

The Bible (Unmuted) Transcript
Episode 49
Romans, Part 22 (Rom 14)
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Episode Summary:

In the early Roman church, it appears there might have been some serious disagreements about whether (and how) to follow certain dietary restrictions. While Jewish Christians, for instance, would have wanted to follow the dietary regulations outlined in Torah, Gentiles Christians likely had different opinions on the matter. In Romans 14, Paul offers his readers some helpful guidelines for how to navigate these sorts of disagreements. When it comes to opinions over matters adiaphora, the Apostle thinks there's a lot of freedom to enjoy. In other words, Christians have the right (and responsibility) to follow the dictates of their individual conscience. That being said, what ultimately mattered to him at the end of the day was that Christians show charity toward one another. And this idea of charity, for Paul, flowed directly downstream of his christological convictions.

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Pre-order Matt's newest book, *The End of the World As You Know It*. You can purchase through (1) Amazon or (2) Lexham Press (as well as other outlets).

Amazon:

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[The End of the World as You Know It: What the Bible Really Says about the End Times \(And Why It's Good News\) - Lexham Press](#)

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Transcript:

0:00 Hey friends, welcome back to another episode of the Bible Unmuted. My name is Matt Halstead, and it's a pleasure to be with you once again this week. I am here right behind the microphone as usual, though a little bit nasally behind the microphone because I've been sick this past week. I think it's been like two or three days in bed pretty much. And then after that, trying to find my strength once again had a good day yesterday. Today was good, although this evening I started to get that feeling, that feeling, you know, where I just wonder, are you taking two steps back? You know, am I getting sick again? I hope not. But I'm starting to get that feeling. So here I am though. Armed with my hot cup of tea. Hopefully that gets me through this. Appreciate your

prayers. Of course, if you're listening to this and you're praying for me to get through this, God would have to answer your prayers retroactively, which logically I guess for someone like God that doesn't seem too difficult. But anyway, yeah... So hopefully I can get through this. I did consider just putting a pause this week and picking back up against again next week. But I was like, no, we can't do that. I took two weeks off for the holidays and then we did Romans 13 last week. We got to do Romans 14 this week. And so here we are ready to tackle Romans chapter 14. So yeah, there's a lot of good stuff in that chapter. I can't wait to get to it. It'll be a lot of fun.

1:30 But before we get to that. Yeah. I just want to say we're about three weeks out from the release of my new book at *The End of the World as You Know It*. If you haven't had a chance yet, go check it out on Amazon. You can pre-order on Amazon and that'll ship on February the 7th. You can actually pretty much preorder it wherever books are sold. So find your favorite seller. And go pre-order your copy. It'll ship on February the 7th. My hope with this book is that it encourages a lot of people to dive into what the Bible says about eschatology. A lot of people are afraid of eschatology and afraid of reading those end times texts largely because those texts have been, by modern prophecy teachers, been depicted almost in frightful terms. I mean, you know, a lot of people just avoid, for example, the Book of Revelation because it's scary. They've been taught things from it that are just quite frightening. And of course, Revelation the way it's written can seem a little different. Weird even. And so this book that I've written helps to parse out some of that and to help make sense of why Revelation is written in the way that it is. And one of the claims that I'm making the book is that when read from the right perspective, biblical end times texts are never meant to scare us. They're actually meant to do the opposite, to comfort us, to give us hope and to give us a resolve to persevere so that we can find our way to the New Jerusalem. And so anyway, this book is all about why the end times is actually good news. That's the subtitle And well, the subtitle is *What the Bible Really Says About the End Times and Why it's Good News*. So yeah. Anyway, I'm really excited for this book to be released into the wild. And it's been a couple years of the works. And so it's been a lot of fun anticipating this...yeah, really, really stoked... three weeks out. Go preorder your copy. Go check it out. You could read up the little blurb at Amazon and whatnot. I hope you enjoy the book and give me some feedback if you read the book and let me know what you think. Always eager to hear from listeners and from my readers. So, that's coming up February the 7th.

4:02 And the other thing I want to mention too is that I guess on that note, I'm giving away a copy of that book on my Patreon channel. So here on the podcast, we have a Patreon membership. There's a Patreon community that we've got going. You can just go to Patreon.com/theBibleUnmuted. And you can find out all about that. And the reason mentioning it is because you can actually do a 7-day free trial on Patreon. So you can go log in and create a Bible Unmuted membership or a membership with the Bible Unmuted at Patreon. And just kind of peruse around and check it out. There is always monthly bonus episodes that I update, and we have get-togethers on zoom and we have book club and things like that. Depending on the tier that you select that you want to be in depends on some of the benefits that you get from being a part of the Patreon community. But everybody, no matter what tier, you always get like a free bonus episode every month. And you get an invite to a book club that we do. And that's a lot of fun. In fact, if I remember correctly, I'm kind of loopy because I've been sick...we've got a meeting this week... I think it's our book club this week, in fact. So yeah. Anyway, go check that out. Patreon.com/theBibleUnmuted. You can also look in the description for this episode for a quick link. You can follow that link there and check it out. We're actually giving away a book there on Patreon. So it's pretty cool. Set up a set up a free trial membership. See if it's something you're interested in. See if it's something that you might like to do. And you should have access to everything depending on what tier you sign up for under that membership. I appreciate it. And thanks to those who support on Patreon. This podcast, though, will always be free. It's always going to be something that's open and available regardless if you support Patreon or anything like that. That's an extra thing. So go check that out.

Let's see what else do I need to talk about? The intros or anything of the sort. We have some great guests coming up on the show. I think I've talked about that already. And it'll be a lot of fun. So be looking for those interviews and those guests coming on the show. All right. Well, I guess it's pretty much it in terms of introduction ...Gosh, I don't think I'm missing anything anyway. Okay. Well, without further ado, let's jump into Romans chapter 14.

6:55 We're looking at just Romans 14 today, though it must be said that the subject matter of Romans 14 flows right into Romans 15 quite smoothly. We could do both chapters in one episode. But I'm keeping chapter 14 and 15 separate because (1) for the sake of time. I try to keep these episodes at an hour or less, and (2) because I think it's good to keep them split up so that we can spend two weeks on a similar topic and that that just helps us to become more familiar with what Paul is saying.

And so I think that's what we'll do. But just keep in mind that Romans 14 and parts of 15 actually, it really goes together quite beautifully. So we'll keep that in mind as we move forward. Well, let's start with Romans 14:1-4.

Romans 14:1–23 (NRSV)

1 Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2 Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Here Paul is addressing an issue that was, it seems, causing friction in the early Roman church. The issue had to do with dietary habits, which as we know were codified into the Torah. Apparently, the problem in the Roman church was how Christian gentiles and Christians Jews could exist together in the same church despite there being disagreements about these dietary regulations.

What Paul will do in this entire chapter is advocate for an ethic of Christ-like love. He will argue that, since Jesus has lived and died for us, then we must live and die for him—and we must recognize how others are on their own journey with God, and this must be respected. Christian charity can help us recognize the sincerity of another believer's opinions and, as a result, allow us to live at peace with one another. The fact of the matter is that Christians don't always agree with one another—and that's okay, provided that we disagree in a spirit of love.

Paul begins in v. 1 by saying “**Welcome those who are weak in faith.**” Those who are “weak in faith” are those who have chosen, out of conscience's sake, to abstain from certain foods. It's clear that Paul personally thinks it's okay to *not* abstain—that's why he calls those who do “weak in faith.” He's not being condescending; he's merely pointing out that *faith* allows one to eat whatever they want. And for those who don't have this sort of faith should not be judged or condemned at all. So if you don't have that faith, it's okay.

You should not be judged or condemned by anybody. There is room for differences of opinions on these matters. There is no room for divisiveness on these matters. And those who abstain should not look down on those who don't. Verse 3 says, ***“Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat.”*** Why does Paul say this? Well, it's because ***“God has welcomed them.”*** The idea is simple. We should welcome each other *because* God has welcomed us. Paul takes a “mind-your-own-business” approach to the situation. Verse 4 says, ***“Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.”***

Paul doesn't want the Christian community at Rome to get pre-occupied with dividing over these sorts of things. So long as Christ is hailed as Lord, then he's content with members within the church having different opinions.

This has been Paul's concern all along – namely, putting everyone on an equal playing field. Recall how earlier in Romans, Paul has shown that both Jews and Gentiles are both under the domain of sin (Rom 1-3). One side's boasting over the other is not permissible.

And here we see this same idea fleshed out with regard to dietary restrictions. Everyone should welcome each other knowing that God has welcomed them.

12:10 Now let's look at vv 5-6:

5 Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

Here Paul is encouraging his readers to recognize that each respective Christian makes the choices they do out of sincerity of heart. In other words, he wants everyone to recognize the goodness in each Christian's decision. And since this particular issue of dietary restrictions or observing sabbaths, etc., are not core issues with respect to the Kingdom of Jesus, there is freedom to decide for oneself on these sorts of matters.

Of course, Paul is assuming that this *actually* is the case in the Roman church. He's assuming that there are good intentions on the part of everyone. The problem he sees, though, is when one group condemns the other group. That isn't healthy, he says.

7 We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? 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." 12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

There's a lot here to unpack, so let's consider things carefully. The first thing to say is that Paul intends for his audience to take to heart what, exactly, the death and resurrection actually means in this particular situation. Every Christian—whether in life or death—is responsible to the Lord. Every Christian is responsible to the Lord. We belong to the Lord in our *living* and in our *dying*. Christ's own *dying* and *living again* has made this possible. In other words, Christ's *death* and his resurrection has made it such that he is Lord over us in our own *living* and *dying*. He has purchased us, redeemed us, etc. He has done all those things. Therefore, we don't live for ourselves. Listen carefully again to the text: **7 We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.**

This means that every Christian is personally redeemed by Jesus as his own. Now, if that's true, then it means—in a profound way—that we are all on equal ground with respect to being free from condemnation. This is why Paul asks next an important question: **10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister?** That's a good question. If every Christian belongs to the Lord, then the community of Christians ought never to look down upon or despise or condemn another believer—not least when it comes to these sorts of disputes that are, at the end of the day, *adiaphora*—that is, these disputes are not about core matters of doctrine.

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Hey friends. I hope this episode is a blessing and encouragement to you. I hope that every episode of the Bible Unmuted gives you something fresh to consider and something deep to Ponder. My goal is to offer food for thought to give listeners the tools they need to be faithful interpreters of scripture. I cherish your continued prayers for this ministry and thanks so much to everyone who lifts me up in prayer each week.

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we will take deep dives into all sorts of fun biblical and theological subjects. Another tier of support will get your name thrown into monthly book giveaways as well. All to say there are lots of cool features for Patrons at the Bible Unmuted.

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17:15 Next Paul follows up with the statement that, at the end of the day, we're each personally accountable to God. **10 For we will all stand [παρίστημι] 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." 12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God.**

Let's talk a bit more about these verses. When Paul says that **we will all stand before the judgment seat of God** in v. 10, this should remind us of what he said earlier in verse 4, where he asked, **"Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand."** Paul's point is clear: Don't judge another believer over these sorts of matters because, at the end of the day, they answer to God and God will qualify them to stand at the judgment (and, don't forget, you're going to answer to God, too. You are going to answer to him as well.). And, if they are saved from future condemnation, then they should also be saved from your present condemnations. I think that's sort of the logic that Paul is operating by here in this passage.

I want to read vv. 10-11 once again because I think there's something important to highlight. Paul says, **10 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."**

Here Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23. Let me read it from the Greek OT: **"I am swearing an oath according to myself: Unless righteousness shall go forth from my mouth, my words shall not turn back, because every knee shall bend to me, and every tongue shall swear by God" (LES).**

Compare again how Paul quotes it: **"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." (Rom 14:11).** There are a couple phrases here that we could highlight, some big ones. One thing you probably notice that is different is that Paul adds the phrase "As I live" to the quotation: **"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow..."** Why would he add this phrase "As I live"? What could the point have been? Well, the OT uses the phrase a lot in divine speeches, so it's not that unusual in and of itself that Paul would throw it in here. For example, listen to Ezekiel 5:11: **"Because of this, as I live!" says the Lord, "Surely on account of these things, you defiled my sacred things by all your abominations, and I shall spurn you; my eye will not spare and I will show no mercy." (LES)**

The phrase, “As I live,” in other words, is quite consistent with God’s other speeches—so Paul does nothing uncouth or anything that would draw the ire of anyone. But still, why would he do that? Throw that phrase in there “As I live?” Because again, That that just doesn’t occur anywhere in Isaiah 45:23. Let me just read this again because I want to read Isaiah 45 and then Romans 14:11 and just I just want to highlight again the difference here. So Isaiah 45:23. **“I am swearing an oath according to myself: Unless righteousness shall go forth from my mouth, my words shall not turn back, because every knee shall bend to me, and every tongue shall swear by God” (LES).** And then Paul quotes it and says, **“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.” (Rom 14:11).** So why would he add the phrase “As I live?”

21:03 Well, clues to an answer might be embedded in the passages that we’ve already read. Remember how Paul spoke about the Christians *living* and *dying*? And do you also remember how he spoke of Jesus’ own *dying* and *living again*? Well, perhaps when he’s quoting this verse from Isaiah, he decided to insert into his quotation this phrase “As I live” – which again was regularly used in divine speeches – what if he did that in order to connect God, YHWH, to the work of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection? So it’s something to consider here, I think, because what this would mean is that the God of the Hebrew Bible is, according to Paul, one with the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul has taken a YHWH text and recontextualized around his christological convictions. And so I think that’s an interesting piece here. Because again, that idea of living is very important here in the passage. And I just wonder if there’s not a some sort of relation here as well.

And if I remember correctly...I need to go back and it’s been a while since I’ve read this book so don’t quote me on this, but maybe use it as a thing to go back and check. But, Matthew Bates’s book, *Hermeneutics of the Apostolic Proclamation...* I think this was a 2012 publication with Baylor University Press. I think he actually notices a little bit of this connection there too. But, go look that up. Don’t quote me on it, but I’m pretty sure that connection was made there too.

Anyway my point here is just to say that I think there’s a strong connection here that that would explain perhaps why Paul adds in the phrase, “As I live” because he’s already talked about Jesus living and emphasizing the *living again* of what Jesus has done. In other words, his resurrection and so perhaps he’s trying to bring those two together the YHWH text with his christological understanding or pre-understanding, I guess you could say.

If we keep a larger perspective, this becomes clear anyway. Romans 14:3 started off by saying that **“God has welcomed”** all Christians—regardless of their beliefs about dietary laws. Then Paul, in the very next verse, says that the “lord” will make them “stand” (v. 4). Here, “Lord” and “God” are used interchangeably. But then Paul goes into more detail, talking specifically about Jesus the Messiah, who he calls “Lord” of “both the dead and

the living” (v. 9). And it’s actually through his own *dying* and *living* that he was able to that. Jesus is able to make people stand at the judgment. Specifically, it is through Jesus’ own death and resurrection that each Christian—regardless of their differing beliefs—can enjoy the benefits of being the Lord’s possession. In other words, the *way* in which Christians has been *welcomed by God* is through Jesus, who has welcomed them through his death and resurrection. Through his *dying* and *living again*.

24:30 So, here’s my point. For Paul, the idea of “God” is conceptualized around the person of Jesus, the person and work of Jesus the Messiah. And this is all the more true if the phrase “As I live” was inserted into the Isaiah quotation by Paul in order to further enhance and reveal this conceptualizing God through the work of Jesus Christ. So what I’m suggesting is that the idea of God is recentered around the work in person of Jesus. There’s a christological understanding of God.

And when you look at one of Paul’s other letters, namely, Philippians, you see this same thing. In fact, in Philippians 2, Paul quotes this same Isaiah verse to refer to Jesus. Philippians 2:9–11 (NRSV):

*9 Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 **and every tongue should confess**
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Notice that here, Jesus shares in the prerogatives of deity *with* the Father. He is sharing in the glory of what it means to be deity. The knee is bending to him and the tongue is confessing. That is the part from Isaiah 45, that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. Jesus is sharing in that prerogative. People are doing that to him now. So this original YHWH text is now being applied to Jesus. And I think we’re seeing the same sort of thing happening in Romans 14 where, again, the Isaiah passage is cited there as well.

The big picture—the takeaway—is to realize that Paul’s ethical exhortations—that is, his teachings about how Christians ought to treat one another when it comes to these sorts of disputes—these exhortations take the shape they do because of the way Paul conceptualizes the work of Christ. Paul’s ethics are rooted in not merely his *theology* but specifically his *christology*. Paul tells the Romans to *welcome* one another because *God* has welcomed us through the work of *Christ*. In this way, the church imitates and reflects the welcoming nature of God’s acceptance that occurs through Christ. Our ethics reveal our Christology, the what we actually believe about Christology. If we think truly that God has reconciled our brothers and sisters through the Lord of Christ, then we should treat them accordingly. We should treat them with charity.

If Isaiah envisions that all people will bend the knee to YHWH, then for Paul that promise would be fulfilled through the victory that comes through the work of Jesus the Messiah. In other words, the final judgment is through Jesus. And moreover, for Paul, the church is the emblem of what bending the knee to YHWH is supposed to look like anyway. In light of this, the church needs to get its act together to start showing the world what it means for people to be united under Jesus, the world's true Lord. The big question, therefore, is this: Will the church live up to its calling?

27:55 Let me just say one more thing about that past segment. What you really need to do is get out your Bible. Don't do this if you're driving to work right now. But when you get home, get out your Bible, look at Romans 14 and grab a highlighter. And use the New Revised Standard Version, or the English Standard Version, or something along those lines. And get your highlighter out, and then highlight every time in that chapter where the word *stand* is used, and every time the word *living* and *dying* is used. And include the phrase "As I live," in that Romans 14:11 passage. And then once you've highlighted all those, take a step back and start looking for these connections. F

When I was preparing this this episode... I have things written down, so I'm a visual person, I think I've mentioned that before. I have to have everything written down and I mean, my goodness, I have to have a pen in my hand every time I read a book. I mean I can't I can't just read a book. I have to underline things and I have to have a pencil and sometimes highlighters and things like that. This practice helps me, so I just encourage you... if what I've said in that past segment doesn't make a lot of sense it's probably because I'm just loopy right now. I'm just not... my brain is out in left field or something. Maybe I'm not explaining it that well, but you know also it could be that this is just one of those things you need to see and you need to highlight.

So again Romans 14... grab a highlighter and highlight the word *stand* and then highlight the word *living* and *dying* and that phrase "As I live". And then start looking all those and start making connections. Maybe grab a pink highlighter for the word *stand* and then a yellow highlighter for the words *live*. And you can start seeing these connections. Maybe grab a pencil and start drawing lines between all the highlights or something. It's really cool. I have to do that helps me navigate scripture in that sense. And if you don't like writing in your Bible then maybe just take Romans 14 copy and paste it into a word document and print that off. Then have fun with it like that. Oaky, that's all I want to say about all that.

Let's look at verse 13.

13 Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.

What Paul means here is that: (1) don't pass judgment on your brother or sister over these matters because they already have a judge who is, and will, make them stand in the final judgment; and (2) don't forget that you're going to be judged too. So, be sure to show mercy to others. For Paul, the church should preoccupy itself with helping each other walk the walk; we shouldn't be busy placing stumbling blocks in front of each other as they walk their walk. We should be helping them walk the walk.

When it comes to these tertiary matters, Let them be tertiary matters. Don't take a tertiary issue and make a primary. That's just bad form. We would not want somebody to do that with us. We should just figure out ways to bear patiently with each other. And I think that's what Paul wants to do in the church, is to show he wants them to be patient with one another and just live at peace with each other when it comes to these sorts of matters. I think that's just super important for Paul.

And again, it goes back to, I think, that Isaiah passage. Isaiah envisions a situation where everyone is bending the knee to the Lord. And so my goodness, I mean, of all places that should happen, it should happen in the church. And so the way we honor our Lord, the way we submit to the Lord is by loving our neighbor. I mean, how can we say that we love God if we're not loving our neighbor? Are we really submitting to Jesus and his Lordship if we're not also playing servant to our brothers and sisters? No, we're not. And so we need to be consistent.

Again, ethics is downstream of our Christology. And because of what we believe about Christ, that he is God in the flesh, and that he has worked a great work on our behalf, then that should impact the way we interact in the church. Again, ethics is downstream of our Christology.

32:35 Okay, let's read this last chunk of passage here vv. 14 all the way down to 23.

14 I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 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. 16 So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. 19 Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; 21 it is good

not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble. 22 The faith that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. 23 But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.

This passage is interesting for a few reasons. First, Paul places a lot of emphasis upon the individual's conscience and convictions. Paul is not an authoritarian, such that he demands everyone believes exactly like he should. In his mind, Christians should not make it a practice of enforcing their every conviction upon their brothers and sisters. No, for Paul, there's room for personal views, different opinions, thoughts and beliefs when it comes to matters such as dietary codes.

Second, while Paul places a lot of emphasis on individual liberty of conscience, he wants his readers to know that such "freedom" is but one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is responsibility. If a believer, for example, thinks their freedom to eat what they wish ought to be enjoyed, then all the more power to them—except for in those moments when one's freedom becomes a means of destruction for their brother or sister in Christ. ***19 Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. 20 Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; 21 it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble.*** Here's how I would sum up what Paul is saying. A believer should always be on the lookout for how they use their freedom, in other words. I think that's a good way to capture what Paul is doing here. Always be on the lookout for how you use your freedom. Make sure you're not using your freedom and in the process hurting your brother and sister.

But it does work the other way around, too. For those whose conscience will not permit such liberty, they should not look down upon those whose conscience does. This seems clear from multiple verses in this passage. The key thing for Paul is charity – we may not always agree with one another, but there is room for us all to simply agree to disagree and then continue worshipping together.

Third, and finally, this is where we can see the Apostle's true heart in the matter. What matters most to Paul is peace and the mutual encouragement of the believing community. When you read Paul's letters, you get the sense that he has a passion for church unity. Think of the Corinthian letters; think of Galatians. And think here of Romans 14. Now, Paul is not suggesting that the church should pursue unity at all costs. That's not true. Some things are worth dividing over (again, think of 1 Corinthians). And yet, not everything is worth dividing over. What things? Well, debates about dietary restrictions. ***"The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (v 17).*** The heavier matters are where the church's unity is grounded.

What does this teach us about Paul as an apostle? I don't think it shows him to be a "set-around-the-campfire-and-sing-kumbaya" sort of guy. No, Paul definitely is a guy of boundaries. He believes in boundaries, he's not a "unity at all costs." But those boundaries are, for him, defined around what he has come to believe about Jesus the Messiah. Like I have said, Paul's ethics are christologically-focused. His ethics are downstream of his christology. His belief that Jesus has died and resurrected impacts the way he thinks people should treat one another. For him, Christ brings people together. And it is a scandal when the church is divided—not least over issues about food. True unity is found in the bread of heaven, in Jesus. It is in Christ where unity truly happens, and Paul calls his churches back to that place of unity.

Notice what Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (NRSV)**

16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

So, instead of condemning and disdainning each other over dietary preferences, let's learn to exist together even with those differences. And we do that, says Paul, by uniting ourselves to the broken body of our Lord Jesus, the bread of heaven, in whom we all have a share as we believe and trust in him.

38:40 That's the end of today's episode. And thanks again for listening to The Bible Unmuted. If you like this podcast, consider rating it on your podcast platform, subscribing to it, and sharing with your friends. You can also support the podcast by becoming a patreon member. Go to: <https://www.patreon.com/TheBibleUnmuted> - or simply find the link in the description of this episode. Thanks for listening. Until next time, friends.