



ROMANS Part 123

Chapter 14:1-3

The infirm in the faith.



Now the infirm in the faith be taking to yourselves, but not for discrimination of reasonings. 2 One, indeed, is believing to eat all things, yet the infirm one is eating greens. 3 Let not him who is eating be scorning him who is not eating. Yet let not him who is not eating be judging him who is eating, for God took him to Himself.

The people who are truly infirm in the faith are those telling all the “sinners” that they are infirm in the faith. The truly infirm in the faith are debilitated by the struggle against their own consciences, their own guilt, their own striving for perfection.

The infirm in the faith can only be Christian; the world has yet to master the art of struggling against the accomplished work of Christ. In Christian circles, the *topic du jour* is about how sin can wreck your life. Strange; they never quite get around to Christ dying for all sin. Great faith believes and announces that Jesus Christ died on the cross and took away the sin of the world. Great faith is mocked by the infirm variety, which says, “Jesus still wants you to work for Him. You’re not trying hard enough for Jesus. What would Jesus do?”

Oh, I don’t know. Die for all sin?

Where the Bible is silent concerning specifics associated with certain infamous Christian sins (involving things like eating, drinking, dancing and sex—Baptists prohibit sex because it might lead to dancing), members of the Christian circles have no problem making sins up. Where God has ten prohibitions, Christianity has ten thousand. (Stay tuned; they’re adding more.)

In the Christian mind, the person of little faith is the person *committing* the ten thousand “sins” that they have drafted and etched upon their homemade tablets. Thus we have yet another instance of Christians getting everything exactly wrong: the person of little faith is in fact the person *inventing* the new sins, not the rogues supposedly committing them.

“Now the infirm in the faith be taking to yourselves, but not for discrimination of reasonings” (Romans 14:1).

This wording is difficult in the Concordant Version—speaking now of, “discrimination of reasonings.” The J.B. Phillips paraphrase has, “Welcome a man whose faith is weak, but not with the idea of arguing over his scruples.” We will see that the infirm in faith (“infirm” means “sick”) is in fact the person sweating over things that God is cool about. The infirm in the faith, according to Paul, eats only greens. That’s weird;

didn't Jesus eat lamb on the Passover? Weren't the Levitical priests ordered to eat parts of the sacrificed bulls? The "greenies" of Paul's day were probably like some modern-day militant vegetarians who consider meat-eating a sin and shame anyone extolling the virtues of cheeseburgers. We now know that we can eat anything, but the infirm in faith missed this memo and perpetually fear offending God with things formerly outlawed by Moses, such as shellfish, pork, and Peanut M&Ms.

When we run into such people, the thing to do is to pull them to us, but not for the sake of exposing the creepy corridors of their cauterized consciences ("discrimination of reasonings.") No, but rather, we are to say, "Hello. How is the kale crop coming in?" In other words, be nice to them. Don't make them feel stupid. Inquire after their greens.

"One, indeed, is believing to eat all things, yet the infirm one is eating greens. 3 Let not him who is eating be scorning him who is not eating."

Paul is still talking about believers behaving in love toward one another. This is the greater context, begun at the beginning of chapter 12. A great part of love is tolerating those who are yet minors in Christ and thus still unaware of the freedoms belonging to grace. Minors in the faith still imagine that they can offend God and Christ by engaging in such allegedly sinful practices as drinking alcohol, saying bad words, eating bacon, or having the woman on top. Those of us aware that wine makes the heart of man glad, that bad words are a verbal laxative, that bacon is delicious, and that woman on top is the greatest invention since power steering—we are not to scorn those acting contrary to these delectable liberties.

"OUT NOT YET ONE"

The word in this context describing the thing that we're not supposed to do to people who eat spinach and say "dang" during missionary sex—namely, "scorn"—is unexpectedly rich. When I first looked it up in the Keyword Dictionary of the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, the word looked to be in a state of disrepair. It was as though there had been an explosion in a Greek alphabet factory. But when I shut up and let God speak, I saw the divine genius of such an arrangement of consonants and vowels.

The Greek word translated "scorn" in the Concordant Version is *exouthenoa*. It's a Dali-like, four-part Greek word consisting of *eu* + *ou* + *th* + *enoa*. "En" is "out," "ou" is "not," "th" is "yet" and "enoa" is "one." The end result is: OUT-NOT-YET-ONE." These are the literal English elements of the word.

Now you understand my initial perplexity. But when we scorn people weaker than we—treat them like lesser members of Christ's body or no member at all—it is the same as telling them, "You're *out* of the body of Christ. You are *not yet one* of us." These words ("out!" and "not yet one!") presuppose that *we* belong to a club that someone who refuses to eat bacon simply could never belong to.

I must break this news to you: eating or not eating bacon has nothing to do with membership in Christ's body. Refusing M&M's or indulging in them, drinking wine or not drinking it, insisting on Amish sex in the dark (men must leave their hats on, women their gardening boots) or doing it upside-down from a chandelier, has nothing to do with belonging to the estimable, God-appointed body called out from before the foundation of the world to be holy and flawless in God's sight. No, but those called to this body will be believing the elements of the gospel as



described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, namely, in the death for sin of God's Son, in His entombment and His resurrection, and in His ultimate success against all of our failings. Such people will refuse every human work in exchange for the singular accomplishment of a crucified and resurrected Christ. It is this belief that defines members of Christ's body, not what such members do or do not do in the arenas of food, drink, or sex.

"Yet let not him who is not eating be judging him who is eating, for God took him to Himself" (Romans 14:3).

We always hear about protecting the feelings of weak brothers and sisters, but never about Paul's admonition to the weaklings to lay off those of us with faith strong

enough to eat ham sandwiches while staring up at the woman. We'll leave *them* alone, and we would appreciate it if they would look the other way at our personal little joys. But they don't. The weak of faith are shockingly militant about bringing others into their weakness. They suggest to us that, unless we reform and repent according to their standards (*their* standards, not God's), we will probably go to hell, where there is nothing *but* kale and where the woman is always on the bottom. It's generally not a two-way street with these people. In fact, the street is so in the same direction that we fun-types sometimes bend way too far over backwards to accommodate baby Christians who would, truth be known, love to see us burning in hell with our bacon. *Ellicott's Commentary For English Readers* says—

The two classes of men are exposed to two opposite faults. The strong despise the weak; the weak judge the strong. In the one case there is contempt for what is thought to be narrowness and pedantry. In the other case censorious judgments are passed on what is regarded as levity and irreligion. Human nature alters very little.

This Ellicott fellow seems intent upon sounding smart and leaving women out of everything (“two classes of *men*”?) I think that what he's trying to say is that the bold and fearless tend to belittle chicken-hearts who are too scared to cross the street alone, while the chicken-hearts call the bold people “careless,” “stupid” and “reprobate.” I'm not sure what is meant by “human nature alters very little” because human nature, under the influence of the spirit of God, ought to alter a lot. The spirit-infused nature neither despises nor judges another's walk. I will neither scorn the non-eater nor dare such a one to partake of my cheeseburger in the hope that he or she might “grow in faith.” Such a one's faith will grow according to God's pace for it, not mine. *I may* suggest to them that they ought not point the finger at me when *they* are the ones actually doubting Christ (this will be a revelation to them), but I will not force them to grow beyond their ability to grill pork chops.

THE SHOCKER

I would not have us forget that the shock of this passage is that the weak of faith are the ones constantly censoring themselves and hyper-vigilantly avoiding even the outskirts of offense. These people *think* that they are strong because, by great feats of willpower and asceticism, they avoid what others partake freely of. In actuality, “infirm in the faith” precisely describes *them*; it is that *they* cannot trust Jesus to

protect them from truly debilitating evils. Such people assume that, if they drink a glass of wine today, tomorrow they will be staggering home in a whiskey stupor. Eat a pulled-pork sandwich for lunch, and by dinner they'll be sacrificing pigs to Baal. Let the woman on top just one time, and a homemade porn video business lurks



just around the corner. So they make up sins, “just to be safe.” They draw the line long before God does, thinking they're doing Him a favor. But how safe is it to not trust Christ? How impressed is God with the invention of lines that He never drew? They call this “strength”? I call it questioning the cross. I call it doubting God. I compare it to Moses striking the rock twice. God said, “Hit it once,” but Moses hoped to out-perform Him. Moses would hyper-impress the Deity. Was the Deity impressed? Not much; Moses died in the wilderness.

For us, the “Promised Land” is grace. For us, the “Promised Land” is trusting God and partaking of everything God has created for our enjoyment, which is pretty much everything; 1 Timothy 6:17—“God, [is] tendering us all things richly for our enjoyment.”

How ironic that an actual, Herculean faith is labeled “weak” by the truly weak who have *so* little faith in Christ that the whole of their Christian walk occurs, not on streets of gold, but upon carpets of eggshells. What God has emphatically stated to be clean, they declare “dirty”—and they do it through guilt-infused (rather than Scripture-inspired) lips.

Later in chapter 14, we will see precisely what God has declared clean. Here's a hint—

Nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contaminating, to that one it is contaminating (Romans 14:14).

—MZ (*To be continued.*)