

# Romans 14:20-23 Commentary

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

**Greek:** me heneken bromatos **katalue** (2SPAM) to ergon tou theou. panta men kathara, alla kakon to anthropon to dia proskommatis esthionti (PAPMSD)

**Amplified:** You must not, for the sake of food, undo and break down and destroy the work of God! Everything is indeed [ceremonially] clean and pure, but it is wrong for anyone to hurt the conscience of others or to make them fall by what he eats. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** Don't tear apart the work of God over what you eat. Remember, there is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But it is wrong to eat anything if it makes another person stumble. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Surely we shouldn't wish to undo God's work for the sake of a plate of meat! I freely admit that all food is, in itself, harmless, but it can be harmful to the man who eats it with a guilty conscience. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Stop on account of food ruining the work of God. All things indeed are pure. But it is evil to the man who eats so as to be a stumbling block.

**Young's Literal:** for the sake of victuals cast not down the work of God; all things, indeed, are pure, but evil is to the man who is eating through stumbling.

## ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 1:18-3:20

Romans 3:21-5:21

Romans 6:1-8:39

Romans 9:1-11:36

Romans 12:1-16:27

SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " <a href="#">Jensen's Survey of the NT</a> "				

**DO NOT TEAR DOWN** (set aside) THE WORK OF GOD FOR THE SAKE OF FOOD: me eneken bromatos katalue (2SPAM) to ergon tou theou:

- Ep 2:10 1Co 8:9, 10, 11, 12, 13 Ro 14:15 Mt 18:6 1Co 10:31
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Middletown Bible - The Law of Love (Romans 14:1-15:3) - For further help in understanding how to live so as to not cause a brother to stumble, see our paper entitled, "[Guidance: 67 Biblical Tests to Use in Deciding Upon a Course of Action](#)"**

**For the sake of food** - Notice that these are the first words in the Greek text which clearly place the topic of food front and center so to speak!

**For the sake** (heneken) means for this cause, by reason of. Heneken usually introduces the basis (root cause) which shapes or determines the outcome of the main verb, in this case "do not tear down."

**MacArthur** - Paul has in mind the idea of offending a Jew with food that wasn't kosher or offending a Gentile with food that had been offered to idols. But "food" is symbolic of any discretionary thing you might have a right to do. We are not to destroy the work of God over discretionary things. Ro 14:20 tells us that a weak believer is a work of God. Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." God is at work in every Christian, even the weaker brother. We are not to pull down what God is building up. Some people are so proud about their liberation that they don't care if they tear down a weaker brother instead of building him up. The present imperative is used in Romans 14:20 for "**Do not tear down.**" Paul is saying to stop what you're doing. Within that Roman assembly there must have been some liberated brethren who were tearing down what God was trying to build up. So Paul tells them to stop. They were not merely dealing with a man, but a man for whom Christ died--a man who is part of the kingdom and who has the Holy Spirit indwelling him. Now Paul adds that he also is a work of God. Would you take a black marker and scribble on the masterpieces in a museum? Would you cut through a Rembrandt with a knife? Would you crush a Stradivarius over your knee? If you wouldn't do those things, then why would you tear down the work of the ultimate master? ([Building Up One Another Without Offending, Part 2](#))

**Do not tear down** = present imperative + negative ("me" = not) which can be translated "*stop tearing down*" -- the point is that Paul is telling the believers to cease this destructive action which is already occurring in the body of Christ at Rome. Stop despising the weaker brother. Give up your liberty where it would cause a brother to stumble or cause others to speak evil of it (if practiced).

**A T Robertson** - "do not loosen down" (carrying on the metaphor in oikodome = building...The brother for whom Christ died, verse

15. Perhaps with a side-glance at Esau and his mess of pottage."

**Tear down** (2647) (**kataluo** from **kata** = down, prefix intensifying verb **luo** = loosen, dissolve, demolish, untie, undo) means literally to loosen down (unloose) and then to utterly destroy or to overthrow completely. To throw down (as the stones of the Temple - see below). To abrogate or abolish by authoritative action, treating as non-existent.

**Thayer** says "metaphorically, to overthrow, i.e. to render vain, to deprive of success, to bring to naught".

**Kataluo** is used literally of destroying, demolishing or dismantling an edifice (even brick by brick) To take apart. (Mt 24:2, 26:61, 27:40, Mk 13:2, Acts 6:14)

**Kataluo** is used as a figure of speech to describe death as pictured by one tearing down ("folding up") an "earthly tent" (where "tent" is a metaphor for our earthly body - see 2Co 5:1 - see slightly different verb **anulusis** with similar idea in 2Ti 4:6-note). Paul uses **kataluo** to describe the belief that one is saved solely by grace through faith and not law keeping (Gal 2:18).

**Kataluo** is used to signify the end of the effect of something. To deprive of force, to abrogate ("the Law or the Prophets" in Mt 5:17-note). To come to naught.

**Kataluo** is used to describe cessation of what one is doing. BDAG has "*unharness the pack animals*", and so rest, put up for the night or find lodging (Lk 9:12, 19:7, Lxx -- Ge 19:2, 24:23, 25, camped = Ge 26:17, lodging place = Ge 42:27, 43:21 ("inn" = Ge 43:21KJV), Nu 22:8KJV, Nu 25:1 = "remained", a "rest" that cost Israel dearly!; Josh 2:1, 3:1). **Vine** adds that **kataluo** "*signifies to unloose (kata =down, luo = to loose), unyoke, as of horses, etc., hence intransitively, to take up one's quarters, to lodge*"

**Kataluo** was used a ruler who was deposed ("*the ruler of this age is **deposed***").

**Liddell Scott** adds that **kataluo** was used "of governments, to dissolve, break up, put down...to dissolve, dismiss, disband a body...to neglect the watch... to end, bring to an end...to break the peace...to unloose, unyoke, to take it down from the wall...to take up one's quarters, to lodge, (he is my *guest*)... to go and lodge with him... to take one's rest (may I take my rest in the grave)

As **kataluo** is used here in Romans 14, it presents a vivid picture of the potential effect of failing to heed Paul's warnings that relate to interactions between strong and weaker brethren in Christ ("*of the marring of a person's spiritual well-being*" - W E Vine). **One wonders if the modern church truly realizes how serious and how destructive this issue can be in a local body.** To help see the "intensity" of the Greek verb "**kataluo**" see uses in Mt 24:2, Acts 5:38)

**W E Vine** - The verb **kataluo**, "to overthrow," literally means "to loosen down." Here (in Ro 14:20) it is used of the marring of spiritual well-being, the pulling down of the work of God in a brother's life, and is set in contrast to building up (Ro 14:19). The phrase "the work of God" suggests both the individual believer as constituting a part of God's spiritual building, and the effects in him of the spiritual teaching by which the building proceeds. Cp. 1Co 3:17. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#) )

I like how **John MacArthur** pictures it - We would consider it an appalling crime for someone to deface a Rembrandt painting, to shatter a sculpture by Michelangelo, or to smash a Stradivarius violin. How infinitely worse it is to tear down a work of God, a man "for whom Christ died" (Ro 14:15-note). ([MacArthur, J: Romans 9-16. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**Kataluo** - 17x in 16 verses. **NAS** renders **kataluo** = abolish(2), destroy(5), destroyed(1), find lodging(1), guest(1), overthrow(1), overthrown(1), tear down(1), torn down(4). Compare the related derivative **kataluma** (Mk 14:14 Lk 2:7 22:11) the picture being that of the traveler "**loosening**" their belt and sandals as well as unharnessing their animals. The antonym **akatalutos** describes that which cannot be dissolved, figuratively referring to the character of the life of Christ (Heb 7:16-note). Compare **kataluo** to **apollumi** which also means to destroy.

Matthew 5:17-note "Do not think that I came to **abolish** the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.

**Vine** - The Lord Jesus declared that He came "not to destroy [**kataluo**] the law," Matthew 5:17, that is to say, not to lower the standard of divine righteousness, not to abrogate the least of God's requirements, but, on the contrary, in His own life to "magnify the law and make it honorable," Isaiah 42:21. Here a general principle is stated; "those things" = any things, but the particular application in this case, as the context plainly shows, is to the use of the law as a means of justification. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#) )

Matthew 24:2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be **torn down**."

Matthew 26:61 and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to **destroy** the temple of God and to rebuild it in three

days."

Matthew 27:40 and saying, "You who are going to **destroy** the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

Mark 13:2 And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be **torn down**."

**Wuest say that Kataluo** - speaks of a gradual demolition of the Temple, such as took place when the Romans captured Jerusalem AD70, and destroyed the Temple. Our Lord's prediction was fulfilled in exact detail. Only the foundation stones remain of all that magnificence. A double negative appears twice in our Lord's answer, making an emphatic negation.

**A T Robertson** - Jesus fully recognizes their greatness and beauty. The more remarkable will be their complete demolition (kataluthēi), loosened down. Only the foundation stones remain.

**Vincent** - Thrown down (kataluo). Rather, loosened down. A very graphic word, implying gradual demolition.

Mark 14:58 "We heard Him say, 'I will **destroy** this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'"

Mark 15:29 Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ha! You who are going to **destroy** the temple and rebuild it in three days,

Luke 9:12 Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find **lodging** and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place."

Luke 19:7 When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the **guest** of a man who is a sinner."

Luke 21:6 "As for these things which you are looking at, the days will come in which there will not be left one stone upon another which will not be **torn down**."

Acts 5:38 "So in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action is of men, it will be **overthrown**; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to **overthrow** them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

Acts 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will **destroy** this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

Romans 14:20 Do not **tear down** the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense.

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is **torn down** ("folded up" = New Jerusalem Bible), we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Galatians 2:18 "For if I rebuild (return to "law keeping") what I have once **destroyed** (the belief that one could be saved by keeping the law), I prove myself to be a transgressor.

**Marvin Vincent:** Peter, by his Christian profession, had asserted that justification was by faith alone; and by his eating with Gentiles had declared that the Mosaic law was no longer binding upon him. He had thus, figuratively, **destroyed** or **pulled down** the Jewish law as a standard of Christian faith and conduct. By his subsequent refusal to eat with Gentiles he had retracted this declaration, had asserted that the Jewish law was still binding upon Christians, and had thus built again what he had **pulled down**. **Building** and **pulling down** are favorite figures with Paul. (Word Studies in the New Testament 4:106)

**Kataluo** - in the non-apocryphal **Septuagint (LXX)** -

Gen 19:2; 24:23, 25; 26:17; 42:27; 43:21; Num 22:8; 25:1; Josh 2:1; 3:1; Ruth 4:14; 2Sa 17:8; 1 Kgs 19:9; 2 Chr 23:8; Ezra 5:12; Ps 8:2; 89:44; Isa 38:12; Jer 5:7; 7:34; 16:9; 25:24; 37:13; 38:22; 49:16, 31; 51:43; Lam 5:15; Ezek 16:8; 21:30; 23:17; 26:13, 17; Zeph 2:7; Zech 5:4.

Most of the Lxx uses of **kataluo** in the Pentateuch refer to the idea of lodging, but below are a few other representative uses.

Ruth 4:14-note Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed is the LORD who **has** not **left** (Hebrew = shabath =

cause to cease, put an end; Lxx = kataluo) you without a redeemer today, and may his name become famous in Israel.

Ezra 5:12 'But because our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who **destroyed** (Lxx = kataluo) this temple and deported the people to Babylon.

NET Psalm 8:2 From the mouths of children and nursing babies you have ordained praise on account of your adversaries, so that you **might put an end to** (Lxx = kataluo) the vindictive enemy.

Psalm 89:44 You have made his splendor to **cease** And cast his throne to the ground.

Jeremiah 7:34 "Then I will make to **cease** from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin.

Lamentations 5:15 The joy of our hearts has **ceased**; Our dancing has been turned into mourning.

Ezekiel 26:13 (KJV) And I will **cause** the noise of thy songs to **cease**; and the sound of thy harps shall be no more heard.

In context, what is the "**work of God**"? The work would seem to the man or woman saved by grace through faith -- our fellow believers who have been redeemed by the Father, Son, and Spirit, for Paul explains "For **we are His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph 2:10-note)

**Vincent on work of God** - The Christian brother, whose Christian personality is God's work. See 2Co 5:17-note; Eph 2:10-note; Jas 1:18-note. ([Romans 14 - Vincent's Word Studies](#))

Paul had just discussed **peace** and the **building up of one another**. Instead of building up one another they were **tearing down one another** (Wuest "*the Christian character and testimony of a brother Christian*") and Paul says to stop destroying the work of God over non-essential issues like your right to eat whatever you'd like to eat. The stronger brother was tearing down the spiritual well-being of the weaker brother rather than building him up (cp Eph 4:29, Acts 20:32).

**Ray Stedman** - Peace is the work of God. Nothing can produce lasting peace among people, especially those of different cultural backgrounds, except the work of God. It is the Spirit of God who produces peace. So, if for the sake of some right that you have, some liberty you feel, you destroy that peace, you are destroying what God has brought about. Do not do that. It is not worth it. The apostle's second guideline is that you stop exercising your liberty whenever it arrests someone else's learning process. All Christians ought to examine these issues more and more. They ought to investigate for new truth from the Word, in a sense, constantly keeping an open mind on these matters. And they will, if you do not push them too hard. But if someone flaunts his liberty in such a way as to anger people and upset them, it will often harden them in their resistance to change, so that they no longer want to examine the question. That, Paul says, must be the limit to those who indulge in their liberty. Do not push people that far, or press them that hard. Rather, we are to help them understand the reason for our liberty. ([The Right to Yield - Romans 14:13-23](#))

**ALL THINGS INDEED ARE CLEAN BUT THEY ARE EVIL FOR THE MAN WHO EATS AND GIVES OFFENSE: panta men kathara alla kakon to anthropon to dia proskommatos esthionti (PAPMSD):**

- Ro 14:14 Mt 15:11 Acts 10:15 1Ti 4:3-5 Titus 1:15
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Matt 15:11 "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man."

Acts 10:15 And again a voice [came] to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no [longer] consider unholy."

1Tim 4:3 [men] who forbid marriage [and advocate] abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 4:5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

Titus 1:15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled.

In this clause, Paul explains when we should not tear down the work of God.

**All things (pas)** means **all** without exception (obviously with the caveat that if the Bible calls something evil, it is still evil, but foods per se are not evil).

**Denney** on **all things are clean** (or pure) - "This is the principle of the strong, which Paul concedes; the difficulty is to get the enlightened to understand that an abstract principle can never be the rule of Christian conduct. The Christian, of course, admits the principle, but he must act from love. To know that all things are clean, does not (as is often assumed) settle what the Christian has to do in any given case. It does not define his duty, but only makes clear his responsibility. Acknowledging that principle, and looking with love at other Christians, and the effect of any given line of conduct on them, he has to define his duty for himself. All meat is clean, but not all eating." ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Clean** (2513) (**katharos**; Eng = catharsis = purifying, cleansing, a term used in psychology and counseling for a cleansing of the mind or emotions - a "soul cleansing" if you will; cathartic = any substance used to induce purging or to cleanse a wound or infected are in order to make it pure; Cathar = member of a medieval sect which sought the purging of all evil from its members) literally describes that which is free of dirt (without admixture, unmixed) and thus clean. **Katharos** is free from anything that spoils or corrupts, free from admixture or adulteration. Figuratively as used in this passage in Romans 14, **katharos** describes that which is spiritually clean, free from contaminating (soiling) influences of sin (Often the purity is a result of God's work - pure heart in 1Ti 1:5, 2Ti 2:22, clear conscience in 1Ti 3:9, pure water in Heb 10:22). From a biblical standpoint the concept of **clean** is deeply rooted in both the Old and the New Testaments. Under the Levitical laws heavy emphasis was placed on that which was ceremonially clean. Contact with any unclean animal, substance, person, or place was strictly forbidden. By the time Christ came this preoccupation with what was ceremonially clean and unclean had displaced true worship, especially among the Pharisees. The New Testament focuses mainly on an **inward** cleanness (heart, conscience), rather than on an external or ceremonial cleanness. (See **extensive discussion of clean versus unclean in word study on koinos**)

**Gary Hill** - Rabbinical (Jewish) laws imposed many needless ceremonial regulations on Jews, like how they should use cups, plates, etc. But these exaggerated, unjustified ceremonial regulations produced many unnecessary "rules" that supposedly kept someone "ceremonially clean." Anyone even touching what was "unclean" (by rabbinical law) was barred from entering the Temple or synagogue. (A person could even become unclean by standing in the shadow of an unclean object!) In contrast, true purity is living according to God's definition of cleanness (**katharos**), which is revealed through faith ("His in worked persuasion"). Jesus exposed the error of the Pharisees, etc. who emphasized minors at the expense of majors. This error repeats itself today with religious "legalism." This exaggerates the insignificant at the expense of the significant (true purity, **katharos**) – i.e. exalting the less important over what is really important (like faith, hope, love). (See **excellent resource The Discovery Bible to enable deeper Word Studies** = <http://www.helpsbible.org> - see [reviews of "The Discovery Bible"](#))

**William Barclay** notes that **katharos** is "Often it is used of clear water . . . it is regularly used of grain that has been winnowed, of metals that are without alloy and of feelings that are unmixed. . . . in the papyri. It is used of all kinds of things in the sense of 'clean,' 'pure,' 'without blemish.' . . . It is used of a document that is corrected and 'free of errors.' It would be the word for a corrected proof. It is used of 'the conditions of entry to a temple.' 'First, and greatest of all, the worshipers must have their hands and their minds pure (**katharos**)'"

**But - term of contrast.** Always pause and ponder "What is being contrasted, why, etc"

**They are evil** - "One who exercises his freedom at the expense of his brother is doing **evil**, even though the thing he is free to do isn't wrong in and of itself. All things are pure, but they become evil when they cause a brother to stumble, be grieved, or be devastated. That's why Paul says, "If food make my brother to offend, I will eat no meat" (1Cor. 8:13)." ([MacArthur](#))

**Denney** explains it this way - "On the contrary (**but**), sin is involved in the case of the man who eats with offence. Some take this as a warning to the weak; but the whole tone of the passage, which is rather a warning to the strong, and the verse immediately following, which surely continues the meaning and is also addressed to the strong, decide against this. The man who eats with offence is therefore the man by whose eating another is made to stumble. ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Evil** (bad, harm) (2556) (**kakos** - the root "**kak**-" means "inherently bad or harmful") basically means a lack of something so that it is bad or not as it ought to be. It is worthless. **Kakos** is the antithesis of **agathos**, the word Paul used in Ro 14:16.

**Offense** (4348) (**proskomma** [word study] from **prós** = to, against + **kópto** = cut, strike) can describe literal or figurative stumbling. It is something a person trips over. Thus **proskomma** can be an obstacle in the way which if one strikes his foot against he stumbles or falls or figuratively it can describe that over which a soul stumbles i.e. by which is caused to sin or which causes an occasion of apostasy. It is also used figuratively, to describe a cause of falling or an occasion of sinning (Ro 14:13, 20; 1Cor. 8:9; Sept.: Ex. 23:33; 34:12).



**Barclay** writes that "**proskomma**, means 'a barrier', 'a hindrance', 'a road-block'. It is the word that would be used for a tree that has been felled and laid across a road to block it. We must never do or allow anything which would be a road-block on the way to goodness. (William Barclay. New Testament Words)

**Wuest** - The idea is that the man in question here eats such things, the eating of which would be a stumbling block to the weaker brother. (Ibid)

What is **weak** in the context of a "weak brother?" Ro 14:1-2 links **'weak'** with **"faith"** in eating. The person's **"weak"** faith clearly interacts with their conscience, which is not necessarily "weak" (in my opinion) but is "hyper-sensitive," so to speak. For example, in not eating meat sacrificed to idols their faith is weak in the sense that they do not fully understand that with Jesus' sacrifice all things (that are not overtly sinful) have been made clean. And thus eating meat sacrificed to idols was "clean," but the one of weak in faith has not fully grasped their freedom in Christ, the freedom that we have because of His sacrifice, a sacrifice that opened the floodgates of God's grace. Remember that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, so presumably the more they are taught and assimilate in their heart the teachings of the **Gospel of grace**, the more their faith grows and the more their faith grows, especially regarding God's grace, the more likely they are to come to understand that there is absolutely nothing inherently wrong or sinful about eating meat sacrificed to idols. Spiritual growth in grace is not necessarily quick and is certainly not automatic - one needs to be in the Word, the Word in them and the Spirit using that internal word to transform us progressively in Christ-likeness. Peter alludes to this in his closing exhortation/prayer - **"grow"** (present imperative - keep on growing) in the **grace** and **knowledge** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen: (2 Peter 3:18+).

For more discussion of what **weak** means in Romans 14 see the commentary on Romans 14:1

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[Gotquestions](#) adds the issue of what is a weaker brother...

**Question: "What does the Bible say about eating food/meat that has been sacrificed to idols?"**

**Answer:** One of the struggles in the early church concerned meat which had been sacrificed to idols. Debates over what to eat might seem strange to most of us in modern society, but to the first-century believers, it was a subject of great consequence. As the apostles dealt with the issue, they gave instructions on several broader topics with application for today:

Unity within the church. In the early years of the church, as Gentile converts began joining Jewish believers in local fellowships, an issue arose concerning the eating of meat. Greco-Roman society was saturated with idol worship, and it was common for meat sold in the marketplace to have been consecrated as a sacrifice to false gods prior to its sale. The Jews would have nothing to do with such meat, wary of "unclean" food-handling practices and believing that to partake of consecrated meat was to give tacit approval of idol worship—kind of a "second-hand" idolatry. The Gentiles rejected the notion that such meat was tainted and held that they could eat meat sacrificed to idols without endorsing idolatry—they had not actually offered the sacrifice, after all. The matter was becoming a point of contention within the church.

The church in Syrian Antioch, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, struggled with this issue (Acts 15). The Jerusalem Council settled the matter by urging Gentile converts to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols (Acts 15:29). This decision was made not to promote legalism but to keep peace within the church. Since eating meat offered to idols was a divisive issue—carrying the possibility of scandalizing fellow believers—abstinence was expedient. Compliance with the council's directive assured that, at the next church potluck, a Jewish believer could eat the brisket he was served with confidence, knowing it had never been part of a sacrificial cow. And the Gentile believer could not be accused of participating in idol worship.

With its ruling, the Jerusalem Council affirmed the need for deference, or consideration for the scruples of others. The principle is one of self-denial; we should be willing to lay down our personal rights for the sake of maintaining unity in the body of Christ. Spiritual growth takes priority over personal preferences.

Causing a weaker brother to sin. In 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, Paul clarifies the teaching on this subject. First, he says that eating meat offered to an idol is not immoral, because "an idol is nothing at all." An idol is an inanimate object. "Food," he says, "does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do." The meat itself is amoral. However, there is more to consider, namely the brother with a weak conscience. Some believers, especially those with a background of idol worship, were still very sensitive concerning this issue and considered it morally wrong to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Under no circumstances, Paul says, should a believer encourage another believer to violate his conscience. To the pure, all things are

pure (Titus 1:15), but to one with a weak conscience, meat taken from pagan temples was spiritually defiled. It would be better never to eat meat again than to cause a believer to sin against his conscience.

The **“weaker” brother is not someone who simply objects to a certain practice, but one who is in danger of falling into sin.** To illustrate, let’s say there are two 1st-century Christians named Demetrius and Clement. Both are former idolaters, now saved by faith in Christ. Demetrius shuns everything to do with his old way of life, including the meat sold in the marketplace, because, for him, eating such meat would constitute a return to paganism. Clement avoids the temple and refuses to participate in the pagan festivals, but he has no problem eating the meat from the market. Clement understands (correctly) that an idol has no power to corrupt good meat, and, for him, eating such meat is a non-issue. Then one day, as both men are in the marketplace, Demetrius sees Clement eating meat that was sacrificed to idols. Demetrius is horrified, but Clement laughs it off and encourages Demetrius to eat some, too. When Demetrius hesitates, Clement cuts off a piece and hands it to him. Demetrius—emboldened by Clement’s confidence—eats the meat. Biblically, both believers have sinned. Clement sinned by violating the conscience of a fellow believer. Demetrius sinned in that he essentially returned to idolatry—at least, that’s what his conscience is telling him. More importantly, Demetrius is learning how to ignore his conscience—a very dangerous thing to learn.

**The principle here is that the conscience of a weaker Christian is more important than individual freedom.** Doing something “permitted” should never hinder the spiritual health of someone else.

Maintaining a pure testimony. In 1 Corinthians 10:25-32, Paul again emphasizes the believer’s liberty and what should limit that liberty. If you buy meat for your own use, don’t inquire where it came from; it doesn’t really matter whether it was sacrificed to an idol or not. “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). However, if you are invited to dinner and someone there says, “This meat was offered to idols,” then graciously refrain from eating. Since your associate obviously considers the meat to be “tainted” by the idols, do not eat it for his conscience’s sake—even though your own conscience is fine. The Christian glorifies God when he limits his freedom for the spiritual benefit of others.

Compromise with the world. In the letter to the church of Thyatira, Jesus rebukes them for tolerating a prophetess who “misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols” (Revelation 2:20). This is a different situation from what Paul was dealing with in Corinth. It seems that members of the church of Thyatira were partaking of the pagan “love feasts,” celebrated with gross immorality and feasting. These believers were not simply buying meat in the marketplace; they were actually attending idolatrous festivals and joining in the sin of the idolaters. (See Rev 2:14 - “stumbling block” - for a similar rebuke of the church of Pergamos.)

Here is a summary of the Bible’s teaching on eating meat sacrificed to idols:

Eating meat offered to an idol is not inherently wrong. Meat is not “defiled” because it was taken from a pagan sacrifice. God “richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment” (1 Timothy 6:17). However, some Christians consider meat offered to an idol to be defiled, and for them it is, since they must follow their conscience. Their scruples should be respected by other Christians with a stronger conscience. Love dictates that all Christians make allowances for their weaker brothers.

There are certain cultures today where idolatry is still practiced and where the specifics of the Bible’s teaching about sacrificial meat are still timely. For the rest of us, here are the principles which should govern our participation in the “gray areas” of life:

- 1) Having the “right” to do something does not mean we are free to do it in every circumstance, regardless of its effects on others.
- 2) The believer’s liberty in Christ can and should be voluntarily limited in order not to cause a weaker brother to sin by violating his conscience. Liberty is limited in love.
- 3) Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of love may require a believer to give up his personal “right” to a thing. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1).
- 4) We should avoid anything that would make a weak Christian think less of his faith or that would make an unsaved person feel more at ease in his sin. ([Gotquestions](#))

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**Steven Cole** - I’ve told you before about my college physics professor who would begin every class by explaining his teaching method. He would say, “Class, I’m going to tell you what I’m going to tell you. Then I’m going to tell you. Then I’ll tell you what I told you. Then I’ll review.” He knew that repetition is the key to teaching well. The apostle Paul was a master teacher, and so he often



follows the method of my physics professor. The verses that we're going to look at today don't say much that is new. Instead, they say one more time what Paul has already said. But since the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to repeat these concepts, rather than tuning out, we need to tune in. Apparently these are things that we may be prone to forget and so we need to hear them again.

The content is arranged in a loose chiasmic (ABCC'B'A') format (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], p. 850, points this out, although I've expanded his analysis somewhat).

A: Ro 14:5: Be fully convinced in your own mind.

B: Ro 14:13: Don't put a stumbling block in your brother's way.

C: Ro 14:14: Nothing (no food) is unclean.

D: Ro 14:15: Do not destroy your brother.

E: Ro 14:16: Do not let your good (liberty) be spoken of as evil.

F: Ro 14:17: The kingdom of God is ... peace.

F': Ro 14:19: Pursue the things that make for peace.

E': Ro 14:20: Your clean food becomes evil if you hurt a brother.

D': Ro 14:20: Do not tear down the work of God.

C': Ro 14:20: All things indeed are clean.

B': Ro 14:21: Don't do anything by which your brother stumbles.

A': Ro 14:22: Have your own conviction before God.

The practical heart of the passage is Ro 14:17, 19: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.... So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." There is a textual variant of one letter in verse 19 that changes the subjunctive, "let us pursue" (old NASB) into the indicative, "we pursue" (updated NASB). But most commentators argue that the context demands the subjunctive. In other words, Paul is urging us not to put our rights or minor issues in place of the main issue, which is God's kingdom and the relationships that we are to promote as members of that kingdom. I'd like to go over Paul's "review" by pointing out four things:

As Christians, we should pursue godly relationships, preserve godly priorities, develop godly convictions, and maintain a good conscience.

### **1. As Christians, we should pursue godly relationships (Ro 14:19).**

Romans 14:19: "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." In the context, Paul is mainly addressing the need for Gentile and Jewish believers to get along so that the church would not be fragmented along racial lines. The Jewish believers tended to cling to the Law of Moses, including its regulations about clean and unclean foods. It was difficult for them to let those things go. But the Gentile believers, coming to Christ out of paganism, didn't understand why there was all the fuss over food. They had no problem eating a steak that had been offered to an idol in the pagan temple before it showed up at the meat market. So the Gentile Christians tended to look with contempt on the Jewish believers for being legalistic, whereas the Jews tended to judge the Gentiles for being licentious.

The problem had two ramifications. First, if a Jewish Christian saw a Gentile Christian eating what to the Jew was "defiled" meat, it could lead to a break in their relationship. The Jew might think, "I'm not going to have anything to do with a so-called Christian who is so licentious!" Or, the Gentile believer might think, "I'm not going to be friends with a person who is hung up over such legalism. He needs to grow up!" And so their personal relationship would be ruptured.

In a worst case scenario, the entire church could be divided along the lines of the meat eater faction and the vegetarian or kosher meat only faction. But for Paul, it was central to the very concept of the church that it was composed of "Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman," with Christ as "all and in all" (Col. 3:11). To divide over secondary matters would send the wrong message about the power of the gospel and the testimony of Christ to the watching world.

By the way, this is one reason that I refuse to divide up the church into a "traditional" (sometimes called, "classic") service and a "contemporary" service. This effectively divides a church along age lines. The older folks were raised on the traditional hymns, accompanied by the organ and piano. It warms their hearts to sing the familiar old hymns. So they all flock to the traditional service. Younger believers who were not raised in the church can't relate to the old hymns. They sound archaic to them. So they flock to the service with newer music. And so the church is divided.

But I think that God wants the church to be like a family, where there are grandparents, parents, and grandkids all coming together to enjoy one another's company and learn from each other. The younger people can benefit by learning some of the great hymns. Granted, some of those old hymns need to be put to rest, but some of them need to be passed on to the next generation. Perhaps the tunes need to be updated, but the words are rich and spiritually nourishing. And the older people should rejoice when they see young people coming to Christ and let their youthful zeal warm their hearts afresh with the power of the gospel. So we need to yield to each other and be committed to preserving "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). But especially the stronger, more mature believers need to yield their rights to the younger saints. That is the thrust of Romans 14:13-23.

The second aspect of the problem was that if a Jewish Christian saw a Gentile Christian eating "defiled" meat and because of this the Jewish Christian went against his conscience and ate the same meat, he would be sinning. Also, the Gentile Christian would be sinning by influencing his weaker brother to violate his conscience. Since sin always has devastating consequences, Paul does not want either side to fall into sin.

So Paul gives this exhortation (Ro 14:19): "So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." "Pursue" is not a passive concept. You don't pursue something accidentally. It takes deliberate effort and persistence. "Pursue" is the same word that is sometimes translated "persecute." We saw the word used in the two senses in Romans 12:13-14, where Paul said (literally), "pursuing hospitality," and then, "Bless those who persecute you." We are to go after hospitality with the same determination that a persecutor goes after his victim. Here (Ro 14:19) we should determine to go after the things that make for peace and the building up of one another. We aren't to be laid back about it, thinking, "Well, if it happens, that's cool!" Rather, we are to go after these things with determined zeal.

A mother with a scout troop said to her son, "I will not take any of you to the zoo if you don't forgive Billy for stealing your candy bar."

"But Billy doesn't want to be forgiven," her son complained. "He won't even listen."

"Then make him," his irate mother demanded.

Suddenly, her son chased Billy, knocked him to the ground, sat on him, and yelled, "I forgive you for stealing my candy bar, but I'd sure find it easier to forget if you'd wipe the chocolate off your face!" (Josephine Ligon, "Your Daffodils are Pretty," Christianity Today [3/2/1979], p. 18)

Well, we aren't to be that aggressive in pursuing peace, but we are to pursue it! Do you do this? Do you do all that you can to try to make peace with your brother or sister in Christ when you're at odds? Before you speak, do you pause to consider, "What will build him (or her) up in Christ?" As Paul says (Eph. 4:29), "Let no unwholesome [lit., rotten] word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." What about with your mate? If husbands and wives would pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another, the air in our homes would be filled with the fragrant peace of Christ!

You may be thinking, "Yeah, but if you only knew how rude he was to me!" "If you had heard what he said to me!" "If you knew how she nags me and snaps at me!" "Don't I have a right to be treated with some kindness and love?"

But the Bible doesn't give us those kinds of loopholes: "Pursue peace and building up one another, except when you've been treated wrongly!" "Go after peace and building up the other person except when he deserves the silent treatment!"

Maybe you're thinking, "Am I just supposed to be a doormat? Am I just supposed to absorb his abusive speech? If I don't fight back, I'll get trampled!" The biblical answer is that sometimes you are supposed to just absorb it. I'm not talking about physical abuse, but about times when someone is rude or mean or insensitive. At other times, especially in marriage, you should try to talk about it in a way that will not lead to more conflict. Approach it from the standpoint of, "I love you and I want our relationship to be all that God wants it to be. But when you say such and such or you treat me like that, it makes me want to pull away from you. So could we communicate in a way that builds up one another?" Here are God's inspired commands (1Pet. 3:8-12):

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For, 'The one who desires life, to live and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.'

In other words, if you seek peace and pursue it when you're wronged, the Lord notices. He will listen to your prayers. He will take up your cause against those who have wronged you. But your job is to pursue peace and the things that build up the other person. This does not mean "peace at any cost," because often that does not build up the other person. If the other person is sinning or is embracing seriously wrong doctrine, you are not building him up to ignore his behavior. But, our aim should be to pursue godly

relationships. Love for one another is the second greatest command in God's kingdom.

## 2. As Christians, we should preserve godly priorities (Ro 14:20-21).

Romans 14:20-21: "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."

Paul is repeating here that the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking (Ro 14:17). Also, he is repeating that all foods are clean (Ro 14:14), as Jesus said (Mark 7:18-23). But that doesn't mean that the stronger brother can ignore the scruples of his weaker brother. The priority is not our right to eat or drink whatever we want. The priority is the work of God, His kingdom. If you ignore that and pursue your "rights" to the disregard of your weaker brother, your food or drink becomes evil.

The phrase at the end of Ro 14:20 is ambiguous. It is literally, **"but they are evil for the man who eats with offense"** Some understand this to refer to the weaker brother, who sins by eating meat against his conscience. But in the context, it refers to the stronger brother who eats and causes his weaker brother to stumble. Eating whatever you want or drinking a glass of wine or a beer is not sin in and of itself. **But if a weaker brother sees you doing what you're at liberty to do and he is led to violate his conscience by doing the same, your eating and drinking becomes sin for you.** As Paul said (Ro 14:15), **"you are no longer walking according to love."**

The phrase **"the work of God"** is unusual. It's only found one other place in the New Testament (John 6:29), and then with a different sense. Scholars are divided here over whether it refers to tearing down an **individual Christian** or to damaging **the church**. In the context, Paul has been emphasizing that we are not to do anything to cause a brother to stumble, so it must refer on a primary level to the **individual**. But hurting a brother can also lead to damaging the entire church. His friends will take up his cause and your friends take up your cause, and soon the church is at war, leading to divisions over secondary matters. It's frightening to realize that by our selfish behavior, we can damage a brother who is a work of God, a new creation in Christ (Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:17). And our selfishness could ultimately damage the church for which Christ died (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

So Paul's point in these verses is that if we selfishly put our rights above a brother's spiritual growth and above God's kingdom, relationships will suffer and God's work will be damaged. People will speak evil of what for us is a good thing (Ro 14:16). And so we need to preserve the godly priority of His kingdom, which focuses on our relationship with Him and with others, rather than on our "rights" with regard to secondary issues. ([One More Time Romans 14:19-23](#))

**Romans 14:21** It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or [*to do anything*] by which your brother stumbles. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** kalon to me phagein (AAN) krea mede piein (AAN) oionon mede en o o adelphos sou proskoptei (3SPA1)

**Amplified:** The right thing is to eat no meat or drink no wine [at all], or [do anything else] if it makes your brother stumble or hurts his conscience or offends or weakens him. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, **or is offended, or is made weak.** (See [note below](#) on **phrase in bold**)

**NLT:** Don't eat meat or drink wine or do anything else if it might cause another Christian to stumble. [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

**Phillips:** We should be willing to be both vegetarians and teetotallers if by doing otherwise we should impede a brother's progress in faith. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor even anything by which your brother stumbles.

**Young's Literal:** Right it is not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything in which thy brother doth stumble, or is made to fall, or is weak.

**IT IS GOOD NOT TO EAT MEAT OR TO DRINK WINE, OR TO DO ANYTHINGBY WHICH YOUR BROTHER STUMBLES:** kalon to me phagein (AAN) krea mede piein (AAN) oionon mede en o o adelphos sou proskoptei (3SPA1):

- Ro 14:13; Malachi 2:8; Matthew 16:23; 18:7, 8, 9, 10; Luke 17:1,2; Philippians 1:10; Hebrews 12:13; Revelation 2:14
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Denney** - A maxim for the strong. Abstinence in order that others may not be made to stumble is morally noble. [Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#)

It is a thousand times better to refrain from meat or wine or anything else than to offend a brother or cause him to decline spiritually. Giving up our legitimate rights is a small price to pay for the care of one who is weak.

**Good** (2570) (**kalos**) describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good, providing some special or superior benefit (eg, Mark 14:6). **Kalos** is good with emphasis on that which is beautiful, handsome, excellent, surpassing, precious, commendable, admirable. **Kalos** describes that which is inherently excellent or intrinsically good and/or that which provides some special or superior benefit. In context the sense is that it is of superior benefit to your brother or sister in Christ if you do not do something (otherwise "neutral" spiritually speaking) that would "trip up" your brethren.

**Vincent - to eat flesh...to drink wine** - "The two points of the weak brother's special scruple (an ethical consideration or principle that inhibits action)."

**Or to do anything** - This phrase is added by virtually all the Bible translations as the translators clearly see that intent from the context of the passage. Eating and drinking would be the most common situations in daily life in the first century, but in modern society there might be a number of things that are in themselves not sinful but which if seen by a weaker brother might cause that weaker brother to stumble. For example, without getting too specific, I think of some TV shows that my pastors love to watch, but which frankly I think are gross and defiling. What might that do to me? I might reason well if they watch those shows, I can watch \_\_\_\_\_ show, but it is a show that I would not usually watch. My conscience would send up a "flare" saying "This is not a good show for you to watch!" But I now feel vindicated (so to speak) in watching it. So I watch it and all the while my conscience is telling me not to watch it because it has scenes that should not enter my "eye gate" and settle in my mind, because these scenes (and I not talking R-rated or X-rated!) will defile me, incite my rotten fallen flesh and will cause me potentially to stumble into some sin. Does that make sense?

Although any given practice is permissible for a Christian (if not precluded by Scripture, in which case he should abstain from it, even though he would not forfeit his salvation by doing it), he should be willing to give it up if it might injure the faith or testimony of a fellow Christian. There are a number of other Biblical guidelines to help us in making informed decisions about doubtful things (see Ro 14:23).

**Stumbles** (4350) (**proskopto** from **prós** = to, against + **kópto** = cut, strike) means literally to strike against and so to dash against something as one's foot against a stone (Ro 9:32, 1Pe 2:8). **Proskopto** in its literal use pictures a traveler who bumps against an obstacle and is caused to stumble. Most of the NT uses of **proskopto** describe a figurative stumbling, as in the use in Romans 9:32 where Paul describes Israel's stumbling in a spiritual sense because they missed Jesus Who is "STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE." (Ro 9:33) And so the nation as a whole "stumbled over the stumbling stone!"

**THOUGHT** - Dear reader content in practicing your religion, have you like the Jews stumbled over the "Stumbling Stone?" In other words, you have a "religion" but you do not really have a "relationship" with the Stone, Christ Jesus. There are countless numbers of individuals in churches today who have deceived themselves into having a "relationship" when in fact all they have is a "religion," and if there is no repentance and genuine belief in the Stone, they will lose their life, eternally! Have you truly placed your faith ("leaned your entire weight on Jesus" so to speak) in Jesus the Stone, so that He is the Rock on which you can securely stand now and forever and not the Stone over which one day you will "stumble" into a Christ-less eternity (cf 1 Pet 2:8+)? And remember faith that saves is always associated with a "change of direction" (repentance) in one's life. Note that this change of *direction* is not *perfection*, for we still harbor the fallen flesh and fall into sin daily (thus the need to confess daily - "confess" is present tense in 1 John 1:9!) Perhaps you might want to meditate on 2 Cor 13:5+. Faith alone saves, but the faith that truly saves is never alone (cf Eph 2:8-9 with Eph 2:10, James 2:14-26+).

**Proskopto** in the context of Romans 14:21 means to we must not encourage our brother to perform acts or actions they can only perform in defiance of their conscience, which would figuratively be causing them to **stumble**.

**Prokopto** - 8x in 8v - slammed against(1), strike(2), stumble(2), stumbled over(1), stumbles(2). Mt. 4:6; Mt. 7:27; Lk. 4:11; Jn. 11:9; Jn. 11:10; Ro 9:32; Ro 14:21; 1 Pet. 2:8

A **Septuagint** use of the related noun **proskomma** (derived from **proskopto**) helps understand what it means to predispose a brother to stumbling. Moses writes "They shall not live in your land, because they will make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it

will surely be a snare (Lxx = [proskomma](#)) to you." (Ex 23:33) Clearly Moses' warning is that association with the idolatrous/immoral Canaanites would "stir up" or "arouse" the old sin nature in the Hebrews and they would be enticed into the same abominations (which is exactly what happened to the nation when they failed to totally eradicate the Canaanites!). **BDAG** notes that one sense of [proskomma](#) is a "cause for making a misstep."

**Matthew Henry** has some comments on "**stumbling**" in his notes on John 11:9-10 ("if anyone walks in the night, he **stumbles**") that might help you "flesh out" what "stumbling" entails or looks like in real life...

If a man walk in the night, he stumbles; that is, If a man walk in the way of his heart, and the sight of his eyes, and according to the course of this world,-if he consult his own carnal reasonings more than the will and glory of God,-he falls into temptations and snares, is liable to great uneasiness and frightful apprehensions, trembles at the shaking of a leaf, and flees when none pursues; while an upright man laughs at the shaking of the spear, and stands undaunted when ten thousand invade. See Isaiah 33:14-16, he stumbles, because there is no light in him, for light in us is that to our moral actions which light about us is to our natural actions. He has not a good principle within; he is not sincere; his eye is evil. Thus Christ not only justifies his purpose of going into Judea, but encourages his disciples to go along with him, and fear no evil. (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible - John 11:9).

**ILLUSTRATION** - During the war when vessels had to be convoyed across the Atlantic because of the U-boats, all ships had to proceed at the speed of the slowest. This is something of what Paul has in mind here. The strong brother could stride ahead, but his love will not permit it. The shepherd must pace the flock to accommodate the weakest lamb. The Christian must regulate his freedom to take into account the feeble conscience of a weaker brother or sister. We must actively pursue those things that make for peace and mutual building up of one another. This is never easy, but it is the way of love.

**Technical Note** on KJV's addition of **or is offended, or is made weak**. - A large number of manuscripts, some of them quite important (i(46vid a(2 )B D F G Y 0209 33 1881 Ū lat sa), read "**or to be offended or to be made weak**" after "to stumble." The shorter reading "to stumble" is found only in Alexandrian MSS (a\* A C 048 81 945 1506 1739 pc bo). Although external evidence favors inclusion, internal evidence points to a scribal expansion, perhaps reminiscent of 1 Cor 8:11-13. The shorter reading is therefore preferred. (NET Note)

[Gotquestions addresses stumbling](#)

**Question: "What does it mean that we are not to cause others to stumble?"**

**Answer:** The concept of not causing others to stumble is found in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8. **In these chapters, Paul talks about personal convictions and our responsibility to our fellow believers in Christ.** He highlights several topics over which believers have disagreements—food, drink, and sacred days. In Paul's time, the disagreements were mostly concerning Jewish law versus the new freedom found in Christ. We experience much the same type of disagreements today, even over the same topics, to which we could add things like body piercings, tattoos, clothing style, movies, video games, books, and alcohol/tobacco. These are all areas for which the Bible does not provide specific instruction and yet are areas in which many feel conviction. **Some of these things can lead to worldliness, sin, impurity or even just become an obsession/idol. But, on the flip side, legalism and avoidance of anything the world has to offer can also become an idol.**

Paul tells the Romans, "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way . . . So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:12-13, 22-23). Paul is telling us to enjoy our freedom in Christ, but along with that freedom comes the responsibility to protect those around us who have doubts about that freedom.

The example of alcohol is relevant here. Alcohol is not inherently evil, and the biblical prohibitions are not against drinking but against drunkenness. But someone who tends toward alcoholism very often knows he must not drink at all and believes others shouldn't drink, either, even in moderation. If a Christian has a friend who is convinced drinking is wrong, then drinking around that person may cause him/her to "stumble" or trip up. The Greek word for "stumble" gives the sense of stubbing one's toe. As Christians, we are forbidden to do anything that may cause our brothers and sisters in Christ to stub their toe, spiritually speaking. Stubbing the toe can cause a person to fall in the spiritual sense, or to damage or weaken his faith. In all things, the important lesson is to "make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

In this way, God is glorified, believers are edified, and the world sees in us “righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). ([Gotquestions](#))

**Romans 14:22** The [faith which](#) you [have](#), [have](#) as your [own conviction before God](#). [Happy](#) is he who does not [condemn himself](#) in [what](#) he [approves](#). ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** su pistin (en) echeis (2SPA1) kata seauton eche (2SPAM) enopion tou theou. makarios o me krinon (PAPMSN) heauton en o dokimazei (3SPA1)

**Amplified:** Your personal convictions [on such matters]—exercise [them] as in God's presence, keeping them to yourself [striving only to know the truth and obey His will]. Blessed (happy, to be envied) is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves [who does not convict himself by what he chooses to do]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by doing something they know is all right. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Your personal convictions are a matter of faith between yourself and God, and you are happy if you have no qualms about what you allow yourself to eat. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** As for you, the faith which you have, be having to yourself in the sight of God. Spiritually prosperous is the one who does not judge himself in that which he has tested with a view to approving it should it meet specifications and, having found that it does, has placed his approval upon it. (

**Young's Literal:** Thou hast faith! to thyself have it before God; happy is he who is not judging himself in what he doth approve,

**THE FAITH WHICH YOU HAVE, HAVE AS YOUR OWN CONVICTION BEFORE GOD:** su pistin (en) echeis (2SPA1) kata seauton eche (2SPAM) enopion tou theou:

- Ro 14:2, 5, 14, 23. Gal 6:1. James 3:13
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**NLT** paraphrases this passage as "You may have the faith to believe that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing, but keep it between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by doing something they know is all right."

**Amplified:** Your personal convictions [on such matters]—exercise [them] as in God's presence, keeping them to yourself [striving only to know the truth and obey His will]. Blessed (happy, to be envied) is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves [who does not convict himself by what he chooses to do].

**Warren Wiersbe** - Christians must not force their opinions on others (Ro 14:22-23) There are certain truths that all Christians must accept because they are the foundation for the faith. But areas of honest disagreement must not be made a test of fellowship. If you have a sincere conviction from God about a matter, keep it to yourself and do not try to force everybody else to accept it. No Christian can "borrow" another Christian's convictions and be honest in his Christian life. Unless he can hold them and practice them "by faith," he is sinning. Even if a person's convictions are immature, he must never violate his conscience. This would do great damage to his spiritual life. For example, the mature Christian knows that an idol is nothing. But a young Christian, just converted out of pagan idolatry, would still have fears about idols. If the strong believer forced the new Christian to eat meat sacrificed to an idol, the younger Christian would experience problems in his conscience that would only further weaken it (see 1Cor 8–9). **Conscience is strengthened by knowledge. But knowledge must be balanced by love; otherwise it tears down instead of building up.** The truth that "all foods are clean" (Ro 14:14, 20) will not of itself make a Christian grow. When this truth is taught in an atmosphere of love, then the younger Christian can grow and develop a strong conscience. Believers may hold different convictions about many matters, but they must hold them in love. ([Bible Exposition Commentary](#))

**Although conscience is not mentioned in this verse specifically, clearly the verse does bring the conscience into focus, for our conscience serves as our "balancing scale" to aid us in determining what is right and what is wrong.**



**Conscience** (4893) (**suneidesis** from **sun** = with + **eido** = know) literally means a "*knowing with*", a co-knowledge with oneself or a being of one's own witness in the sense that one's own conscience "takes the stand" as the chief witness, testifying either to one's innocence or guilt. It describes the witness borne to one's conduct by that faculty by which we apprehend the will of God.

**Conscience** is not an infallible guide, but it is wrong to go against one's own conscience. We ought to never sin against our conscience, no matter who pressures us to do so.

**Webster's 1828** defines "**conscience**" as "The faculty, power, or inward principle which decides as to the character of one's own actions, purposes, and affections, warning against and condemning that which is wrong, and approving and prompting to that which is right; the moral faculty passing judgment on one's self; the moral sense."

- American Tract Society [Conscience](#)
- Bridgeway Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Baker Evangelical Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Charles Buck Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Easton's Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Holman Bible Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible [Conscience](#)
- Hastings' Dictionary of the NT [Conscience](#)
- Vines' Expository Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Webster Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- Watson's Theological Dictionary [Conscience](#)
- 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica [Conscience](#)
- International Standard Bible Encyclopedia [Conscience](#)
- McClintock and Strong's Bible Encyclopedia [Conscience \(2\)](#) [Conscience](#)
- Nave Topical Bible [Conscience](#)
- Torrey Topical Textbook [Conscience](#)
- [Conscience](#) by William Arnot in his discussion of Proverbs 28:1
- [Conscience: The Voice of God Within](#) by Timothy Lin

**Faith** (4102)(**pistis**) - see more discussion of **faith** in Paul's use in Ro 14:23 below.

**Denney** - The verse is still addressed to the strong. The **faith** he has is the enlightened faith which enables him to see that all things are clean; such faith does not lose its value though it is not flaunted in reckless action. ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Spurgeon** - Do you feel quite sure upon such matters? Keep it within thine own bosom, but do not worry others with it.

**Your own conviction** - The NAS paraphrases the Greek which more literally reads "to thyself" or "to yourself". This emphasizes personal responsibility.

**Your own conviction** (to yourself) (4572) (**seautou** from **sé** = thee + **autos** = self) is a reflexive pronoun. The idea of "reflexive" is that it expresses action directed or turned back on oneself.

**Before God** - The idea is in His very presence and recalls a similar reminder (or motivator) in Ro 14:10, the judgment seat of God.

**Denney** - (Paul) reminds the strong once more (Romans 14:10) that the fullest freedom must be balanced by the fullest sense of responsibility to God. ([Ibid](#))

Don't try to change your brother who has more rigid scruples. I may have complete liberty to partake of every kind of food, knowing that God gave it to be received with thanksgiving. But I should not needlessly flaunt that liberty before those who are weak. It is better to exercise that liberty in private, when no one could possibly be offended.

Two ideas are included in this phrase. The first is, "**Keep it private**" — that is, do not parade it or make it a point to show that you are above the weak scruples of your brothers; and the second is that this faith or firm conviction is not to be renounced but retained, for it is founded on the truth.

**Ray Stedman** - So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. {Ro 14:22NIV} Unfortunately, that is not a very good translation. It suggests that you are to keep quiet about your liberties, that you do not say anything to anybody, that you keep it between yourself and God. That really is not what Paul is saying. What he is saying is, "if you have faith, have it between yourself and God." That is, let God and God's Word be the basis for your faith, and nothing else. Be sure that what you are doing is

not because of pride on your part, because you want to show off how free you are -- you are doing this because God has freed you by his Word. And, Paul says, if you do that, "Blessed..." Ro 14:22b NIV. ([The Right to Yield - Romans 14:13-23](#))

Paul does not require the strong to abandon their convictions about things not condemned by the law. Instead he encourages them to have faith about such issues. Although mature believers may refrain from eating meat in front of weaker believers, they can still believe that Christ gives them the freedom to eat all types of food (Ro 14:2) privately before Him (see Ro 14:5).

Before God: that is, in the sight of God. Since God sees and recognizes it, this conviction need not be displayed in front of men. It is to be cherished in our hearts and used in a way that is acceptable to God. Being right in itself, it is to be piously and not ostentatiously paraded and employed.

**HAPPY IS HE WHO DOES NOT CONDEMN HIMSELF IN WHAT HE APPROVES; makarios o me krinon (PAPMSN) heauton en o dokimazei (3SPA1):**

- **Happy** - Ro 7:15, 24. Acts 24:16. 2Co 1:12. 1Jn 3:21
- **Condemn himself** - 2Sa 24:10. Job 9:20. Mt 12:36, 37. 1Ti 3:7. James 3:2
- **Approves** Ro 2:18
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Denney** - It is a rare felicity (this is always what **makarios** denotes) to have a conscience untroubled by scruples—in Paul's words, not to judge one's self in the matter which one approves (by his own practice): and he who has this felicity should ask no more. In particular, he should not run the risk of injuring a brother's conscience, merely for the sake of exercising in a special way the spiritual freedom which he has the happiness to possess—whether he exercises it in that way or not. ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Happy** ([3107](#)) (**makarios** [word study]) (cf Paul's 2 other uses in Romans: Ro 4:7, Ro 4:8, cf Jas 1:25, 1Pe 3:14, 1Pe 4:14) which is usually translated "**blessed**".

**Blessed** describes the state of being fully satisfied no matter the circumstances.

**Happy** is probably not the best English word to use to translate **makarios** because as common vernacular use of 'happy' conveys the picture of the person with good 'luck' as the English word is derived from the root "hap" which means luck as a favorable circumstance. God is sovereign over all events at all times in all places and thus from a divine practical perspective there is no such thing as "chance" or "luck" that the world speaks of.

**Makarios** is the one who is in the world yet independent of the world because his or her satisfaction comes from God and is not dependent on favorable circumstances. Thus one can be "**makarios**" and yet be in miserable circumstances as Jesus clearly illustrates - "**Blessed** (makarios) are you when they insult you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." (Mt 5:11,12).

So "blessed are you" does not mean "untroubled are you" or "healthy are you" or "admired are you" or "prosperous are you."

It means "between you and God all is well." You are deeply secure, profoundly content, happy in God even if you are weeping over the pain of a struck body, a perplexed mind, or a heartbreaking relationship.

**Vincent** on **does not condemn himself** - Who, in settled conviction of the rightness of his action, subjects himself to no self-judgment after it.

**Condemn** ([2919](#)) (**krino**) primarily signifies to distinguish, separate or discriminate and then, to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, without necessarily passing an adverse sentence, though this is usually involved. **Krino** means to sift out and analyze evidence. Passing judgment, by implication, means condemning.

**What he approves** - This chapter this man examines something and determines it is permissible and his conscience does not judge him as "off base" or out of line. He is blessed because he has a **clear conscience** (2Ti 1:3, Acts 24:1) regarding whatever it was he tested and then approved of. A person is blessed if he can do what he thinks is right without feeling guilty.

**Approves** ([1381](#)) (**dokimazo** from **dokimos** = tested, proved or approved, tried as metals by fire and thus purified from **dechomai** = to accept, receive) means to assay, to test, to prove, to put to the test, to make a trial of, to verify, to discern to approve. **Dokimazo** involves not only testing but determining the genuineness or value of an event or object. That which has been tested is demonstrated to be genuine and trustworthy.

Here are the 22 uses of **dokimazo** in the NT -

Lk. 12:56; 14:19; Rom. 1:28; 2:18; 12:2; 14:22; 1 Co. 3:13; 11:28; 16:3; 2 Co. 8:8, 22; 13:5; Gal. 6:4; Eph. 5:10; Phil. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:4; 5:21; 1 Tim. 3:10; 1 Pet. 1:7; 1 Jn. 4:1

**Study some the other uses in context to help understand this great Greek word.** In the NAS, dokimazo is translated as - analyze(2), approve(3), approved(1), approves(1), examine(4), examines(1), prove(1), proving(1), see fit(1), test(2), tested(3), try(1), trying to learn(1).

**Dokimazo** was used in classic Greek to describe the assaying of precious metals (especially gold or silver coins), usually by fire, to prove the whether they were authentic and whether they measured up to the stated worth. That which endures the test was called **dokimos** and that which fails is called **adokimos**.

**Dokimazo** means to put to the test for the purpose of approving, and finding that the person tested meets the specifications prescribed, to put one's approval upon him. For example Paul writes that unregenerate mankind "did not **approve** (dokimazo) of having God in knowledge, God gave them up to a disapproved mind, to do the things not seemly. (Young's literal translation see **note** Romans 1:28)

In this incredible verse in Romans 1, fallen men presumptuously put God to the test for the purpose of approving Him to see He if He would meet the specifications which they laid down for a God Who would be to their liking! But sinful man did not stop there, for finding that He did not meet their specifications, they refused to **approve** (dokimazo) Him as the God to be worshipped or to be kept in its knowledge! They tested the infinitely precious God as they would a mere coin, and chose to turn aside from Him!

**Dokimazo** means to make a critical examination of something to determine its genuineness. **Dokimazo** was used in a manuscript of 140AD which contains a plea for the exemption of physicians, and especially of those who have **passed the examination** (dokimazo). **Dokimazo** was thus used as a technical expression referring to the action of an examining board putting its approval upon those who had successfully passed the examinations for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. **Dokimazo** was also used to describe the passing of a candidate as fit for election to public office.

**Charles Spurgeon**, at the height of his fame, was one day walking down the street and saw a sign which read, "We sell the cigar that Charles Spurgeon smokes"

Upon seeing this sign **Spurgeon** gave up the habit. He came to see that what was for him a freedom might cause others to stumble. "Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves."

**Ray Stedman** - If you have really based it on that, then your action will be one in which your conscience is free. You will not feel guilty and troubled as to whether you are acting beyond what the Word of God really says. You will be happy, free, blessed. But, if you do not, if you really have not settled this on the basis of Scripture, but are acting only because you want to indulge yourself; if you like this thing but you still feel a bit troubled by it; if you act then, you are going to be condemned by your conscience. And if you are condemned by your conscience, you will feel guilty. And if you act because you feel guilty, you are not acting out of faith, and, therefore, you are sinning. This is Paul's argument. ([The Right to Yield](#))

**Hodge** - That is, blessed is the man who has a good conscience, who does not allow himself to do what he secretly condemns. Therefore the faith about which the apostle has spoken is a great blessing. It is a source of great happiness to be sure that what we do is right, and therefore the firm conviction which some Christians had attained was not to be undervalued or renounced. ([Romans 14 Commentary](#))

**R Kent Hughes** - Paul is saying, What you believe about neutral things is between you and God. Keep it that way. Moreover, you are a happy (blessed) person if in exercising your liberty you do not condemn yourself by harming another. You are blessed if your exercise of freedom is free from doubt. You are blessed if no one is being scandalized and led toward sin by you. You are blessed because you feel God's pleasure. ([Hughes, R. K. Romans: Righteousness from heaven. Preaching the Word. Crossway Books](#))

**Steven Cole** - As Christians, we should develop godly convictions (Ro 14:22). Romans 14:22: "The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." Paul is repeating here what he stated in Ro 14:5b, "Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind." Again, he is not talking about matters where the Bible gives clear moral commands. He is not saying, "If you think that adultery is okay, just be convinced in your own mind." Or, "If you think that stealing is allowed in certain circumstances, just have that as your own conviction before God." Adultery, stealing, and many other things are always sin for all people in all circumstances. Your conviction to the contrary does not make them okay. God's Word, not our opinion, defines what is sinful.

Rather, Paul is talking about developing convictions in areas where the Bible does not give direct commands. The Bible never says,

for instance, "You shall not watch movies." It doesn't say, "You shall not play computer games or watch TV for hours every day." It does not say, "All alcoholic beverages are sinful," although it does say that we should not get drunk or depend on alcohol for relief. You have to develop convictions about these and many other things by extrapolating biblical principles that apply.

You will change in your understanding of these things as you grow in Christ. As a newer believer, you may not be bothered by going to movies that are filled with profanity, sexual scenes, or violence. But as you grow in your understanding of God's Word, you will realize that certain kinds of movies are defiling and do not help your growth in Christ. So you develop a conviction that for you, those movies are off limits. As you grow in the Lord, it will dawn on you that you are wasting gobs of time that you could be spending furthering God's kingdom purposes playing computer games. And so you'll limit your time in that activity. It becomes your conviction before God. It isn't a legalistic rule. Rather, you are applying Paul's counsel (1Cor 10:23), "**All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.**"

Paul says that you are **happy** ("**blessed**" is a better translation) if you do not condemn yourself in any non-biblical activities that you believe God allows you to do. He means that if you have a conviction that it's okay to do (or not to do) something (in an area where the Bible gives no command), then you're blessed to hold and follow such convictions. It shows that you have thought things through biblically. You're not just following the crowd. And, you're not violating your conscience, which is his last point: As Christians, we should maintain a good conscience (14:23). ([One More Time Romans 14:19-23](#))

**Romans 14:23** But he who **doubts** is **condemned if he eats, because** his eating is not from **faith**; and **whatever** is not from **faith** is **sin**. ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** o de diakrinomenos (PMPMSN) ean phage (3SAAS) katakekritai (3SRPI), hoti ouk ek pisteos: pan de o ouk ek pisteos hamartia estin (3SPAI)

**Amplified:** But the man who has doubts (misgivings, an uneasy conscience) about eating, and then eats [perhaps because of you], stands condemned [before God], because he is not true to his convictions and he does not act from faith. For whatever does not originate and proceed from faith is sin [whatever is done without a conviction of its approval by God is sinful]. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** But if people have doubts about whether they should eat something, they shouldn't eat it. They would be condemned for not acting in faith before God. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Yet if a man eats meat with an uneasy conscience about it, you may be sure he is wrong to do so. For his action does not spring from his faith, and when we act apart from our faith we sin. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** But the one who doubts, if he eats, stands condemned because not by faith did he eat. Moreover, everything which is not of faith is sin.

**Young's Literal:** and he who is making a difference, if he may eat, hath been condemned, because it is not of faith; and all that is not of faith is sin.

**BUT HE WHO DOUBTS IS CONDEMNED IF HE EATS BECAUSE HIS EATING IS NOT FROM FAITH : o de diakrinomenos (PMPMSN) ean phage (3SAAS) katakekritai (3SRPI) hoti ouk ek pisteos:**

- 1Corinthians 8:7) (Ro 13:2; 1Cor 11:29-31
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## WHEN IN DOUBT DON'T

**But** (on the other hand) **He who doubts is condemned** - Denney says "such, on the other hand, is the unhappy situation of the **weak**—a new motive for charity." ([Ibid](#))

**Morris** - Over against the strong, blessed in the freedom he enjoys under God, Paul sets the weak, plagued with doubts. ([The Epistle to the Romans- Leon Morris](#))

**Doubts** ([1252](#)) (**diakrino** from **diá** = thoroughly, "back and forth" + **krino** = judge, decide, in turn from a root "**kri-**" meaning to separate) means literally to judge "back and forth" (thoroughly), thus to separate one from another. Metaphorically, **diakrino** can be positive (referring to close-reasoning, discrimination) meaning to distinguish (critically examine) relevant details to reach an important, personal evaluation (discernment) (e.g., as of God's will). Negatively **diakrino** means "over judging," going too far or vacillating and came to mean to be divided in one's mind, being indecisive, halting between two opinions. In the present verse **diakrino** means to think that something may not be true or certain and thus to waver, doubt or be divided in one's own mind. It is interesting that in a number of languages '**doubt**' is expressed by means of idioms, for example, 'to have two thoughts' or 'to believe only a little' or 'to question one's heart about.'

**Diakrino** was used by Paul to describe Abraham's faith = "he did not **waver** (KJV = stagger - diakrino) in unbelief" (Ro 4:20). James uses **diakrino** twice in one verse describing a wavering faith - "But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." (James 1:6). Jesus declared 'Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not **doubt** (**diakrino**) in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be [granted] him. (Mk 11:23).

**Godet** has an interesting comment writing that this person's "Conscience has not reached oneness with itself; hence the term **diakrino**, to be divided into two men, the one of whom says yes, the other no. Many give to the word **pistis**, faith, the abstract sense of conviction. But there is nothing to authorize us to take from the word so common in Paul its religious signification. It refers, as always, to the acceptance of the salvation won by Christ. What a man cannot do as His redeemed one and in the joy of His salvation, must not be done at all. Otherwise this act, of which faith is not the soul, becomes sin." ([Romans 14:1-15:13 Directions Regarding a Difference of View](#))

**Denney** explains that "The weak Christian cannot be clear in his own mind that it is permissible to do as the strong does; it may be, he thinks one moment, and the next, it may not be; and if he follows the strong and eats in this state of mind, he is condemned (**Ed**: Note **condemned** is in the perfect tense, so it would be more accurately stated that "he stands condemned"). The condemnation is absolute: it is not only that his **own conscience** pronounces clearly against him after the act, but that such action incurs the **condemnation of God**. It is inconsistent with that conscientiousness through which alone man can be trained in goodness; the moral life would become chaotic and irredeemable if conscience were always to be treated so. The man is (stands) **condemned** because he did not eat **from faith** (ek pisteos). All that is not of faith is sin; and therefore this eating, as not of faith, is sin. It is impossible to give **pistis** here a narrower sense than Christianity: see Romans 14:1. Everything a Christian man does that cannot justify itself to him on the ground of his relation to Christ is sin." ([Romans 14 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Spurgeon** - Do nothing about which you have need to ask a question. Be quite sure about it, or leave it alone. Whatsoever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right is sin to you. Though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself, it is evil to you.

**Is condemned** - In context **condemned** by his own conscience (But see **Denney's** note above). If a Christian eats food or does anything when he has doubts in his own mind as to whether it is right or wrong before God (one who is "weak" in faith, Ro 14:1,2), his action does not spring from (**ek**, "out of") his faith or trust in God and is therefore wrong. As Paul generalized, everything that does not come from (**ek**, "out of") faith is sin. The principle is, '**When in doubt, don't.**' As far as the weak brother is concerned, it is wrong for him to eat anything about which he has conscientious scruples. His eating is not an act of faith; that is, he has a bad conscience about it. And it is a sin to violate one's conscience.

**John Murray** - This verse is concerned with the weak and "the danger of the weak brother is now brought into striking contrast with the happy condition of him who is strong in faith, and so supplies a further motive to the charitable restraint of freedom". We may not tone down the condemnation to which the weak believer is subjected when he eats without clear conscience. It is not merely the condemnation of his own conscience; it is condemnation before God. This is proven by the last clause that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin". Just as the strong believer entertains his conviction of liberty before God (vs. 22a) and is blessed before God (vs. 22b), so the weak is condemned before God when he violates conviction (cf. vss. 14b, 15). ([Epistle to the Romans](#))

**Condemned** ([2632](#)) (**katakrino** [word study] from from **katá** = against, and **krino** = to judge) means literally to "judge down", that is, to issue a penalty or to judge someone decisively (decidedly) as guilty. To pronounce sentence against, condemn, adjudge guilty and always denotes to pass an adverse sentence. **Katakrinō** ("decisively condemn") focuses on the end-verdict (of being found at fault) with its exact penalty (punishment, rejection) – something viewed as richly deserved. Reflection: C. S. Lewis, "The lost enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded. . . ". Here the weak brother condemns himself if he goes against his conscience. **Katakrino** is used 3 other times in Romans Ro 2:1, 8:3, 8:34 (cf uses in Mt 20:18, 27:3, John 8:10, 8:11, 1Co 11:32)

**C. E. B. Cranfield** - Paul has advice for the man who is weak in the faith, the man with the scrupulous conscience. It may be that this may disobey or silence his scruples. He may sometimes do something because everyone else is doing it. He may do it because



he does not wish to stand in a minority of one. He may do it because he does not wish to be different. He may do it because he does not wish to court ridicule or unpopularity. Paul's answer is that if, for any of these reasons, a man defies his conscience he is guilty of sin. If a man in his heart of hearts believes a thing to be wrong, if he cannot rid himself of the ineradicable feeling that it is forbidden, then, if he does it, for him it is sin. A neutral thing only becomes a right thing when it is done out of faith, out of the real, reasoned conviction that it is the right thing to do. The only motive for doing anything is that a man believes it to be right. When a thing is done out of social convention, out of fear of unpopularity, to please men, then it is wrong. ([A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, volume II](#))

**Ray Stedman** sums up this section writing that Paul is saying "Do not deliberately stumble or shock your brother or sister. Do not deliberately do things that will offend them, or even make them feel uncomfortable. Think about them, not yourself. **SECOND:** Give up your right when it threatens the peace or hinders the growth of another individual. Be alert to judge in that area. And **THIRD:** Never act from **doubt**. Act only from conviction, by the Word, and by the Spirit of God. If these problems are all settled on that basis, a congregation will be moving gradually toward the great liberty that we have as children of God....These are wise words. Properly followed, they will gradually work out the differences of viewpoints we may have. But if they are ignored, the church is bound to go along with one side or the other, and division, anger, and upset will follow, and the whole cause of Christ will be injured by that. In our next study, we are going to see how Christ is our great example in this, and what will happen to us when we really begin to live on these terms. Prayer: Thank you, our Father, for words that help us to understand these problems, and the way of working them out peacefully and cheerfully and joyfully, "preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Teach us Lord, to walk softly before you in this, with a concern for our brother and sister; to be patient and to learn to enjoy our liberties only as they do not injure or hurt another. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen ([The Right to Yield](#))

#### AND WHATEVER IS NOT FROM FAITH IS SIN: *pan de o ouk ek pisteos hamartia estin* (3SPA1)

- Titus 1:15; Hebrews 11:6
- Romans 14 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**A W Pink** - If a man does not believe it is right to do some act, and yet ventures to do it, he sins. (Pink, A. W. The Holy Spirit)

**Mounce** - "Whatever is done without the conviction that God has approved it is by definition sin. God has called us to a life of faith. Trust is the willingness to put all of life before God for his approval. Any doubt concerning an action automatically removes that action from the category of that which is acceptable." ([Romans- An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture New American Commentary](#))

**Herman Ridderbos** - "For a Christian not a single decision and action can be good which he does not think he can justify on the ground of his Christian conviction and his liberty before God in Christ." ([Paul- An Outline of His Theology](#))

**Spurgeon** - If you are not sure that a thing is right, let it alone, for it will **besin** to you.

People who can't come to a settled conviction about what God wants them to do are for ever subject to a guilty conscience and are in constant danger of acting against their conscience and thus sinning. So pray and study until you arrive at a settled conviction about your course of action.

**Guzik** - Paul concludes with another principle by which we can judge "gray areas" - if we can't do it in faith, then it **issin**. This is a wonderful check on our tendency to justify ourselves in the things we permit. If we are troubled by something, it likely isn't of faith and likely is sin for us. ([Romans 14 Commentary](#))

**Morris** - The apostle is condemning conduct that springs from motives like selfishness or greed or fear. Faith is that by which one receives salvation, but it is also basic to the whole Christian way of life. Faith is a humble reliance on God, on God alone, for salvation and for the living out of the implications of that salvation. What cannot be justified by being in accord with our relation to Christ is sin. ([The Epistle to the Romans- Leon Morris](#))

**Hodge** - That is, however sure a man may be that what he does is right, he cannot expect others to act on his faith. If a man thinks a thing to be wrong, to him it is wrong. He, therefore, who is uncertain whether God has commanded him to abstain from certain meats, and who notwithstanding indulges in them, evidently sins; he brings himself under condemnation. Because whatever is not of faith is sin; i.e., whatever we do which we are not certain is right, to us is wrong. The sentiment of this verse, therefore, is nearly the same as of Romans 14:14. "To him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." ([Romans 14 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

**William Barclay** - Paul has advice for the man who is weak in the faith, the man with the over-scrupulous conscience. This man may



disobey or silence his scruples. He may sometimes do something because everyone else is doing it and he does not wish to be different. He may do it because he does not wish to court ridicule or unpopularity. Paul's answer is that if a man defies his conscience he is guilty of sin. If a man believes a thing to be wrong, then, if he does it, for him it is sin. A neutral thing becomes a right thing only when it is done out of the real, reasoned conviction that it is right. No man is the keeper of another man's conscience, and each man's conscience, in things indifferent, must be the arbiter for him of what is right or wrong. ([Romans 14 Commentary Daily Study Bible](#))

**Faith** ([4102](#))(**pistis**) is synonymous with trust or belief and is the conviction of the truth of anything, but in Scripture usually speaks of belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. **Thomas Constable** notes that "'Faith" here as in Ro 14:1 and Ro 14:22 does not refer to the teachings of Christianity but to what a person believes to be the will of God for him. If a person does what he believes to be wrong, even though it is not wrong in itself, it becomes sin for him. He has violated what he believes to be God's will. His action has become an act of rebellion against God for him." ([Romans 14 Commentary](#))

**Sin** ([266](#))(**hamartia**) literally conveys the idea of missing the mark as when hunting with a bow and arrow (in Homer some hundred times of a warrior hurling his spear but missing his foe). Later hamartia came to mean missing or falling short of any goal, standard, or purpose. Hamartia in the Bible signifies a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word or deed (righteous). It pictures the idea of missing His appointed goal (His will) which results in a deviation from what is pleasing to Him. In short, sin is conceived as a missing the true end and scope of our lives, which is the Triune God Himself. As Martin Luther put it "Sin is essentially a departure from God."

**John Stott** - This final epigram exalts the significance of our conscience. Although, as we have seen, it is not infallible, it is nevertheless sacrosanct, so that to go against it (to act not from faith) is to sin. At the same time, alongside this explicit instruction not to violate our conscience, there is an implicit requirement to educate it. ([Romans- God's Good News for the World -Bible Speaks Today](#))

**William Newell** - The apostle's definition of sin here as "what is not of faith" is most searching. It will drive us to our knees. It reaches everything in our lives concerning which our conscience is not at rest, in which we do not have faith to proceed, in which we cannot walk with God. ([Romans 14 - Newell's Commentary on Romans](#))

The context of Romans 14 has to do with issues that are **not absolute "do" or "don't."** So if you do something that you don't have the freedom **in your conscience** to do it is **sin**. We know that whatever contradicts the known will of God is **sin** but this verse reveals another dimension of sin, that JESUS CAME TO SAVE US FROM and not to leave us in. To reiterate, any action that violates my Christian conscience (my renewed mind, my "mind of Christ") is a **sin**. Therefore, a person who has scruples about matters not wrong in and of themselves should not act contrary to his conscience, because to violate the conscience is not acting in faith but is sin. The principle is...

### WHEN IN DOUBT... DON'T!

Here are **12 excellent tests** to apply...

1. **THE WORLD TEST.** Is it worldly? Will it make me worldly to do it (John 15:19, 1 John 2:15, 16, 17)?
2. **THE QUALITY TEST.** Is it good for me physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Ro 12:9b)?
3. **THE TEMPLE TEST.** Can I do it when I remember my body is God's temple and must not be marred or misused (1Co 6:19)?
4. **THE GLORY TEST.** Will it glorify my Lord, or will it on the other hand possibly bring shame to His name (1Co 6:20, 10:32)?
5. **THE BLESSING TEST.** Can I honestly ask God's blessing on it and be sure I'll not regret doing it (Pr. 10:22, Ro 15:29)?
6. **THE REPUTATION TEST.** Is it apt to damage my testimony for the Lord (Phil 2:15)?
7. **THE CONSIDERATION TEST.** Am I being considerate of others and the effect this might have on them (Ro 14:7, 21)?
8. **THE APPEARANCE TEST.** Will it look bad? Does it have the appearance of what is wrong or suspicious (1Th 5:22)?
9. **THE WEIGHT TEST.** Could this slacken or sidetrack me in running the Christian race (Heb 12:1, 1Co 9:24)?

10. **THE COMING OF CHRIST TEST.** Would I be ashamed to be found doing this when He comes again (1Jn 2:28)?

11. **THE COMPANION TEST.** Can I invite Christ to go with me and participate with me in this (Mt 28:20b, Col. 3:17)?

12. **THE PEACE TEST.** After having prayed about it, do I have perfect peace about doing it (Col 3:15, Php 4:6,7)?

(from Bible.org: From Basic Bible Beliefs, Bible Baptist Church, Auburn, Wn., 1975, unpublished. From Training Manual for Local Church Visitation, Eugene A. Wood, DTS, ThM Thesis, 1980)

**Middletown Bible - The Law of Love (Romans 14:1-15:3) - For further help in understanding how to live so as to not cause a brother to stumble, see our paper entitled, ["Guidance: 67 Biblical Tests to Use in Deciding Upon a Course of Action"](#)**

**Harry Ironside** (in Illustrations of Bible Truth - has 70 excellent illustrations indexed by Title/Scripture) gives the following illustration - Sandy was a thrifty Scot who objected to needless laundry expense, so when he wore a dress shirt to a banquet, he put it away carefully for future use. On one occasion when dressing for such an event, he took a used shirt out of the drawer and examined it with care, hoping to be able to wear it that evening. Not being quite sure of its strict cleanliness, he took it to a window, where he was looking it over under a better light than the room afforded. His wife, Jean, noticed him shaking his head as though fearful that it would not pass careful scrutiny. "Remember, Sandy," she called to him, "if it's doubtful, it's dirty." That settled it. The shirt went into the discard and another—a fresh one—took its place. Jeans' words may well speak to every believer concerning things about which conscience raises any question whatsoever.

**Spurgeon** - Do nothing about which you have need to ask a question. Be quite sure about it, or leave it alone. Whatsoever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right is sin to you. Though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself, it is evil to you.

**Morris** writes that...

Although all things are, indeed, legal for a true Christian, he will try to do only those things which please his Lord. When he encounters questions not specifically mentioned in Scripture (smoking, movies), he should consider the various Scriptural principles that are given as guideposts to help him make such decisions. One of those is given in this verse, namely, he should be able to do it in full confidence that it is pleasing to Christ. Some of the principles, with typical supporting Scriptures, may be noted as follows:

(1) The act has positive value and is, without question, pleasing to the Lord (Ro 14:23 1Co 10:23; Col 4:5);

(2) The act is consistent with our new life in Christ (Col 3:1, 2, 3, 4; 2T 1:2,4; 2Co 5:14,15);

(3) We can sense the positive leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit (1Co 6:19,20 Ga 5:16, 17, 18);

(4) The act will not diminish our Christian influence (Ro 14:13,21 1Co 8:8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; 1Th 5:22)

(5) The act does not pose a danger of our becoming addicted to it (1Co 6:12; Ep 5:18; James 1:14,15)

(6) It can be done consistently with the example set by Jesus (1Pe 2:21 1Jn 2:6 Php 2:5)

(7) It can be done in confidence that it brings glory to God (1Co 10:31 Col 3:23).

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of relevant principles or appropriate Scriptures, but is at least indicative of what to look for. ([Romans 14 Study Notes - Defender's Study Bible - see right column](#))

**Summary...**

(1) There will always be diversity in the church, even diversity of conviction about what the will of the Lord is for some areas of behavior.

(2) Many of these differences we should not distinguish as good and evil. Sin is what does not come from faith. But our varying perspectives and varying degrees of faith, give rise to differing choice which may both honor Christ as acceptable choices.

(3) Therefore, we must not despise or condemn our brothers and sisters, but trust their Master and ours to deal with his servants wisely.

(4) We should all seek to be fully persuaded in the convictions we follow so that we are not immobilized by indecision or plagued with a guilty conscience.

(5) We should do all we do for the honor of Christ and with a heart full of thanksgiving to him.

**Steven Cole - As Christians, we should maintain a good conscience** (Ro 14:23). Romans 14:23: "But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin." Paul refers here to the weak brother, but he's still speaking to the strong brother, showing him why he needs to be careful with his liberty. If by his exercising his liberty, the strong brother causes a weak Christian to go against his conscience, he's influencing the weaker brother to sin. When Paul says, "he who doubts is condemned," I do not agree with those who say that Paul is referring here to eternal condemnation. Rather, Paul means it in the sense that Peter stood condemned (a different Greek word, but the same idea) when he acted with hypocrisy in Antioch (Gal. 2:11; see 1Jn 3:20-21). He was guilty of sin. If a weak Christian violates his conscience, he has sinned.

Paul explains that the reason he has sinned is **"because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin"** While it's a general principle that we sin if we do not trust God in every situation, in this context Paul's meaning is more focused. **"Faith"** here refers to a person's conviction before God (Ro 14:22). As Douglas Moo explains (ibid., p. 863),

"What he here labels 'sin,'...is any act that does not match our sincerely held convictions about what our Christian faith allows us to do and prohibits us from doing." He adds (pp. 863-864), "Violation of the dictates of the conscience, even when the conscience does not conform perfectly with God's will, is sinful."

Over time, you should educate your conscience through a diligent study of God's Word. Your convictions will become progressively conformed to the principles of Scripture. But you should not go against your conscience, even if you see other Christians doing something that you think is wrong or even if they tell you that you're free to do it, because that isn't your conviction yet. If you act against your conscience, you're doing something that you think God doesn't want you to do. You're not acting in the faith which you have as your own conviction before God. That, for you, is sin.

**Conclusion** - Since "Professor" Paul goes over it one more time, let me go over it one more time: First, as Christians, we should pursue godly relationships by diligently working for peace and doing the things that build up one another. Are you doing that, beginning at home? Second, as Christians, we should preserve godly priorities. Keep the main thing as the main thing. Don't tear down the work of God in a brother or in Christ's church over secondary matters. Don't put your rights ahead of helping other Christians grow. Third, as Christians, we should develop godly convictions. Don't go with the flow of our culture, even if it's our Christian culture. Study the Word continually to see how it applies to modern issues. Finally, as Christians we must maintain a good conscience. Don't do anything that you think is wrong. As Paul put it (Acts 24:16), "Do [your] best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men." These four things will appear on the final exam! Class dismissed!

### Application Questions

- 1 How can we know whether to absorb a wrong done to us or to confront it in love? What biblical guidelines apply?
- 2 Think of a situation where you damaged a relationship over a secondary matter. How should you have dealt with it?
- 3 What are some areas where the Bible gives no direct commands, but where you need to develop "your own conviction before God"? How can you go about this?
- 4 Why should we not violate our conscience, even if our conscience is not in line with Scripture? [One More Time Romans 14:19-23](#)

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**Alan Carr** - Paul tells us that we should do what we do with assurance of heart. If there is a doubt, leave it out! He says that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." This means that regardless of what you do in life, if you cannot do it with faith in your heart that it is right in the sight of God, it is a sin to you! The Christian life is not about seeing who can get closest to the edge without falling off into sin. It is about living every moment for the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31!

King and new chariot driver. The king was interviewing men to be his chariot drivers. And so he said to them, "I want you to take this chariot and I want you to go around this winding mountain road, there are cliffs on the side of it, and I want you to see how close you can get to the precipice in the chariot and still make it on the road."

And so, one man came down and he said, "Aw, I got within two feet of the edge of that thing and I still made it." And the king said, "No, thank you, you're not my chariot driver." Then another man came and he said, "Oh, I want you to know I got within three feet of the precipice." And he said, "No, thank you, I don't want you to be my chariot driver." Another man came and he said, "I got an inch and a half from the precipice of the road." And he said, "You're not my chariot driver."

And then a man came and he said, "Aw, I didn't even try to get close to the edge. If I'm going to be the chariot driver for the king, I want to stay as far away from the danger point as I can." That man got the job!

Note: We talk of "Doing it in good faith", or "Giving it good faith". The idea being, if our motive is right, then it makes whatever we do or give right as well. This is fine to a point! However, when you do something about which there is a doubt in your mind then it is no longer in "good faith." If you do it with doubt, it is a sin! If I give \$5.00 to a homeless man to buy him some food, then I have given it good faith. If he walks straight to the liquor store, that is his problem. However, if I see him take the money I have given him and go buy liquor with it, I have not sinned the first time. But, if I give money to that same man tomorrow, knowing what he is going to do with it, I am just as guilty as he is, 1 Tim. 5:22. I cannot give it in good faith, if I know it will be used for evil. This applies to every area of our experience as believers. There is very fine line between acting in faith and turning a blind eye to evil. If you can live your life with a clean conscience toward God and toward your fellow believers, you are a blessed individual!)

Note: There may be those who think this is a rigid way to live life. Always looking around trying to please the other brother. Well, verse 22 puts it into perspective I think. It reminds us that the happiest people are those who can live their lives without felling condemnation in their hearts; either from the Lord, or from causing their brother to stumble. If you really want to be happy, learn to put others first in your daily walk!)

**Conclusion** - It would be nice if all of life were scripted for us, if there were no questionable areas, if there were no weak brothers to accommodate. Such is not the case! As we go through this life, there will be many situations when we will be called upon to make a decision about right and wrong. What we decide in those moments reveals the truth of the condition of our hearts. When we have come to the place where the Lord Jesus and the needs of others come before our own wishes and desires, we have begun the process of maturing in the Lord. God help us to get there! With His help we can and will. ([Romans 14:13-23 Free To Help, Not To Hinder](#))