Believers in Rome, with Paul needing to issue some admonitions. The proposal that there was unnecessary and inappropriate criticism of the presumed “strong” toward the presumed “weak,” over what the “weak” would not eat at fellowship meals, has the advantage of being something that works to explain the situation, if one holds to the traditional view of Paul considering kosher, the Sabbath, and appointed times to be matters of indifference—*or* as we should think, if the issue is clean (Romans 14:20) yet *koinos*/common meat (Romans 14:14), and optional fast days (Romans 14:5-6) being in view.

When we decide to consider the background issues behind the whole of Romans 14, is it really about things like the kosher dietary laws, Sabbath, and appointed times now being issues entirely of personal choice? Or, does it concern unnecessary divisions the Roman Believers were having at fellowship meals, and how if some Jewish Believers who fast on certain days were not to be criticized over their severity—why would anyone criticize some of them over the much more minor issue of not eating “common” meat? Too many of today’s Christian readers of Romans 14 forget that a mixed grouping of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers, in First Century Rome, is being addressed. They also forget that the religious and social climate of that ancient time and setting is not the same as today.

The contemporary application can very much be seen in the spiritual and social dynamics of today’s Messianic congregations. There are many Messianic Believers who are hyper-sensitive about the type of meat they eat. They will not eat clean meat unless it has a Rabbinical seal of approval on it, whereas at many Messianic congregations or homes more common meat from the local supermarket is served during fellowship times. This is the meat of Biblically clean animals, where the blood has been drained and soaked out with saltwater. But, the opinion of some is that it is too common, and that they will instead eat around. These are largely the same Messianic Believers who will be more prone to observe the many extra-Biblical fast days of Orthodox Jewish tradition, being convicted that it is helpful in their relationship with God.

The circumstances, that Romans 14 really does describe, are encountered in today’s Messianic congregations all the time. How are we to handle them? Like Paul, I would eat at someone’s table where “common,” albeit Biblically clean meat, was being served, without any problem. As a teacher and spiritual mentor to many, just like Paul who served the Lord (cf. Romans 14:14a), I do not have the luxury of staying secluded to myself, in a protected environment where everything has to be certified “kosher”; I have to interact with the world at large. Yet I would be sensitive to the needs of those who are more cautious with what meat they eat, and by extension if they have chosen to separate out meat and dairy products as a part of their honoring *kashrut*. I would not at all look down upon certain Messianics who would not eat meat without a Rabbinical seal of approval, any more than I would look down upon them for not eating on various extra-Biblical fast days. I would pray that in their level of observance that they be blessed for their honoring of the Lord, and that I not unnecessarily offend them for their convictions.⁸⁵

Many of today’s evangelical Christians will be unable to consider this perspective of Romans 14. This is partially because resting on the Sabbath (much less observing the appointed times) has lost most of the significance it had for previous generations, including that of my parents—even if those previous generations of Christians kept a rigid “Sunday Sabbath.” But most significantly, it is because the Christian Church of the

⁸⁵ For a further discussion, consult the author’s article “How Do We Properly Keep Kosher?”, appearing in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

Twenty-First Century is not the mixed body of Jewish and non-Jewish Believers as the *ekklēsia* of the First Century. Yet, Romans 14 does speak profoundly to the circumstances that many of today's Messianic congregations must work through—and so we must take important notice of Paul's word to the Romans, and not be unnecessarily divided over what are ultimately disputable matters. We must learn to uphold the Torah's instruction in Messiah (Romans 3:31), but similarly give grace to those who hold to different applications of it in terms of things like eating and fast days.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Further discussions are available in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* and the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics, and the author's publication *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers*.