

## THE BOOK OF ROMANS

### Lesson 33, Chapters 14 and 1

In Romans chapter 14 we again encountered an issue that simply will not go away: the issue of kosher eating. Thus in verse 14 of chapter 14 we read this:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Romans 14:14 *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;***

Although Western gentile Christianity has tried to solve the matter by declaring simply and succinctly that the Levitical dietary laws have been abolished for Christians, some clever reconstruction of certain New Testament passages was needed to try to validate that questionable position. So when we look at the oldest New Testament manuscripts ever found (all of them written in Greek) we find discrepancies from what we find in most English Bible versions when it comes God's dietary laws. Interestingly the KJV tends to stay more true to the original Greek in its rendering of words concerning eating and diet, and so sometimes it tells a different story.....but not always. Let me give you an example.

#### **Acts 10:11-15 KJV**

**<sup>11</sup> And (Peter) saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: <sup>12</sup> Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. <sup>13</sup> And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. <sup>14</sup> But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. <sup>15</sup> And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.**

Notice in this passage in Acts that the word "common" is used to describe something that Peter said he has never eaten, and that God said that Peter should not call common what God has cleansed. You will not find the word "common" in most standard English translations or in the CJB; instead the word "unclean" is used. So why the discrepancy? It is because the Greek word that is translated "common" in the KJV, but "unclean" in almost all English translations, is **koinos**; however **koinos** means ordinary and common and not "unclean". There is a separate Greek word that means unclean, and it is **akathartos**. **Akathartos** is not used here. So why, when it comes to the discussion of food, do English Bible translations change the meaning of **koinos** from common to unclean? Clearly it is because a certain doctrinal agenda is being taught that doesn't necessarily agree with the plain Scripture reading so some adjustments to the Scriptures had to be made to make the words fit the doctrine that kosher eating has been abolished for Christians.

So what does "common" mean when it applies to food? Before we delve into that I want to

throw out a question that I'm sure many of you might be asking at this moment; why does Tom Bradford address the issue of kosher eating so regularly? It is because I have noticed that within Western culture and especially within Western Christianity the issues of dietary restrictions and Sabbath are among the most difficult to deal with. It isn't that hard for Westerners to understand and obey God's biblical moral standards that make murder, stealing, and lying wrong. However we simply don't like the idea of being told what we can eat and what we can't, or what day we should set aside to cease our regular work or if we are obligated to do and not do certain activities on the Sabbath. Somehow the concepts of a God designated Day of Rest and of God regulating our food such that some foods are permissible and some is prohibited goes against our values of individualism and personal choice. After many decades of life and my personal experience with God I have learned a valuable lesson; it is that those areas in our life of which we demand God keep His hands off are the ones He may well meddle in the most. Why? It is for our benefit; obedience to Him in all areas of our life is the forgotten element of our relationship with the Lord in modern Christianity.

As much as I love democracy, the Kingdom of Heaven is not democratic and God is not the President of Heaven. The Kingdom of Heaven is a theocracy with but one absolute ruler who established Himself as that ruler: Yehoveh. We don't get to vote in our relationship with God. We have no right or mechanism to establish new divine rules or abolish established ones. He gives us no options when it comes to morality, although He gives us wide latitude in matters of preference. God has made eating and Sabbath matters of The Law and thus they are moral issues; not issues of personal preference. He has made clear rules and regulations about what we should and should not eat, and about what day we are to set apart as holy and different from all the other days of the week.

Therefore let me be clear: is it wrong to disobey God's laws concerning diet and Sabbath? Yes it is. Is it sin to disregard God's regulations about what we eat and what day we set aside as the Day of Rest? Yes it is. And I can tell you from personal experience (and I have heard the same from so many other Believers) that after you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, and then you also make the decision to obey God in all areas of your life including diet and Sabbath, an entire new world of intimacy and relationship with the Lord opens up. Why? Because obedience is God's love language. It is an oxymoron to say you love God but in the same breath make it clear that you won't obey Him in certain areas of your life and lifestyle that you wish to continue to control according to your own standard. As I have pointed out before: God originally gave Adam and Eve only one rule; and interestingly that rule concerned their diet. They could eat everything God gave them for food except the fruit from one particular tree. The Scriptures acknowledge that the prohibited fruit was edible, beautiful, and tasty.

### Genesis 3:1-7 CJB

<sup>CJB</sup> **Genesis 3:1** *Now the serpent was more crafty than any wild animal which ADONAI, God, had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You are not to eat from any tree in the garden'?"* <sup>2</sup> *The woman answered the serpent, "We may eat from the fruit of the trees of the garden,* <sup>3</sup> *but about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, 'You are neither to eat from it nor touch it, or you will die.'"*

***<sup>4</sup> The serpent said to the woman, "It is not true that you will surely die; <sup>5</sup> because God knows that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."***

***<sup>6</sup> When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it had a pleasing appearance and that the tree was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her; and he ate. <sup>7</sup> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to make themselves loincloths.***

The very first law God ever gave to mankind He gave in the Garden of Eden....before there was a Law of Moses or a Hebrew to obey it....and it concerned food. What we eat matters to God and has since Creation. And since it matters to God naturally Satan is going to interfere and try to get us to go against what the Lord wants. It rubbed Eve the wrong way that God restricted her from that gorgeous fruit; it must have seemed pointless and unreasonable. Because of our inborn evil inclinations we carry with us that same attitude about food that Adam and Eve had; we demand total freedom to choose as we please. If we like the taste and it doesn't physically harm us, then we feel as though we should have the right to eat it. Just because some of the Early Church Fathers were deceived, and because the Church in general remains deceived on this matter, doesn't mean you have to be. Remember: the rules of kosher eating are found in the Holy Scriptures, primarily in Leviticus chapter 11, and they don't amount to great deal. The food rules that Judaism follows include much more than God requires and even Yeshua Himself railed against those extra rules. So this is why I speak so regularly about kosher eating and about Sabbath.

So back to the issue of what common means as it applies to food. It is important to understand that in the Torah the term "common" is not used in reference to food. Food is basically divided into two categories: permitted and prohibited. And then the permitted food is divided into two categories: ritually clean and ritually unclean. So the use of the term common by Paul creates a real challenge in trying to discern what he means by it. Surely it doesn't mean unclean because there was an everyday Greek word for unclean that we regularly find used in the Bible. My best educated guess is that because the Synagogue and Judaism had taken firm hold in the lives of Jews well before Paul's day, certain terms had their meanings altered to reflect conditions of the times. I think "common" is one of those altered terms and it reflects the difficulties of proper eating for the vast bulk of Jews who lived among millions of gentiles in a predominately gentile world. I also think that in the NT era the word "common" referred to food (probably mainly meat) that is on the list of permissible foods as found in the Torah, but because Jews in the Diaspora more often than not had no hand in the raising, butchering, and handling of the food they could never be sure if it had been done according to God's laws. If any of that was done improperly it could render the food unclean. And depending on how pious a Diaspora Jew was, the details of the food handling were either extremely important or not important at all. Thus for many Jews they ate only vegetables so that kosher issues were removed and they could be certain that they ate nothing that they shouldn't.

Let's pause now and re-read the last several verses of Romans 14.

### RE-READ ROMANS 14:14 – end

We've discussed verse 14 with the pertinent info being that the word unclean doesn't actually appear here. However the principle Paul speaks of "nothing is common of itself" means that food has no intrinsic condition. That is, no food is automatically created holy; no food is automatically created common; and no food is automatically created unclean because of its chemical makeup. Pig meat doesn't have some evil genetic quality about it that makes it prohibited for food while cow meat has some good genetic quality about it that makes it permissible for food. Rather the issue is obedience by God's worshippers to whatever the Lord ordains. This fact was long recognized by the Rabbis and I'd like to quote you a rather interesting narrative from the *Pesikta de-Rab Kahana*, which was created as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century and is essentially a series of Jewish religious homilies.

***A heathen questioned Rabban Johanan be Zakkai, saying: The things you Jews do appear to be a kind of sorcery. A heifer is brought, it is burned, is pounded into ash, and its ash is gathered up. Then when one of you gets defiled by contact with a corpse, two or three drops of the ash mixed with water are sprinkled upon him, and he is told, "You are cleansed!" Rabban Johanan asked the heathen: "Has the spirit of madness ever possessed you?" He replied: "No". "Have you ever seen a man whom the spirit of madness has possessed?" The heathen replied: "Yes". "And what do you do for such a man?" (The heathen said) "Roots are brought, the smoke of their burning is made to rise about him, and water is sprinkled upon him until the spirit of madness flees". Rabban Johanan then said: "Do not your ears hear what your mouth is saying? It is the same with a man who is defiled by contact with a corpse; he, too, is possessed by a spirit, the spirit of uncleanness, and, as of madness, Scripture says, I will cause false prophets as well as the spirit of uncleanness to flee from the Land".***

***Now when the heathen left, Rabban Johanan's disciples said: "Our master, you put off that heathen with a mere reed of an answer, but what answer will you give us?" Rabban Johanan answered: "By your lives, I swear: the corpse does not have the power by itself to defile, nor does the mixture of ash and water have the power by itself to cleanse. The truth is that the purifying power of the Red Heifer is a decree of the Holy One. The Holy One said: I have set it down as a statute; I have issued it as a decree. You are not permitted to transgress my decree. This is the statute of the Torah.***

So holiness, commonness, and uncleanness have nothing to do with the substance of the object or the creature; they only gain such status as the Lord deems it. And if, as says Rabban Johanan, God says pig meat is not food for you, then it isn't. If God says chicken is food for you, then it is. There is nothing more to it than that; however as much as we humans might question why pork is forbidden but chicken is permitted, we have no right to do anything but obey. Here in Romans 14:14 the issue is the "commonness" of some kind of edible item thus meaning (according to Paul) that it should not be eaten as food. But interestingly the rationale and the point for Paul's injunction about food has less to do with obedience to the Torah food laws and much more to do with loving your neighbor as yourself. Paul's injunction is that we are to respect the other person's stance on such matters and not make it a bone of contention that causes division. He is in no way saying it doesn't matter; but rather that it is up to God,

and not to a fellow Believer, to judge that person for not obeying the kosher food laws.

But now notice verse 15: it continues the subject by speaking of your brother (your fellow Believer) being upset by the choice of food you eat. Thus by eating food that you know upsets your fellow Believer (I'm assuming this means eating it in the presence of your fellow Believer) you are going against the fundamental principle of loving your neighbor. Who is Paul speaking to in his letter? Most often it is said that this is aimed at Believing Jews for being especially rigid about food by maintaining kosher eating standards and thus when gentiles see them eat a restricted diet it upsets the gentiles; but that is exactly the opposite of what these words say. In fact simple logic asks why would gentiles be upset with Jews because Jews only ate certain foods? So it is not an issue of what Jews eat, but what they don't eat. Further, nothing a Jew eats would upset a gentile, even if that gentile thinks that restrictions don't apply to him. Rather the upset occurs when it is gentile Believers who eat things that Believing Jews consider common or unclean (and thus forbidden) that is the issue. It is gentiles Paul is admonishing by saying that what they eat may be upsetting their brothers in Christ who are Jews who eat kosher. So, says Paul in verse 15, gentiles don't let your unrestricted eating habits (of eating things that upset those who eat kosher) destroy someone for who the Messiah died (that is, another Believer). To destroy in this context means to offend. Thus gentiles should honor Jews' convictions by eating kosher in their presence in order to show them respect and not offending them. One can only imagine the contentious issues of diet when gentile Believers began to be saved and especially at first joined Jewish synagogues.

Verse 16 is a bit cryptic but here's how we should take it. Paul is talking to those on one side of the issue in verse 15, and then to those on the other side of issue in verse 16. So to paraphrase these two verses to help us understand better let's try this: On the one hand don't let your eating habits, gentiles, offend fellow Believers (Jew or gentile) who eat kosher. But on the other hand, kosher eaters, don't let your devotion to eating kosher (a good thing) be turned into something bad by demanding that your fellow Believer eat kosher because to do so violates the overriding principle of loving your neighbor. And then in verse 17 Paul says this is the case because the Kingdom of God is not based on wooden, mechanical instructions about what you eat or what you drink such that it can cause divisions among Believers. Rather the Kingdom of God is based on the righteousness, peace and joy given to us by means of the Holy Spirit.

So here is the application for us in modern times: yes, Believers, God does instruct us to eat Kosher. But if you don't first have the Holy Spirit in you, and you feel no conviction to follow God's dietary laws, then to do so anyway is pointless and especially so if you do it only as an outward show. At the same time if you are saved, and you do have the conviction to obey God's dietary laws, then not only should you do so but you should not judge or ostracize other Believers who have not come to that same conviction. Why is this? Because the spirit of God is not one of slavery to the Law, but one of devotion to the Law out of love and gratitude for the Law's creator. Thus while I fully believe that following God's dietary laws are for all Believers, I will not make or end relationships with fellow Believers based on whether or not they, too, hold that same conviction. At the same time, those Believers who have no conviction to obey God's dietary laws need to honor my convictions should they invite me over for a meal. It is a two way street and never should we get into battles with one another over kosher eating. And

Paul says in verse 18 that if we will go forward with this type of attitude then this is the proper service of worship to our Messiah because it pleases God and it also allows others to see us (as Messiah's representatives) in a good, proper, loving light that well represents our Savior.

It can only be that the issue of food and drink was a contentious one among the Roman congregation (a mixed congregation of Jews and gentiles) that Paul spends so much time on it. And Paul says that of all things to not battle over, it is this. But then we are thrown another typical Paul curve ball in verse 20 when he says that all things are clean (and indeed he uses the Greek word for clean, *kathartos*), but at the same time no one should cause anyone else to fall away from Messiah due to food. What does he mean here? Naturally Western Christianity claims that Paul says that because of Christ, the food laws are gone and now every edible thing is OK for Believers to eat. And yet that doesn't fit with what Paul says here and in others of his epistles. In fact, the wording says that ALL things are clean; that is, this statement although it includes food goes beyond food such that the entire principle of clean and unclean has been abolished as it applies to anything at all. That would make sense because otherwise we have Paul saying that the principles of clean and unclean remain but they now apply to everything but food. However this can't be right either because Paul talks about the need to be cleansed in a number of his epistles. One of the more well known of his statements in this regard is found in 1Corinthians.

### **1Corinthians 6:9-11 CJB**

***<sup>9</sup> Don't you know that unrighteous people will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't delude yourselves- people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, who engage in active or passive homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> who steal, who are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, who rob- none of them will share in the Kingdom of God.***

***<sup>11</sup> Some of you used to do these things. But you have cleansed yourselves, you have been set apart for God, you have come to be counted righteous through the power of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and the Spirit of our God.***

But then there is also this from the John the Revelator:

### **Revelation 21:22-27 CJB**

***<sup>22</sup> I saw no Temple in the city, for ADONAI, God of heaven's armies, is its Temple, as is the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> The city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, because God's Sh'khinah gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. <sup>25</sup> Its gates will never close, they stay open all day because night will not exist there, <sup>26</sup> and the honor and splendor of the nations will be brought into it.***

***<sup>27</sup> Nothing impure may enter it, nor anyone who does shameful things or lies; the only ones who may enter are those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.***

So clearly the issues of obedience and of clean and unclean (ritually pure and ritually impure) continue into the Messianic age and we should not take Paul as meaning that the status of unclean has been abolished. So what does he mean? Considering his Jewishness, that he is an educated Pharisee, what he has said throughout Romans, and that he lived during the era of Judaism, Tradition and the Synagogue, then I think those several factors are the necessary context for interpreting what Paul means by “all things are clean”; and he means that nothing is created by God as unclean. At Creation God did not create unholy or unclean substances or creatures or things. That is, inherently the physical substance of every created thing is acceptable to God since He’s the one who did the creating. We know this because it is recorded in Genesis that God looked over everything that He created and pronounced it as “good”. However the spiritual and ritual status of unclean can be and is assigned by God to some things under some circumstances for His own good reasons. This status, however, never changes the physical make-up of a person, animal or object itself (in some magical way). A few minutes ago I read you an excerpt from an ancient Jewish document that said essentially the same thing. So Paul is but stating what was an accepted spiritual principle among Jews that all things are created inherently clean, even if some are later deemed unclean (and therefore unusable) by God for ritual purposes.

Nonetheless, says Paul to finish up this section, these issues (what we eat and what we drink) should not be the cause of making a fellow Believer to stumble due to religious arguments within a congregation. And since trust is the standard God uses to determine our salvation, then it is on account of this trust and nothing else that we are to make the decision to eat according to the Torah food laws. We should not eat kosher because of being brow beaten; not because of thinking that somehow we are more pious or have more merit for doing so; and not simply to conform to others in our group. However this same trust that leads us to eat according to God’s food laws also compels us to be respectful and loving to Believers who don’t.

Let’s get a glimpse of Romans chapter 15 before we close for today.

### **READ ROMANS CHAPTER 15 all**

Once again we have to mentally set aside the chapter divisions that give us the sense that the former subject has ended and a new subject as begun. This is because the first verse of chapter 15 is based entirely on what Paul has previously said in chapter 14. That is, the “so” to begin the chapter means “because of the principles I have just taught you”. And Paul says that because of these principles “we” who are strong must bear the weaknesses of those are not strong. It is important that we pick up on the fact that Paul includes himself as part of the strong because he uses the term “we”. So which side of the kosher eating issue did Paul fall on? The side that says kosher eating is abolished, or the side that says it continues on? In order to know we have to look elsewhere in the New Testament to learn about Paul and how he conducts himself. Listen to how he describes himself as he stands on trial before King Agrippa.

### **Acts 26:1-5 CJB**

<sup>CJB</sup> Acts 26:1 Agrippa said to Sha'ul, "You have permission to speak on your own behalf." Then Sha'ul motioned with his hand and began his defense: <sup>2</sup> "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you today that I am defending myself against all the charges made against me by Jews, <sup>3</sup> because you are so well informed about all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

<sup>4</sup> "So then! All Jews know how I lived my life from my youth on, both in my own country and in Yerushalayim. <sup>5</sup> They have known me for a long time; and if they are willing, they can testify that I have followed the strictest party in our religion- that is, I have lived as a Parush.

Pharisees were super strict about the Torah food laws, even adding some burdensome traditions that made it even stricter. As a Pharisee Paul of course followed their dietary rules. And earlier in Acts when Paul was on trial standing before Governor Felix he said this about himself:

**Acts 24:14 CJB** <sup>14</sup> "But this I do admit to you: I worship the God of our fathers in accordance with the Way (which they call a sect). I continue to believe everything that accords with the Torah and everything written in the Prophets.

Paul believes everything written in the Torah. The food laws are part of the Torah. Was Paul a liar? Did he "believe" everything in the Torah, but he only obeyed some of it? If that is the case, I don't know why we would listen to anything the man has to say. And earlier yet Paul said this:

**Acts 22:3 CJB** <sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of Gamli'el in every detail of the Torah of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today.

Paul was either lying or telling the truth in these 3 statements (and a few others to this same effect). He either remained a highly trained, strictly Torah observant Jew or he was being a hypocrite and a phony (which, by the way, some of the Early Church Fathers say he was deceiving others by living one way and teaching another way but he can be excused for it because he did it for the good of spreading the Gospel). Paul of course was no hypocrite as he went to great lengths to prove when he went to meet James, Jesus' brother, in Jerusalem and went into the Temple to pay the vow offerings for him and several other men. Paul followed the Torah food laws as a Believer. And as he said to begin Romans 15, he (as part of the "we") is what he considers "the strong". So clearly by Paul's definition it is the strong who eat a kosher diet; not the weak as it is often taught.

So in continuing the theme of the strong and the weak Paul says it is self-evident that it is the strong that must bear the weaknesses of the weak. I say self-evident because if the weak could bear their own weaknesses they wouldn't be weak! He adds in verse 2 that we should "please" our neighbor and choose our actions according to what is best for him. This of course is just another way of stating the love your neighbor as yourself principle that Yeshua and the Rabbis say the entire Torah stands upon and upon which Paul has based most of the Book of



Romans. Here is the thing: while what Paul is calling for is for the strong to take the responsibility to lovingly care for the weak, it is also a test of faith for the strong. It is anything but human nature for the strong to want to help those weaker than themselves. Rather more typically the strong want to dominate and impose their ways and doctrines upon the weak. The strongest man who ever lived was Yeshua and He spent His life being a servant to others, giving every ounce of His life for the good of the weak. He is our example. As He said: He came to minister to the sick, not to the healthy. Just as Jesus shouldered our burdens (for we are all weak compared to Him), the strong among us are to help shoulder the burdens of the weak among us. And let's remember: we're talking here about the strong in the faith versus the weak in the faith. Those who have more trust are to help those who, for the time being, have less trust. Nonetheless the weak do have trust, they are saved because of that trust, and they are just as valuable to the Kingdom of God as are the strong of faith.

We'll continue with chapter 15 next time.