

“Mind Your Own Business!” (Romans 14:1–12)

I can split nearly any church in less than two minutes. How can I do that? By asking which of the following items are sinful (or at best unspiritual):

- Drinking alcohol
- Smoking cigarettes or cigars
- Gambling
- Dancing
- Watching R-rated movies
- Listening to secular music
- Watching MMA (Mixed Martial Arts)
- Using birth control
- Sporting tattoos or piercings
- Sending your kids to public school
- Owning a luxury car or other extravagant possessions
- Working on Sunday
- Observing Halloween

The above practices are *not* explicitly discussed in Scripture. Yet, many Christians have practically come to blows over these issues! This should not be! The church must stop fixating on non-essential issues. We cannot continue to major on the minors and minor on the majors. Perhaps you’ve seen or heard the slogan, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” This is fantastic advice. But I would also add this, “The second thing is to keep second things second.” Indeed, it isn’t possible to keep the main thing main if we aren’t careful to keep second things second.”¹ When Christians trivialize significant issues and hyper-focus on insignificant issues we must own the label “judgmental.”

In his book *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman highlights a number of troubling statistics of those born between 1965–2002. from an extensive study by the Barna Research Group Included are two statistics that show how those outside the church view those within: Nearly nine out of ten young outsiders—eighty–seven percent—said that the term “judgmental” accurately describes present-day Christianity. Of those non-Christians surveyed, eighty–four percent said they personally know at least one committed Christian. Yet just fifteen percent thought the lifestyles of those Christ-followers were significantly different from the norm.² It would seem that you and I have some business to attend to.

Of course, we should have convictions on non-essential practices. Our convictions draw the line between what we will do and what we will not do as an exercise of Christian liberty.³ Personal convictions are important to the apostle Paul. In the vitally important application chapters of Rom 12–15, no subject is dealt with in greater detail than our convictions concerning Christian liberties. Paul devotes nearly two chapters to this subject (14:1–15:13).⁴ In his discussion, he addresses various controversies between “weak” and “strong” Christians in the church at Rome. Most likely the “weak” were primarily Jewish Christians and the “strong” Gentile Christians. Both groups were dividing over inconsequential issues: avoiding meat (14:2), observing sacred days (14:5), and abstaining from wine (14:21). The weak believed that if the Bible hadn’t specifically approved something, then it was probably wrong. Those that were strong, on the other hand, believed if the Bible hadn’t specifically forbidden something, then it was probably within the realm of freedom.⁵ In 14:1–12 Paul argues that both groups need to exercise humility and grace with one another. His bottom line is: *Be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself*. He lays out three keys to experiencing harmony with God and others.⁶

1. Stop judging other believers (14:1–3). Paul argues that God’s family is big enough to encompass believers who have different perspectives on non-essential issues. In 14:1 Paul writes, **“Now accept the one who is weak in faith,⁷ but not for the purpose of passing judgment⁸ on his opinions.”** The word “Now” (*de*) marks a new section in Paul’s argument⁹ as he moves into a discussion regarding neutral practices of faith between believers (14:1–15:13). He insists that we are to “accept the one who is weak in faith.”¹⁰ The word “accept” (*proslambano*) may not be the best translation. Modern Americans often equate “accept” with the term “tolerate” or “put up with.” The conclusion is that to accept one who is weak in faith is to agree to disagree. The Greek term, though, means “to extend a welcome, receive into one’s home or circle of acquaintances.”¹¹ Hence, various English versions opt for the translation “receive” (NET, NKJV) or “welcome” (ESV, NRSV). The strong believer is to welcome the weak believer even when a particular issue of Christian freedom is off limits to him or her. If you are a strong brother or sister, you need to receive with warmth your weak brother or sister. Don’t reject your brother. Don’t call your sister a compromiser. Simply show them the love of Christ.

Now bear in mind Paul is discussing “opinions” (*dialogismos*)¹² or “disputable matters” (NIV). He is not talking about tolerating blatant sin. On some matters Scripture is rather pointed: Christians are forbidden from getting divorced on unbiblical grounds. Sexual immorality will be judged by God. Gossip, slander, lying, and envy are on par with the most heinous sins. Believers who choose not to attend church, serve, or give are disobedient. There are also some doctrinal issues that are not optional. The authority and inspiration of the Bible are non-negotiable. Jesus Christ (fully God and fully man) as the only way to God is non-negotiable. Salvation by faith alone in Christ alone is non-negotiable. A literal return of Christ is non-negotiable. These are all fundamental, foundational truths. They are clear essentials upon which we all ought to agree. But apart from these (and possibly a few more), there are many other things that are not as clear, not as apparent, and not as easily understood in Scripture. In these matters, we must allow for differing opinions (e.g., the gifts of the Spirit, the age of the universe, the timing of Christ’s return, predestination/free will, etc.).

The first non-essential issue of debate between the Roman Christians comes up in 14:2: the issue of diet. Paul writes, **“One person has faith [lit. “believes”]¹³ that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.”** The strong were convinced that as New Covenant Christians they were not obligated to the Old Testament laws and were free to eat anything. In this case, I’m definitely a stronger brother. My favorite verse is found in 14:2b “he who is weak eats vegetables.” I’ve chosen to forgo my veggies, not because I don’t like the taste of them, but because I’m concerned about being weak. I’m kidding! Children, like me, you must continue to eat your vegetables. This is an essential. Seriously, this description of a vegetarian is not one on account of principle or health reasons, but because their conscience is bothered in some way by eating meat. This could be on account of kosher laws, or more likely, is looking toward meat sacrificed to idols in pagan temples. Either way this person avoids all meat in the fear that some of the meat may be tainted in one way or another.

Paul continues in 14:3 and states, **“The one who eats is not to regard with contempt¹⁴ the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge¹⁵ the one who eats, for God has accepted him.”** In the case of food, God has not forbidden Christians to eat any food (1 Tim 4:3–4). Eating food is an amoral matter. It is neither morally good nor morally bad. The person who eats should not view himself as superior or look down on his extremely sensitive brother with a condescending attitude.¹⁶ The weaker brother should not judge the more liberal Christian as unacceptable to God either, because God has accepted him (cf. Rom 14:1). All people have a right to their own convictions. The key is that God can accept both the weak and the strong. Therefore, if God can receive people who have different opinions on non-essential issues, how much more so should you and I? May we *be slow to judge others; be quick to judge ourselves.*

There are several principles that may prove helpful in the issue of judging fellow believers:

Recognize that believers agree on far more than we disagree on. We see eye-to-eye on those doctrines, philosophies, and practices that are most essential to Christendom. Thus, we must focus on those things that unite us, not on things that divide us. *Be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself.*

Acknowledge that disagreement over non-essentials can be healthy. If the body of Christ never disagreed, we could never express true *agape* love. In any relationship (e.g., marriage, family, friendship), you can only enjoy true unconditional love when conflict has occurred. At that point forgiveness and grace can be extended. Furthermore, cookie-cutter Christians would be terribly boring. Variety is the spice of the church.

Distinguish between primary and secondary issues. There is no point in warring over secondary issues. Remember: “The second thing is to keep second things second.” We must not spend precious time constantly debating non-essential issues. If Christ could return today, let’s make sure we’re not spinning our spiritual wheels fighting over things that really don’t matter.

Exercise humility on non-essentials. No one knows everything there is to know about non-essential issues. That’s why they are non-essential issues! You must always be willing to change your mind or modify your perspective. Over the years, I have changed my mind on issues such as the charismatic gifts, the age of the universe, and women in ministry. It is wise to remain humble.¹⁷

Refuse to criticize those who see things differently. When I am working through a study on non-essential issues, I love to read those who hold different opinions. Often I learn the most from those who see things differently. Such men and women poke holes in my arguments and beliefs and help me to be a clearer thinker. These individuals are a service to the body of Christ and to my ministry and learning.

Allow people to come to their own conclusions. Someone once defined a legalist as: “A Christian who lives in mortal fear that someone, someplace, is enjoying himself.”¹⁸ In the same vein, the “weak” (i.e., abstainers) had concluded that what was wrong for them was wrong for everyone! Our culture and our background influence us more than we think.¹⁹ Christians have differing levels of spiritual maturity. We must realize what is best for us may not be best for everyone. We need to warmly and respectfully give one another freedom in non-essential areas. Doing so would revolutionize our life within the church as well as our testimony outside. For the sake of Christian love and community, we must leave room for people to grow and be different. *Be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself.*

[The first key to a harmonious life is to stop judging other believers. Paul second key is to . . .]

2. Submit your convictions to the Lord (14:4–9). The decisions that you make regarding non-essentials should be made with the Lord in mind. In 14:4 Paul writes: “**Who are you²⁰ [weak believer²¹] to judge the servant²² of another?²³ To his own²⁴ master he stands or falls;²⁵ and he will stand, for the Lord is able [or “is powerful”] to make him stand.**”²⁶ Imagine that I am visiting the president of a major corporation and during our conversation I began to criticize his executive secretary. He might listen for a few minutes, but eventually he would probably say something like, “Who do you think you are?!” Paul is saying: “Back off. Cut others some slack. They are serving Christ; and He can take care of them.” We must always recognize that the Lord can take care of changing others where they need changing. He cares about the maturity of His kids more than we do. Moreover, God is able to keep the strong believer from falling into sin while participating in an amoral activity.²⁷ God’s grace provides both the possibility and the power for standing favorably at the judgment seat of Christ.

In 14:5–6 Paul brings up another illustration: days. He writes: **“One person regards one day above another,²⁸ another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced²⁹ in his own mind.³⁰ 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;³¹ and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.”** The Christians in Rome disagreed on the significance of days (e.g., Sabbath, holy days). Today Christians disagree on whether or not churches have the freedom to add Saturday night services (or for that matter, Friday night or Monday night services). There is also disagreement as to whether or not it is permissible to celebrate Halloween and Easter because of their pagan backgrounds. There is also a question as to whether or not a believer can work on Sundays. In these issues pertaining to worship, we are to develop personal convictions before the Lord. God no longer regulates the issue of what day we worship. *Regular* worship is an issue (Heb 10:25), but the *day* of worship is not.³²

The principle that is found in 14:5 is critical: We must determine what we believe to be appropriate even with the non-essentials. However, we must recognize that our responsibility is to do this for ourselves not our brother. “Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.”³³ This means that every believer has the freedom in areas of non-essentials to make up his or her own mind. Of course, this should not be done haphazardly, but with great care. The word that is translated “fully convinced” (*plerophoreo*) means “to accomplish, carry out fully.”³⁴ This requires careful personal study and corporate discussion. But in the end, know for sure that at the judgment seat of Christ, there’s one thing our Lord will never ask you: “What did Keith believe?” We must all come to our own convictions and opinions of what Scripture is teaching from our own study of the text.

The beautiful thing about 14:6 is: “Two believers can disagree and both be right (that is accepted by God). Given that we disagree, it is not necessary that you be wrong in order that I should be right.”³⁵ The key is giving thanks to God, which is repeated twice. Whether your conscience allows you great freedom or no freedom, God’s goal is for you to be able to give thanks to Him. If you can’t give God thanks, you need to reexamine whether or not you are “fully convinced” in your own mind. If there is any doubt ask the Lord to reveal this to you. But please remember: *Be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself.*

Now having said all this, the fact of the matter is that very few of us fit neatly into the category of a strong brother or a weak brother. All of us like to think of ourselves as strong and we like to think that we have no legalism in us. I know I like to think that of myself. But the fact of the matter is that if we’re really honest with ourselves we will admit that we’re generally quite inconsistent in this area. The one who has a conscience against going to the movies will often watch them at home. The one who has freedom to enjoy an occasional glass of wine with supper wouldn’t be caught dead with a can of beer in his hand. The one who believes that chewing tobacco is the devil’s bubble gum doesn’t hesitate filling himself with coffee, refined sugar, sodium, and all sorts of other alleged poisons. The one who wouldn’t think of sitting at a blackjack table in Las Vegas will, nevertheless, gamble on a football pool at the office, or go to a bingo parlor, or even gamble on speculative stocks. If we will recognize and admit these inconsistencies it will probably be a lot easier for us to accept our brothers and sisters in Christ when their lifestyles don’t happen to coincide with ours.³⁶

When I am thinking through various issues and trying to determine if a doctrine, philosophy, or practice is an essential or non-essential matter I like to ask myself these three questions: (1) Would I be willing to lose lunch over this issue? (2) Would I be willing to lose my house over this issue? (3) Would I be willing to lose my life over this issue?³⁷ With regards to the latter, I would only lose my life for an essential doctrine (e.g., the Bible is the God’s Word, Christ is the Son of God, salvation is by faith alone). Surprisingly, there are very few things I would lose my house or even a lunch over. Hence, I need to major on the major, not the minors. I need to *be slow to judge others; be quick to judge myself.*

In 14:7–9 Paul provides the theological rationale for why we should submit our convictions to the Lord. In doing so Paul pens one of the strongest passages on the lordship of Christ.³⁸ He writes: **“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,³⁹ we are the Lord’s.⁴⁰ For to this end Christ died and lived again,⁴¹ that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.”⁴²** Please note that the word “Lord” (*kurios*) occurs seven times in 14:6–9. All that we do, we are to do “for the Lord.” No Christian, however, is an island. Our actions affect others. Therefore, we must limit our personal freedom in love (cf. 14:13–23). But why is there such an emphasis on life and death, living and dying? Because this makes Paul’s teaching all-encompassing. Life and death circumscribe the whole of life—nothing lies outside these boundaries. Paul meant that we should not live to please ourselves alone but we should live to please the Lord. This desire to please the Lord will continue beyond the grave,⁴³ so Paul could also say that we do not die for ourselves. Our whole existence this side of the grave and the other, in life and in death, should express our commitment to please the Lord.⁴⁴

[Paul now issues a third and final key to Christian harmony . . .]

3. Remember that judgment belongs to God (14:10–12). Instead of being concerned with the neutral decisions of other Christians, you need to prepare for how God will judge you. As you read 14:10–12, pay careful attention to Paul’s use of pronouns, particularly “you” (four times). Paul writes, **“But you [weaker brother],⁴⁵ why do you judge your brother? Or you [stronger brother] again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written [Isa 45:23], ‘AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD.’⁴⁶ So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”⁴⁷** In 14:10 both the weaker brother and the stronger brother are guilty of the same offense, namely, judging prematurely and unwarrantedly. This leads Paul to explain that every believer will stand before “the judgment seat⁴⁸ of God.”⁴⁹ The Greek word for “judgment seat” is *bema*, meaning the place where the judges stood at the athletic games. If during the games they saw an athlete break the rules, they immediately disqualified him. At the end of the contests the judges gave out the rewards. Here, Paul suggests that criticizing other believers will be called into account at the *bema*. So don’t judge your brother or sister because God is going to do it. Be careful how you think about your brother because God is going to judge you too. When you stand before the Lord, He won’t quiz you about what Mr. Jones did or how Mrs. Smith lived. You’ll answer for yourself and for no one else. I don’t know about you, but I have more than enough to answer for myself! I should be more concerned about *me* than anyone else. God will judge your friends, why should you get involved? He knows them better than you do, He loves them more than you do, and He reads the thoughts and intents of the heart, which you can’t read at all. Furthermore, if we all spent more time worrying about ourselves, we’d have very little time left to worry about other people. *Be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself.*

If you have multiple children you know that kids don’t always get along. In our home we have two “big brothers” and one “mother hen.” My three children are all guilty of telling me when one of their siblings sins or commits an inadvertent transgression. Of course, they want their brother or sister to be judged. I inevitably ask the question: “Do you know who I am? My title is ‘Dad.’ I am the one who judges and brings discipline, *not you*. Your brother or sister does not answer to you; they answer to me. You are the house servant (cf. 14:4)—the child. Let me do my job.” Likewise, God says: “I am God; you’re not. Let Me judge My children. They answer to Me, not you. Give Me my job back!”⁵⁰ Make a commitment today *to be slow to judge others; be quick to judge yourself.*

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Scripture References

Romans 14:1–12

Matthew 7:1

Mark 7:14–23

1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Colossians 2:16–17, 20–23

1 Timothy 4:4

Romans 16:17–18

Study Questions

1. Am I a strong Christian or a weak Christian (Rom 14:1)? In what specific area(s) am I weak or strong? What gray areas have the Lord told me to abstain? How would I assess my relationships with other Christians? In what area(s) do I find myself judging those who I believe to be “weak?”
2. How can I be more accommodating to those who disagree with me on non-essential issues (Rom 14:1–3)? How have I discussed some of these controversial subjects with other believers? What was the outcome? What can I do differently in future conversations? When should I take a stand in a discussion concerning an issue of freedom?
3. Today most believers don’t disagree over issues pertaining to days and diet (Rom 14:2–3, 5). What contemporary issues might we struggle to graciously disagree about? Why must we be “fully convinced” in our own minds (14:5)? How can we know when we’ve become “fully convinced?”
4. What do I do when a fellow Christian brother/sister disagrees with me on how God’s people ought to live? When am I free to enjoy my liberty? When should I limit it for the sake of others? How should I respond to those who enjoy more liberties than I do, if they’re participating in those activities with discretion? How should I respond to those who are flaunting their liberties? How do I respond to those who choose to enjoy fewer liberties than I do, especially when I am in their company?
5. Am I prepared to stand before Christ and give an account of my life (Rom 14:12)? If not, what must take place for me to have greater confidence? How does knowing that I will be judged by God affect how I treat brothers and sisters with whom I differ on non-essential debates? Have I been guilty of making a fellow believer answerable to me instead of God?

Notes

¹ Dwight Edwards, *Releasing the Rivers Within* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2003), 73.

² David Kinman, *UnChristian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 48, 182.

³ I strongly recommend Charles R. Swindoll, *The Grace Awakening* (Dallas: Word, 1990). As a sophomore in college, God used this book to radically change my thinking on many points.

⁴ Moo comments concerning Rom 14:1–15:13: “His concern is not so much with the ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ of this particular issue but with the ‘peace’ and ‘mutual edification’ of the body of Christ (cf. 14:19). And he makes clear that those who pride themselves on being the ‘strong’ have a special responsibility toward this end. It is they, those who truly sense their liberty on these matters, who are to put their exercise of that liberty in perspective and to subordinate it to the far more important ‘good’ of their fellow believers’ edification and salvation (14:15-21). In this they are to imitate their Lord, who subordinated his own interests for the sake of those — both circumcised and uncircumcised — that he came to redeem (15:3, 8-12).” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 832.

⁵ Lutzer writes, “If you had been there, you might have seen this quite differently. You probably would have said that the person who adhered to the old Jewish standards was a strong person and that the one who had freedom to eat anything was the weak Christian. We tacitly assume that the Christian who has the liberty to enjoy certain activities is the weak one, whereas the strong one is the person who believes that such freedom is capitulation to the world.” Erwin Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 221.

⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 834–35 rightly observes: “This paragraph divides into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-9, and 10-12. The divisions between the sections are marked with similar rhetorical questions, each using the second person singular: ‘Who are you who is judging the servant of another?’ (v. 4a); ‘Why are you judging your brother?’ (v. 10a) . . . The first (vv. 1-3) and the third (vv. 10-12) state in almost identical language the main point of the paragraph: the ‘strong’ are not to ‘despise’ the ‘weak’; the ‘weak’ are not to ‘judge’ the ‘strong’ (cf. vv. 3a and 10a). In the central section, vv. 4-9, Paul provides the theological foundation for these commands: every Christian is a servant of the Lord; and it is to that ‘master,’ and not to any other fellow servant, that the believer must answer.” Elsewhere Moo writes, “In verses 1–3, Paul introduces the issue; in verses 4–9 he insists that every believer must answer to the Lord and the Lord alone; and in verses 10–12 he reminds us that only God has the right to stand in judgment over the believer.” Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 448. In support of this argument, I also find a helpful chiasm between 14:1 (*proslambano*) and 14:3 (*proslambano*).

⁷ The phrase “the one who is weak in faith” is emphasized by being fronted (i.e., put first in the Greek text). Paul refers to “the faith” (*te pistei*) here. Paul may be referring to “the faith” here in the sense of the body of orthodox Christian teaching (so NET, NKJV) or to a subjective experience of trust (so ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT). Some argue that this man is having a doctrinal and theological problem—he hasn’t yet come to grips with the fact that at the death of Christ the believer was released from bondage to the Mosaic Law. See René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 263. However, it is more likely that Paul is referring to the *practice* of one’s faith in God, as said specifically in Rom 14:22–23. The presence of the Greek article *te* (“the”) is not unusual; it appears elsewhere when Paul is clearly speaking of faith as an abstract noun (Rom 4:19–20; 11:20; 2 Cor 1:24; Phil 3:9). A similar expression is used of Abraham: *me asthenesas te pistei* (Rom 4:19, “he did not weaken in faith”) where “faith,” not “the faith” is clearly meant. See Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 510. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 836 analyzes the phrase in this manner: “Paul is not . . . simply criticizing these people for having a ‘weak’ or inadequate trust in Christ as their Savior and Lord. Rather, he is criticizing them for lack of insight into some of the implications of their faith in Christ. These are Christians who are not able to accept for themselves the truth that their faith in Christ implies liberation from certain OT/Jewish ritual requirements. The ‘faith’ with respect to which these people are ‘weak’, therefore, is related to their basic faith in Christ but one step removed from it. It involves their individual outworking of Christian faith, their convictions about what that faith allows and prohibits.”

⁸ BDAG s.v. *diakrisis* 2: “engagement in verbal conflict because of differing viewpoints, *quarrel*.” The only other NT occurrences of *diakrisis* are 1 Cor 12:10 and Heb 5:14. There appears to be an *inclusio* between Rom 14:1 (*diakrisis*) and 14:23 (*diakrino*).

⁹ However, there is still likely two connections with Rom 12:1–13:14: the command to “love one another” (12:9–13:14) and the problem of the “flesh” (13:11–14). See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*. Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 794–95.

¹⁰ Paul identifies himself with the “strong” in Rom 15:1.

¹¹ BDAG s.v. *proslambano* 4. Paul only uses this word in Rom 14:1, 3; 15:7 (twice); Phlm 17. Cf. Acts 18:26; 28:2.

¹² BDAG s.v. *dialogismos* 2: “content of reasoning or conclusion reached through use of reason, *thought, opinion, reasoning, design*.” See also Rom 1:21; 1 Cor 3:20; Phil 2:14; 1 Tim 2:8; Jas 2:4.

¹³ Paul uses a wordplay where the verb “has faith” (*pisteuo*, Rom 14:2) echoes the noun “faith” (*pistis*) in 14:1. *Contra* NASB and NIV, the verb *pisteuo* in 14:1 is better rendered “believes” (NET, ESV, HCSB, NKJV, NLT).

¹⁴ BDAG s.v. *exoutheneo* 1: “to show by one’s attitude or manner of treatment that an entity has no merit or worth, *disdain*.” See Rom 14:3, 10; 1 Cor 1:28; 6:4; 16:11; 2 Cor 10:10; Gal 4:14; 1 Thess 5:20. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 838 explains: “‘Despise’ connotes a disdainful, condescending judgment, and attitude that we can well imagine the ‘strong’ majority, who prided themselves on their enlightened, ‘liberal,’ perspective, taking toward those whom they considered to be foolishly ‘hung up’ on the trivia of a bygone era. The ‘weak,’ Paul suggests, responded in kind, considering themselves to be the ‘righteous remnant’ who alone upheld true standards of piety and righteousness and who were ‘standing in judgment’ over those who fell beneath these standards. Paul calls on each side to stop criticizing the other.”

¹⁵ See Paul’s other uses of *krino* (“to judge”) in Rom 14:4, 5 (twice), 10, 13 (twice), 22.

¹⁶ At one time Peter struggled with the extent of his liberty and moved from being weak to being strong in faith (Acts 10). However in the process of his growth Peter had a relapse that led him to misrepresent the gospel, cause Barnabas to sin, and Paul, as a result, to rebuke him (Gal 2:11–12).

¹⁷ The seventeenth century theologian Rupert Meldenius is credited with the maxim, “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity” (quoted in Edwards, *Releasing the Rivers Within*, 73).

¹⁸ As Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* 219 says, “Some who define the Christian life by what they *don’t* do just miss the point.”

¹⁹ Michael Eaton, *Romans: A Practical Exposition*, forthcoming. Eaton goes on to write: “What a lot of controversies there have been over clothing and adornment. I think of areas in Africa where a woman is thought to be immoral if her shoulders are bare or her arms uncovered. Yet I also know of places where Christian women come to church so scantily dressed that visitors from my part of the world would be shocked and embarrassed. I think also of places where head coverings are thought essential in Christian women. I have a friend who was preaching among a certain group of Christians in India, and was rebuked for wearing a gold wedding ring. For the remainder of his time there he put his wedding ring out of sight. I myself enjoy preaching with bare feet in south India (it keeps me cool!), following the local custom. I wish I could do it in Nairobi as well.”

²⁰ The phrase, “Who are you?” (*su tis*) is emphatic in Greek.

²¹ Thomas Schreiner, *Romans*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 717; Lopez, *Romans, Unlocked*, 264–65.

²² The word “servant” (*oiketes*) is not the typical word for servant/slave (*doulos*); rather, it is the word for a house slave.

²³ This sounds very much like Rom 2:1 and 3, where Paul rebuked the self-satisfied Jew.

²⁴ The word *idios* (“own”) is in the emphatic position.

²⁵ There is no instance in the LXX of the wordplay “stand and fall,” though the antithesis to fall/to rise up is common (e.g., Amos 5:2; 8:14; Mic 7:8; Isa 24:20; cf. Prov 24:16; Eccl 4:10).

²⁶ Some scholars argue that this verse is speaking of eternal salvation (e.g., Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 841 n. 62 [tentatively]; Schreiner, *Romans*, 718–19). However, Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 265 explains: “To *stand* does not refer to the judgment of one’s eternal-salvation; God has already guaranteed this victory (since these are already believers; *contra* Schreiner, *Romans*, 718–19); instead, to *stand* refers to the strong *servant’s* success that God guarantees at Christ’s Tribunal, since the issue of eating becomes irrelevant for believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ since there is no sin in eating any kind of food. Rather, whether one obeys Paul’s command not to condemn *another’s servant* concerns both groups (cf. vv 12–13) because that is not guaranteed by God and will be judged at Christ’s Tribunal.” See also Bruce who draws a parallel with 1 Cor 4:5 as referring to one’s individual appearing (including specifically the apostle Paul) at the judgment seat of Christ. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 231. Morris writes, “Paul is not here speaking of final judgment but using an illustration.” Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 480 n. 15. Swindoll says it best: “The apostle’s use of the verb ‘stand’ is one of his favorite expressions. It means to be in good standing, confidently and resolutely doing as one should and receiving favor as a reward (1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:15). Obviously, to ‘fall’ is to do the opposite. This has nothing to do with the final

judgment; it has everything to do with God's favor and whether one deserves chastisement." Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 288.

²⁷ John Hart, "The Letter to the Romans," unpublished class notes (2010 ed.), Moody Bible Institute.

²⁸ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 266 comments: "Paul did not see anything wrong with keeping any Old Testament ritual, but not for justification or sanctification as Galatians shows; for even he, for the sake of not offending Jews after becoming a Christian, on numerous occasions participated in such practices (Acts 21:18–26; 24:11–12; 1 Cor 9:20)."

²⁹ BDAG s.v. *plerophoreo* 2: "*convince fully*." See Paul's other uses in Rom 4:21; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 17.

³⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 842 rightly remarks: "It is typical of Paul's approach to the dispute in Rome that he does not commend, or command, one practice or the other, but exhorts each believer to be 'thoroughly convinced in his own mind.' In 'opinions' (v.1) such as these, Paul urges believers to consider an issue carefully and not hold opinions in a wishy-washy fashion. If a believer sits the fence then they can't be honoring the Lord; they are neither eating from faith nor abstaining from faith. They are neither observing a holy day nor worshipping equally every day. Instead each must be convinced fully in their own thinking."

³¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 843 analyzes: "This is one of the earliest references to the Christian practice of giving thanks at mealtime (see also Acts 27:35; 1 Cor. 11:24; 1 Tim. 4:3 [?]; *Did.* 10:1-6); it is, of course, an extension of the Jewish practice (see esp. Deut. 8:10; and, in the NT, Mark 8:6 and par.; 14:23, John 6:11, 23)."

³² Lutzer, *Who Are You to Judge?* 223: "Should we not be concerned about how Sunday is being devalued because of sports, shopping, and traveling? Yes, we should be concerned, for although we worship God each day, Sunday is a special time when we gather with the people of God. But the answer is not to make a rule that fits every Christian! The answer is to teach people to love God more than they love sports. And to love the people of God more than they love shopping, or whatever."

³³ Osborne suggests that Rom 14:5 "may go back to the 'renewing of your mind' in 12:2. If the Spirit was indeed transforming the thought process of each believer, the two sides must think through the issue carefully and make a reasoned decision." See Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 361.

³⁴ See Rom 4:21; cf. Luke 1:1; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 17.

³⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Christian Liberty: A New Testament Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 54.

³⁶ Michael P. Andrus, "Respecting One's Lifestyle Choices" (Rom 14:1–12): unpublished sermon notes.

³⁷ Edwards, *Releasing the Rivers Within*, 78. Not all biblical values are equally weighty. Christ made that unmistakably clear when He said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected *the weightier provisions* of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others" (Matt 23:23, emphasis added).

³⁸ See also Alan F. Johnson, *Romans*. Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2000), 246.

³⁹ Stott, *Romans*, 362 explains: "Life and death seem to be taken as constituting together the sum total of our human being. While we continue to live on earth and when through death we begin the life of heaven, everything we have and are belongs to the Lord Jesus and must therefore be lived to his honour and glory."

⁴⁰ As Paul said in 2 Cor 5:15: "and He [Jesus] died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

⁴¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 845 explains: "[Paul] departs from the more customary 'Christ dies and was raised' (cf. 1 Thess. 4:14; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Rom. 8:34) to use a formula unique in the NT: 'Christ died and came to life.' Presumably Paul does this in order to forge the closest possible link between Christ's redemptive acts — his death and 'coming to life' — and the two most basic parts of Christian experience — life and death. The same purpose explains the unusual word order 'the dead and the living' at the end of the verse: Paul simply maintains the order that he used in depicting Christ's work on behalf of Christians (v. 9a)."

⁴² Stott, *Romans*, 362, says, "It is wonderful that the apostle lifts the very mundane question of our mutual relationships in the Christian community to the high theological level of the death, resurrection and consequent universal lordship of Jesus."

⁴³ Death does not just mark a transition for the Christian from struggle to rest; death is also a doorway that leads to new enlarged opportunities for service and worship (cf. Luke 19:11–27).

⁴⁴ See Rom 8:38–39; cf. Phil 1:20; 2 Cor 5:9.

⁴⁵ "But you" (*su de*) is fronted for emphasis. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 846 further elucidates: "Paul's direct and lively style creates the picture of the apostle shifting his gaze from the 'weak' to the 'strong' as he publicly

chastises these representative Christians from the Roman community. Each, Paul suggests by using the term ‘brother’ (which becomes central to the argument of vv. 13-23), is guilty of casting doubt on the status of a fellow member of the spiritual family. No believer has such a right.”

⁴⁶ Moo writes: “The bulk of this quotation is from Isaiah 45:23, a text apropos to the issue Paul is discussing here, since the verse is surrounded with claims of the Lord’s unique sovereignty: “I am God, and there is no other” (45:22); “In the LORD alone are righteousness and strength” (45:24). The opening words of the quotation, “As surely as I live,” do not come from Isaiah 45. This phrase, however, does occur twenty-two times in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 49:18, which may be Paul’s specific reference. Why does he add these words? Perhaps to suggest that the “Lord” of the quotation from Isaiah 45:23 is none other than the Lord Christ, who died and was raised.” Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 83.

⁴⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 815 calls Rom 14:10–12 “one of the most powerful monotheistic passages in the scriptures.”

⁴⁸ Paul’s only other use of *bema* (“judgment seat”) is found in 2 Cor 5:10. The term used for judgment seat (*bema*) is a platform upon which a civic officer was seated. The structure was familiar to Paul since it was the base of the *bema* at Corinth that Paul appeared before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), and the *bema* is still visible at the ancient site today.

⁴⁹ The KJV/NKJV has “the judgment seat of Christ” because in many textual witnesses, most of them late, the Greek has *Christou* (“Christ’s”) instead of *theou* (“God’s”). However, it is likely that the copyist’s desire was to confirm the statement to 2 Cor 5:10. See Everett F. Harrison and Donald A. Hagner, “Romans” in the *Revised Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 207.

⁵⁰ There is a correspondence between Rom 14:10–12 and 12:19, although many would argue Paul is referring to unbelievers in 12:17–21. However, in both contexts God is depicted as the Judge who will repay.