
Paul's Epistle to the Romans

Volume 2

Chapters 9–16

Notes & Commentary
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Chapter 14

Commentary

The first thing that we encounter in this chapter is Paul's use of the phrase "weak in faith" (τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει). As one might imagine, a good deal of controversy has arisen through the centuries about how "weak in the faith" is to be understood. The following survey summarizes the most common interpretations:

- 1) The weak in faith are those who held to a legalistic view of righteousness. That is, those who believed they could gain right standing before God by doing good works. The more chaste they believed themselves to be (even going beyond the normal requirements of the Torah), the more they felt themselves to be righteous.
- 2) The weak in faith were those who took a very strict view of the "things offered to idols." While the majority understood the decree of Acts 15 to involve actual participation in idolatrous meals, those "weak in faith" created a protective fence around the Apostolic decrees of Acts 15 and refused to eat anything remotely connected with idols, or even with idolaters.
- 3) The weak in faith were Jewish believers who abstained from meat because they were on a kind of "fast of sorrow" for their Jewish brothers who had not yet confessed Yeshua to be Messiah. They were imposing this same fast upon the Gentile believers, and were offended when the Gentile believers were unwilling to join them.
- 4) The weak in faith were a pre-Gnostic group who felt that the mere abstention from things that were good (such as certain foods) was necessary for raising the soul in its spiritual awareness.
- 5) The weak in faith felt that observance of the ceremonial aspects of the Torah were still necessary for the believer in Yeshua, and that those who were disregarding the ceremonial aspects of Torah were sinning and in need of exhortation.

Evaluation

#1 – *the weak in faith are those who held to a legalistic, works-righteousness*

The problem with this explanation is that it is difficult to sustain the idea that Jews in the 1st Century believed they could obtain righteousness by doing good deeds. It has been more and more recognized that 1st Century Judaism did not teach a works-righteousness *per se* but that righteous status before God was granted to all of Israel on the basis of her corporate election, and that Israel's obligation was to remain within the covenant by obeying God's commandments so as not to be "cut off from His people." The covenant afforded a status of righteousness, and thus covenant membership (which was a matter of God's grace by birth) was not earned by good works.

Moreover, even if one allowed some measure of "works-righteousness" to be extant in the

theology of 1st Century Judaism, it seems highly unlikely that Paul would accord such a position as constituting genuine faith. For even though he identifies them as “weak” in the faith, he still considers their faith to be genuine. Indeed, Paul reckons that Messiah died for those who were “weak in the faith,” and in Paul's theology, Yeshua's death only accrues to the elect. Thus, this first explanation, as popular as it is, cannot stand under even the most surface scrutiny.

#2 - the weak in faith are those who take an overly strict view of things offered to idols

There is no denying that a great many affinities occur between this passage and the other texts where Paul deals with things offered to idols.³⁴⁵ But there are some telling difficulties in this explanation. First is the fact that the section dealing with days does not fit well into the discussion of things offered to idols. Second, it seems sure that if Paul had things offered to idols in mind, he would have used the term εἰδωλόθυτος, *eidolothutos* as he does elsewhere when the topic of things offered to idols arises. The absolute lack of direct mention of idols seems a strong blow to this interpretation. Third, if this view is taken, then the “strong” are those who have no problem eating meat offered to idols. Yet in other passages dealing with this subject (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:20-22), there is a strong warning about entanglement with idols, and one would expect the same warning here if this were the topic. All in all, then, this explanation does not satisfy.

#3 - the weak abstain from meat because they are engaged in a “fast of sorrow.”

It is true that there were those who abstained from meat and wine as a mourning for the destruction of the Temple after 70 CE,³⁴⁶ but it is a stretch to say that this was common among Jewish believers as a mourning for their fellow Jewish unbelievers. What is more, one wonders if this could categorize them as “weak in faith.” This seems a bit far-fetched.

#4 - the weak in faith are those engaged in a pre-Gnostic mysticism who felt that the mere abstaining from good food was somehow an enhancement to their spirituality.

Once again, that such a group existed in Rome is mere speculation. What is more, it is not certain that pre-Gnostic groups abstained from certain foods. In fact, this explanation lacks good historical data for its support and should therefore be rejected.

#5 - the weak in faith are those who believe they are required to maintain the ceremonial aspects of Torah.

This is perhaps one of the most popular interpretations because it fits the Christian Church's view of Torah, namely, that all but the moral aspects or principles of Torah have been abolished by the death of Yeshua. Thus, according to this view, those who are weak in faith believe they must still maintain adherence to the ceremonial aspects of Torah, and are thus not willing to see that it was abolished by the cross.

The grave problem with this view is that Paul himself continued to maintain the ceremonial aspects of Torah. He takes a nazirite vow (Acts 18:18) which required an even higher degree of attention to the ceremonial laws. In Acts 28:17 Paul affirms that he had done nothing against any of the customs of the fathers, a phrase which not only takes in all of Torah, but includes the traditions of the elders as well. For Paul, the Torah is a single entity and could not be divided into parts (civil, ceremonial, moral). Therefore, this explanation also fails to fit the context and the practice of Paul as we know it. We must look further.

Mark Nanos³⁴⁷ has made another suggestion, one that I think fits the context and the message of Paul. He suggests that those weak in faith are the Jewish members of the synagogue who had demonstrated a genuine faith in the God of Israel, but who were still in the process of being convinced that Yeshua was the promised Messiah. Their genuine faith had been demonstrated within the community but they were still considering the evidence regarding whether Yeshua was, in fact, the promised Messiah of that faith. In one sense, the genuine character of their faith would be confirmed by their confession of Yeshua as Messiah, but until that time came, they could not be charged with faithlessness. Their faith was weak only in the sense that it was not as strong as it would be when they fully espoused Yeshua.

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

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

1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

The order of the Greek sentence is instructive. A literal translation would be: "The one weak in faith receive, but not with an eye to a dispute on opinions." The point is that the "one weak in faith" is thrown to the beginning of the sentence for emphasis, and then immediately followed by the imperative "receive" (προσλαμβάνω, *proslambano*). This imperative is the leading idea of the paragraph: those who are weak in faith are to be received. The imperative is in the present tense, giving the sense "keep on receiving." This might imply that the situation at Rome had reached a critical point. Previously (most likely when the Jewish members were in the majority) the problem had not existed. When the synagogue community become more and more populated with Gentile believers, many of whom had no generational attachment to Israel, it is easy to see how Jewish members, particularly those who had not yet confessed Yeshua as the long awaited Messiah, could be marginalized. What is more, in such a scenario, it could have been the case that the Jewish congregants were being accused of having no faith whatsoever, and treated as though they were unbelievers.

But the imperative given by the Apostle is to "receive," meaning to treat the one weak in faith as a full-fledged member of the congregation with all the privileges and responsibilities that would entail. If our understanding is correct, that "weak in faith" refers to Jewish congregants who had not yet outwardly confessed Yeshua as Messiah, then a very important point must be made by the use of Paul's word "faith" here. While the person in question is weak in faith, he nonetheless is credited with genuine faith! We must presume, therefore, that those weak in faith had a genuine faith in the Messiah, but simply were not yet sure if Yeshua was that Messiah.

Immediately the question will be raised: "is this scenario possible today?" "Are there those who have a genuine faith in Messiah, but have rejected the "Jesus" they have heard about because he does not fit the picture they have of Messiah?" In theory, the answer must be "yes." If it were possible in Paul's day, it theoretically should be possible any time.

But if one is trying to find a way to believe that an observant Jewish person in our times who, though rejecting the "Jesus" portrayed by Christianity, may actually be saved because he or she lives a pious life and believes in a coming messiah, there is a major problem. Orthodox Judaism is not looking for a Messiah to affect atonement for sins, but rather to heal the world and to bring the nations out of their paganism into the one true religion of Judaism. Moreover, most if not all of the Tanach passages describing the suffering Servant have been interpreted to describe the sufferings of Israel rather than the Messiah. Instead of seeking righteousness through faith in the atoning work of Messiah through His offering Himself as a sin offering, orthodox Judaism teaches a righteousness based upon the merits of the fathers, the merits of personal repentance (*teshuvah*) and of keeping the *mitzvot*. In other words, the heart of the gospel, that the suffering of the Messiah as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners is the only way to obtain right standing before God, is not found in modern orthodox views of the Messiah. Therefore, even though an observant orthodox Jewish person may confess a genuine belief in the coming Messiah, such a belief does not necessarily include a confession of one's own unworthiness and the need of a Savior, something essential for saving faith.

Yet in the Apostolic period, it would seem reasonable to believe that there were Jewish people who, having faithfully awaited the coming of Messiah, were contemplating whether Yeshua was, indeed, that Messiah. Their faith was genuine, because they believed that the Messiah promised by the Prophets would affect atonement for their sin. What remained was for them to be convinced regarding Yeshua, and to confess Him as their Messiah. Thus, even though their faith may have been considered "weak," they were still to be received as genuine covenant members by the synagogue community of The Way.

but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Paul's point here is that receiving one who is weak in faith should be demonstrated by a full reception, not a half-hearted one. The weak in faith are not to be received in order to convince them to change their current *halachah* regarding food or days, but they are to be received as genuine members of the body of Messiah in anticipation of the confirmation of their faith through a confession of Yeshua as the Messiah. At what point they clearly show themselves to have rejected Yeshua, then, and only then, are they to be counted as outside the circle of believers.

The word translated "passing judgment" (*διακρίσις, diakrisis*) is used only two other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: 1Cor 12:10; Heb 5:14. Its basic meaning is "to judge between." It may also have the sense of "firm conclusion" (the preposition *δια, dia* most likely functioning in a perfective sense) or coming to a "final decision."

Perhaps most important for the overall understanding of this section, however, is the word translated "opinions" (*διαλογισμός, dialogismos*). It is found 14 times in the Apostolic Scriptures (Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; Luke 2:35; 5:22; 6:8; 9:46-47; 24:38; Rom 1:21; 14:1; 1Cor 3:20; Phil 2:14; 1Tim 2:8; James 2:4) and 19 times in the Lxx (1Mac 2:63; Ps 39:6; 55:6; 91:6; 93:11; 138:2, 20; 145:4; Wis 7:20; Sir 9:15; 13:26; 27:5; 33:5; 40:2; Is 59:7; Jer 4:14; Lam 3:60-61). Considering its use in these texts, the primary meaning is "thought" or "to reason," "to think carefully." NIV has "disputed matters," NASB, NRSV and ESV have "opinions." Regardless of the various English translations, the point is clear that the word defines matters for which there were no certain solutions, or at least not any upon which the Apostle Paul would take a dogmatic stance. This in itself should forever put to rest the notion that Paul is discussing issues of Sabbath and kosher food laws, for though in our times these might be considered matters of "opinion," they surely could not have been so construed in Paul's day. What must fall under the category of "opinions" are those things for which both sides could equally be considered righteous and worthy.

Though those weak in faith may have been often characterized as accepting one side of the issue, the side they chose was not, in and of itself, wrong or dangerous. If it had been, we would certainly have expected Paul to be more firm on which side was correct and which one was not.

We may be equally assured that the issues at hand could not have centered on the centrality of Yeshua, either of His person or His work. For Paul, these are never matters of opinion. But those who argue this text as being a basis for the abolition of the Sabbath in particular, and the Torah in general, do so on the basis that to maintain Torah (and thus the Sabbath) is to diminish the finished work of Yeshua. Furthermore, the opinions held by those weak in faith could not have in any way undermined nor cast dispersions upon the core doctrines regarding the method by which God declares a sinner righteous, upon which Paul has already expound in the opening chapters of the epistle. That is to say, those who were holding one side or the other could not have been teaching a righteousness based upon the works of the Torah, for if that were the case, Paul could not have labelled them as opinions which should be allowed to remain as acceptable. For Paul goes on to indicate that not only should the congregants receive each other, but that *God Himself had received both sides*.

2-3 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.

The first matter the Apostle gives by way of example is that of food laws, but clearly not laws enjoined in the Torah. That is to say, the issue the Apostle brings forward as an example is not one of kosher versus non-kosher, at least from the laws of clean and unclean specified in the Torah. Rather, the issue is between strict vegetarianism and those who, with clear conscience, ate meat. All too often this is read by the modern church as a difference between eating clean and unclean, which the text clearly does not address, for eating things unclean would have been understood as forbidden by the word of Moses and surely not something in the realm of "opinions."

Rather, what must have been the issue addressed here were the various levels of food separation being imposed by the sects of the 1st Century. We know, for instance, that the Qumran sect was extremely strict in their food laws, putting many more levels of requirements upon the written text of Torah. For instance, all food eaten in a communal meal had to be ritually pure, meaning it had never been in the presence of the ritually impure. And since the food of the Temple must be ritually clean, and the Qumran sect apparently considered themselves to be required to attain the same level of holiness as the priests, all food had to be carried in ritually pure skins and containers as well.³⁴⁸

There was also the widespread concern about things "contaminated by idols," that is, food that had come from animals sacrificed at the pagan temples.

These things belonging to gentiles are prohibited, and the prohibition affecting them extends to deriving any benefit from them at all: (1) wine, (2) vinegar of gentiles which to begin with was wine, (3) Hadrianic earthenware, and (4) hides pierced at the heart. Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel says, When the tear in the hide is round, it is prohibited. [If it is] straight, it is permitted. Meat which is being brought into an idol is permitted. But that which comes out is prohibited, because it is like sacrifices of the dead (Ps. 106:28), the words of R. Aqiba.³⁴⁹

It seems quite probable that some Jews who were still in the process of being convinced that Yeshua was the Messiah were being torn by the issue of idolatry as it was being defined by the majority rule of the Sages. Did eating meat that had been sacrificed to an idol constitute idolatry itself? Could one eating such meat be guilty of idolatry, an offense that drew the *karat* (cut-

ting off) penalty? Paul's *halachah* did not reason so. Since idols are, in reality, nothing, then they could in no way effect the meat that was offered to them. For Paul, intent was of utmost importance in these issues. Surely if one was participating in the idol ceremony itself, this showed intent to commit idolatry. But to simply eat, and perhaps unknowingly eat, meat that had been in the pagan temple court could not be considered idolatry. (See his explanation in 1 Corinthians 8-10.)

However, there apparently were those who were not so easily convinced. If the Sages were saying that eating meat procured by Gentiles constituted idolatry (since all Gentiles were suspect of participating in idol worship), and if those weak in faith still considered the Sanhedrin to be their primary ruling authority, then the safest thing to do when living and eating among Gentiles was not to eat meat at all. What is more, such a stance would convince the outsiders that these Jewish followers of Yeshua had not abandoned their ties with the wider Jewish community.

On the other hand, Gentile believers who formerly had no ties to the *halachah* of Sanhedrin, or at least minimal ties, could easily discount the additional *halachah* of the Sages' "fences" as superfluous in light of the overwhelming victory won by Yeshua against all forms of darkness. Idols were nothing (1Cor 8:4; 10:19). Since their conscience was clear in matters of eating meat that may have come from the common market (after all, it conformed perfectly with the written Torah), they felt no compulsion to give it up. Moreover, the Master Himself had taught that in some cases, the traditions of the elders had caused the Torah of Moses itself to be neglected (e.g., Mk 7:6-8). Given that Paul had no problem eating meat that had been handled by Gentiles, it makes sense that Gentile believers who had no connection to the traditions of the Sages in this matter would have felt clear in their conscience to disregard the more stringent measures enacted by the rabbis.

Thus, Paul requires that both groups receive each other, and that neither hold the other in contempt. And the reason he makes such a requirement is clear: "God has received him." In other words, to reject a brother on these grounds is to put oneself above the authority of God Himself, for He has received both the one who abstains from meat (because he cannot be sure if the meat had been handled by Gentiles and thus suspect of being offered to idols), and the one who eats meat (because he is not concerned whether the meat came from the common market because he believed idols to be nothing, cf. 1Cor 8:4; 10:19).

But I hasten to say again, both parties received the Torah and its laws concerning clean and unclean as the unmovable foundation for *halachah* in the first place. When verse two states "One person has faith that he may eat all things . . .," the "all things" must be understood within the context of the discussion, and thus as including both meat and vegetables as over against the other person who, in good conscience, could only eat vegetables. The controversy raged, not over issues of the written Torah, but over the additional regulations imposed by the Sages in their attempts to interpret and implement the Torah. While Paul clearly taught the need to establish the Torah (Rom 3:31), he was not concerned to establish all the rulings of certain Sages, even if they did represent the majority opinion. He was no doubt concerned that such a position would hinder the inclusion of the non-Jews as they strove to become full-fledged participants in the Jewish community of faith.

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

What might this suggest? It could be that the use of the present indicative points to a

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

This viewpoint is confirmed later on in the chapter when the Apostle states: (v. 15), “Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died.” In other words, do not allow your *halachah* to turn away someone who is otherwise seeking to know the truth of Yeshua as Messiah.

What does it mean to “regard with contempt” (μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω, from ἐξουθενέτω, *ex-outheneto*, used 10 other times in the Apostolic Scriptures: Luke 18:9; 23:11; Acts 4:11; Rom 14:10; 1Cor 1:28; 6:4; 16:11; 2Cor 10:10; Gal 4:14; 1Thess 5:20)? The word itself means “to treat with contempt,” “to despise,” “to reject.” In the context the meaning must include the idea of “exclusion,” that is, to consider the one who does not eat meat as actually not part of the community, and more specifically, not part of the covenant community. Thus, we may presume that those who were willing to forego the prevailing rabbinic *halachah* regarding clean and unclean (we know this is the heart of the issue, cf. v. 14—the rabbinic ruling had advanced a second level of “clean” and “unclean” that could render even legitimate food, i.e., that allowed by the Torah, as “unclean”) were doing so on the basis that the *halachah* of Yeshua as taught by Paul did not always match the prevailing *halachah* of the Sages. As such, they felt quite justified in by-passing *halachah* that appeared excessive or in some measure unwarranted by the biblical text. Yet in their freedom to hold such a view, they could not treat those of differing *halachah* with contempt, as though they were outside of the circle of the larger, covenant community.

Here is a practical example of the “arrogance” Paul warned about in chapter 11. We may presume that those labelled as “weak” were Jewish members of the community who had not yet confessed Yeshua as Messiah and who were still committed to the additional *halachah* of the Sages, especially in matters related to contamination of food by Gentiles. These Jewish members of the community were still to be considered as covenant members, and as “in process” regarding the whole life of faith. In some measure the tables had turned: while the Jewish community had previously accepted the so-called “God-fearers” as those in the process of becoming “full covenant members,” now the Jewish members were to be received in somewhat the same fashion: as covenant members on their way to embracing Yeshua and thus a full (strong) faith.

It is also worth mentioning that in the second clause of v. 3, those who do not eat (=weak) are not “to judge” (κρίνω, *krino*) those who do eat. This is directed to the group that has, in their opinion, maintained the “stricter” *halachah*. They are not to judge those who eat as though they had transgressed or in some measure become unclean because they are judged as eating forbidden food (from a rabbinic standpoint). The fact that Paul gives this exhortation to the weak proves beyond doubt that he considered them community members, i.e., genuine members of the Torah community, because he expects them to follow his instructions, to abide by his *halachah* in this specific matter.

Finally, the conclusion reached by the Apostle, a conclusion he expects his readers to espouse, is that “God has accepted him” (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ αὐτὸν προσελάβετο). The pronoun “him” refers specifically to the one who does not eat (since this is the closest antecedent) but in context must likewise refer to the one who eats. Thus the NRSV rightly interprets the phrase: “for God has welcomed them.” God’s acceptance of both parties makes their acceptance to each other a given. For if one rejects the person God has accepted, he has, in his rejection, rejected God. It is this line of reasoning to which Paul moves in the next verse.

4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Who is being addressed here? At first it would seem possible that Paul addressed those who abstain, since they are the ones last named, and since the word “judge” (κρίνω) is repeated. But the second person address (“Who are you ...”) generalizes the statement, and makes it apply to both parties. The fact that each belongs “to his own master” cannot mean that there are more than one Master in mind. Rather, the statement is given as a general axiom: a servant answers to his master, not to the other servants. Since all are servants of one Master, the judging ought to be left to Him. And since it has already been stated that the Master receives both the one who abstains and the one who does not, the matter is settled.

Furthermore, the ability to make one “stand” belongs to the Lord, not to individuals. The idea of making one “stand” must mean “prove to be worthy,” and this is the prerogative of the Master, not the fellow servants.

5-6 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.

The obvious first question that confronts us in this text is the transition from the former discussion of eating or abstaining to that of days appointed for special honor. How does the former discussion regarding food connect with the topic of days?

Historically there are three general interpretations of what is being referenced by “days:” 1) days of fasting, 2) ceremonial days of the Jewish year (including the weekly Sabbath), and 3) distinguishing “lucky” and “unlucky” days upon which events should be held. Of these, the third should quickly be dismissed. Paul would give no warrant to superstitions about “lucky” and “unlucky” days. He would speak against them without equivocation. The first two suggestions have been maintained throughout the history of Christian Church, but the first, that these “days” refer to “fast days” was the majority interpretation in the ancient fathers³⁵⁰ and is held by some modern commentators. The majority of Christian commentators, however, predictably understand Paul to be talking about the “change from Sabbath to Lord’s Day.”³⁵¹

We will first examine the idea that Paul is talking about a change of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week. Generally, those who hold this view do so on the grounds that the New Covenant replaced the “Old Covenant.” Whereas the “Old Covenant” prescribed the seventh day as Sabbath, the New Covenant initiated the first day of the week as the “Lord’s Day” since it was on the first day of the week that Yeshua arose from the dead. Furthermore, this change from Sabbath to Sunday is theologically charged, for to remain with the Sabbath is to remain under the Old Covenant. It is therefore a divine imperative that the Sabbath be abandoned and Sunday observed. To continue to keep the Sabbath is viewed as, in some measure, a denial of the New Covenant status possessed by those who are in Yeshua.

But this is clearly not how the Apostle speaks in our text. Rather than considering one day as preferred to another on theological grounds, the point of the Apostle is that both the one who chooses a specific day, as well as the one who chooses no day are fine in their decisions. Neither position is right or wrong—both are equally acceptable.

This means that the one who held a specific day to be the “right” day and the only “right” day was just as correct as the one who held that there were no days with special meaning. If indeed Paul is referring to those who maintained the weekly Sabbath in contrast to those who had abandoned the sanctity of any day, then the Christian Church should affirm both as well, for Paul makes it clear that *both perspectives are acceptable*. Yet clearly this has not been the case throughout Church history. Not only were those who remained Sabbath keepers marginalized, they were persecuted for their holding the seventh day as distinct from the six days of work. Moreover, since the majority of people who hold that Sunday has replaced Sabbath do so on

theological grounds, it is incongruous to expect them to affirm a practice that is at odds with that theology. To admit that the Sabbath may still remain viable is to give up a basic theological premise pertaining to the abolishment of the "old covenant" and the establishment of the New.

But there are a host of reasons why this passage cannot be talking about the shift from Sabbath to Sunday which came about in the emerging Christian Church. First, such a shift cannot be documented to have occurred any time before the destruction of the Temple. Even if Ignatius (*To the Magnesians*, 9) speaks of the "Lord's Day" as the first day of the week, or if other documents (such as *Didache*, "the Lord's own day," 14:1; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, "Wherefore also we keep the eighth day for rejoicing. . .," 15:9) speak of the priority of the first day, these are post-destruction, and cannot be used to document that such a shift had occurred in the time of Paul. Laansma, even though he comes to the conclusion that the first day of the week gained a wide recognition in the 1st Century, must still admit:

There is no indication in the NT evidence that the day displaced or rivaled the sabbath, that it was a day of rest, that it had anything to do with the Fourth Commandment or that it involved any sort of transfer theology.³⁵²

It is therefore without historical foundation to presume that Paul's mention of various days automatically refers to a choice between Shabbat and the first day of the week.

Secondly, there are only two times in the Apostolic Scriptures that even mention the first day of the week in reference to the sect of The Way.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (1Corinthians 16:2)

The Acts 20:7 text is obviously talking about the conclusion of the Sabbath, when Paul began to teach after *havdalah* (the ceremony that concludes the Sabbath). It is reasonable to presume that Roman slaves were not afforded the Sabbath as a day of rest by their masters. The only time they could gather together with the Jewish believers, therefore, was after the day's tasks were completed. In Acts 20, Paul anticipates traveling the next day, and prolongs his time with the believers into the late evening and night. Since the new day began at sunset from a Jewish reckoning, the *havdalah* service was technically on the first day of the week. It seems quite possible that the Jewish believers and their non-Jewish brethren would eat together at the end of the Sabbath, sharing with those who because of their slave status could not attend the Sabbath services. But this is hardly presented by Luke as a substitution for the Sabbath.

The second text, 1Corinthians 16:2, deals with the injunction of Paul that the communities of The Way should gather money for the relief of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Since in traditional Jewish *halachah* money was not to be gathered on the Sabbath, it was only natural that another day should be chosen. To select the first day of the week makes sense since the awareness of the needs were no doubt made known in the Sabbath gatherings, and they were therefore fresh on the minds of the community. But note carefully in the context of 1Corinthians 16 that there is no explicit mention that the community reconvened in order to gather the funds. All the text really indicates is that individually each should set aside money on the first day to await its gathering at the arrival of Paul.

Thirdly, there is some indication in the early church fathers that though there was a clear and discernible shift in the 2nd Century away from Sabbath to the first day of the week, there were still many who considered the Sabbath to be a day of rest, and a day that the followers of

Yeshua should observe. Note the remarks of Jerome (342-420 CE):

You ask me whether you ought to fast on the Sabbath and to receive the eucharist daily according to the custom - as currently reported - of the churches of Rome and Spain. Both these points have been treated by the eloquent Hippolytus, and several writers have collected passages from different authors bearing upon them. The best advice that I can give you is this. Church-traditions - especially when they do not run counter to the faith - are to be observed in the form in which previous generations have handed them down; and the use of one church is not to be annulled because it is contrary to that of another. As regards fasting, I wish that we could practice it without intermission as - according to the Acts of the Apostles - Paul did and the believers with him even in the season of Pentecost and on the Lord's Day. They are not to be accused of manichism, for carnal food ought not to be preferred before spiritual. As regards the holy eucharist you may receive it at all times without qualm of conscience or disapproval from me. You may listen to the psalmist's words: - "O taste and see that the Lord is good;" you may sing as he does: - "my heart pours forth a good word." But do not mistake my meaning. You are not to fast on feast-days, neither are you to abstain on the week days in Pentecost. In such matters each province may follow its own inclinations, and the traditions which have been handed down should be regarded as apostolic laws.³⁵³

Why would Christians of the 4th Century be asking Jerome whether they should fast on the Sabbath? The only reasonable answer is that they were still considering the Sabbath of some importance.

In the Epistle to the Philippians attributed to Ignatius (but known to have been written by someone else), we read:

Do not lightly esteem the festivals. Despise not the period of forty days, for it comprises an imitation of the conduct of the Lord. After the week of the passion, do not neglect to fast on the fourth and sixth days, distributing at the same time of thine abundance to the poor. If any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ.³⁵⁴

In fact, the strong laws made against the Sabbath were, in some measure, to stop the practice among Christians who, according to the leaders, were imitating the Jews in their observance. Chrysostom (347-407 CE) refers to the many Christians who keep the Sabbath.³⁵⁵

The fact that at the Council of Laodicea in the 4th Century it was decreed (Canon 16) that only the "New Testament" was to be read on the Sabbath would appear to indicate that many Christians apparently preferred to hear the Jewish Scriptures read and expounded on that day.³⁵⁶

Aphrahat, a Syrian Church Father in the 4th Century (c. 345) in his first homily implores his readers to abstain from observing Sabbath, new moons, and festivals of the Jews. The fact that many 4th Century Christians were attracted to the Sabbath and Festivals offers the necessity for the 69th Canon of the Apostolic Canons which warns bishops and other clerics not to join the Jews in celebrating their feasts and fasts.

And this is only a mere mention of the many data that could be amassed to show that the continuation of Sabbath and Festivals among Christians was a well known phenomenon as late as the 4th Century. It is therefore without warrant to read the late practice of the medieval Church back into Paul's day. When he was talking of days, and one observing one day over another, he cannot be referring to the much later Sabbath/Sunday debate.

So to what was Paul referring? What was the situation in the Roman synagogue to which Paul makes reference? At least two possibilities present themselves. First, the reckoning of

Shavuot was known to be controversial in the 1st Century. At least three different sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Qumran society) calculated the Festival of Shavuot differently.

A second possibility is that Paul is talking about scheduled fast days. We know that the issue of fasting was an important one in the 1st Century, and that controversies even continued into the 2nd and 3rd Centuries among the Christian Church leaders regarding the proper days for fasting.

*The Reckoning of Shavuot by the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Qumran Society*³⁵⁷

The Pharisees understood the text of Lev 23:15-16 as indicating that the counting of the omer was to begin on the day following the Festival Sabbath, i.e., the first day of Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMatzot*) or the 15th of Nisan which is a Festival Sabbath. Thus, on the 16th of Nisan they counted the first omer, and this put Shavuot 50 days later, on Sivan 6. They understood the term "complete Sabbaths" to mean "complete weeks" and thus began counting seven groups of seven from the day following the opening of *Chag HaMatzot*.

The Sadducees, however, interpreted the word "Sabbath" to refer to the weekly Sabbath. Thus, in the phrase "You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath..." (Lev 23:15), they interpreted the meaning to be that one should begin counting after the weekly Sabbath, i.e., on the first day of the week. On the day following the first weekly Sabbath of the Festival, they would begin counting the omer. Obviously, this meant they celebrated Shavuot on the first day of the week as well, but this could fluctuate as to the monthly date each year.

The Qumran society took yet another view. Believing they could not eat any of the grain offering during the feast of Unleavened Bread (and by some estimations the Qumran society took upon themselves the stricter *halachah* applicable only to the priests), they waited until the Festival was finished, then began counting on the day following the next weekly Sabbath. Like the Sadducees, they always began counting on the first day of the week, but a week later than their counterparts. And, like the Sadducees, they always celebrated Shavuot on the first day of the week, but again, a week later than the Sadducees.

The real question (and one that has little if any historical evidence for its solution) is whether or not these divergent opinions were actually lived out. Did the Sadducees, for instance, actually conduct Temple services on their scheduled Shavuot, in spite of the fact that they certainly accommodated the Pharisees on their day? Of course, the Qumran society was removed from Jerusalem, and it seems highly unlikely that they would have overcome their hatred of the Jerusalem priesthood in order to venture into the City for the Festival. (Whether or not the Qumran society were actually the Essenes is still debated).

Is it conceivable that there were Pharisees and Sadducees in the synagogue at Rome? Certainly! And if there were, then it is equally conceivable that they debated over the exact date of Shavuot (and of counting the omer). If this were the underlying issue that Paul references, then the scenario would go like this: one person is not convinced of a particular position, but is willing to go with the majority. His conviction was that one could not know for sure, and therefore he was willing to consider all of the prescribed days equally. The other person, however, was fully convinced that his reckoning was the right one, and he was intent upon keeping the Festival day according to his calendar. If this were the case, then we must presume that Paul was no able to be dogmatic on the issue either, and simply called the people to act in forbearance toward each other.

While this scenario is possible, I have come to think it less and less probable for the following reasons. First, Paul remained a Pharisee after his coming to faith in Yeshua (Acts 23:6) and therefore no doubt favored the Pharisaic reckoning. But more than that, even if he was not convinced in his own mind that the Pharisaic interpretation of Leviticus 23 was correct, since it was the majority view put forward by the Sanhedrin, in his uncertainty he would have submitted to

their rule, and most likely would have taught others to do the same (cf. Matt 23:1–3). Secondly, if the dating of Shavuot is the controversy about which he is talking, we would expect some mention or allusion to the Torah texts themselves since, after all, the observance of Shavuot is a Torah commandment. And finally, it is not Paul's way on matters of biblical interpretation to take an "I don't know" position. While it is certain that Paul did not consider that he had the final word on everything, more often than not he develops a fairly strong opinion about how the Tanach is to be interpreted.

Scheduled Fast Days

We know that in Intertestamental Judaism there was an increasing emphasis put upon fasting. Fasting is commended by Tobit (12:8) as a worthy component of prayer and alms giving. Judith teaches that fasting is rewarded by divine favor (4:9) though an attempt to bend the divine will through fasting is discouraged. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs makes frequent reference to fasting as the hallmark of piety (e.g., T. Jos. 3:4).

This growing emphasis upon fasting is reflected in the Apostolic Scriptures as well. Yeshua's admonition not to look downcast when fasting (Matt 6:16ff) would suggest that fasting was at least prevalent enough to warrant His comments. In Matthew 9:14ff the disciples of John are concerned that Yeshua's disciples are not fasting as they should, and Yeshua responds that when He leaves, then they will fast. Luke (2:36ff) notes that Anna, a prophetess in the Temple, served continually with fasting and prayer, and Luke 18:12 indicates that the Pharisees of Yeshua's day fasted twice a week.

Indeed, the rabbinic materials are replete with regulations and instructions for fasting. Megillat Ta'anit, a work compiled in the 1st Century (it lists no events past 67 CE) maps out 36 days upon which fasts are prohibited. Tradition assigns this work to Hananiah b. Hezekiah b. Garon (b. *Shabbat* 13b) but this is disputed because the appendix to the work gives the author as Eliezer, the son of Hananiah. Whatever the case, this is a very early witness to the importance of fasting.

According to other rabbinic sources (Tosefta to m. *Ta'anit* 2:4), the prescribed days for weekly fasting were Monday and Thursday. This tradition underlies the later tradition of reading the Torah in the synagogue on Mondays and Thursdays. Voluntary fasting in the rabbinic sources is usually commended as a means to keep oneself from sin, and as a way of seeking forgiveness and/or atonement for one's transgressions. The early communities of The Way practiced fasting (Acts 13:2; 14:23).

That fasting became attached generally to prayer can be seen by the variants that come into the biblical text in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries. For instance, in Acts 10:30-31 where Cornelius is noted for his "prayer and alms giving," several Greek texts add "and fasting."³⁵⁸ Likewise, fasting is added to 1Corinthians 7:5.³⁵⁹

An interesting notice in the Didache (usually dated 90–130 CE, though some scholars put it much earlier) contrasts the appropriate days for fasting with those of the "hypocrites":

But do not let your fasts coincide with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Monday and Thursday, so you must fast on Wednesday and Friday. (Didache 8:1)

That such an early controversy over fast days is exhibited in the Didache may well evidence that it existed earlier. Since the rabbinic materials prohibit fasting on Shabbat and Festival days (cf. b. *Eruvin* 41a), and since the traditional synagogue fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (cf. b. *Ta'anit* 10a), Wednesday and Friday seemed likely candidates for the emerging, Gentilized Christian Church.

Is it possible that this tendency among the growing Gentile population of the Roman

congregation to whom Paul addresses himself was also a point of contention? It seems likely. If so, this may well be what Paul addresses in his reference to "days" in our text. Since neither the Torah nor Yeshua prescribed weekly fast days, the issue was a matter of personal choice, and Paul was not willing to make specific *halachah* on it. This scenario fits the context well, and puts the matter of "days" into the realm of choice for the followers of Yeshua. I am inclined to take this interpretation as fitting the overall context of Romans 14.

In fact, the wording of v. 6, "He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God" would best fit one who fasts in contrast to the one who does not. For the one who "eats" gives thanks to the Lord (i.e., says the *berachah* before eating) and the one who does not eat, fasts unto the Lord. This combining of "eating" and "days" fits the scenario of scheduled fasts days and best explains why Paul would begin with issues of eating and move easily to matters relating to days for fasting.

7-9 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Messiah died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

These verses should be taken together, for the logic Paul employs requires their grouping. That v. 7 begins with "For" (*γάρ*, *gar*) shows that Paul intends to support his conclusion in v. 6 with his line of reason in vv. 7-9.

His point is obvious: both in life and death, those who are true worshippers of God have their focus toward Him. All matters of life, as well as one's courage in death, have God as their focus. They do this because, in fact, they belong to the Lord. And Yeshua exemplified this perfectly, for both in His life as well as in His death, He lived and died unto God. In his death and resurrection (the two cannot be separated), He met the requirements to become the unquestioned Lord of all who are saved. Once again, Paul has no difficulty equating Yeshua, the Messiah, with the Lord in Whom we live and die. He is the hope of those living as well as those who have died, for by His death and resurrection all who are His will live again. It is this focus that brings divergent opinions into the realm of loving, mutual submission within the body of Messiah.

We should also notice carefully that Paul gives to us, in a short, succinct fashion, the purpose of Yeshua's death and resurrection: that He might be Lord of both the living and the dead. That is, the glory of His death and resurrection is not so much exemplified in rescuing sinners from hell as it is in being known as their Lord. His salvific work has as its ultimate accomplishment making sinners holy.

10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

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

Note also that in this verse Paul utilizes the word "brother" (*ἀδελφός*, *adelphos*) twice, a word he has not mentioned since 12:1. Paul recognizes that both the one weak in faith as well as the one strong in faith are "brothers." Here we find the term "brother" used to identify covenant

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

stand before the judgment seat of God The Greek manuscripts show a variant, Χριστοῦ, *christou*, “Christ,” “Messiah,” no doubt in an attempt to parallel this text with 1Corinthians 5:10 where Χριστός, *Christos* is used.³⁶⁰ The use of “stand” (παριστάναι, *paristanai*) in the sense of “stand before a judge” has clear technical usage in the Greek of Paul’s day.³⁶¹

Excursus on The Judgment Seat of God/Messiah

The phrase “judgment seat of God/Messiah” is used only in our text (Romans 14:10) and in 1Corinthians 5:10—

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The mention of a “judgment seat,” however, is common. It is found in Matthew 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 18:12,16-17. In each case (including Romans and 1Corinthians), the Greek is βῆμα, *bema*, “judicial bench,” “place of judgment,” “court.” The Greek word identifies first of all a “step, stride,” and then a “plot of ground” (cf. Acts 7:5). It came to refer to a speaker’s platform (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.209; 7.370) and thus eventually came to mean the place where the tribunal of the Roman government (in whatever capacity) met to make judgments and pronounce sentence upon criminals. In Rabbinic Hebrew בֵּמַה, *bemah* was a loanword from the Greek to identify the place of judgment, reflective of the societal situation in which the “gate” of the city had been replaced by a designated place of the judges. Thus Herod Agrippa I addressed the people of Tyre and Sidon from the “*bema*” (Acts 12:21), and both Yeshua and Paul were brought to a place of judgment with the same designation (John 19:13, cf. Matthew 27:19; Acts 18:12-17). Paul stood before Festus at Caesarea at the “judgement seat” (Acts 25:6, 10, 17).

The question of when the “judgment seat of God/Messiah” will take place has been a matter of discussion among theologians. The mention of a “great white throne” in John’s Apocalypse (20:11) has often been differentiated from the “judgment seat of God/Messiah” referenced in Paul:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. (Rev 20:11)

It is not clear, however, that the two should be delineated as two separate judgments. Systematic theologians, taking the descriptions of each, have postulated that the “great white throne” judgment is for the unbelievers, while the “judgment seat of God/Messiah” is directed toward believers. Acts 17:31 does not seem to envision two judgments:

because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a

Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

And even closer to the text of Rom 14:10 is Acts 10:42:

And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead.

At the end of the age Yeshua will sit as the Judge upon His throne and judge the nations, separating the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:31-36) at which time the wicked will be cast into a "furnace of fire ... then the righteous will shine like the sun" (Matt 13:41-43). This must correspond to John's picture of the "great white throne" when those judged will be sentenced as to whether their names are written in the "book of life" (Rev 20:11ff).

There is, of course, an apparent contradiction in all of this, for Paul makes it clear that for those who are in Yeshua, all judgment has ceased. Salvation assures one that the wrath of God has passed (Rom 5:9) and that no one will be able to bring a charge against God's elect (Rom 8:33). Does this mean, then, that all mention of judgment in the Apostolic Scriptures is necessarily pointed toward the unbeliever? Are those who have confessed Yeshua to give no attention to a future day in which their works will be judged? Commenting on this Jewett writes:

One must not make a bagatelle of such a solemn statement in the name of grace, as though it were appointed to men once to die and after this the judgment (Heb 9:27), for those who are not Christians only. Whereas the Christian, as a citizen of the heavenly country, has a "scroll" (Bunyan) and wears a "wedding garment" marking him as an invited guest to the marriage supper of the Lamb, there is surely an awesome accounting that he must render for the manner in which he has lived his life. Whereas grace and works are mutually exclusive principles in justification, grace does not exclude good works. Good works are the fruit of grace, and he whose life has been unfruitful will give answer for his lack of stewardship. The NT does not offer cheap grace.³⁶²

Paul calls his readers to pay attention to this kind of judgment, a judgment that assesses whether or not their lives, as those borne again by the Spirit, have produced the fruit of genuine faith and repentance. Such fruit is seen in one's willingness to hold the standards of righteousness given to us by God, exemplified in the life and teachings of Yeshua, while at the same time not despising our brothers or sisters when they do not conform to our own personal opinions or standards.

The motivation of the judgment seat of God/Messiah is therefore the passionate desire to hear the words "well done, good and faithful servant." This motivation drives the child of God to an unceasing pursuit of God's truth, and propels him forward in zeal for good works (Tit 2:14). It equally fosters patience, acceptance, and love toward those who, while maintaining an evident obedient faithfulness to God, differ in matters of personal opinion and *halachah*.

11-12 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul has given the notice about the judgment seat of God as a motivation to proper behavior within the community of faith. In doing so, as usual he grounds his exhortation in the Tanach, here quoting Is 45:23–

MT	Lxx	Paul
<p>בִּי נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי יֵצֵא מִפִּי צְדָקָה דְּבַר וְלֹא יָשׁוּב כִּי־לִי תִכְרַע כָּל־בֶּרֶךְ תִּשְׁבַּע כָּל־לָשׁוֹן</p> <p>I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.</p>	<p>κατ' ἑμαυτοῦ ὀμνύω ἢ μὴν ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου δικαιοσύνη οἱ λόγοι μου οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ</p> <p>By Myself I swear, righteousness shall surely proceed out of My mouth; My words shall not be frustrated; that to Me every knee shall bend, and every tongue shall swear by God.</p>	<p>ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται τῷ θεῷ.</p> <p>As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.</p>

It can be seen that Paul quotes the Lxx of the last half of Is 45:23, with the exception that he transposes ἐξομολογήσεται, *exomologesetai*, “to confess, praise” and γλῶσσα, *glossa*, “tongue.” In addition, Paul has introduced the quote with “as I live,” an oath formula found in a number of Tanach texts (cf. Is 49:18; Num 14:28; Jer 22:24; Ezek 5:11). With this introduction he adds greater weight to the pronouncement and ties it into the larger context of Is 45, emphasizing the concept of “oath” in the phrase “by myself I have sworn.”

Paul quotes the same text in Phil 2:10f, at which point it is clearly applied to the exalted Messiah, Yeshua. Whether or not Paul intends that his readers see the fulfillment of Is 45:23 in Yeshua as the final Judge, it is clear that he intends to equate the judgment of God (note the final “give praise to God”) and that of Yeshua. Both the Father and the Son act together as the divine Judge before whom all will bend the knee.

In v. 12 the emphasis that Paul intends to give, however, is that “each one will give account of himself” and not of his neighbor. The Greek is emphatic: each one of us, that is, each individual believer, will indeed give account—none will be exempt. One will not be able to answer for the other, nor will one be in a position to judge the other. Each will give his own reckoning. If this will be true in the final day, it ought also to be true now. We all stand before our own Master, and it is to Him we give account. For Paul, the eschatological reality has clear bearing upon the present. Since the future has invaded the present in the coming of Yeshua, we are to live in that reality, and in the present context, the emphasis Paul intends is how this impacts our response to others in our community, particularly when our “opinions” differ.

13 Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

The summation is in the form of an exhortation: stop judging each other. In the context (by which this summary exhortation must be understood), the judging deals with matters of personal “opinion” by which one judges the other. The “politically correct” atmosphere of our current society in which a call to standards is considered unkind or unloving is not the perspective of the Apostle. He is not negating the requirement for each one to submit to the righteous standards of God, and to give account when such standards are neglected or transgressed. What he is emphasizing is the need to accept each other, not because one conforms to the other's own personal standards, but because each submits to the standards of God, standards which are couched in terms of love and loyalty first to Him, and then to each other. Paul would never have thought that one could honor one's neighbor while at the same time disobeying God.

But Paul goes beyond simply exhorting not to judge each other on the basis of one's personal preferences. He adds a positive exhortation, "not to put an obstacle or stumbling block in a brother's way." Since we see in the context that the issue of judging was in the realm of personal opinions or preferences, it is clear that the stumbling block goes beyond these peripheral issues to something deeper—something more central in terms of the issue of faith. This, of course, has to do with the presentation of the "gospel" (i.e., the righteousness of God) in life actions that are consistent with its message. To exclude someone on the basis of personal preferences is actually to add something to the gospel, for it is in the gospel, the good news preached to Abraham (Gal 3:8), that we should find our unity. To separate from someone on the basis of one's own preferences is to suggest that these personal preferences ("opinions") have equal authority and importance with the word of God. Only the most arrogant could proffer such a position.

What exactly is an "obstacle" (πρόσκομμα, *proskomma*) or a "stumbling block" (σκάνδαλον, *skandalon*)? Previously (9:32-33) Paul has noted that Yeshua Himself, in His death, became a stumbling block to Israel—she stumbled over the cornerstone. It seems most likely that here Paul has "stumbling block" and "obstacle" in mind as regards the gospel. He is talking about how one might stumble while walking toward an acceptance of the Gospel as grounded in Yeshua. We may note two other times when Paul uses the term "stumbling block":

Rom 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

1Cor 1:23 but we preach Messiah crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness,

Yeshua Himself also used the "stumbling block" metaphor:

Matt 13:41 "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,

Matt 16:23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

Matt 18:7 "Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! (cf. Luke 17:1)

It is quite possible that Paul knew of these sayings of Yeshua, and that he incorporated the teaching of "stumbling blocks" from Him. In general, Yeshua equated "stumbling blocks" with those who commit lawlessness, and thus cause others to following in their transgressions. Likewise, when He addresses Peter as a stumbling block, it is because Peter intends to stand in the way of what is righteous, in this case, Yeshua's willingness to endure the penalty for sinners. In like manner, Matt 18:7 envisions stumbling blocks as those who cause others to stray from the ways of the kingdom.

Paul considers those who are weak in faith as "on their way into the kingdom," i.e., as coming to faith in Messiah Yeshua. He is not naïve in thinking that all will come, but certainly those who are part of the Roman synagogue are envisioned within the broader community of The Way, and are at the point of being drawn into faith in Yeshua. While Paul certainly believes in Divine providence and sovereignty in the whole scope of salvation, he nonetheless warns his readers that they should not become stumbling blocks for those who are progressing toward faith. And thus this exhortation is directed primarily toward those whom Paul characterizes as

strong in faith (in contrast to those weak in faith). The manner in which the strong in faith could become stumbling blocks to those weak in faith is through causing division (rejection of the weak) over matters of opinion.

While Paul does not say so explicitly, it is difficult to escape the obvious fact that he is dealing with matters of Oral Torah here. The development of the Sages' *halachah* was in a formative stage during the pre-destruction era, as the Mishnah clearly reflects. Social and political issues were driving new decisions, and the influx of the Gentiles was accelerating the development of boundaries. For the post-Damascus Paul, *halachic* decisions had taken on a new criteria, namely, the manner in which they would enhance and reflect the message of the gospel in Yeshua. Though he was willing to abide by the prevailing *halachah* when able, he was not willing to adhere to it if by doing so he would in any way diminish the message of the gospel. And of course, this included the inclusion of the Gentiles, something that was continuing to be a problem for the Sages. It was in this realm of Oral Torah that divisions were happening within the Roman synagogue to which he addressed himself. And in his appeal to the strong in faith, he warns that the opinions of man should not bring division among those who were pursuing the oneness that comes by faith in Yeshua.

14-15 I know and am convinced in the Lord Yeshua that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died.

Here is a statement of the Apostle Paul which, if taken out of context, and without reference to the whole scope of the Apostle's life and teaching, could be (and has been) sorely misinterpreted. Wresting the phrase "nothing is unclean of itself" from its context, some have interpreted Paul to be teaching the abolition of the Torah with its distinctions between clean and unclean (טהורָה, *t'horah*, "clean"; טָמֵא, *tamei*, "unclean"). Cranfield is representative of this thinking:

He [Paul] is indicating his own agreement with the basic position of the strong, namely, that the fact that Christ's work has now been accomplished has radically transformed the situation with regard to the ceremonial part of the OT law: now it is no longer obligatory to obey it literally—one obeys it by believing in Him to whom it bears witness.³⁶³

Stern is no better when he tries to explain the passage from the viewpoint that the ceremonial aspects of Torah are not for the Gentile:

Since the laws of ritual purity apply to Jews only, the statement that nothing is unclean in itself should suffice to free any Gentile whose conscience still bothers him in regard to such matters. As for Jews, even in rabbinic Judaism most of the purity laws gradually fell into disuse (see *Encyclopedia Judaica* 14:1412).³⁶⁴

Stern's last comment disregards all clear indications that purity laws not only maintained among 1st Century Judaisms, but was one of the primary concerns among the Sages.

But did Paul actually teach here that the Torah has been modified or abandoned regarding the laws of clean and unclean? To hold such an interpretation one must presume Paul was lying in Acts 28:17 when he is reported as saying:

... Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Paul affirms emphatically that he had not transgressed even the “customs of our father,” which not only includes the specific commands of Torah, but also the interpretations of this Torah by the Sages. That this overarching statement must include the laws of clean and unclean is certain.

In addition, Paul must have agreed with the words and teachings of Yeshua that not even the least commandment of the Torah would be done away with (Matthew 5:17-20). To understand him here as teaching that the ceremonial laws of the Torah have been suspended or abolished is to fly in the face of Yeshua's explicit teaching.

Once again, we must keep in mind that the primary focus of the Apostle in this section is how varying “opinions” (v. 1) over disputed matters are causing division within the community at Rome. In the context, those who were not willing to eat meat did so, presumably, because they were not certain that the meat being offered was “clean” according to their standards. The issue at hand, then, was to what extent the current *halachah* of the Sages should be accepted as an absolute in determining clean and unclean. If the Sages ruled that meat purchased from a Gentile was unclean, did this in fact make it unclean? Was meat obtained from the public market to be considered unclean? Paul clearly says “no.” The definition of clean and unclean comes from Torah, not from man. Therefore, any meat declared edible by God should not be ruled unclean by man. It is on this basis that Paul emphatically declares that nothing is unclean in and of itself. That is, if God has declared it clean (and therefore edible) it should not be otherwise considered. That this viewpoint is correct will be seen in v. 20 where Paul includes the word “food”: “Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean....” Paul's point must be that everything that qualifies as food (i.e., everything God permits to be eaten) is clean.

Yet there were apparently those in the synagogue at Rome who still, to one measure or another, held the Oral Torah as binding in the matter of food prepared by or eaten in the presence of Gentiles. In their opinion on the matter, they would rather forego eating meat at all rather than risk violating the prevailing rabbinic *halachah*. Paul does not want those strong in faith to coerce those weak in faith through pressure of rejection. Rather, he wants each person to be fully convinced in his own conscience as an exercise of genuine faith.

What is more (and perhaps this was Paul's greater worry), if those who are weak in the faith leave the congregation because they are wounded in conscience over matters of opinion, they likewise leave the place where the gospel of Yeshua is taught and lived out. It must be in this context that Paul gives the warning “For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Messiah died.”

It is usually presumed that Paul is talking about eternal destruction. That is, he is suggesting that those who are offended might be eternally lost because they would be discouraged from believing in Yeshua. But it is more probable that Paul is speaking of the personal, spiritual ruin that may come to those who are without community when he speaks of “destruction.” Such ruin would be temporal (though this does not diminish its severity), for Yeshua's death secures the eternal salvation of all the elect (Rom 8:29–30).

Here, as usual, we see the intersection of Divine sovereignty and human agency. For while Paul clearly teaches the sovereign salvation of the elect, he likewise holds the believers of Rome responsible for the careful shepherding of their fellow congregants. A disregard for the ways of God could cause those weak in faith to suffer personal ruin. They were not allowed to think that God's sovereignty in salvation somehow obviated them from their responsibilities to each other.

16-17 Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Paul knew that the teaching of men could be false. That had been made clear to him when he was personally confronted by the risen Savior. His view of himself, of the righteous-

ness he thought he had based upon his Jewishness and his zeal for the Torah; his perspective of the Gentiles; and most assuredly, his view of Yeshua had radically changed in the course of a few days. In the wake of this experience of God's grace, Paul came to understand that in some measure the laws of the Sages had created walls, separating Jew and non-Jew—walls God never intended to be built. In fact, the wall of partition spoken of in Eph 2 is just such a wall. But in Yeshua, this wall had been broken down so that all, Jew and non-Jew alike, could fellowship together in the shalom of Torah as the Spirit enabled them to walk in God's righteous ways.

Yet even this freedom from the entanglement of man-made laws that had separated Jew and non-Jew could be used in a wrong way. Paul is concerned that in the exuberance of their new-found faith, the Gentile believers could arrogantly judge the Jewish congregants as less than free in Yeshua because they were remaining under the yoke of traditional, man-made *halachah*. That which had become good for them (their liberty to fellowship within the Torah community) could, if wrongly used, become evil within that same community of believers. The strong in faith were to recognize that their liberty was one of service, not self promotion. Those who are weak in faith should rather be able to speak about goodness that flowed toward them from the liberty their fellow community members were exercising.

Paul's reasoning is flawless. The kingdom of God (used by Paul seven other times, 1Cor 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 2Thess 1:5) does not have as its goal what one eats or drinks, but fellowship with the Almighty. The kingdom of God is the dwelling of God among His people, and it is from this perspective that all *halachah* should cohere. Thus, opinions that divide must be changed. In their place must preside the righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit brings, particularly (and especially in this context) as evidenced in the unity of the congregation as each one submits to the reign of Messiah. Paul regularly speaks of the Holy Spirit in the context of the unity of the body of believers (e.g., Eph 4:11ff; 1Cor 12:12ff).

This does not mean that eating and drinking are unimportant. Indeed, Paul teaches that even this must be done for the glory of God:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1Cor 10:31)

But eating and drinking are not the goal: the dwelling of God among His people is.

18 For he who in this way serves Messiah is acceptable to God and approved by men.

This verse must surely be taken as a re-emphasis of what was stated in v. 17. Set in kingdom terms, the manner in which we walk (our *halachah*) must be understood in terms of service to the King. Our goal in treating our neighbor in a loving way is that we should serve the King. Thus, to forego one's own desires in order to preserve the conscience of one's neighbor is a matter of obedience to the Master. Actions done with this motivation will not only be acceptable before HaShem, but will also be approved by the rest of the community.

The fact that Paul uses the singular "in this way" has given rise to number of interpretations. What does he mean by "he who serves in this way...?" The following have been suggested:

- 1) in the Holy Spirit
- 2) in righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (v. 17), the three viewed as a unity.
- 3) in this = "in this manner, in this way"
- 4) in peace, since Paul is focusing on this singular idea throughout the passage

Cranfield opts for number 2, and it is the most likely due to the close proximity of the phrase in v. 17. But number 3 is not without its merits (most of the modern translations take it this way,

e.g., NASB, NIV, NRSV).

Paul's perspective is that when one's conscience is clear before God in what he is doing, he may expect the approval of men. And even if one does not always receive man's approval, if God is pleased, then he at least *deserves* the approval of his fellow man.

19 Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Paul states clearly his primary exhortation:³⁶⁵ “pursue what makes for peace and edification.” This is his bottom line. He does not intend that peace should be sought at the expense of truth, but by its careful implementation.

The idiom “pursue peace” is found in the Lxx of Ps 33:15 (Heb Ps 34:15) translating the Hebrew *בְּקֶשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְרָדְפֵהוּ*, “seek peace and pursue it” (cf. Heb 12:13; 1Pet 3:11 which also quote Psalm 34). It is likely that “peace” in the trilogy of v. 17 has as its primary focus peace with God. Here, of course, one is to pursue peace with one's neighbor. But the two are obviously not isolated. Those who are at peace with God will likewise have much greater success at finding peace with their neighbors. And the opposite is likewise true: enmity toward God will inevitably result in strife to one's neighbor.

The metaphor of “building” is used often by Paul³⁶⁶ in the sense of growing in one's faith, and of strengthening the community of faith. He no doubt takes this from the rich imagery of the Tanach, in which God builds Jerusalem (Psalm 147:2), Zion (Psalm 102:16), the throne of David (Ps 89:4, cf. 1Sam 7 where God promises to build David a “house,” i.e., dynasty), as well as Israel itself (Jer 31:4). God specifically builds up Gentiles in the midst of His people Israel (Jer 12:16).

Paul's use of the metaphor as applied to the followers of Yeshua must surely be seen as based upon these Tanach images, not as teaching a replacement of Israel. Rather, the “building up” is viewed as the continuing promise of God that He would build His people. As the Gentiles (through the apostolic ministry of Paul) are grafted into the people of Israel, the ancient promises of God are fulfilled. But Paul recognizes that God uses His people to accomplish His purposes as well and thus the building up is realized by the obedience of those who love Him. Paul sees the building up of Israel occurring within the synagogue of Rome as Jew and non-Jew live out their faith in Yeshua. And as the next verse implies, the building up of the whole begins by the building up of each individual (cf. Eph 4:12ff).

20-21 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles.

The issue at hand is the *halachah* of food: what is to be eaten, and when. As noted above, Paul is not overturning the Torah distinctions of clean and unclean. Nor is he saying that there are two distinct *halachot*, one for Gentile believers and a different one for Jewish congregants.³⁶⁷ His statement that “everything is clean” (*πάντα μὲν καθάρᾳ*) must be understood within the context of the debate about whether or not Gentile contact with food rendered it unclean. For Paul, this is wrong. That which God declared to be clean should not be considered unclean. However, those “weak in faith” were torn between the prevailing *halachah* of the Sages which did suggest that food in the presence of Gentiles rendered it susceptible (see above, pp. 409f), especially meat that may have come from the common marketplace since the possibility existed that it had been offered to idols. Paul is simply asking those strong in faith (who were convinced that rabbinic *halachah* could be disregarded when it divided Jew and Gentile) to understand the place of those weak in faith, and to be willing to forego their privileges (like eating kosher meat even if it was purchased in the common market) for the sake of those with a differing opinion. After

all, the goal is not to exercise one's privileges but to aid the "work of God." Thus, the statement "everything is clean" must be restricted by the context: everything given by God for food is clean. Cranfield agrees:

As with οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ [nothing is unclean in itself] of v. 14, we have to understand this statement as intended in a restricted sense, the reference being not to such things as men's thoughts, desires and actions, but only to the resources of the created world which are available and appropriate for human consumption.³⁶⁸

It is clear that for Paul, the Torah defines what is "fit for human consumption," that is, what God has given for food.

Once again, however, I am convinced that what Paul was combating in the synagogue at Rome was an unwillingness to "get along" when it came to rabbinic *halachah*. The layers of laws put upon the written Torah moved in the direction of isolating the Jewish community from the Gentile population. For the followers of Yeshua, this could never be the reality. Jew and non-Jew were to fellowship within the context of "one new man" and to receive each other on this basis. Thus, Paul calls upon those strong in their faith to patiently accommodate the stricter *halachah* of those who were not yet convinced that Yeshua was the Messiah, and therefore that His message regarding the burden of traditions (cf. Mk 7:6ff) was worthy of their reception.

In this context, what is the "work of God" ("do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God")? It must be the ingathering of the Gentiles and the final and full salvation of Israel (as Paul taught in chapter 11). If one of the purposes of the Gentile ingathering was to provoke Israel to jealousy, the Gentile believers (if indeed this is the group understood to be the "strong in faith") must understand this and be willing to lovingly serve their Jewish brothers and sisters within the framework of God's family.

Frustrating God's work is spoken of as causing someone to "fall": "make others fall by what you eat." It is not as though some would refuse to believe because of the differing *halachah*. Rather, the issue is that those who had not yet come to faith in Yeshua would, if repeatedly rejected because of their *halachah*, go elsewhere. In such a scenario, they would leave the influence of those who were believers and therefore be outside the sphere of the gospel as it was lived out and spoken. And while one does not sin by eating the meat that is, by rabbinic standards, unclean, one does sin by eating it if in so doing one's brother is turned away.

The Talmud actually agrees with this general line of reasoning, that one should adjust one's *halachah* in order not to offend:

Even as it was taught: Things which are permitted, yet some treat them as forbidden, you must not permit them in their presence, because it is written, he shall not break his word.³⁶⁹

This talmudic quote raises another question. Did those weak in faith take an oath regarding what they would and would not eat? If so, trying to persuade them to eat against the oath they had taken would be to encourage transgression.

It may also be significant that v. 21 speaks of "meat" and "wine," for these two elements were the basis for many *halachic* discussions regarding table fellowship with Gentiles, most likely because both of these were prominently used in the pagan temples. Meat was suspect as coming from pagan sacrifices, and wine was used for libations to the gods. Here, again, the issue may be over rulings regarding the use of food purchased at the common market where, admittedly, idolaters sold their produce. Paul's consistent admonition is that one should forego eating any food that would cause a brother to fall or stumble with regard to the gospel.

22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

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

Furthermore, to acquiesce to the weak brother may be done in full conscience of faith, for one’s freedom allows such accommodation. Thus, he is not being “wishy-washy” or somehow unstable, but inwardly knows that he is approved in what he does, both by God and by his own conscience. In the presence of these two “witnesses,” he may rest assured that his choice, to forego his own freedom for the sake of his brother, is the right one.

Once again, this verse could easily be misconstrued if taken out of context. Paul is not teaching that if one is certain in one’s own soul, then the matter is righteous for him! The guidelines of righteousness are not subjective but are the objective and eternal revelation of God with the Torah as the foundation. But in matters of preference (in this case, varying *halachah* regarding food and designated fast days), one’s conscience must be free and not bound. And this freedom comes from a clear confession of faith in God and a willingness to follow Him as He has revealed Himself in Messiah Yeshua. Such a freedom, which springs from faith, must be the foundation for the choices Paul enjoins upon those strong in faith.

It does seem clear that this verse is directed toward the strong in faith. It seems equally possible that the following verse is in reference to those weak in faith. This is especially true if those weak in faith were also laboring under the fact that they had taken a vow in regard to what they would and would not eat. To force them against their conscience would, indeed, cause them to stumble.

Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves The form of this saying follows that of a “beatitude,” which in Hebrew would begin with the common אֲשֶׁרִי, *ashrei*, “Happy is he who....”³⁷⁰ It may well be that Paul quotes or adapts a well known beatitude, though this exact wording is not found elsewhere. The meaning of the phrase is not immediately evident, however. As noted above, this concluding phrase cannot mean that mere self-confidence secures individual righteousness. The idea of being “happy” is that of being “blessed.” This blessing comes from the Lord, and thus one is blessed when his actions agree with what he knows to be right. One who knows with certainty what God has commanded may, with similar confidence, live out that conviction and anticipate blessings from his Master. This means that one is not persuaded by trends or even by the majority, but by what God has said. With this confidence, one is able then to divide between those absolutes that may not be compromised, and personal preferences which may be adjusted. In being settled in one’s own conscience regarding the things God requires, one is able to both assess and appreciate the personal scruples of the weaker brother. Thus, in following this *halachah* or that (in matters that are not absolutes), one must do so in accordance with well received principles, not merely to accommodate.

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.

It seems best to understand this statement to be directed toward the weak in faith. The strong are not to coerce the one who is intent upon not eating. This would only wound his conscience in the end, and violate the principle that one’s personal *halachah* should flow from

received principles, not from a need to conform. Once again, it may well be that oaths were involved, and to coerce someone to break a valid oath is wrong. Here, as above, the concept of "faith" is one's inner convictions upon which one is obligated to act. For Paul, the foundation of *halachah* is faith—a faith that always begins in the renewed heart but inevitably is seen in outward obedience.

If, as I have suggested, this verse pertains particularly to the "weak in faith," then it emphasizes once again that those in this category are considered by the Apostle to have genuine faith. In fact, their faith in God is what motivates them to seek His approval for their *halachah*.

The use of the word "condemned" (κατακρίνω, *katakrinw* here a perf. pass. part.) does not mean "condemned" in the sense of "eternally lost" but rather condemned in his own conscience, for he has gone contrary to his own convictions and cannot therefore experience the "blessing" (happiness) of which the previous verse speaks.

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

We may ask exactly how the final phrase ("whatever is not from faith is sin") is to be taken: is it universal or limited to the immediate context? While many commentators (both ancient and modern) have taken this to be a universal axiom, it seems most consistent with the context to understand that Paul was referring to the immediate situation of personal *halachah*. Those who take it as universal also take "faith" to mean "saving faith," and interpret this to mean that those who have not confessed Yeshua as Messiah are constantly engaged in sin, for all of their actions are derived apart from "faith," i.e., apart from saving faith in Yeshua.

Yet this seems to go contrary to the basic context and argument of the Apostle. Rather, he seems to imply that those who are weak in faith have, nonetheless, a genuine faith—a faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such faith moves them to adopt their particular *halachah* which is not contrary to Torah but, in their opinion, derives from it. As such, the categorical statement that "whatever is not of faith is sin" should be understood to mean that in matters of personal *halachah*, one must be convinced on the basis of one's conscience in the realm of faith in God, and that if one acts contrary to this, one is sinning.