



# ROMANS Part 127

Chapter 14:13-23

## How to stay free without offending fellow believers.



By no means, then, should we still be judging one another, but rather decide this, not to place a stumbling block for a brother, or a snare. 14 I have perceived and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contaminating, to that one it is contaminating. 15 For if, because of food, your brother is sorrowing, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not, by your food, destroy that one for whose sake Christ died. 16 Let not, then, your good be calumniated, 17 for the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in holy spirit. For he who in this is slaving for

Christ, is well pleasing to God and attested by men.

19 Consequently, then, we are pursuing that which makes for peace and that which is for edification of one another. 20 Not on account of food demolish the work of God. All, indeed, is clean, but it is evil to the man who with stumbling is eating. 21 It is ideal not to be eating meat, nor yet to be drinking wine, nor yet to do aught by which your brother is stumbling, or is being snared or weakened. 22 The faith which you have, have for yourself in God's sight. Happy is he who is not judging himself in that which he is attesting. 23 Now he who is doubting if he should be eating is condemned, seeing that it is not out of faith. Now everything which is not out of faith is sin.

The most shocking statement of this passage is verse 14—“I have perceived and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contamination, to that one it is contaminating.” It aligns with another of Paul's statements in 1 Corinthians 10:23—“All is allowed me, but not all is expedient.”

Paul states this truth here in Romans 14 with great confidence. In a way, it's a centerpiece of Romans because it speaks to one's freedom in Christ, purchased for us by Christ's death on the cross, described in earlier chapters. You may say that the centerpiece of this chapter is love, and you may be right, but the love is expressed, here, by refusing to challenge another person to accept as a freedom that which *you* accept but what the other person considers to be sin. (I will explain more of this in a moment.) Without the *knowledge* of the freedom, the freedom cannot be sacrificed. And so Paul *needs* us to know—or he reminds us—that nothing, of itself, is contaminating.

Is the man actually serious? Yes. He's as serious as a bottle of beer, a fine cigar, a platter of bacon and a Playboy centerfold.

## TWO KEY WORDS

Before you misappropriate this verse and surrender all your liberties to practically become a slave to other people's opinions of you; before you live some other life besides your own because you imagine that you have to abandon everything you love for the sake of weak brothers and sisters, I will jump down to verse 15 and point out two key words—

For if, because of food, your brother is *sorrowing*, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not, by your food, *destroy* that one for whose sake Christ died.

These are two very violent words: “sorrowing” and “destroy.” Let me ask you this: How could you possibly *destroy* someone who is merely watching you drink a beer? How can you *sorrow* someone by skipping church to watch the NFL pre-game show?

## PROFESSIONAL DART THROWERS

There is such a thing in this world as people who will be offended no matter what you do. They love to wag their fingers at the free in Christ and shame them for exercising their freedoms—any freedoms. When engaged in this condemning activity, these people are neither destroyed nor sorrowful in the face of your so-called sin. In fact, they relish the thought of looking down their noses at you. It is practically their profession. Nothing makes them feel more self-righteous than occupying their homemade pedestals and throwing darts down at your little beerfest. Far from being destroyed and sorrowing over your perceived indiscretion, they roll in their own self-justification and give themselves high-fives, lauding themselves for avoiding your sin, at the same time smirking in delight at the prospect of you spending an eternity in hell, where all the beer is warm.

Paul describes people like this in Galatians 2:4-5—

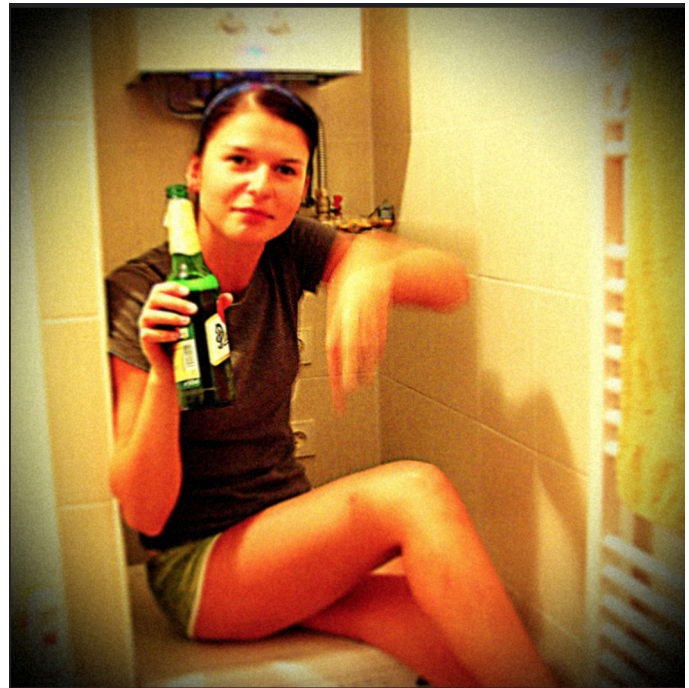
...the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.

Between Romans 14:15 and this verse, it seems that Paul contradicts himself. On the one hand, he tells us not to use our freedom to stumble another person. On the other hand, Paul resists with everything he has (“we did

not yield in subjection to them for even an hour”) those who would take away his liberties so as to enmesh him into their particular bondage.

Part of the key to understanding this apparent discrepancy is to not only look behind the words “destroy” and “sorrow,” but to appreciate the following, from verse 22—

The faith which you have, *have for yourself in God's sight*. Happy is he who is not judging himself in that which he is attesting.



How could we possibly have faith in that which God gave us to enjoy, while at the same time refusing to enjoy *anything* (living lives of relative misery) for the sake of jelly-bellied saints who think donuts are of the devil?

What is it that we are really supposed to watch out for?

## “IN YOUR FACE”

We ought to be careful not to exercise our freedoms *in the faces* of those whose faith is weak and who consider many, many things to be unclean. Why avoid the *faces*? Because that's where the noses and eyes are. The closer that things like beer or porn or dancing or poker get to the eyes and noses of easily-offended saints, the more tempted these saints will be to partake of a thing that would wreck their juvenile consciences. This is where “destroy” and “sorrow” come in. These violent words apply to one who *partakes* of a thing that he or she, due to weakness, would writhe in





guilt over consuming. Two verses in this context will prove this. Here is verse 20—

Not on account of food demolish the work of God. All, indeed, is clean, but it is evil to the man who *with stumbling is eating*.

And here is verse 23

Now he who is doubting *if he should be eating* is condemned, seeing that it is not out of faith. Now everything which is not out of faith is sin.

In the second verse, we have the word “condemned,” which is as violent as “destroy” and “sorrow.” One who offends his or her own conscience (by actually *doing* that which he or she considers a sin), can sorrow over it and may eventually be destroyed. Condemnation is included in this package.

## IDOL SACRIFICES

What about the idol sacrifices of 1 Corinthians 8? Paul appears to take a radical, even ridiculous stance here. From 1 Corinthians 8:9-13—

But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. 12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.

“I will never eat meat *again*”? I believe that Paul is purposely being a drama queen. But such was the man’s rabid love for people that he would voluntarily go verbally overboard for their sakes. It is possible that the “so that” (“thus” in the KJV) of verse 13, refers back to the case in point, that is, “dining in an idol’s temple” (the Concordant has “lying down”; I’m quoting the NASB here). In other words, perhaps Paul is saying that, to the end of the eon, he would never lie down in the actual idol’s *temple* (for this is the context) to eat meat sacrificed to idols. It is a matter of avoiding something so *blatantly* offensive.

Dining in the idol temple itself is more than merely eating something sacrificed to idols. (Lying down in the temple would be even worse). It would be the most exaggerated, evil way possible to wave one’s freedom into someone’s face who is offended by idol meat. It would be like, instead of simply drinking a beer in front of some poor weak-faithed brother, I make sure that this brother sees me at the Budweiser plant swimming naked in a barrel of Bud Light, drinking the stuff through a snorkel. It’s absurd. In fact, this whole passage is absurd. It must be absurd on purpose; Paul is making a point.

Notice in verse 10 that, once again, the weak brother is actually strengthened, by the exaggerated display of freedom, to “eat things sacrificed to idols.” It is the physical participation in the personally forbidden thing that produces the condemnation, the destruction, the sorrow and—in verse 11 of 1 Corinthians 8—becoming “ruined.”

I like the *Pulpit Commentary* on this passage—

Verse 13. - Make my brother to offend. “Make to offend” is, in the original, the verb “scandalize.” The word for “meat” means any kind of food. Flesh. The particular subject of discussion here. “I will,” says St. Paul, “abstain from flesh altogether rather than by eating it lead a weaker brother into sin.” The same expression [“altogether”] is elsewhere rendered “forever.” Literally it means to the aeon. St. Paul is often led into these impetuous expressions of the depth of his feelings. The reader will find the whole question argued in a similar spirit in Romans 14:19-22. “Lest”; namely, in the case supposed. In reality there was no need for taking so severe a pledge of abstinence.

are offended by dancing and playing cards. Catholics are offended by not going to Mass. But Paul is here speaking of brothers and sisters. Even these have so many pet peeves that one cannot keep track of them. I know one sister who is offended by anything with alcohol in it; she probably doesn’t even like getting swabbed at the doctor’s office before getting a shot. (This would be a shot, say, for the flu, and not a shot of Jack Daniels.) Alcohol is not contaminating of itself, of course—unless one *thinks* that it is contaminating. I remind you of verse 14—



This commentator believes that Paul, by use of the word “lest” (“so that” in the NASB) promises complete abstinence concerning the potential offense of the sin of the context only, that is, eating why actually lying down in an idol’s temple. This very well may be the case, as I shared above. Otherwise, Paul would be abstaining completely, for the eon, from something that he had full freedom to eat—abstaining even in the offended brother’s absence. Let’s investigate the absurdity of such an abstinence.

#### WALKING CAUTIOUSLY

There are people who can be potentially offended by anything—literally anything—that you do. Baptists

Nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contaminating, to that one it is contaminating.

Now, what should I do and what should I *not* do for (or to) this particular sister? The one thing I’m *not* going to do is wave an alcoholic beverage beneath her nose and taunt her into drinking. I will avoid cajoling her into my freedom. For here, indeed, is Paul’s main thrust: *it is the eating and the participating in the personally forbidden thing that potentially destroys the weak of faith.*

Here’s how far I take it: As long as I do not attempt to shame a weak brother or sister into partaking of my freedom, I feel fine about it. I feel fine drinking in such

a person's presence. *However*. If I am made aware that someone in my presence is completely aghast at even the thought of any believer drinking alcohol, I will gladly abstain for the sake of that person. Can I not live a day without wine, beer or whisky? Of course I can. So it becomes my privilege to lay down my right for the sake of the other person.

I will always judge the situation. If a person doesn't really like me drinking but they don't want to infringe upon my freedom, then I will drink. What I will *not* do is saunter over to them and say, "Hey, what's your hang-up with alcohol? Don't be such a scaredy-cat. See how delicious this wine looks. Take a whiff! Jesus drank this stuff, don't you know? It makes the heart of man glad. And woman, too. *Try it.*" I would never do that. For if I make the wine tempting enough and the weak person succumbs and drinks, *that* is when I potentially destroy, sorrow, condemn or ruin that person.

Now, I *am* perfectly willing to drink in a weak person's presence as a way of subtly strengthening his or her faith. Such people could say to themselves, *Hmm, Martin Zender is a mature saint who makes funny, entertaining and yet extremely holy and educational videos, and yet he's over there drinking wine and eating lots of potato chips. He*



*doesn't seem to be freaking out or anything, and Jesus hasn't struck him by lightning yet, or anything of that nature. And so maybe we are allowed to drink wine and eat lots of potato chips after all.*

*Maybe I shouldn't be so worried about it.* I will happily help a person along in this manner. But I will not taunt or shame such a person into jumping headlong into my freedom.

### THAT'S PAUL'S "PROBLEM"

Let's say that Paul actually meant that he would never, ever eat meat again (for the eon) if it offended a weak brother. I say, *that's Paul's "problem."* Good for him. Paul was the premiere member of the body of Christ, the chief apostle, the *numero uno* spokesman for our transcendent grace of God, and thus he labored beneath intense scrutiny. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9 that he had the right to eat and drink, the right to take a wife, and the right to plow (that is, work) in expectation of remuneration for his labors. But Paul refused even the prescription of the Lord, that "those who are announcing the evangel are to

be living of the evangel" (1 Corinthians 9:14). He did this to avoid even a whiff of hindrance to the evangel of Christ. Yes, Paul eschewed even the right to take a wife (1 Corinthians 9:5;15). He went overboard, Paul did. Why? Because he was "the man"; the pioneer. He does not set this course for anyone but himself. It is his particular privilege. I say, "Have at it, Paul."

So I would not put it past Paul to abstain from meat "for the eon," even in the absence of a brother who is (or even was) offended by it. And yet, I still doubt that he did this. Consider the following scenario:

A brother offended by meat is in Antioch, let's say, and Paul is in Ephesus, and Paul is offered a kosher hamburger at a Tabernacles cookout, and he says to his host, "I would love to eat this, but there was a guy ten years ago in Antioch who was offended by anyone who would eat meat sacrificed to idols, and so I decided to abstain, not only from idol-sacrificed meat, but from *all* meat, and not only in the guy's presence, but in his absence as well. I plan on doing this for the rest of my life."

Or is Paul simply employing a technique of language known as hyperbole? I believe in my heart (and in my brain) that it's hyperbole. (*hy-per-bo-le • /hī pərbəlē/ • noun • "exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally."*) I believe, as the commentator in the *Pulpit Commentary* says, that this is one of Paul's "impetuous expressions of the depth of his feelings." Otherwise, Paul potentially contradicts another statement made elsewhere, that he became "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). He became as a Jew to the Jews and as a Greek to the Greeks. This would nearly obligate him, I think, to eat that hamburger in Ephesus, for surely there are those in the body who are offended by those who *don't* eat meat. When people can be potentially offended by anything and everything, where does one draw the line?

One draws the line at rubbing one's freedom into another's face. One draws the line at tempting a weaker brother or sister to partake of a thing that undoubtedly offends them. On the other end, one draws the line at refusing to partake, ever, of God's many gifts, for He is the One "tendering us all things richly for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17).

I draw the line, personally, at drinking any wine that costs more than \$10 a bottle. —MZ

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