

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 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.

14:5 With the discussion having started about eating meat and vegetables, or only eating vegetables (v. 2), a point is raised about various sacred days, which it is safe to assume are days held in high regard by the same persons who will only be found eating vegetables. The Apostle Paul raises the point, “One person esteems one day over another while another judges every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind” (TLV). It is most often witnessed by Christian examiners that the days in view are not only the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), but all of the Torah-prescribed appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים).²⁵ There are, however, some interpreters, who will at least be willing to concede that just automatically assuming that the sacred days referenced in vs. 5-6 are the Sabbath or appointed times, needs to be tempered.²⁶ It cannot go unnoticed how the term “Sabbath,” *sabbaton* (σάββατον), is notably absent from the Epistle to the Romans.

The challenge we have to consider is what Romans 14:5-6 meant to the Romans. While it is easy for many to just jump ahead and automatically conclude that the Sabbath, appointed times, and likewise kosher, are being discussed—this may be a little too convenient. While a Jewish orientation of things being eaten and sacred days is certain, keep in mind that what is in view concerns matters of disputable *halachah*: “opinions” (v. 1). Lay readers, with a nominal understanding of the Torah and Second Temple Judaism, would assume that the Sabbath or appointed times are being targeted in vs. 5-6; academic Christian resources on Romans have to offer a wider array of possibilities, which notably mention how the sacred days in view need not (only) be the Sabbath or appointed times, but could also be various traditional days of fasting. The following is an encapsulation of the various options witnessed:

C.E.B Cranfield: “As to the nature of this disagreement about days to which Paul refers various suggestions have been made: that it was closely connected with the disagreement about foods referred to in v. 2 and related to the observance of particular days as days of abstinence (this was the view generally taken by ancient interpreters...); that it had to do with observance of the special days of the OT ceremonial law (possibly also with the change from Sabbath to Lord’s Day); that it had to do with the distinguishing of lucky and unlucky days.”²⁷

Everett F. Harrison: “Whether the question of regarding one day as more sacred than another refers to Sabbath observance or to special days for feasting and fasting is not easily determined. Since the early church in Jerusalem almost certainly observed the Sabbath (as well as the first day of the week) because of its Jewish constituency and the dangers of giving offense to non-Christian Jews, and since the Roman church presumably had a good-sized minority of Jews, it is not impossible that Paul has the Sabbath in mind.”²⁸

²⁵ Osborne, pp 360-361; Witherington, 336.

²⁶ Cf. Moo, 842.

²⁷ Cranfield, *Romans* 9-16, 705.

²⁸ Harrison, in *EXP*, 10:145-146.

James R. Edwards: “[W]e are probably correct in assuming that Paul is referring to Jewish calendric observations, perhaps the regular Monday and Thursday fast days, perhaps the Sabbath and various feast days.”²⁹

N.T. Wright: “It is just possible that Paul has in mind the festival days of the wider pagan world, not least the Roman Empire; but it is far more likely that he is referring to the Jewish festival days, some of which, Acts implies he himself observed...It is interesting, if that is so, that he does not refer to the sabbath explicitly.”³⁰

Mark Nanos: “The *day* is not specified; it could be the Sabbath or other feast days, but also could be disputes about what day things should be observed based on differing calendars.”³¹

The observations of Keener on the sacred days mainly being the regular observance of the Sabbath, cannot go unmentioned. Although he seemingly holds to a position that the seventh-day Sabbath was mainly for those living in the pre-resurrection era, and he does mention some First Century Jewish variance on how Greek and Roman God-fearers attached to the Synagogue may have kept the Sabbath, he notably mentions how Yeshua the Messiah probably did not abolish *Shabbat*:

“[I]t would seem surprising if the Sabbath were less of a controversy than food customs, even if everyone believed that the law of Moses was no longer in effect. While God-fearing Gentiles who were not full proselytes might not be expected to keep the Sabbath, the Sabbath, in contrast to the food laws, was illustrated in creation before the birth of Israel (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11). Although Jesus countered a strict approach to the Sabbath, it is not clear that he did away with it, and early believers in Jesus continued to designate the seventh day by that term (Acts 1:12), albeit especially regarding conventional Jewish gatherings (e.g., Acts 13:44; 16:13).”³²

The fact that the sacred days, mentioned by Paul in vs. 5-6, are indeed “less of a controversy,” as Keener puts it, should open up readers to the possibility that the sacred days *are not actually the Sabbath and appointed times*. Moo, who does think that the Sabbath is at the center of the sacred days of vs. 5-6, still notably hesitates, detailing,

“Whether the specific point at issue was the observance of the great Jewish festivals, regular days of fasting, or the Sabbath is difficult to say. But we would expect that the Sabbath, at least, would be involved...The believer who sets aside certain days for fasting, or who observes the Sabbath, does so because he or she sincerely believes this honors the Lord.”³³

The major alternative to the sacred days of vs. 5-6 being the Sabbath or appointed times, which has the unique advantage of associating them with the topic of eating (v. 2), having introduced this part of Paul’s discussion, is that they were **days of fasting**. Days of fasting have already been noted as within the scope of options, by Christian interpreters who would see this as a secondary option. But,

²⁹ Edwards, 322.

³⁰ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:736.

³¹ Nanos, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 282.

³² Keener, 164.

Ibid., pp 164-165 where he goes on to discuss the challenges with implementing a Sabbath in the Roman world. This should be evaluated more fully in the analysis, “How Did We Lose the Sabbath?”, in the forthcoming *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

It has also to be mentioned that even when assuming that the seventh-day Sabbath has been abolished for the post-resurrection era, Schreiner, in *ESV Study Bible*, 2181 still advises, “it is still wise to take regular times of rest from work, and regular times of worship are commanded for Christians (Heb. 10:24-25; cf. Acts 20:7).”

³³ Moo, pp 842, 843.

there were some leaders in early Christianity, such as Augustine and John Chrysostom, who notably did appeal to Romans 14:3 and Romans 14:5, to address the issue of fixed days for fasting:³⁴

“In this question, however, of fasting or not fasting on the seventh day, nothing appears to me more safe and conducive to peace than the apostle's rule: **‘Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth:’** [Romans 14:3] ‘for neither if we eat are we the better, neither if we eat not are we the worse;’ [1 Corinthians 8:8] our fellowship with those among whom we live, and along with whom we live in God, being preserved undisturbed by these things. For as it is true that, in the words of the apostles, ‘it is evil for that man who eateth with offence,’ [Romans 14:20] it is equally true that it is evil for that man who fasteth with offence. Let us not therefore be like those who, seeing John the Baptist neither eating nor drinking, said, ‘He hath a devil;’ but let us equally avoid imitating those who said, when they saw Christ eating and drinking, ‘Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.’ [Matthew 11:19] After mentioning these sayings, the Lord subjoined a most important truth in the words, ‘But Wisdom is justified of her children;’ and if you ask who these are, read what is written, ‘The sons of Wisdom are the congregation of the righteous:’ [Ecclesiastes 3:1] they are they who, when they eat, do not despise others who do not eat; and when they eat not, do not judge those who eat, but who do despise and judge those who, with offence, either eat or abstain from eating” (Augustine *Letter* 36, to Casulanus).³⁵

“Here he seems to me to be giving a gentle hint about fasting. For it is not unlikely that some who fasted were always judging those who did not, or among the observances it is likely that there were some that on fixed days abstained, and on fixed days did not. Whence also he says, ‘Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.’ And in this way he released those who kept the observances from fear, by saying that the thing was indifferent, and he removed also the quarrelsomeness of those who attacked them, by showing that it was no very desirable...task to be always making a trouble about these things. Yet it was not a very desirable task, not in its own nature, but on account of the time chosen, and because they were novices in the faith” (Chrysostom *Homilies on Romans* 25).³⁶

With the option of the sacred days being times of fasting, the only Biblical time God's people are explicitly commanded to fast is on *Yom Kippur*. Leviticus 23:27 specifies, “On exactly the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; it shall be a holy convocation for you, and you shall humble your souls.” It is clearly identified in Acts 27:9 as “the fast.” However, other than references in the Scriptures to *Yom Kippur*, there is not very much more that the Bible has to say about fasting.

The tradition of “Monday and Thursday are set aside for public fasts” (*t.Ta'anit* 2:4)³⁷ was established in Second Temple Judaism, because fasting was largely prohibited for the Sabbath and festivals (*b.Eruvin* 41a). The more likely, more serious days of fasting to be considered, though, were some fixed fast days established by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian exile, established to remember important events in Jewish history. Jacob Milgrom summarizes,

“Fixed fast days are first mentioned by the post-Exilic prophet Zechariah who proclaims the word of the Lord thus: ‘The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and the

³⁴ Cf. Kruse, 515 fn#21.

³⁵ [BibleWorks 9.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers](#).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Neusner, *Tosefta*, 1:625.

It is to be noted how in the emerging Christianity of the late First Century, there were discussions about if and when Believers should fast: “But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week; but do ye fast on the fourth day and the Preparation (Friday)” (*Didache* 8:1; [BibleWorks 9.0: Ante-Nicene Fathers](#)).

fast of the tenth...' (Zech. 8:19; cf. 7:3, 5). Jewish tradition has it that these fasts commemorate the critical events which culminated in the destruction of the Temple: the tenth of Tevet (the tenth month), the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem; the 17th of Tammuz (the fourth month), the breaching of the walls; the ninth of Av (the fifth month), when the Temple was destroyed; and the third of Tishri (the seventh month), when Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah, was assassinated" (EJ).³⁸

When **optional fast days**, and not the seventh-day Sabbath or appointed times, are selected as being a matter of personal opinion on which to dedicate one's practice unto the Lord, few of today's Messianic people would take issue with Paul's assertion, "say, one person thinks that some days should be set aside as holy and another thinks that each day is pretty much like any other. There are good reasons either way. So, each person is free to follow the convictions of conscience" (The Message).

14:6 As the CJB renders Paul's words of v. 6, "He who observes a day as special does so to honor the Lord. Also he who eats anything, eats to honor the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; likewise the abstainer abstains to honor the Lord, and he too gives thanks to God." There are two translation issues to be aware of in v. 6, which often reflect decisions made regarding the scene in view.

The first translation issue surrounds the proper rendering of the participles *esthiōn* (ἐσθίω) and *mē esthiōn* (μὴ ἐσθίω), which appeared earlier in v. 3. The Moffat New Testament actually renders these literally as "eater" and "non-eater": "The eater eats to the Lord, since he thanks God for his food; the non-eater abstains to the Lord." The NIV, however, has made a value judgment, in adding "meat" to its rendering: "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God." And interestingly enough, on the other side, the Phillips New Testament reflects the interpretation that what is in view are days of fasting: "The man who eats, eats for the Lord's sake, for he thanks God for the food. The man who fasts also does it for the Lord's sake, for he thanks God for the benefits of fasting." It is fair, in more formal equivalence rendering, though, to leave these participles by themselves: "and he who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat" (my translation).

A second translation issue surrounds how to properly approach the verb *phroneō* (φρονέω), which in a selection of versions is rendered as "observe" or "observes" (RSV/NRSV/ESV, NASU, HCSB, CJB, TLV). Some notable definitions of *phroneō*, as detailed by *BDAG*, include, "**to have an opinion with regard to someth., think, form/hold an opinion, judge,**" and "**to give careful consideration to someth., set one's mind on, be intent on.**"³⁹ The two main alternative renderings for *phroneō* in v. 6 would be "minds" (LITV, or "mindful") and "regards" (NIV; "regardeth," American Standard Version). Hegg's thoughts on v. 6 should be well taken:

"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...would best fit one who fasts in contrast to the one who does not. For the one who 'eats' give 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

³⁸ Jacob Milgrom, "Fasting and Fast Days," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

³⁹ *BDAG*, 1065.

scheduled fast days and best explains why Paul would begin with issues of eating and move easily to matters relating to days for fasting.”⁴⁰

The sacred days in view, regarded as days of fasting for the non-eater, would obviously be something practiced as a very beneficial spiritual procedure, the non-eating being performed for the Lord. Fasting on certain days are often times when each individual must be convinced in his or her own mind (v. 5). Fasting is often a matter solely of individual choice and spiritual conviction, from which one can clearly benefit.

Having admonished the presumed “strong” in Rome for eating meat (v. 2), Paul then admonishes them with how those who will not eat regard various days as special to the Lord (v. 5). If these are days optional Jewish of fasting—which are definitely intended to be, decisions of conscience—then Paul has made an important rhetorical point to those “strong” who look down upon, or with contempt toward those who were only eating vegetarian. None of the Roman non-Jewish Believers, in their right minds, should have looked down with utter disdain on a Jewish Believer for fasting on a day like the Ninth of Av, remembering the destruction of the First Temple—so why would they look down on what might not be eaten by them during fellowship meals, something *far less* important?

Keeping these fasts would be something that was entirely optional as far as one’s faith practice was concerned. Yet remembering the siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, by fasting and entreating the Lord for such events never to happen again, are worthy things to reflect upon—still largely observed in Judaism today. They may not be required, *per se*, but no mature Believer should ever look with contempt upon others who are convicted that these times are worthy moments to abstain from food and pray before God. *They are high convictions deserving of respect.*

Frequently in contemporary Christianity, the sacred days of Romans 14:5-6 are looked at in terms of Sabbatarianism observed by others, perhaps practiced by denominations such as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. While officially, many evangelical Christian leaders and teachers encourage a policy of *adiaphora* toward Christians who keep a seventh-day Sabbath—and by extension this would include Messianic groups who keep *Shabbat* and the appointed times—implementing a no-judgment policy is not at all easy. Perhaps the Christian academic is a bit more conscious of the tensions that can arise, than your average run-of-the-mill lay Believer. As Witherington points out, “What works to build community and what does harm are at the forefront of Paul’s discussion.”⁴¹ Moo, being among those who think that Romans ch. 14 treats the seventh-day Sabbath, appointed times, and dietary laws as being matters of indifference, also does acknowledge how such practices are to be performed as unto the Lord:

“The believer who sets aside certain days...or who observes the Sabbath, does so because he or she sincerely believes this honors the Lord. Similarly, both the believer who eats anything without discrimination and the believer who refuses to eat certain things ‘gives thanks’ to God at their mealtimes and are motivated in their respective practices by a desire to glorify the Lord.”⁴²

While neither Witherington or Moo, among others, thinks that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or dietary laws is necessary for today—I do not think that they would look down with resentment or harsh judgment toward those who do. They would consider it an issue of personal choice and preference, and hopefully wish today’s Messianics the best in their trying to honor the Lord. This does not mean that there are not Christians who look down with disdain at Messianics, because there are. And, much of this is reciprocated with some disdain toward Christians on the Messianic end, which is

⁴⁰ Hegg, *Romans 9-16*, 417.

⁴¹ Witherington, pp 325-326.

⁴² Moo, 843.

Also Osborne, pp 361-362; Keener, 165.

equally wrong and reprehensible, and needs to be remedied by Messianics who encourage their fellow Believers to change via a positive testimony.

7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 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. 9 For to this end Messiah died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

14:7-9 Having just admonished various Believers in Rome, mostly non-Jewish Believers, about the need for them to not judge regarding the issues of eating and sacred days (vs. 2-6), Paul's instruction about not looking down with disdain or contempt over opinions is noticeably intensified. He communicates, "This indeed is how matters stand. None of us lives to be his own master, and none of us dies to be his own master. When we live we live serving the Lord, and when we die we die serving the Lord. Whether we live, then, or whether we die, we belong to the Lord" (vs. 7-8, God's New Covenant-Cassirer). The whole spectrum of serving the Lord Yeshua, *from life to death*, is presented before the audience. The actions of conviction, held by the presumed "weak," are actions performed to the Lord. Further, it should be obvious with a spectrum of *from life to death* in view, how all of one's opinions mean relatively little in comparison to the important good deeds of hard service of the Kingdom—which in many cases for the First Century Believers led to hardship, ostracism, harassment and imprisonment, or even martyrdom.

All of a born again Believer's activities are to be conducted with Yeshua the Messiah as the central focus. Yeshua is the Lord of all who have acknowledged Him, as a result of His death and resurrection: "It was for this that Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living" (v. 9, God's New Covenant-Cassirer). The paraphrase offered by The Message for v. 9 is worth noting: "That's why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other." Differences of opinion, and worthwhile matters of conscience, mean very little in light of the ministry, example, and sacrifice of the Son of God.

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. 11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD" [Isaiah 49:18; 45:23]. 12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

14:10 Perhaps some of Paul's word about judging another is rhetorical, and perhaps some of it is representative of how nasty a few things had gotten among the Roman Believers. He inquires, "But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God" (Common English Bible). All Believers will have to give some account of their actions before the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), in an evaluation of their service to Him. Demonstrating a harsh attitude of contempt toward fellow brothers and sisters in the present, and having a less-than-positive evaluation of one's service to the Messiah in the future, is not something that mature Believers should at all want.

14:11-12 The Apostle Paul highlights the importance of Believers' works being evaluated in the future, by appealing to Tanach Scripture: "for it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God'" (v. 11, ESV). V. 11 includes a quotation from Isaiah 45:23,

with Isaiah 45:21-23 in total detailing how the Lord God of Israel is the only Savior, the only place in which true salvation can be found, and how all will be forced to acknowledge Him:

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. 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*.”

The significance of Paul’s statement, for the situation in Rome, is of course highlighted in how all Believers will have to stand before the God of all Creation, for their works to be evaluated and eschatological rewards granted. In terms of the nature of the Messiah, there is excellent reason for us to consider “the Lord” of v. 11 and Isaiah 45:23 to actually be Yeshua. Paul has stated in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah.” And in the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, the Lord to whom all must bow down, is certainly Yeshua the Messiah:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (PME).

Yeshua being “the Lord” (YHWH) of Isaiah 45:23 is notably highlighted by what is asserted in Isaiah 42:8, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.” Either Yeshua the Son is authentically and truly God, by the application of Isaiah 45:23—or Paul has committed blasphemy against the God of Israel (cf. 10:13). Wright is entirely correct to state how this “indicates how strong and high Paul’s underlying christology is at this point.”⁴³

For the purposes of Paul’s admonition in ch. 14, those who would unfairly judge others who hold to opinions regarding eating and sacred days, may be regarded as though they have usurped the position of the ultimate Judge Himself.⁴⁴ This is not something that the presumed “strong” in Rome needed to be doing, as “each of us will be answerable to God” (v. 12, REB).

13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way. 14 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. 15 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.

14:13 Paul’s discussion from vs. 13-23, having been purposefully interrupted by some statements about sacred days (vs. [3]5-6), now returns to the original issue about eating (v. 2). Whatever circumstances had caused the problem of the Roman Believers who ate meat looking down upon the other Roman Believers who were vegetarian—which we should think was most probably taking place at some kind of fellowship meal gatherings—is something that is crafted in terms of

⁴³ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:738.

⁴⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:809.

stumbling blocks or hindrances being placed in others' path. Paul states, "Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister" (TNIV). Paul is right to emphasize that there are things far more important than what one eats.

If, the largely non-Jewish Believers in Rome were not to look down on their, mainly fellow Jewish Believers, for remembering various extra-Biblical fast days as times for honoring God (vs. 5-6)—why would they criticize any Jewish Believers for not necessarily eating the meat available at some of their fellowship gatherings? What one chooses to eat, especially if food is being passed around at a table, or is laid out in a buffet, is entirely one's personal preference. If you are not going to judge a brother or sister for a more significant matter, why would you judge a brother or sister on a much smaller matter? If a non-Jewish Believer chooses to be unfair to a Jewish Believer over what is eaten at a fellowship meal, what could that communicate to the same Jewish Believer's other actions of faith? As the Phillips New Testament paraphrases v. 13: "Let us therefore stop turning critical eyes on one another. Let us rather be critical of our own conduct and see that we do nothing to make a brother stumble or fall."

14:14 There is no statement more confusing for today's kosher-friendly Messianics, than Romans 14:14. Properly examining what is communicated not only involves a correct translation of what appears, but also a right diagnosis of the setting to which Paul directed his evaluation. Far too frequently, Romans 14:14 has been mistranslated in most English Bibles, and Romans ch. 14 has been read from the incorrect point of view of an abstract essay, rather than circumstances in Rome needing to be admonished.

Paul says in Romans 14:14, *oída kai pepeismai en Kuriō Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di' heautou, ei mē tō logizomenō ti koinon einai, ekeinō koinon* (οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκεῖνῳ κοινόν). A Messianic version like the CJB is not too different from what appears in standard Christian versions: "I know—that is, I have been persuaded by the Lord Yeshua the Messiah—that nothing is unclean in itself. But if a person considers something unclean, then for him it is unclean" (CJB). Apparently, Paul has just communicated that the meats classified as unclean according to the Torah (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), are in fact clean, and if anyone considers such meats to be unclean, then it is an issue of personal preference or choice, but one which is ultimately irrelevant.

The Hebrew term directly associated with unclean meats in the Torah is *tamei* (טָמֵא), "unclean," or "ceremonially unclean: animals" (HALOT).⁴⁵ In the Greek Septuagint, *tamei* is rendered in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 as *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος), which as *Thayer* notes, "in the Septuagint equivalent to טָמֵא [tame], not cleansed, unclean...of food."⁴⁶ If the Apostle Paul intended there to be a direct abrogation of the Torah's dietary code in v. 14, reducing it from the level of Biblical commandment to that of personal opinion, then *akathartos* would have been the certain and unambiguous term to use in v. 14. ***Akathartos* is not the Greek term which is used in Romans 14:14.**

What appears instead in Romans 14:14, being widely translated as "unclean," is *koinos* (κοινός). Generally speaking, "This word means 'common'...in the sense of common ownership, property, ideas, etc" (TDNT).⁴⁷ Scholars William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, in their Greek-English Dictionary provided for *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)*, notably define *koinos* as "common, belonging equally to several, "in the NT common, profane," and "ceremonially

⁴⁵ HALOT, 1:376.

⁴⁶ *Thayer*, 21.

Consulting Hebrew translations of the Greek Apostolic Scriptures, will not at all be helpful in evaluating Romans 14:14, as they tend to use *tamei* (טָמֵא; Delitzsch, Salkinson-Ginsburg, UBSHNT).

⁴⁷ F. Hauck, "*koinós*," in TDNT, 447.

unclean.”⁴⁸ AMG offers the description of *koinos* as “Defiled, common, unclean, to lie common or open to all, common or belonging to several or of which several are partakers...such as were common to other nations but were avoided by the Jews as polluted and unclean.”⁴⁹

There is enough reason to question whether *koinos* in Romans 14:14, should really be translated as “unclean,” or whether it should be more “lit, ‘profane/common,”⁵⁰ with some important nuance intended for the scene being addressed in Rome.

The following chart has assembled a selection of renderings seen for Romans 14:14, where *koinos* has notably been translated differently among some versions, and where *koinos* has been improperly extrapolated or paraphrased among some others:

ΚΟΙΝΟΣ KOINOS IN ROMANS 14:14	
GREEK	VARIED ENGLISH VERSIONS
<p><i>oída kai pepeismai en Kuriō Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di' heautou, ei mē tō logizomenō ti koinon einai, ekeinō koinon</i></p> <p>οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδὲν κοινὸν δι' ἑαυτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκεῖνῳ κοινόν</p>	<p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for any one who thinks it unclean” (RSV).</p> <p>“As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean” (NIV).</p> <p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing by itself is common; except to the one deeming anything to be common, it is common” (LITV).</p> <p>“I know and have been persuaded by [the] Lord Jesus that nothing [is] common through itself; except to the [one] reckoning anything common to be, to that man [it is] common” (Marshall).⁵¹</p> <p>“I know and have been persuaded in [the] Lord Jesus that nothing [is] common through(in) itself, except to the one counting anything common to be, to that man [it is] common” (Brown and Comfort).⁵²</p> <p>“I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is profane in itself, except that to the one who reckons something profane, to that person it is profane” (WBC).⁵³</p> <p>“I know, and am persuaded in the Lord <i>Yeshua</i>, that</p>

⁴⁸ William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1098.

⁴⁹ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 872.

⁵⁰ Nanos, in *Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 283.

⁵¹ Marshall, 477.

⁵² Brown and Comfort, 570.

⁵³ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:815.

	<p>nothing is unholy in itself; but it is unholy for the one who considers it unholy” (TLV).⁵⁴</p> <p>“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua that nothing is of itself impure—except that to the one who concludes something is impure, to him it is impure” (The Messianic Writings).</p> <p>“Through my union with the Lord Jesus, I know and am persuaded that nothing is ‘defiling in itself.’ A thing is ‘defiling’ only to the person who holds it to be so” (<i>A New New Testament</i>).⁵⁵</p> <p>“I know and I’m convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is wrong to eat in itself. But if someone thinks something is wrong to eat, it becomes wrong for that person” (Common English Bible).</p>
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The most frequent alternative for *koinos* (κοινός) **not** being rendered as “unclean,” would instead be **“common”** (LITV, Marshall, Brown and Comfort), although “defiled” or “profane” would also be acceptable. It is notable, that nowhere in the Septuagint translation of the Torah or Pentateuch does the term *koinos* appear. In fact, *koinos* does not really start appearing in Greek Jewish texts, until the composition of the Apocryphal books, with some obvious linguistic influence from Hellenism. In terms of *koinos* as a classical Greek term, the *Liddell-Scott-Jones* lexicon includes the definitions of “*common, ordinary*” and “*common, of inferior quality,*” with at least some Biblical association stated: “of forbidden meats, *common, profane.*”⁵⁶ On the whole, theological resources—when choosing to acknowledge *koinos*—have tended to conclude that *koinos* is equivalent to *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος), and by extension also *tamei*. As concluded by James D.G. Dunn:

“κοινός [*koinos*] in ordinary Greek means simply ‘common, ordinary.’ The sense of ‘profane, unclean’ derives from the use of κοινός as equivalent to the biblical טָמֵא [*tamei*] (e.g., Lev 11:4-8; Deut 14:7-10; Judg 13:4; Hos 9:3) or חַי [cho] (Lev 10:10; Ezek 22:26; 44:23), a step taken subsequent to the LXX rendering of the OT, but reflecting the increasing purity concerns of the Maccabean and post-Maccabean period.”⁵⁷

Some of the main reasons for just translating *koinos* as though it were *akathartos*, as “unclean,” would pertain to various uses witnessed in the Apocrypha, regarding the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E., and the defilement of the Temple Mount by Antiochus Epiphanes. The RSV Apocrypha renders *koinos* as “unclean,” but the NETS or New English Translation of the Septuagint, renders *koinos* as “common”:

“[T]o build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and unclean animals...But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food” (1 Macabees 1:47, 62, RSV).

⁵⁴ The Phillips New Testament has the similar, “I am convinced, and I say this as in the presence of the Lord Jesus, that nothing is intrinsically unholy. But nonetheless it is unholy to the man who thinks it is.” The Wuest New Testament renders *koinos* as “unhallowed.”

⁵⁵ Hal Taussig, ed., *A New New Testament: A Bible for the Twenty-First Century Combining Traditional and Newly Discovered Texts* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 259.

⁵⁶ *BibleWorks 9.0: LSJM Lexicon (Unabridged)*.

⁵⁷ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:818; also Moo, 852 who takes *koinos* as an antonym for *katharos* (καθαρός) or “clean” in v. 20.

“[T]o build altars and sacred precincts and houses to idols and to sacrifice swine and common animals...But many in Israel remained strong and fortified themselves not to eat common things” (1 Maccabees 1:47, 62, NETS).

Koinos is employed in the Apocrypha where *hueia kai ktēnē koina* (ἕεια καὶ κτήνη κοινὰ) were sacrificed in the Temple precincts. There is little doubting that the pig as an unclean animal was sacrificed on the Temple Mount, and that Jews were forced to eat pork or die. But why are *ktēnē koina* or “common animals” also referenced? What animals other than pigs would have defiled the sacred space? This is where it can be frequently overlooked how Greco-Roman religion most definitely employed animals for sacrifice which would be considered technically clean on the lists of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Yet, any cattle, sheep, or goats sacrificed on the Temple Mount by the Seleucid Greeks, would not at all be considered being *tamim* (טָמִיִּם) or fit for sacrifice in God’s holy place.⁵⁸ On the contrary, such animals would be regarded as *koinos*: “common,” “profane,” or “defiled.” Similarly, a common Greco-Roman Mediterranean diet would have involved the eating of cattle, sheep, goats, and various fowl, which are listed as “clean” on the food lists of the Torah.

Romans 14:14, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua, that nothing is common in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be common, to him it is common” (my translation), with *koinos* inappropriately rendered as “unclean,” is frequently taken as a definitive statement of abrogation of the kosher dietary laws,⁵⁹ or at least a reduction of it to one of personal opinion. Furthermore, Romans ch. 14 in total is customarily read as an abstract essay on all matters of opinion. When read this way, a typical conclusion would be, as detailed in the *NIV Study Bible*, “Not to be generalized to mean that sin is only a matter of subjective opinion or conscience. Paul is not discussing conduct that in light of Scripture is clearly sinful, but conduct concerning which Christians may legitimately differ (in this case, food regulations).”⁶⁰

Is the status of clean and unclean meats, as stated by God in the Torah (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), something to be regarded entirely as arbitrary for the post-resurrection era? If the Apostle Paul wanted to make this unambiguously clear, then as a scholar trained by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), he could have used *akathartos* (ἀκάθαρτος; cf. 1 Corinthians 7:14), which he did not do in v. 14.

Messianic handling, of what is communicated in v. 14, has not been terribly impressive. Not noting the source text—meaning that issues pertaining to *koinos*, *akathartos*, or *tamei* are overlooked—all Stern can conclude in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* is, “The Bible does not always explain why some things are pure and others not...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.”⁶¹ However, thinking that non-Israelites in the Torah were exempt from the dietary laws, is something that can be disputed via the tenor of Leviticus 17:10-16 (among other passages), where the native and sojourner in Ancient Israel were only permitted to catch clean animals in the wild.⁶²

⁵⁸ I.e., Exodus 12:5; Leviticus 1:3, 10; 3:1, 6, 9, etc.

⁵⁹ Sometimes this is associated with various interpretations of Mark 7:19, which itself has translation issues regarding the clause *katharizōn panta ta brōmata* (καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα).

Consult the examination of Mark 7:1-23 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics, defending the translation of “purging all the foods” as excretion for Mark 7:19.

⁶⁰ *NIV Study Bible*, 1768; also Osborne, 368.

⁶¹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, pp 435-436.

⁶² Consult the examination of Leviticus 17:10-16 in the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

Hegg's commentary on Romans likewise does not go into any discussion regarding *koinos*, but just jumps into talking about what is clean or unclean in Rabbinical estimation.⁶³

When Romans ch. 14 is read from the vantage point of Paul addressing his audience in terms of a circumstance which has arisen among them, suggested by this writer to be various controversies that have erupted during fellowship meals, then "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Yeshua, that nothing is common in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be common, to him it is common" (my translation) is a remark made by the Apostle, with a real issue in mind. With some in Rome, labeled by Paul to be the "weak," only willing to eat vegetables, it is important to recognize how *koinos* relates "**to being of little value because of being common, common, ordinary, profane,**" and can concern "that which ordinary people eat, in contrast to those of more refined tastes" (BDAG).⁶⁴ The discrimination of, mainly Jewish Believers, toward the clean meat that was being served at fellowship meals (discussed further for v. 20), would have involved the source of where such meat was acquired.

Assuming that the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:20, 29) was being observed, we can safely conclude that the *koinos* meat was that of Biblically-clean animals. If the meat were butchered properly with the blood removed (perhaps procured by various wealthy Believers hosting a cross-gathering of Messiah followers, butchered to their specifications), but if it came from a Roman meat source, the "weak" could have chosen not to eat it, and out of conscience would have considered it *koinos*: "common," "profane," or "defiled." *In Romans 14:14 Paul labels this to be a personal value judgment.*

Paul himself would have had no problem eating any of the "common" or "defiled" meat served at the Roman fellowship meals—and even appeals to his faith in Yeshua Himself for holding to such an opinion. But if this opinion would cause some to stumble, he later notes how he would gladly give up eating meat altogether (v. 21).

14:15 That the issue of eating (v. 2) and sacred days (vs. 5-6) are not to be viewed as abstract, or even hypothetical remarks by Paul—but instead are rooted in circumstances that have arisen among the Roman Believers—is evidenced by his admonition in v. 15: "If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died" (NRSV). Paul's reference to *tō brōmati sou* (τῷ βρώματί σου), "with your food," was obviously directed to those who were being unfair about what or when others chose to eat or not to eat. With a scene of fellowship meals in view, one can easily envision Paul speaking to such a person, with a plate in hand, and with somebody having an utterly dumbfounded or bewildered look.

Paul is very serious about those who would look down upon others in the assembly, who were vegetarian, as their actions can have severe consequences. *If being a part of this community means having one's convictions criticized, why be a part of it?* He employs the verb *apollumi* (ἀπόλλυμι) to describe this, a default rendering being "destroy" (NASU, ESV), but also seen as "ruin" (RSV, NRSV), "grieve" (Wuest New Testament), "tear down" (The Voice), or even "undo" (*Lattimore*). In the Mishnah, the thought is expressed, "whoever destroys a single Israelite soul is deemed by Scripture {Genesis 4:10} as if he had destroyed a whole world" (m.*Sanhedrin* 4:5).⁶⁵ Whatever scruples and criticism have arisen over the Believers in Rome and eating, Paul is clear *that it was not worth it!* The Message has a useful paraphrase to consider here: "Would you risk sending them to hell over an item in their diet?"

People who are treated unfairly in a larger group, if circumstances are not rectified, will often leave and find a place more welcoming of them. In this case, with the "weak" most probably being Jewish Believers, it would mean leaving the community of Messiah followers, and returning to a Messiah-less Synagogue.

⁶³ Hegg, *Romans* 9-16, pp 422-423.

⁶⁴ BDAG, 552.

⁶⁵ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 591.