

FAQ – Romans 14:14 – Persuaded that Nothing is Unclean?

We already know that the writings of Paul are difficult to understand. We were even warned beforehand by Peter that Paul's letters can be misunderstood by those lacking a strong foundation in God's Word. According to Peter, that error results in breaking God's Law (lawlessness/wickedness) simply because Paul can be used (in a theological error) to teach against all or some of God's Law (2 Peter 3:14:17).

Romans 14 is another unfortunate instance (amongst many) where teachers fail to exercise due diligence in studying God's Word to understand exactly what Paul is teaching. As a result, many accidently dismiss Peter's clear warning and mistakenly render any application meaningless. Instead, either because of intellectual laziness or placing too much unchecked faith in the doctrines of men, Romans 14 is continuously used to support a law-abolishing paradigm. More specifically, the commandments considered abolished via Romans 14 are the commandments found in Leviticus 11 (Dietary) and Leviticus 23 (Sabbath).

We are even told by Paul himself to test everything and only hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The problem is when we allow our flesh to define good verses allowing God's Word to establish the true definition. Paul even commended those who tested everything he said and practiced to God's Word (Acts 17:10-11). If we were to test everything to scripture as Paul recommends, then using his letters to generate the error of lawless men would be actually quite a difficult feat.

Most do not consider that the only Word the Bereans could have been searching daily to prove Paul right or wrong was what we now call today the Old Testament. That should put things into a new perspective. Many people only test Paul's writings against Paul's writings, which is disturbing in and of itself. How much of today's interpretation of Paul's letters could pass the test using only the Old Testament? That is certainly what a Berean would ask. In reading the Old Testament, we quickly discover that God's Law, as delivered to us on Sinai, is intended to exist forever, and it is defined as light, liberty, the way, the truth, the life, and absolutely perfect. Yet some accuse God of removing such blessings from us. Some even accuse Paul of defining God's Law as bondage, broken, or worthless, and doubtful disputations, as stated in Romans 14.

We not only discover that in both the New and Old Testaments that there is no support of the notion that Paul taught against God's Law, but that Paul actually taught the exact opposite. Paul taught that the Law is good, holy, just, delightful, and spiritual. He stated that he believes in all of the Law and Prophets (Acts 24:13-14). He practiced God's feast days (Acts 18:20-21, Acts 20:17, Acts 27:9-10). In Acts 21, James directs Paul to perform a Nazirite vow with four others, just to prove accusations against Paul to be false. Paul did indeed teach and practice the Law of Moses (Acts 21:20-26). These false accusations directed to Paul in the first century required that he defend himself relentlessly. These are also the exact same accusations today, resulting from a poor interpretation of Paul's letters by mainstream theology. After 2,000 years, Paul still has to defend himself against these false accusations. After 2,000 years, and a couple languages removed, Paul is even more difficult to understand in matters of God's Law, yet we pretend otherwise and send those new in the faith to read and study Paul first. According to Peter, we should read and understand the Old Testament and Gospels first, then read Paul, once a stable and educated foundation is established. How often do we hear such advice?

Even if we test Paul's words that supposedly abolish or change God's Law against each other, we would find several disturbing contradictions. If we read the preceding 13 chapters of Romans in the context of the audience and debate at hand (as Paul certainly intended his letter to be read), we would find that it proves very difficult to make the error of lawless men.

Romans 3:31 [Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.](#)

Romans 7:12 Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

Paul obviously believed in and taught the law of God. If the above verses are established as true, what sense can we make of Romans 14, which supposedly teaches against God's Law?

In case there is any confusion on how he defines the Law of God, Paul declares to the Jews that they are those who understand the Law. Paul is not inventing some new mystical Law of God, but the same one that was passed down through the ages.

Romans 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law)

This is why Paul states that the Jews had the advantage in understanding these things.

Romans 3:1-2 What advantage then has the Jew, or what *is* the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

When Paul says the "Law of God", he means the "Law of God"!

Paul begins the chapter by declaring we are to still receive those who are weak in the faith and to not dispute over doubtful things.

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things.

We need to keep in mind that Romans 14 is often used to support the abolishment of the Sabbath day (Leviticus 23) and the dietary instructions (Leviticus 11). These commandments have always been clear and have never been matters of "doubtful things." On the contrary, God's Law is given to us to clearly define sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7 and 1 John 3:4) and to enable us to correct and rebuke others (i.e. 2 Timothy 3:14-17). Paul is speaking of things outside of God's Law that were matters of contention for believers in the first century. Given that this is a letter to a specific group of people about a specific debate, we must extract various clues to assist us in piecing together exactly what Paul is teaching.

There are two debates Paul focuses on in Romans 14. Paul outlines these points of contention in the very next two verses (2 & 3). The first matter of discussion and correction from Paul is whether they can eat all things or should they eat only vegetables.

Debate #1

Romans 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

The second matter Paul establishes as a focus in chapter 13 is related to what day(s) believers should fast.

Debate #2

Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats;

Paul answers debate #1 in verses 14-23.

These verses are often used in mainstream Christian doctrine to suggest that all animals are now clean and suitable for food. The proof verse to support this understanding begins in verse 14.

Paul answers debate #2 in verses 5-13.

These verses are often used in mainstream Christian doctrine to suggest that God abolished the Sabbath day and now all days are alike, however, if in your mind, all days are not alike then the Sabbath still exists. It

somehow depends on if you are doing it for the Lord or not. Therefore, anyone can determine where God's Law stands on this matter, solely based on what one wants to believe.

Supposedly we can decide what God's Law now is or what God wants us to observe. This matter is no longer established by what is written in God's Word about the Sabbath or even by what was practiced by Yeshua (Jesus) as an example for us to follow, but purely based on how convinced we now are in our own mind. The proof verse to support this understanding is supposedly established in verse 5.

Romans 14:14

The focus of this study is Romans 14:14 which Paul establishes as debate # 1.

Romans 14:14-23 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.* Yet if your brother is grieved because of *your* food ("broma"), you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who serves Christ in these things ^{is} acceptable to God and approved by men.

Therefore let us pursue the things *which make* for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed *are* pure, but *it is* evil for the man who eats with offense. *It is* good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. Do you have faith? Have *it* to yourself before God. Happy *is* he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does* not *eat* from faith; for whatever *is* not from faith is sin.

Contrary to God's Word, Yeshua (Jesus), and Paul, verse 14 is often used as license to teach that all animals are now clean and suitable for food. If we examine the context, we discover that in verse 15, Paul is speaking of what God's Word already defines as food according to Leviticus 11. The word used for "food" is "broma."

Strong's:

G1033 *broma* *bro'-mah*

from the base of G977;

food (literally or figuratively), especially (ceremonially) articles allowed or forbidden by the Jewish law.

Unclean animals have never been considered food ("broma"), regardless of what unbelievers outside of God's Word might consider food.

Paul is not entertaining a debate whether unclean animals, according to Leviticus 11, are now suddenly clean and can be defined as food ("broma"). Paul is settling a debate whether Biblically clean food can be made unclean in ways not mentioned in scripture.

The first century believers were confused and debated this issue. This is not a new debate. There are a couple other examples and parallels in scripture from which we can draw understanding.

Paul addresses the issue of eating meat from the meat market that has been sacrificed to idols. He teaches that it is fine to eat of we are unaware of it's origin and do not give the impression to others that sun god temple sacrifice is acceptable. If those criteria are met then it is Paul's opinion and understanding that the meat is just fine.

We can also contrast this with the decree James made in Acts 15:20 in which it is made clear that we are to not directly participate in pagan cultic temple sacrifices. Thus there is a difference. Eating meat sacrificed

to idols, as it relates to directly partaking in the cultic pagan practices, is different than unknowingly eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols and purchased from the marketplace. It is all about whether one is participating directly or indirectly in sun god worship and/or giving the impression of participating in sun god worship, and consequently causing others to stumble.

In Yeshua's (Jesus') day there was much debate on whether food (broma) considered clean by God's Word can be made unclean. Yeshua (Jesus) dealt with this issue in Mark 7, surrounding the Pharisee tradition of forcing and compelling others to wash their hands before eating. One who did not wash his hands according to the prescribed method defiled his food and made it unclean, according to the man made "oral law". Again, there is a difference between commandments of men and commandments of God.

Yeshua (Jesus) taught that clean food cannot be made unclean by such practices. It is because of this teaching Yeshua provided in Mark 7 that Paul can declare in confidence in what he teaches in verse 14:

Romans 14:14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.

Paul is convinced by Yeshua (Jesus) because Yeshua (Jesus) stated this:

Mark 7:18-19 So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?"

In this case, Yeshua (Jesus) states that all "foods" (broma) are purified by the stomach. To those who knew God's Law, only animals defined as clean in Leviticus 11 were to be considered food. In the context of this declaration, Yeshua (Jesus) was rebuking the Pharisees for nullifying the Law of Moses in their traditions:

Mark 7:6-13 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written:

*' This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far from Me.
And in vain they worship Me.
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*

For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Obviously Yeshua (Jesus) is not rebuking the Pharisees for nullifying the Word of God (God's Law written by Moses) and then abolishing it Himself. Likewise, Paul is not doing that either.

It is through this teaching of Yeshua (Jesus) that Paul said that he was convinced by that all things are clean. In the context the "things" are defined as "broma." "Broma" is defined as animals that are already clean. Paul applies Mark 7 by teaching that clean animals (broma) that are sacrificed in pagan temples and sent to the marketplace are still considered clean and thus, still considered food.

Paul was not nullifying the Law of Moses, which would be contrary to what Paul wrote several chapters earlier. He goes on to teach that those who are weak may not understand the Law of Moses, but those who are strong should bear with those who are weak. This may mean modifying our practices for those who don't understand God's Law just yet. Paul's point is that we want to lead others to their edification and learning.

Romans 15:1-3 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please *his* neighbor for *his* good, leading to edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, *"The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me.*

Paul then states exactly what they will be learning - everything that was written before.

Romans 15:4 For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Eventually, those weak in the faith will understand the Law of God well enough and there will be no more "doubtful disputations."

Simply put, all Paul is teaching, as it relates to debate #2, is that we can eat anything that was already written in the past to be declared clean (broma). We do not need to be concerned with the doctrines or concerns of men that are not rooted in the Word of God. Yeshua (Jesus) already taught us on this matter in Mark 7. As long as we stick to the Word of God, then we are strong in the faith. Those who exercise doubtful disputations outside of the Word of God are weak in the faith. We need to be patient with them and not offend them as they continue to learn about everything. They will eventually come to the same conclusions.

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