

Romans 14

By Moshe Schwab

When we take Romans 14 out of its Jewish cultural context we get a different message. Shaul, the Apostle Paul, told us that we should not listen to wrong messages (Galatians 1:9). Unfortunately, some Bible preachers use the afore mentioned scripture in Galatians to mean that people should only listen to them. There are various interpretations of Romans 14 and some even teach that it says in Romans 14 that it is okay to do what we want to do as long as we don't condemn ourselves. That is obviously not true. Rabbi Shaul¹ stays in line with the Torah as we see in Romans 13:13. I believe Rabbi Shaul never says that it is okay to disobey the Torah. Let's look at the verse; Shaul tells us that it is wrong to sin.

Romans 13:13 CJB

“Let us live properly, as people do in the daytime - not partying and getting drunk, not engaging in sexual immorality and other excesses, not quarrelling and being jealous.”

Let's go to the beginning of Romans 14 now. Some say that in Romans 14 that the person who is weak is someone who observes the Old Testament. Instead, consider this; **think, how would a Jewish believer in Yeshua (Jesus) in the first century could be considered weak?** Perhaps they are new to Nazarene Judaism; perhaps they are unsure what is what is right or wrong, or perhaps they are overly scrupulous. The issue in Romans 14 is about clean meat² in Gentile communities that often came from pagan temples. Is it right to eat meat sacrificed to idols? It is not saying that it is okay to disobey the Old Testament or to eat pig. The issue is about meat coming from pagan temples in Rome, a Gentile city. Why is their trust weak; **it is not** because they obey the Old Testament as some say (think what is the context); they only eat vegetables because they are not sure it is okay to eat the meat that comes from pagan temples – they are trying to obey the Torah and not worship pagan gods.

Romans 14:1-2 CJB

“Now as for a person whose trust is weak, welcome him - but not to get into arguments over opinions. 2 One person has the trust that will allow him to eat anything, while another whose trust is weak eats only vegetables.”

Nazarene Jews (People who believed in the Jewish Messiah Yeshua in the first century were considered part of Judaism which was called the Nazarene Sect.) would naturally be expected to observe the Jewish feasts and be observant according to the Torah. **Some extra laws or rituals were added by the rabbis** regarding the first of the month and other holidays (feasts), an extra day was added to the feasts in Gentile communities, and extra holidays (days of rest – Sabbaths) were also added and observed. In Romans then it is not talking about not observing the feasts. Taking scriptures out of their Jewish cultural context can destroy the meaning of what was meant. The issue is laws and days imposed by man and man made rituals. The message can get changed by our lack of understanding of the biblical cultural context.

Romans 14:5 CJB

“One person considers some days more holy than others, while someone else regards them as being all alike.”

Also, again it is not saying in Romans 14 that we shouldn't consider sin wrong as some say. **If we stick to right thinking**, it is saying in Romans that we shouldn't look down on others over matters that were added to the Torah by man. Shaul uses the Old Testament portion to establish his point (And if the Torah has been done away then he makes no point at all – this should show us that the Torah has not been done away with as some say.).

¹ We can properly call Shaul rabbi because in today's language, “rabbi” is a Jewish leader or teacher. In Yeshua's time it meant “great one” and that is what Yeshua was at odds with. Titles are often necessary in culture; tax consultant, vice president, CEO, bank teller; in Germany Pastors are German shepherds (joke).

² Clean meat or kosher meat is meat that the Bible says is okay to eat. The Bible tells us what we shouldn't eat. I sometimes tell people that we listen to the latest fads and to what the doctor tells us. Why not listen to God; most of the things God tells us not to eat are scavengers that could carry something harmful to us.

Romans 14:10-12 CJB

“You then, why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For all of us will stand before God's judgment seat; 11 since it is written in the Tanakh, ‘As I live, says ADONAI, every knee will bend before me, and every tongue will publicly acknowledge God.’ 12 So then, every one of us will have to give an account of himself to God.”

In the Torah it says we shouldn't put a stumbling block in front of a blind person. Rabbis like Shaul also see that applying to other things. Rabbis often make logical good sense conclusions and there is nothing wrong with that. Since Shaul is making a biblical point from his frame of reference, the Old Testament, he probably means that we **shouldn't put a stumbling block in front of someone and cause them to stop observing the Torah.**

Romans 14:13 CJB

“Therefore, let's stop passing judgment on each other! Instead, make this one judgment - not to put a stumbling block or a snare in a brother's way.”

Shaul then says in Romans 14 that **it is not loving** to eat meat that the Torah says is okay if your brother is upset that it came from a pagan temple (Torah context, Bible context, Jewish context – think).

Romans 14:15, 19-20 CJB

“If your brother is being upset by the food you eat, your life is no longer one of love... So then, let us pursue the things that make for shalom and mutual upbuilding. Don't tear down God's work for the sake of food. True enough, all things are clean; but it is wrong for anybody by his eating to cause someone to fall away.”

Don't cause someone to fall away. Who might fall away? Perhaps someone who is new to Nazarene Judaism. Again, Shaul is not telling people not to observe the Torah.

This final section of Romans 14 again needs to be understood in context. So what “belief” are we to keep between us and God according to Romans 14:21? What's the main issue; meat that comes from pagan temples.

Romans 14:21-23 CJB

“What is good is not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. 22 The belief you hold about such things, keep between yourself and God. Happy the person who is free of self-condemnation when he approves of something! 23 But the doubter comes under condemnation if he eats, because his action is not based on trust. And anything not based on trust is a sin.”

Some people because they are not bolted to the scriptures and not bolted to a proper understanding of the scriptures take verse 22 to mean that it is okay to do anything they please, like adultery, homosexuality, stealing etcetera, as long as they don't condemn themselves.³ They are clearly in the wrong and this wrong interpretation is disgusting. God calls sexual sin in Leviticus 18 “abominations,” in other words the Creator that knows how we best should live calls them disgusting.

Jude refers to some of the sinners in the Torah in his letter. It says that they will live in eternal darkness forever; please listen to what Jude says.

Jude 1:11-13 CJB

Woe to them, in that they have walked the road of Kayin, they have given themselves over for money to the error of Bil'am, they have been destroyed in the rebellion of Korach. 12 These men are filthy spots at

³ A simple reading or understanding of the scriptures is good if we mean getting back to the original meaning. People also use “simple reading” to say, “I'm going interpret the scriptures the way I want to and do what is right in my own eyes.” The Bible says that doing what is right in ones own eyes is wrong and those that do that are fools. See Prov. 12:15.

your festive gatherings meant to foster love; they share your meals without a qualm, while caring only for themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; trees without fruit even in autumn, and doubly dead because they have been uprooted; 13 savage sea-waves heaving forth their shameful deeds like foam; wandering stars **for whom the blackest darkness has been reserved forever.**

In conclusion, let us consider the words of Kefa. The scriptures seem constantly under attack. Let's stand with the truths of the scriptures as they were intended to be understood.

2 Peter 2:3-5 CJB

In their greed they will exploit you with fabricated stories. Their punishment, decreed long ago, is not idle; their destruction is not asleep! 4 For God did not spare the angels who sinned; on the contrary, he put them in gloomy dungeons lower than Sh'ol to be held for judgment. 5 And he did not spare the ancient world; on the contrary, he preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, and brought the Flood upon a world of ungodly people.

2 Peter 2:12-13 CJB says,

Presumptuous and self-willed, **these false teachers** do not tremble at insulting angelic beings; 11 whereas angels, though stronger and more powerful, do not bring before the Lord an insulting charge against them. 12 But these people, acting without thinking, like animals without reason, born to be captured and destroyed, insult things about which they have no knowledge. When they are destroyed, their destruction will be total - 13 **they will be paid back harm as wages for the harm they are doing.**

In conclusion, Shaul says that sin is wrong and his frame of reference was the Old Testament; there was no New Testament at the time. It makes sense that those who are weak according to Shaul **are not those** who observe the Old Testament. Shaul is talking about the issue of meat that came from pagan temples in a Gentile city, Rome. Shaul tells us not to cause others to stumble. Stumble from what, from following God. What part of the Bible was Shaul's frame of reference – the Old Testament portion.

Finally, in 1 Timothy, Shaul says that a person who doesn't agree with being godly knows nothing (Again and again, we have to remember that Shaul's frame of reference was the Old Testament.).

1 Timothy 6:3-4 CJB.

“If anyone teaches differently and does not agree to the sound precepts of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah and to the doctrine that is in keeping with godliness, he is swollen with conceit and understands nothing.”

People who teach others to be ungodly will be held accountable by God. We don't hold them accountable, but God will hold them accountable. If someone needs help, we are to inform them with humility (Gal. 6:1). We are to live our lives in a godly manner (following God's commandments), trust in God, and not make up our own version of the Bible outside of its Jewish cultural context or believe in false philosophy and theology. “Watch out, so that no one will take you captive by means of philosophy and empty deceit;” Colossians 2:8 CJB.