

PAUL'S ETHIC OF ACCEPTANCE: A STUDY OF ROMANS 14:1

PAUL'S ETHIC OF ACCEPTANCE:  
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF ROMANS 14:1

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## ABSTRACT

One of the major issues which continues to receive attention in New Testament studies is the debate over the occasion and purpose of Romans. The present exegetical study enters into the "Romans Debate" by focusing on the text of Romans 14:1. It is our thesis that here Paul appeals to the predominantly Gentile Christian "strong" ones in Rome to exercise vigorous acceptance of the predominantly Jewish Christian "weak in faith" who, although sharing in the righteousness of God in Christ, continue to exhibit scruples about food and calendar laws. Our study contributes to the current debate by confirming the plausibility of a concrete situation in Rome which warranted the address of this text. We also demonstrate how our interpretation harmonizes with the major themes of the letter, which are clearly concerned with the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the redemptive-historical moment inaugurated by God's action in Christ. By establishing the existence of a significant dimension of Jewish-Gentile relations in Rome, we enable a clearer understanding of Paul's motivation for writing not only the text in question, and the pericope which it introduces, but the entire letter.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

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"The Romans Debate" has occupied the attention of New Testament scholars since the early part of this century, gaining much impetus from the 1977 publication by the same name, edited by Karl Donfried.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the debate is on the occasion and purpose of the letter, and on the relationship between these and the content of the letter.

Some argue that the occasion is not to be found in Rome, but rather in Paul's experiences or plans external to the circumstances of the Christian community in Rome. Bornkamm concludes that Romans represents Paul's "last will and testament," a document "which elevates his theology above the moment of definite situations and conflicts into the sphere of the eternally and universally valid."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Kümmel interprets the letter as Paul's self-introduction, intended to acquaint the Roman Christians with himself and his message in order to solicit their support for his further missionary

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<sup>1</sup> The Romans Debate (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1977). Articles cited in this thesis are from The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991). The latter volume contains 13 additional articles.

<sup>2</sup> Günther Bornkamm, "The Letter to the Romans as Paul's Last Will and Testament," in Debate, 28.

endeavors.<sup>3</sup> Jervell understands Romans to be primarily directed to Jerusalem, serving as a rehearsal for "the 'collection speech,' or more precisely, the defense which Paul plans to give before the church in Jerusalem."<sup>4</sup>

Others are equally adamant that the occasion for Romans is to be found primarily in the circumstances of the Christian community in the capital city. While acknowledging the importance of the apostle's situation, and recognizing "the convergence of causes that motivate the letter,"<sup>5</sup> these scholars contend that Paul addressed this particular correspondence to a specific situation which he knew to prevail in Rome.<sup>6</sup> In this view, in spite of its literary and rhetorical uniqueness among the letters of Paul, Romans is as much an occasional letter as the others.

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<sup>3</sup> See Werner Georg Kümmel, Introduction to the New Testament. Trans. Howard Clark Kee (New York: Abingdon, 1975) 311-14.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Jervell, "The Letter To Jerusalem," in Debate, 56.

<sup>5</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 77.

<sup>6</sup> Among those in this camp are Beker, F. F. Bruce, William Campbell, Karl Donfried, James Dunn, Robert Jewett, Harry Gamble, Paul Minear, Willi Marxsen, Peter Stuhlmacher, and Wolfgang Wiefel.

Of particular importance to the debate over occasion and purpose is Paul's address to "the weak" and "the strong" in 14:1 - 15:13. Some believe this passage to be a key to unlocking the actual historical circumstances existing in Rome. Others are convinced it offers no clue to the situation in Rome, being rather a "summing-up of Paul's position as it had been hammered out in the heat of controversy during the previous months" of his work in Corinth.<sup>7</sup> All the literature is compelled to do something with the meaning and purpose of Paul's reference to "the weak" and "the strong" in this pericope.

Because of its recognized significance for the ongoing "Romans debate," we propose to pursue an exegetical study of the opening verse of this passage, a text which sounds the keynote (*proslambanesthe*) and sets the tone for the paraenesis that follows. The thesis for which we will argue is this: In Romans 14:1, Paul launches an urgent appeal for the predominantly Gentile Christian "strong" ones in Rome to exercise vigorous acceptance of the predominantly Jewish Christian "weak in faith" who, although sharing in the

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<sup>7</sup> T. W. Manson, "St. Paul's Letter To The Romans -- And Others," in *Debate*, 4. Manson is one of a number of scholars who believe that Paul, in the passage under consideration, is rediscussing problems he considered earlier in 1 Corinthians 8-10. We will look more closely at this position below, focusing particularly on the arguments of Robert Karris.

righteousness of God in Christ, continue to exhibit scruples about food and calendar laws.

The development of this thesis will require critical interaction with current literature. The first four chapters will be used to develop our case for identifying "the weak" and "the strong" as we do above. Chapter One ("The Basic Profile") will review the basic profile that emerges from a straightforward reading of the text (14:1) in its context (14:1-15:1).

Chapter Two ("Response to Detractors") is the first of three chapters in which we will present an exegetical case for our thesis concerning the identification of "the weak" and "the strong." In this chapter we will review the arguments of those detractors (Furnish, Karris, Sanday and Headlam, et al) who contend that it is not possible to determine exegetically the identity of "the weak" and "the strong" in this passage, devoting particular attention to the cogent presentation of Robert Karris as representative of this camp.

After responding to Karris, we will forward the weighty exegetical evidence which supports our thesis. We will begin, in Chapter Three ("Identity Clues in Romans 14:1 - 15:13"), by identifying clues within the immediate context (14:1 - 15:13).

In Chapter Four ("Identity Clues in the Rest of Romans") we will focus on those signals in the rest of the letter which confirm our identification of the weak and the strong. In developing our case, we will marshal the insights of a number of recent contributors to "the Romans debate," prominent among them Campbell, Cranfield, Lampe, Stuhlmacher, and Watson.

In Chapter Five ("The Imperative of Acceptance") we will identify and clarify contextually the force of the text's positive requirement ("accept the one..."), as well as its negative prohibition ("but not for arguments..."). This will serve to demonstrate the "strenuous" (Jewett's word) nature of the acceptance Paul demands.

In the Conclusion we will indicate how and what our study contributes to the ongoing "Romans Debate."

## CHAPTER ONE: THE BASIC PROFILE

Any study of Romans should proceed on the initial assumption that this letter was written by Paul to deal with a concrete situation in Rome. The support for such an assumption is the fact that every other authentic Pauline writing, *without exception*, is addressed to the specific situations of the churches or persons involved. To argue that Romans is an exception to this Pauline pattern is certainly possible, but the burden of proof rests with those exegetes who wish to demonstrate that it is impossible, or at least not likely, that Romans addresses a concrete set of problems in the life of Christians in Rome....<sup>8</sup>

We share this assumption posited by Karl Donfried as one of the two basic methodological principles to be employed in the study of Romans.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Harry Gamble contends that "the critical principle for the interpretation of the other letters -- the necessity of correlating the content of the letter with the situation of the recipients -- must remain in force for the Roman letter also."<sup>10</sup> Our task in the first

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<sup>8</sup> Karl P. Donfried, "False Presuppositions," in The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition, Ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991) 103-4.

<sup>9</sup> The second principle is that "any study of Romans should proceed on the assumption that Rom. 16 is an integral part of the original letter...." Ibid., 104.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Gamble, Jr., The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans. Studies and Documents 42 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 136.

four chapters is to reconstruct the situation of the recipients as reflected especially in 14:1ff. We do this by first considering the basic profile that emerges from the text and immediate context (14:1 - 15:1), and then (in Chapters Two, Three, and Four) fleshing this out with particularity on the basis of the exegetical evidence.

*Ton de asthenounta tē pistei proslambanesthe....* "Accept the one who is weak in faith." Paul begins his exhortation by addressing it to those who, like himself, are "the strong ones" (*hoi dynatoi*, 15:1). What characterizes these parties and necessitates this admonition is clear from the passage.

First there is "the one who is weak in faith." Paul uses the generic singular, with "the one" clearly representing a group or community. Whereas *astheneia* is used elsewhere in Paul and the NT with reference to physical or moral "weakness," it is here characterized as a weakness "in faith" (the same expression as used in 4:19). There is some deficiency evident in the expression or outworking of faith among some in the Roman Christian community. In 15:1 the apostle speaks of *ta asthenēmata tōn adynatōn*. Whatever weakness plagues the faith of such persons, it renders them "impotent" or "powerless" to express their faith in the same manner as "the strong."

In a carefully balanced fashion, Paul identifies the basic issues and practices involved. They revolve around the observance by the weak of certain dietary habits and special days. The first is cited in v 2: *hos men pisteuei phagein panta, ho de asthenōn lachana esthiei*. "On the one hand (there) is one who believes (has faith) to eat anything, but on the other hand the weak person eats vegetables." The use of verbs of believing with the infinitive is found in a number of NT texts, but this is one of only two where we find *pisteuei* plus the infinitive. The other is Ac 15:11, where Peter is recorded to say, *alla dia tēs charitos Kyriou 'Iēsou pisteuomen sōthēnai*. According to Bauer, the infinitive (aorist passive in this case) indicates what is believed: "we believe that we have been saved..."<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Bauer finds the usage of *pisteuei* in Rom 14:2 to be unique, giving the translation, "the one trusts himself to eat anything." He acknowledges in the text "a combination of two ideas: 'he is so strong in the faith' and: 'he is convinced that he may.'"<sup>12</sup> Blass and Debrunner conclude that the expression in our text "does not mean 'believe'..., but 'to have the confidence to risk, to feel equal to...'"<sup>13</sup> Similarly

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<sup>11</sup> BAG, *pisteuō* 1d, 666.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., *pisteuō* 4, 667.

<sup>13</sup> BDF, 397.2, p 204.

Cranfield, observing that the concept of "faith" can have several distinct meanings in the Pauline epistles, judges that the apostle's usage here carries the sense of "the assurance that one is permitted by one's faith (in the sense of *fides qua*) to do some particular thing."<sup>14</sup> In this case, *pisteuei phagein* means "has the assurance that his faith permits him to eat."<sup>15</sup> The "faith" which permits the strong to eat anything is that very "faith" in Jesus Christ which Paul prescribes throughout the epistle (note especially 1:16-17; 3:21ff) as the God-revealed way by which believers now (emphasis 3:21) achieve righteousness. The strong one exhibits such trust in God/Christ, entailing also the conviction of acceptance by God/Christ on the basis of that trust (see 14:3b; 15:7), that he feels liberated from any restriction in dietary practices.

Dunn finds it striking that Paul does not qualify the vegetarian practice of the weak as an act of faith (2b): "It

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<sup>14</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 2. 697.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 698. Cranfield argues further that the same sense is intended by *pistis* in 14:1. He then adds an important note: "It is very likely that the strong tended to assume that, because they were strong in faith in the sense [indicated above], they must also be strong in faith in the basic Christian sense of the word [i.e., faith in the sense of *fides qua creditur*], and that their brethren who were weak in faith in [the sense Cranfield accepts for v 1] must also be weak in faith in [the basic Christian sense of the word]" (698).

is significant that Paul does not repeat the *pisteuein* in this clause; whereas 'eating everything' is an expression of faith (unconditional trust in God), to eat only vegetables Paul does not regard as an expression of faith as such."<sup>16</sup> But this seems to us a strained interpretation. Paul, in the opening verse of the pericope, acknowledges the faith of the weak. He further recognizes, in v 6, that the weak abstain with the same motivation by which the strong eat -- "unto the Lord" and with "thanks to God." The contrast is not between those who have faith and those who do not, or between those who have unconditional trust and those whose trust is conditional. The contrast is between those who feel assured that their faith (= unconditional trust) permits them to eat anything, and those who lack such assurance about what their faith permits them to do. This lack of assurance betrays the deficiency which, from Paul's perspective (as one of "the strong ones"), qualifies such "faith" as "weak."

From vv 14, 20 we learn that the dietary scruples of the weak are due to sensitivity about what is "clean" (*kathara*, v 20) and what is "common," "profane," "unclean" (*koinon*, v 14). This indicates that the weak feel at least some degree of obligation to make such distinctions in the outworking of

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<sup>16</sup> James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988) 799.

their faith. It is also apparent, however, that the weak were not completely settled in their conviction on this score. Paul implies that their belief on this point is so shaky that they are "grieved" (*lypeitai*, v 15) by the behaviour of their counterparts. The apostle's language suggests a hurt that is both deep and dangerous for the faith of the weaker brother. "What is in mind is the state of the wounded conscience, not irritation that I break conventions and do not follow traditions."<sup>17</sup> Not only do the weak take offense at the actions of the strong (v 21), but their very faith and salvation are put at risk by the possibility that they will be tempted to violate their creed by the actions of the others. Add to this Paul's reference to the weak brother as "he who wavers" (*diakrinomenos*, v 23) and the picture emerges of persons whose weakness in faith was accompanied by a weakness in character. They were "fundamentally timid,...liable to yield to social pressure, succumbing to contempt and ridicule and falling in with the practices of their fellow-Christians, in spite of their scruples and misgivings."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1980) 376.

<sup>18</sup> Cranfield, Romans, 2. 691.

Whether or not the weak abstained also from wine is open to debate. Paul's statement in v 21, that "it is better not to eat meat or to drink wine or do anything which causes your brother to take offense," may be understood as implying that wine was also avoided. As Cranfield observes, however, the apostle may simply be speaking hypothetically, choosing to use abstinence from wine as an example because of its stylistic compatability with stereotypical phrase "eating and drinking" in v 17.<sup>19</sup>

So the first issue distinguishing weak and strong, and that which warrants most of Paul's attention in the passage, is a difference of opinion and behaviour with respect to dietary practices. The second concerns their difference in viewpoint and practice regarding the observance of special days. Stylistically v 5 parallels v 2, but now the order is reversed and Paul begins with the position of the weak. "On

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<sup>19</sup> Says Cranfield: "Whereas both abstinence from meat and observance of days are mentioned near the beginning of the section and in a way which makes it quite clear that these are actual practices of the weak, abstinence from wine is not mentioned until the end of chapter 14 and the reference is then to abstinence on the part of the strong, not -- except indirectly -- to abstinence on the part of the weak" (Romans, 2. 725).

Robert Karris concurs, citing the arguments of M. Rauer (in Die "Schwachen" in Korinth und Rom nach den Paulusbriefen), that "(1) abstinence from wine is not mentioned in the programmatic 14:2; (2) the parallelism of eating and drinking in 14:17 stylistically requires eating and drinking in 14:21" ("The Occasion of Romans," in Debate, 69, n27).

the one hand there is the person who judges one day more important than another (*hēmeran par' hēmeran*, lit. "a day more than a day"),<sup>20</sup> but on the other hand is the person who judges every day (the same)...."

The sentence is compact and the matter receives no further elaboration. Even more so than with the former issue, Paul states the matter in such general terms that we are hard pressed to determine the precise nature and expression of this distinction between days by the weak. Sabbath observance is an obvious possibility, but as we shall consider further below, it is not the only one. Perhaps it is the same concern addressed by the apostle in Gal 4:9f. If that is the case, however, we must account for the radically different tone evident in Paul's response to the Roman situation.

By virtue of the more extensive treatment accorded the dietary matter, we conclude that Paul considered it either more weighty or problematic, and that "the advice he gives on foods was advice...sufficient to cover both issues."<sup>21</sup> We are also convinced that he is describing two behaviour patterns

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<sup>20</sup> The *para* is used in a comparative - contrastive sense, standing as it does before the accusative. In this context it clearly indicates preference. See BDF 236.3, 124.

<sup>21</sup> Dunn, Romans 9-16, 805.

peculiar to one community (represented by "the one who is weak in faith"), rather than two types or sub-groups of "the weak." Not only are the points of disagreement presented "in precise parallel" to one another (vv 2, 5), but the motivations for the divergent practices are dealt with in the same breath in v 6. In the matter of "days," therefore, we understand Paul to be citing another area of religious behaviour wherein the weak are sensitive to certain distinctions which the strong judge to be unnecessary.

As for the incentive prompting the weak and strong in their respective positions, it is significant that Paul credits both with the same honourable intention of serving the Lord. In v 4 he qualifies the strong person as a servant (*oiketēn*) of God who stands or falls *tō idiō kyriō*, "before his own lord."<sup>22</sup> With respect to their dietary practices, both strong and weak consecrate their eating "unto the Lord" (*kyriō*, v 6), and do so with expressions of thankfulness (*eucharistei*, v 6) to God. Paul also acknowledges that the observing of days (v 6a) is "unto the Lord," using an

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<sup>22</sup> Paul uses the dative of advantage and disadvantage, according to which "the meaning of the sentence is that it is his own Master whose interest is involved, who is concerned, in his standing or falling" (Cranfield, Romans, 2. 703). Cf. BDF, 188.2, 101. We prefer this position to that of Dunn, who argues that the issue is "whether the master regards the slave's conduct as acceptable or unacceptable" (Dunn, Romans 9-16, 804).

expression that certainly refers to the posture of the weak and may be intended to embrace both weak and strong.<sup>23</sup> In vv 7-9 he sums up and generalizes the intention of all concerned (using "we" in an inclusive sense in v 8, opposite the "none of us" of v 7) to devote their entire existence (living or dying) *tō kyriō*, as those who belong to the Lord (as servants to their master).<sup>24</sup> Such is the submission rendered by those (weak and strong alike) who profess to stand under the rule of the crucified and risen Christ (v 9).

Thus Paul takes pains to affirm, in a carefully balanced way, that, differences notwithstanding, both weak and strong "are aiming at the one essential thing, to render service to

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<sup>23</sup> As Dunn explains, it depends how one translates *phroneō*. Translated in the softer sense of "holding an opinion" ("the one who holds an opinion on the day..."), "the clause could refer to both opinions....Alternatively, *phronein* could be taken in a stronger way, 'set one's mind on, be intent on,' and thus be restricted to the view of 'the weak': 'the one who is intent on the day (that is, a particular day rather than others)'" (Romans 9-16, 806). Robert Jewett adopts a similar position: "Paul's formulation is so inclusive that both sides could easily feel themselves included: he uses the term *phronein*, 'be minded,' which would have been a favourite term of self-description for the 'strong' who thought of themselves as 'the high-minded ones.'" Christian Tolerance: Paul's Message to the Modern Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 33.

<sup>24</sup> We take this to be the force of *tou kyriou esmen* in v 8, extending the servanthood motif of v 4.

God, to live as men who are to give account to Him."<sup>25</sup> What he urges of both parties, however, is that they come to a settled conviction in their own minds about the course they are pursuing. This is the force of the final imperatival clause of v 5: *hekastos en tō idiō noi plērophoreisthō*. As noted above (pp 10-11), such firm resolution is missing on the part of the weak, which explains their susceptibility to stumbling (vv 13, 20), being grieved (v 15), and wavering (v 23). But Paul's admonition is for all concerned ("let **each** one be fully convinced..."). In their diverse patterns of behaviour in the matters discussed, they are to ensure that they are acting on the basis of thoughtful reflection. As he indicated in the opening paragraph of this paraenetic section of the epistle, this is what Paul expects of persons who are saved by the mercies of God displayed in Christ Jesus: "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order for you to test out what the will of God is..." (12:2). As Käsemann explains, it is this renewed reason that Paul has in mind in 14:5, that "critical capacity [which] leads through the call

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<sup>25</sup> William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925) 387. Note Käsemann's comment on v 6b, that "their difference in attitudes to foodstuffs does not affect their acknowledgment of the same Lord" (Romans, 371).

into a circumscribed sphere to firm conviction and resolute action on the basis of insight into one's own situation."<sup>26</sup>

Recognizing this unity of purpose (to serve Christ as lord) and a shared need to employ renewed minds does not, however, prevent Paul from distinguishing between those who are "weak in faith" and the "strong ones." Whether he is accommodating himself to the labels current among the "strong" or utilizing categories which he found useful in his earlier dealings with Corinth (1 Cor 8-10), he nonetheless grants a measure of legitimacy to the descriptions and even (to no one's surprise) counts himself among the "strong ones" (15:1).

But what is the basis for this distinction? We offered preliminary observations on this point in our discussion of v 2 above (pp 9-10), noting that the difference between the weak and strong is one of assurance about what one's faith permits one to do. The weak are not faithless, but their faith does not afford them a sufficient level of assurance to allow a change in their dietary or calendar practices. Put differently again, there is a lack in their faith which leaves them "powerless" (*adynatoi*, 15:1) to enjoy the measure of freedom experienced by the strong. Those exegetes who

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<sup>26</sup> Käsemann, Romans, 371. See also Cranfield, Romans, 705; Dunn, Romans 9-16, 806; and Jewett, Tolerance, 32.

interpret this weakness as a failure to embrace the principle of justification by faith (Barrett, Dunn, Sanday and Headlam, et al) are overstating or over-simplifying the case. Nowhere in the pericope does Paul lay such a charge against them, and it is not apparent to us that the scruples of the weak imply such failure.<sup>27</sup> A study of Protestant Christianity will provide more than enough evidence that one can grasp the principle of justification and still be uncertain about what God expects or demands in terms of godliness. Furthermore, it is hard to imagine the apostle urging acceptance of persons whose behaviour or beliefs undermine a dogma (justification by faith alone) that plays such a prominent role in the presentation of his gospel which dominates the opening part of the epistle (1:16-17; 3:21ff).

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<sup>27</sup> Barrett qualifies weakness as "a failure to grasp the fundamental principle ...that men are justified and reconciled to God not by vegetarianism, sabbatarianism, or teetotalism, but by faith alone...." C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (Black's New Testament Commentaries; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962) 256-7.

Dunn concludes that the weak "fail to trust God completely and without qualification. In this case the weakness is trust in God plus dietary and festival laws,...a trust...which leans on the crutches of particular customs and not on God alone, as though they were an integral part of that trust" (Romans 9-16, 798).

Sanday & Headlam define weakness as "an inadequate grasp of the great principle of salvation by faith in Christ; the consequence of which will be an anxious desire to make this salvation more certain by the scrupulous fulfilment of formal rules" (Romans, 384).

Rather than interpret their weakness as a denial of, or "failure to grasp," the principle of justification, it appears to be a matter of inadequate or immature understanding of the full implications of that principle relative to what God now requires of them in the way of obedient living. Paul's assertion in v 14 confirms our conclusion: *oida kai pepeismai en kyriō 'Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di' heautou*. The apostle is emphatic about his conviction and insight concerning the cleanness of all foods,<sup>28</sup> a position repeated boldly in v 20 ("all things are clean"). It is a belief he comes to "in the Lord Jesus." There is a range of meanings possible for this expression, as Cranfield points out:

Paul may perhaps have meant simply that what he was about to say was an insight derived from his fellowship with the risen and exalted Christ or -- more generally -- that it was consonant with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as a whole, that is, with the gospel, or that his certainty of its truth rested on the authority of the risen and exalted Christ; but we certainly cannot rule out the possibility that he had in mind some specific teaching of the historic Jesus (the use here of the personal name *'Iēsous* could be... a pointer to the presence of such a reference), and the evidence of Mk 7:15-23 and Mt 15:10-11, 15-20, has...to be considered.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Cranfield finds the statement "strikingly emphatic," noting Paul's use of the first person singular of the perfect passive of *peithein*, with *oida kai* preceding, *Iēsou* added to the following *en kyriō*, and "great weight being given to the content of the *hoti*-clause" (Romans, 2. 712).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 712-13. He proceeds to affirm the likelihood that "(i) the *ouden koinon di heautou* of this verse and the *panta...kathara* of v. 20 are slogans of the strong; (ii) the

Whichever interpretation one finds compelling, what remains is the powerful confession of Paul that he has become convinced, upon the authority of the Lord Jesus (however derived), that dietary strictures are not appropriate or at least necessary.<sup>30</sup> Paul, speaking as representative of the strong, "knows" this to be true. The weak, though they have genuine faith, do not (yet) share this insight. And it is this lack of *gnōsis* regarding the full meaning and implications of what God has achieved through Christ that characterizes their faith as "weak." It leaves them uncertain about what God now requires of them, and therefore "powerless" to set aside their dietary (and calendar) observances.<sup>31</sup> It

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strong appealed to the tradition of the teaching of Jesus in support of their position; and (iii) Paul is here accepting that these slogans of the strong are indeed true to the teaching of Jesus."

Dunn calls v 14 "a good example both of the pneumatic character of Paul's use of the Jesus and kerygmatic traditions...and of the character of the passing on, or better living in and through, what was not merely a remembered but also a reexperienced tradition of Jesus still heard as the word of the Lord (*en kyriō 'Iēsou*) to his disciples" (Romans, 819-20).

<sup>30</sup> For Paul the Jew, this insight marks a new interpretation regarding the normativity of Mosaic law, an insight expressed earlier in the letter by his assertion that Christ is the *telos nomou* (10:4).

<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Minear speaks of the weak having a "fixed conviction" about certain foods being "by nature defiling and sinful (14:14)." Paul S. Minear, The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (London: SCM, 1971) 9.

is this weakness of faith that Paul finds (and proposes to be) acceptable, not a "faith" that fails to grasp the fundamental principle of justification.<sup>32</sup>

This brings us, then, to the point of Paul's concern and the reason for his urgent appeal. His admonition is prompted not by the differing convictions held by the weak and strong, but by the way in which they relate to one another as a result of their differences. As noted above, the primary addressees are the strong. The key word describing their posture *vis-a'-vis* the weak is *exouthenein*, appearing in vv 3 ("Let not the one who eats despise the one who does not...") and 10 ("And you, why do you despise your brother?"). It carries the force of contempt and disdain.<sup>33</sup> It is possible, as Furnish submits, that there is another important dimension to the

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<sup>32</sup> With our understanding of the "weakness" of the "weak," we are still impressed at the exhortation to accept such fellow-believers (as we shall develop in chapter 2), but we cannot share Barrett's "surprise to find that Paul recognizes that both strong and weak have a place in the church, and that both can stand before God and be accepted by him..." (Romans, 256-7).

<sup>33</sup> BAG renders it "despise, disdain; reject with contempt; treat with contempt." Minear takes it as "angry repudiation," observing its use elsewhere in the NT to describe human rejection of Jesus (Mk 9:12; Lk 23:11; Acts 4:11). "It fitted well a situation where one's self-righteousness was hidden by his pious protest against another's sinfulness (Luke 18:9). It indicated treatment of these fellow-believers as if they were non-persons or nobodies" (Obedience, 10).

apostle's use of this term. "Paul customarily associates 'despising' with personal repulsion, and his application of the concept to himself in 2 Cor 10:10 and Gal 4:14 is instructive. In spite of his repulsive personal condition the Galatians did not 'despise' him; but the Corinthians did regard his personal presence 'weak' and his speech 'despisable.'"<sup>34</sup> By referring the word to the strong, Paul indicates that "their negativism toward the weak does not spring from deep, deliberate religious convictions, but from personal, subjective distaste."<sup>35</sup>

Paul also describes their demeanour toward the weak as one of "passing judgment." Verse 13 is the only place in the passage where *krinein* is indisputably applied to the disposition of the strong. Paul uses it primarily to characterize the behaviour of the weak toward the strong (in vv 3, 4, 10),<sup>36</sup> and in this context it bears the force of

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<sup>34</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, The Love Command in the New Testament (New York: Abingdon, 1972) 116.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> The subject of *krinein* in v 4 is disputed. Wayne Meeks argues that the verse is addressed to both strong and weak, finding support in Paul's use of the verb in v 5 "on both sides of the antithesis...." W. A. Meeks, "Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1 - 15:13," in G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz, Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) 295. We believe the context points in the opposite direction. Employing diatribe style, Paul is pursuing the case raised in

"condemn," or "find fault with."<sup>37</sup> Since v 13 serves as an inclusive (note use of *allēlous*) summary exhortation following from vv 10-12, it may signal a more general attitude of judgment. It is also possible that its use here is intentionally ambiguous, since "despising" and "condemning" are both forms of "judgment." This may be Paul's way of letting the shoe be worn by whomever it fits!

Furthermore, v 1b implies that the strong exhibit their attitude of disdain/judgment by welcoming the weak for the purpose of *diakriseis dialogismōn*. In Chapter Five we shall deal more fully with the intent and implications of the qualifying clause of which this expression is a part. All the literature acknowledges the difficulty in translating the phrase, particularly because of the variety of interpretations which either word can bear. In anticipation of our later consideration, and at the risk of appearing dogmatic at this

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v 3, where it is the abstainer who "judges" the meat-eater (thus Cranfield, Dunn).

<sup>37</sup> BAG, *krinō* 6b, 453. Similarly, Cranfield understands *krinein* to connote "the censorious attitude of the weak" (*Romans*, 2. 711, n 5). Dunn attributes this attitude of condemnation to the weak person's "firmly held judgment that the conduct is unacceptable, which in this context means 'unacceptable to God' (v 4)" (*Romans*, 802). The picture that emerges of "the weak," as noted above, is hardly one of persons with "firmly held judgment." The attitude of the weak may be better understood as the reaction of uncertain, wavering persons feeling threatened by the disdain displayed toward them by the strong.

point, we construe the expression as a reference to a particular behaviour to which the strong were inclined -- that of "passing judgment upon the scruples" of the weak. The context surely permits this understanding. Being strong in their own eyes, feeling confident and liberated in their "knowledge," they have little use or patience for the unenlightened sensitivities of the weak. Since their personal disdain does not permit a wholehearted reception of the weak into their fellowship, they use their "advantage" to pass judgment upon the weak for their thoughts on matters such as diet and special days.

Although the weak are not guiltless in contributing to the tension that apparently existed within the Christian community in Rome, Paul addresses his admonition primarily to the strong. If, as we contend, the strong comprise a predominantly Gentile Christian constituency, then it is no surprise that they are the principal addressees, since Paul is apostle to the Gentiles. But there is more to it than that. In terms of the communal dynamics described above, the apostle also considers the strong to be in the best position to minimize the damage and not exacerbate the differences. In other words, they bear greater responsibility in the situation. For all their "knowledge" regarding the implications of God's saving work in Christ, they should show

more sensitivity when it comes to interpersonal relations within the community.<sup>38</sup>

In this first chapter we have outlined the basic picture that emerges in the text and context. We have clarified the situation in terms of the characters involved and the problem addressed. We are now in a position to press the issue of historical identity and development. Our thesis is that the exegetical data are sufficient to achieve reasonable clarity on such particulars. We proceed with our case for identification in the following chapter, focusing on the exegetical evidence.

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<sup>38</sup> This is not to deny the reciprocal responsibility on the part of the weak, just the greater accountability of the strong. The general principle posited in 15:7 is inclusive.

## CHAPTER TWO: RESPONSE TO DETRACTORS

Beginning with this chapter, we intend to present an exegetical case for identifying "the weak in faith" as predominantly Jewish Christians and "the strong" as predominantly Gentile Christians. Our first order of business is to clarify the exegetical arguments posited by those who contend that the passage at hand (ordinarily cited in the literature as chapters 14-15 or 14:1 - 15:13) cannot be used to identify particular circumstances existent in Rome at the time of Paul's address. Our thesis, according to such scholarship, cannot be defended exegetically.

The most persistent argument on this score contends that Romans 14-15 constitutes, in Furnish's words, "a generalized adaptation of a position he had earlier worked out respecting an actual, known situation in Corinth."<sup>39</sup> This implies, of course, that the Roman situation is not known to Paul and that it is fruitless, therefore, to look for clues to that situation in the pericope before us. We let Karris serve as spokesman for this interpretation.

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<sup>39</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, The Love Command in the New Testament (New York: Abingdon, 1972) 115. The same view is shared by Bornkamm, Manson, and Sanday and Headlam.

Commenting on the relationship of Rom 14:1 - 15:13 to 1 Cor 8 - 10, Karris offers the following observations:

1. The Romans passage contains thirteen imperatives, most of which are in the first person plural or third person singular. Quoting approvingly from Leenhardt (The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary), Karris concludes that the paucity of second person imperatives (of which there are six) suggests "that Paul is not really addressing a particular group of people, whose concrete circumstances he is considering while pointing out their errors."<sup>40</sup> By comparison, 1 Cor 8 has one and there are seven in 10:23 - 11:1, an observation which only carries weight for Karris when added to the following consideration.
2. There is only one circumstantial "if" clause in the Romans pericope (14:15), whereas Corinthians contains five (8:10, 13; 10: 27-30), serving to concretize Paul's teaching to the latter community. As for the former, "one could argue that since such circumstantial clauses are almost entirely lacking in Rom 14:1 - 15:13 Paul is not addressing himself to a concrete situation within the Roman community."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Robert J. Karris, "Romans 14:1 - 15:13 and the Occasion of Romans," in The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition, Ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991) 72. In his footnote to this observation, however, Karris acknowledges that "Leenhardt may go beyond the evidence in his evaluation of the meagreness of second person imperatives...!"

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

3. Only in Romans does Paul speak of "the weak" and "the strong." 1 Cor 8 and 10 do not mention "the strong." "The weak" appear only in 1 Cor 8, where three of the five occurrences refer to a weak conscience (vv 7, 10, 12). Karris believes this to be another indication of how Paul in Romans generalizes the specific circumstances of Corinth to portray two conflicting groups.<sup>42</sup>

4. There are numerous verbal parallels between the two passages (Karris cites 14 sets), leading to the following conclusion:

These parallels clearly indicate to what a great extent Rom 14:1 - 15:13 repeats, rephrases, echoes the arguments of 1 Cor 8; 9; 10:23 - 11:1. These parallels confirm Hans Conzelmann's observation [in Der erste Brief an die Korinther] that Rom 14:1 - 15:6 is a theoretic development of the actual treatment of 1 Cor 8-10. In his treatment of Rom 14:1 - 15:13 Paul has excluded personal references, such as are found in 1 Cor 9; 10:33 - 11:1. He has eliminated the circumstantial "if" clauses which apply his general principles to particular concrete instances within the community. He has omitted references to the catchwords of the Corinthians: "All of us possess knowledge" (1 Cor 8:1); "All things are lawful" (1 Cor 10:23); "liberty, freedom" (1 Cor 8:9; 10:29b); "conscience" (1 Cor 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25, 27, 28, 29). He has also omitted references to the concrete situation: the problem of food sacrificed to idols. Paul has given names to different types of individuals in Rom 14:1 - 15:13 whereas in 1 Corinthians he mentions "the weak" only and that mainly in reference to their consciences.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 75.

5. Although these parallels do not account for all the elements within the Romans pericope,<sup>44</sup> the unique features of the latter are not sufficient to compel one to believe that Paul is addressing a concrete situation. Karris presents alternative explanations for these elements:

First, he observes that "the most noticeable expansion in Rom 14:1 - 15:13 occurs in those verses where Paul has introduced quotations from the OT to support and confirm his principles (cf. 14:11; 15:3, 9-12)," signalling his strategy to "tighten up, confirm, and solidify" the arguments which he adduced in addressing the Corinthian situation.<sup>45</sup>

Second, "the argument in Rom 14:4, 6-9 about the slave-Lord relationship is almost unparalleled in 1 Cor 8-10, but may stem from Paul's thought elsewhere in Romans."<sup>46</sup> Karris points to Rom 6:10f and 7:4 as the likely source for the apostle's point regarding the all-encompassing rule of Christ. 2 Cor 5:10, 15 are cited as likely background to the "generalized" principles found in Rom 14:4, 6-9.

Third, Paul's reference to "the weak" as "weak in *faith*" (14:1) is unexplained by the Corinthian parallels, "yet one could argue that the idea of conscience has been omitted in

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<sup>44</sup> In fact, as Karris acknowledges, most of the parallels are concentrated in Rom 14:13-23.

<sup>45</sup> Karris, "Occasion," 76.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

Rom 14 because it seems to have been introduced into the discussion in 1 Cor 8; 10:23 - 11:1 by the Corinthians and not by Paul."<sup>47</sup> Faith, on the other hand, is part of Paul's vocabulary and plays a significant role in the rest of Romans. Fourth, if the Romans passage is a generalized adaptation of Paul's previous positions, what are we to make of his references to "vegetables" in 14:2 and to "days" in 14:5? Karris adopts the view of Rauer and Dederen that "days" refers to "fast days." "Thus, in both instances there is a question of abstinence from food."<sup>48</sup> This is another example of Paul generalizing from his Corinthian address concerning food sacrificed to idols. He concludes that "'vegetables' is meant to cover all cases of abstinence from food. The reference to 'fast days' is also general, typical."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Meeks pursues a different tack on this point, arguing that "the difference in substance is not great" between the persons described in 1 Corinthians as having a "weak conscience" and the one called "weak in faith" in Rom 14. He points to other expressions in Rom 14 that are "functionally equivalent" to "conscience": *logizomenō* (14:14) and *ho mē krinōn heauton en hō dokimazei* (14:22-23). W. A. Meeks, "Judgment and the Brother: Rom 14:1 - 15:13," in Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament, FS E. E. Ellis, Ed. G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) 293.

<sup>48</sup> Karris, "Occasion," 77.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 77. In a similar vein, Meeks points to 14:2, 21 as examples of "rhetorical hyperbole" and finds it significant "that Paul chooses expressions that are broader than either the *eidolothyta* of Corinth or food purity laws. Similarly in the other kind of example that he gives in 14:5-6, Sabbath observance is perhaps the most obvious instance of someone who

*Response to Karris*

Since defense of our thesis must account for the points raised by Karris, we begin our exegetical argumentation by responding to his analysis and conclusions. This will serve as a springboard for consideration of other identity clues within the immediate context and the entire letter.

By making grammatical comparisons of the use of imperatives and circumstantial "if" clauses in 1 Cor 8-10 and Rom 14-15, Karris contends that Paul is not addressing a concrete situation in Romans. We find his case to be very weak. The relative number of imperatives in any passage compared with another is hardly conclusive evidence regarding the actuality or generality of the address. "The fact is that imperatives can serve both specific and general situations, and in 1 Corinthians and Romans they can serve both

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'judges one day in contradistinction from another,' but that need not be the only case.... Thus, throughout the argument, Paul is describing concerns that every diaspora Jew faced, but using language general enough to include Gentiles, too" (Meeks, "Judgment," 292-3). Similarly, Sanday and Headlam interpret v 2 as "a typical instance of excessive scrupulousness" and v 5 as a reference not to specific people or circumstances, but rather to "special types." William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925) 402.

functions."<sup>50</sup> Context and literary style are among the factors that have to be considered to determine what Karris presumes to establish on the basis of statistical analysis alone.<sup>51</sup> The observation concerning circumstantial "if" clauses is equally unconvincing and unsubstantiated. In itself, the presence or absence of such clauses in a passage is not sufficient to determine whether or not a concrete situation is being addressed.<sup>52</sup> Again, context and literary style have to be considered, as well as the type of circumstantial clause employed. It is interesting that the one such clause which Karris recognizes in the Romans pericope (14:15) is a logical conditional clause (present tense), the type ordinarily used in the NT in referring to actual circumstances.<sup>53</sup> We concur with Donfried: "In the last analysis, whether or not an actual situation or circumstance

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<sup>50</sup> Karl P. Donfried, "False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans," in Debate, 108.

<sup>51</sup> It is noteworthy that scholarship is devoting increased attention to the literary and/or rhetorical style employed by Paul in Romans, particularly his use of diatribe.

<sup>52</sup> Donfried cites 2 Cor 10-13 as a passage "concretely addressed to a specific Corinthian situation even though there is a paucity of these clauses" (in "Presuppositions," 108).

<sup>53</sup> We are following the standard classification of B. L. Gildersleeve. Moule refers to this as a past or present condition, possible or actual.

is intended is based solely on Karris' judgment, rather than on an objective grammatical argument."<sup>54</sup>

The presence of numerous verbal parallels leads to Karris' deduction that in Romans Paul "repeats, rephrases, echoes" the arguments of 1 Cor 8-10. The fact is, as Cranfield indicates, there are even more points of contact between the two than Karris has cited.<sup>55</sup> But all that such parallels suggest is that the same apostle recognized problems in the Roman community that were sufficiently akin to those which existed in Corinth to warrant his drawing from the earlier experience in addressing the later. Undoubtedly, "Paul's past struggles with the Corinthian church have contributed to the development of his thought, and have therefore left their mark on his statements in Romans."<sup>56</sup> Responsible exegesis requires, therefore, that we devote careful attention to those signals within Romans that point to the unique problems in Rome that called forth this fresh application and reworking of earlier positions. Karris would have us believe that Paul simply reworked his earlier

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<sup>54</sup> Donfried, "Presuppositions," 108.

<sup>55</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 2. 691-93.

<sup>56</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn, The Reasons for Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 35.

admonition to the Corinthians. The apostle deleted the personal references, circumstantial clauses, Corinthian catchwords, and concrete references, generalized and expanded what remained and sent it off to Rome. Even if we were to accept this imaginatively convenient approach, we would be left wondering why Paul bothered to address *this* paraenesis to *this* community (Rome).<sup>57</sup>

Next we attend to Karris' explanation of those elements distinctive of the Roman pericope. He begins with the OT quotations, suggesting that they were "added" by Paul to firm up the arguments used earlier in the Corinthian correspondence. Quite a different interpretation commends itself to us. The liberal use of OT references, found throughout Romans, was particularly appropriate considering the subject matter and community addressed. As we shall demonstrate in the final section of this chapter, Jewish - Gentile issues and tensions form the backdrop for the central theme(s) of the letter. Add to this the fact that the readership represented a mixed community (Jewish and Gentile

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<sup>57</sup> Gamble finds this to be a weakness in those approaches to Romans which argue that the purpose of the letter is not to be found in the circumstances of the Roman community. "If this understanding of Romans can explain why Paul wrote a letter to Rome, it offers no reason why he wrote *this* letter...." Harry Gamble, Jr., The Textual History of Letter to the Romans. Studies and Documents 42 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 134.

Christians) and it is no wonder that the apostle sought to bolster his argument, wherever possible, with OT support. Rather than serving to expand and generalize a former position, such references are clues to a concrete (and *different*) set of problems being addressed by Paul.

On Paul's use of the slave-Lord relationship in Rom 14:4, 6-9, Karris submits that it "may stem from Paul's thought elsewhere in Romans" (particularly 6:10f)<sup>58</sup> and also serves to "generalize" principles developed earlier (2 Corinthians). On the first point, we fail to understand what difference it makes that Paul may be picking up ideas raised earlier. If anything, it demonstrates consistency in Paul's argumentation from one section of the letter to another. Furthermore, the "slave-Lord"/"judgment" motif (as developed in Romans 14) relates significantly to what we identify as the central issue of Romans -- "justification" or "God's righteousness made available to Jew and Gentile in Christ" (see further below). Its use in Romans 14 shows the apostle's conscious integration of key ideas and provides yet another clue to the specific circumstances of Rome, wherein both law-free "strong" (predominantly Gentile) and law-bound "weak" (predominantly

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<sup>58</sup> Karris, "Occasion," 76.

Jewish) must reckon with the consequences and implications of God's judgment and Christ's lordship.

Observing that Paul's denotation of "the weak" as "weak in *faith*" is inexplicable on the basis of parallels in 1 Corinthians, Karris ventures the possibility that it was the Corinthians who introduced the idea of "conscience" into the earlier discussion, while "faith" is a genuinely Pauline term. We are attracted to another, simpler explanation. Paul speaks of the "weak in *faith*" because "faith" is the distinct locus of the problem as he perceived it in the Roman situation. Weakness of conscience is related, but not equated. In short, he chose a description suited both to the circumstances of Rome and to the message which he deemed appropriate for addressing those circumstances. Furthermore, the degree to which it is similar in substance to the Corinthian description makes no difference in determining whether Paul was addressing a concrete state of affairs in Rome. In itself, of course, such similarity need only imply similarity in the actual conditions prevailing in each community.

Finally, we must comment on Karris' interpretation of Paul's reference to "vegetables" (14:2) and "days" (14:5). He understands these as general or typical references which boil down to a common concern about abstinence from food, thus

providing further evidence of Paul generalizing from his Corinthian address regarding food sacrificed to idols. That there is a link between the Corinthian issue (regarding food sacrificed to idols) and that in Rome (regarding vegetarianism and observance of days) is a reasonable conclusion, considering that in each case Paul stresses the responsibility of the strong to refrain from abusing their sense of freedom and to show proper consideration for the sensitivities of the weak. Dunn surmises that "Paul was generalizing from the more specific issue of Corinth to address a broader issue which, however, could well have included the specific issue of idol food."<sup>59</sup> Dunn is probably right, but this does not mean, *contra* Karris, that Paul was generalizing with no specific Roman situation in mind! It only suggests that the concerns in Rome were broader.

Parallels with 1 Corinthians 8-10 notwithstanding, we find Karris minimizing the differences between that pericope and Romans 14, differences which serve as clues to variant circumstances. Although he agrees with Karris that Paul's address is not precipitated by a specific crisis in Rome, Meeks nonetheless recognizes that the parallels do not obliterate the contrasts:

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<sup>59</sup> James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988) 801.

The term *eidolothyta* does not appear in Romans, and indeed the whole question of idolatry goes unmentioned in the present context. Rather, it is a question of food being deemed "profane," *koinos*, or not. In the synoptics and Acts, the term is used as the opposite of "clean" and thus equivalent to the Hebrew *tame'*, or perhaps *stam*. Paul's statement, "I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is *koinon* of itself," is roughly equivalent to the synoptic Jesus-saying, "There is nothing that, entering a person from without, can *koinōsai* him" (Mark 7:15 par.; cf. Acts 10:15; 11:19). The question in Rom 14:14 thus seems broader than in 1 Cor 8-10; not only meat from pagan markets, but *kashrut* or at least some modified food taboos, like those in Acts 15:20, 29; 21:15, are at issue.<sup>60</sup>

We also question how Karris can interpret the reference to "days" in 14:5 as dealing with substantially the same concern as "vegetables" in v 2. Even if "days" includes "fast days," which we dispute below, such a correlation still does not equate it with the vegetarianism of v 2. In deliberate literary fashion (see Chapter One) Paul poses and balances two instances or examples of the scrupulous concerns of the weak in faith *vis-a'-vis* the strong. They may be related concerns or behaviours, but that hardly warrants equating them.

To sum up our position on the relationship between 1 Cor 8-10 and Rom 14-15, we concur with the judgment of Cranfield:

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<sup>60</sup> Meeks, "Judgment," 292. Cranfield is equally adamant: "It is scarcely credible, in view of its prominence in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, that Paul should never once have used the word *eidolothytos* in this passage, had he had this problem in mind" (*Romans*, 2. 692).

While it is clear that Paul saw the tension between the strong and the weak with which he was concerned in Rom 14:1 - 15:13 as involving the same issues of respect due to one's fellow-Christian's conscience and the absolute obligation to refrain from insisting on exercising the liberty allowed by one's own faith, which were raised by the question of "things sacrificed to idols" (hence the very close similarities between this section and 1 Corinthians 8 and 10), it seems unlikely that it was the problem of the *eidolothyta* that Paul had specially in mind here.<sup>61</sup>

What, then, is the problem "that Paul had specially in mind" in Rom 14-15? In this chapter we have exposed the weakness of Karris' exegetical argument that Paul (in Rom 14-15) was generalizing from the concrete circumstances in Corinth. But we have yet to present a cogent exegetical case for the position we are maintaining -- that Rom 14:1 - 15:13 was addressed to a specific situation in which "the strong" were comprised primarily of Gentile Christians and "the weak in faith" consisted mainly of Jewish Christians. To this task we now turn.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 692-3.

CHAPTER THREE: IDENTITY CLUES IN ROMANS 14:1 - 15:13

There are a number of exegetical clues within this passage which strengthen our thesis regarding the identification of the parties mentioned by Paul. We specify four of these.

First, we cite the way Paul characterizes the issue of dietary scruples observed by "the one who is weak in faith." We note especially vv 14 and 20 of chapter 14, where Paul portrays the issue between the strong and the weak in a way that embraces "specifically Jewish categories."<sup>62</sup> Paul affirms in v 14 a conviction which he shares with the strong: *oida kai pepeismai en kyriō 'Iēsou hoti ouden koinon di' heautou; ei mē tō logizomenō ti koinon einai, ekeinō koinon.* Dunn declares the apostle's use of *koinos* to be "almost indisputable proof that the discussion moves within the

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<sup>62</sup> W. A. Meeks, "Judgment and the Brother: Rom 14:1 - 15:13," in Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament, FS E. E. Ellis, Ed. G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 292. Although Meeks acknowledges that these categories "are probably the starting point in his [Paul's] mind," he nevertheless argues (to our amazement) that "there is no evidence...of any present crisis around this issue (of food purity laws) in the Roman groups" (292).

context of distinctively Jewish concerns and sensitivities."<sup>63</sup> "Almost" is an important qualifier in Dunn's argument. Cranfield is among those impressed with evidence confirming that there were various religious-philosophical movements in antiquity which practised abstinence from certain foods on the ground that some creatures were regarded as "unnatural and defiling."<sup>64</sup> Although such movements cannot be dismissed out of hand as possible influences upon primitive Christian ideas and practices of abstinence, we concur with the majority of scholars, including Cranfield, who understand Paul's concerns against the background of the Judaism of his day. Our reasons will become apparent as we proceed.

Mosaic law specifies two major restrictions regarding what foods Jews may eat. Some creatures are ruled to be

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<sup>63</sup> James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988) 819.

<sup>64</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 2. 694. He mentions Orphism (dating from the sixth century B.C.E.), Pythagoreanism (sixth to fifth centuries), and Neopythagoreanism (first century B.C.E.) as movements outside of Judaism where distinctions were made between clean and unclean foods, using in some cases the same terminology as became common in Judaism (particularly *katharas* in the texts cited). Similar evidence is cited by Behm in *TDNT* II, s.v. *esthiō*, 689-692. It should be noted that Cranfield prefers a Jewish provenance for the concerns addressed by Paul in our text. Our point here is simply to acknowledge that the evidence is not as "indisputable" as Dunn would have us believe.

forbidden on the basis of their impurity (Leviticus 11, Deuteronomy 14),<sup>65</sup> and the blood and fat of permissible meats must not be consumed (Lev 3:17; 7:26f.; 17:10-13). Two observations are important for our thesis. The first concerns the terminology current in Judaism in Paul's day to explain and propagate these food laws. The second concerns the observance of these laws in the Diaspora.

We note first the terminology. The standard Hebrew word used to designate cultic impurity is *tame*, which is rendered *akathartos* in the LXX. In the apocrypha *koinos* is used for the Hebrew *hol* to refer to that which is "profane" or "for common use."<sup>66</sup> In the Synoptics and Acts both words, *koinos* and *kathartos*, are employed in texts dealing with the matter of clean and unclean food.<sup>67</sup> Paul uses the same terminology

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<sup>65</sup> As E. P. Sanders explains, "food laws may be called purity laws, since forbidden creatures are characterized as 'impure' (Lev. 11:1-30; Deut. 14:3-21)," as well as being called "'abominations' (Lev. 11:10-13, 20, 40-41)." Jewish Law From Jesus To The Mishnah: Five Studies (London: SCM Press, 1990) 272.

<sup>66</sup> Hauck cites 1 Macc. 1:47, 62 as examples of this use of *koinos*. He observes the same usage in Josephus, in Ant. 11:346; 3:181; 12:320; and 13:4. *TDNT* III, s.v. *koinos*, 790-91.

<sup>67</sup> In Mark 7:19, the evangelist interprets Jesus' words ("there is nothing outside a person which by going in can defile; but the things which come out are what defile," Mk 7:15) to mean, *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*. Note Sander's comment on this passage: "It is hard to imagine the circumstances in which Jews living in Jewish communities in

in Romans 14 in the context of distinctions being made regarding the cleanness or uncleanness of foods. It would appear that the weak were sensitive about the continued normativity of Mosaic legislation concerning clean and unclean foods. At any rate, they did not feel free to discontinue their observance of these laws.

We note further that the basic laws on prohibited foods were unchanged in the Diaspora,<sup>68</sup> and the evidence shows that Diaspora Jews were generally careful to observe them.<sup>69</sup> In fact, next to circumcision, "purity regulations [of which food laws were a sub-set] were the most obvious and universally kept set of laws" among Jews.<sup>70</sup> Josephus reports that Julius Caesar granted certain rights to Jews in Palestine and in the

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Palestine could have started breaking the dietary laws, and I continue to think that the issue actually arose either in the Diaspora (e.g. in Paul's churches) or in connection with the conversion of Gentiles in Palestine (as in Acts 10)." Jewish Law, 27. Acts 10 is the other passage in which both terms are used in the context of food law observance.

<sup>68</sup> Sanders cites the LXX (Deut. 14:4-5) and Philo (*Spec. Laws* 4:105) as evidence of local variations in the list of permitted meats. *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>69</sup> Sanders cites a number of passages indicating Jewish concern to avoid Gentile meat and/or wine, among them II Macc 7; IV Macc. 5:1-6:30; Judith 10:5; 12:2, 9ff, 19; 13:8; Tob. 1:10f; Add. Esther 14:17; III Macc. 3:4-7; Josephus, *War* 2:591; *Life* 74; *Antiq.* 12:120. See Jewish Law, 274-83.

<sup>70</sup> E. P. Sanders, Judaism: Practice And Belief 63 BCE - 66 CE (London, SCM Press) 1992: 214.

Diaspora in gratitude for Jewish support during his conflict with Pompey. Among these benefits is the right to have their ancestral food,<sup>71</sup> an indication that it was a concern of Greek-speaking Jews to obtain "native food."<sup>72</sup> Paul's use of the same terminology does not prove that Jewish food laws are the source or context of the problems addressed, but the prevalence of such concerns in the world of his mission certainly commends Jewish practice or influence as a likelihood.

Equally important for our case is the NT evidence of the impact these food laws had upon the early church. We noted above (p 40, n 67) that Mark and Acts use *koinos* and *kathartos* in the context of Jewish food laws. In Mark 7:15, Jesus is reported to teach that "there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him." Several verses later (v 19), Mark interprets Jesus' teaching: "Thus he declared all foods clean" (*katharizōn panta ta brōmata*). While Sanders considers Mark 7:15 to be "too revolutionary to have been said by Jesus himself"<sup>73</sup> (because it amounts to a denial of the

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<sup>71</sup> *Antiq.* 14:226, 245, 261.

<sup>72</sup> See the discussion of Sanders in Jewish Law, 27, 272-83.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

Jewish dietary code), the inclusion of the text together with the evangelist's editorial comment (v 19b) serves as a clear indication of how one Christian source (the Gospel of Mark) viewed the matter of Jewish food laws and their normativity. The passage in Acts 10 tells of Peter's revolutionary vision. When a sheet filled with prohibited animals descends from heaven and a voice commands him to "kill and eat," Peter refuses: "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is *koinon kai akatharton*" (v 14). Then the voice responds, *Ha ho Theos ekatharisen, su mē koinou*. The words are repeated verbatim in 11:9 when Peter reports the incident to the apostles and brothers in Jerusalem. It appears at first that the heavenly announcement serves as a sweeping declaration concerning the distinction between clean and unclean foods. As the story unfolds, however, the focus shifts and a different lesson emerges. It is clear in Acts 10 that the vision serves to prepare Peter for his visit to the home of Cornelius and for the conversion and reception of this Gentile centurion. Reflecting on the meaning of the vision, Peter testifies to Cornelius, "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). If Peter understands the vision and heavenly pronouncement to signal an end to Jewish food laws, he is conspicuously silent on that score when the Jerusalem conference deliberates in Acts 15 and he (apparently) concurs with the resolution that Gentiles should

not be required to be circumcised, but should be asked "to abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity" (15:29). If Peter does recognize the relevance of the heavenly word for the issue of food laws, he apparently makes a concession on the matter at Jerusalem following the speech of James.

The fact that Mark and Acts address the matter of distinguishing between clean and unclean foods, and do so using the same (standard) terminology, is weighty. It indicates that for the readers of these documents there were (or had been) questions about whether or not Christians were obliged to observe the Mosaic distinction between clean and unclean foods.<sup>74</sup> The issue of food laws was apparently alive within mixed (Jewish / Gentile) Christian communities.

We return now to Romans 14. Paul writes in v 20, *Panta men kathara*, using a slogan of the strong which is equivalent to his *ouden koinon* of v 14. This perspective on the resources of the created world places Paul in the same camp as Mark's gospel and of the heavenly voice of Acts 10:15 (if one understands the declaration in Acts to cover the issue of food

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<sup>74</sup> It is noteworthy that both Mark and Acts are generally recognized to be addressed to a primarily Gentile readership where interaction with Jewish and/or Judaizing believers would have heightened the significance of such debate over the continued normativity or applicability of food purity laws.

laws). Paul's use of *katharos* in this context parallels its use in Mark and Acts in passages addressing the same dispute about clean and unclean foods. While Paul, as well as Peter, concurs with the resolution of the Jerusalem conference about the policy to observe in the Gentile mission, Rom 14:14, 20 clearly indicate his fundamental perspective on the matter.<sup>75</sup>

Paul's use of *koinos* and *katharos* in the context of the tension in Rome over dietary matters contributes significantly to our thesis. We have shown the importance of food laws among Jews in the Diaspora, and in the Christian mission in the Diaspora. The language and setting of Romans 14 make it likely that the weak in faith are Jewish Christians (together with Gentile proselytes and God-fearers) whose weakness of faith consists of the fact that, from Paul's perspective, they do not have sufficient understanding or knowledge of the implications of what God has provided through Christ, and thus they are still inclined to observe certain dietary restrictions with respect to clean and unclean foods.

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<sup>75</sup> On the basis of the evidence cited, Hauck concludes that "the distinction between profane (*koinos*) or unclean (*akathartos*) and clean, which is maintained by Judaism, ceases to have divine validity for the conduct of the community." *TDNT* III, s.v. *akathartos*, *akatharsia*, 427-9.

Before proceeding to the next point, we must attend to one additional problem regarding Paul's portrayal of the dietary scruples of the weak. We have established the likelihood that Jewish food laws are the source and influence for the practices of the weak, but we have not explained why they "eat only vegetables" (Rom 14:2). There simply is no law in Judaism which requires vegetarianism, and some take this to be proof that the apostle is addressing a non-Jewish concern.<sup>76</sup> There is evidence, however, that under certain conditions Diaspora Jews did practice vegetarianism. We need to look at this more closely. As Sanders explains, there were two potential problems faced by Diaspora Jews on the issue of food purity:

An animal might have been sacrificed to a pagan deity, or it might have been slaughtered in such a way as still to have blood in it (for the prohibition of blood, see e.g. Lev 3:17). The first was frequently true of the red meat available in Gentile cities. As in Judaism, slaughter was usually sacrificial; animals did double duty. The

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<sup>76</sup> Käsemann's conclusion is representative: "Jewish orthodoxy can be ruled out as a source. General abstinence from meat and wine is not found there." Ernst Kasemann, Commentary on Romans, Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 367. Together with C. K. Barrett (A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962], 257f.), Robert Jewett (Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings [Leiden: Brill, 1971] 43), Werner Georg Kummel (Introduction to the New Testament, Trans. Howard Clark Kee [New York: Abingdon, 1975] 310f.), and others, Kasemann suggests that the weak have been influenced by syncretistic ascetic ideas.

second possible problem (that blood was still in the meat) need not have been true. Pagan slaughter was not precisely like Jewish; the animal was not hung up by the leg after the throat was cut. By the time the Greek or Roman priest or butcher was through, however, there was no blood left, since he both eviscerated the animal and boned the meat. Yet not all Gentile slaughter followed Greek sacrificial technique, and Jews especially feared eating meat from an animal that was literally strangled. They may also have *suspected* pagan slaughter of leaving blood in the meat, and there seems to have been some fear that a pagan butcher might cut an animal's throat in such a way as to make it choke on its own blood. Though Jews might have been legally justified in accepting some Gentile meat as bloodless, they may not have been willing to do so.<sup>77</sup>

Noteworthy for our purposes is the fact that there were also possible problems with the two principle liquids used as food among the Jews: wine and oil. Both were not only subject to impurity, but "a libation to a pagan deity might have been offered from wine before it was sold."<sup>78</sup>

The way some Diaspora Jews responded to these potential hazards was to abstain altogether from Gentile meat and wine:

Some, if they had to eat Gentile food, would eat only vegetables and drink only water; some would eat nothing cooked at all. That is, some Diaspora Jews responded to their pagan environment, full of idolatry and sexual immorality (from their perspective), by cutting themselves off from too much contact with Gentiles. In

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<sup>77</sup> Sanders, Judaism, 216.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 216.

such families, there was a desire to control their food supply entirely.<sup>79</sup>

Sanders demonstrates that there are frequent admonitions in Jewish Diaspora literature neither to eat Gentile meat nor drink Gentile wine. "The 'admonitions' are often not direct, but appear in the descriptions of heroes and heroines, of whom Daniel [Dan 1:1-16] was the archetype."<sup>80</sup> Not all Diaspora Jews were of a mind to follow such noble examples, but some were, and the weak in Rome may have been among them.

We conclude from the evidence presented that the extraordinary observance of a vegetarian diet by the weak<sup>81</sup> may reflect either a heightened sensitivity about the obedience God requires of them or circumstances that were especially difficult. As Cranfield argues, it would "scarcely be surprising that Christians in a pagan city, wishing to be sure of avoiding meat which was in one way or another unclean

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>80</sup> Sanders, Jewish Law, 274. He cites the following passages: IV Macc 5:1 - 6:30; Judith 10:5; 12:2, 9f., 19; 13:8; Tob 1:10f.; Add Esther 4:17; III Macc 3:4-7; *Jos. and Asen.* 7:1; 8:5; 18:5; 20:8.

<sup>81</sup> Perhaps they also practised abstinence from wine. See discussion above, p 11.

according to the OT ritual law, should decide to abstain altogether from meat."<sup>82</sup>

The second exegetical clue to the identity of the weak and strong in Rome is *Paul's reference to the issue of "days" in v 5*. As in v 2 and the description of dietary observance, Paul identifies the problem in a vague and general way. There are several options available for interpreting the disagreement over days. Käsemann is among those scholars who believe the weak in this case to be Christians under the influence of pagan notions about days being lucky or unlucky, depending upon the astrological configuration under which they fall. If this were the situation, however, it is hard to explain the apostle's sympathetic tone. Furthermore, given the distinctive Jewish/Judaistic background to the dietary issue, such a position asks us to assume the existence of very divergent elements and influences within the camp of the weak.

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<sup>82</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 2. 696. In a similar vein, Jewett concludes that the weak "might well have been Jewish Christians who wished to avoid contact with meat offered to idols. Since all meat which was sold by Gentile butchers was contaminated with some connection with idolatry, Jewish Christians with a radicalized nomistic tendency might have decided to abstain entirely...." (*Terms*, 45).

Another approach is that taken by Karris. As noted and debated above, he contends that Paul had "fast" days in mind and that the issue was therefore fundamentally the same as the dietary one of v 2. Dederen agrees with the correlation of issues, but (*contra* Karris) still accounts for the tension in terms of a concrete scenario in which "Jewish converts were ... clinging to ... feast days" which in this case "were more probably fast days."<sup>83</sup>

Although not convinced that abstinence from food is the common denominator by which the issues of vv 2 and 5 are correlated, we believe that Dederen is on the right track in recognizing a common source for both concerns within Judaism. The deliberate parallel structure of vv 2 and 5 suggests that Paul was citing another example of how the sensitivities of the weak, with respect to the normativity of the Torah, invited conflict with the strong. If this is the case, then we assume Paul had in mind the keeping of the Sabbath and other Jewish festivals (the three pilgrim festivals being Passover, Booths, and Weeks). This being so, we can rule out abstinence as the point of correlation between diet and days because the fast of the Day of Atonement is the only one

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<sup>83</sup> Raoul Dederen, "On Esteeming One Day Better than Another," *AUSS* 9 (1971): 29-30. Dederen proceeds to argue for the possibility that the Essenes may have caused the problem.

prescribed by biblical law. The Sabbath and other festival occasions are otherwise joyous occasions characterized by feasting, not fasting. The Sabbath is the primary day of honour and its observance was "the most unusual aspect of standard Jewish practice," both in Palestine and in the Diaspora.<sup>84</sup> The right to keep the Sabbath was another of the privileges granted to the Jews by Julius Caesar.<sup>85</sup>

Although he counts himself among the strong, it was Paul's custom to worship on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) and he did make room in his schedule to share in the feast of Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16). This does not mean that he endorses the continued validity of the Jewish Sabbath and festivals.<sup>86</sup> We take Paul's Sabbath custom to be another case, as with his agreement with the food laws policy for Gentiles in Acts 15, of the apostle's accommodation to Judaistic observances which, in themselves, he apparently considered harmless.

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<sup>84</sup> Sanders, Judaism, 209.

<sup>85</sup> This is according to Josephus in *Antiq.* 14:226, 242, 245, 258, 263f.

<sup>86</sup> Dederen finds Acts 17:2 to be conclusive evidence that Paul "was in no doubt about the validity of the weekly Sabbath" ("One Day," 28).

So in spite of, and perhaps because of,<sup>87</sup> the paucity of evidence in the immediate context, it appears most likely that the "days" issue was cited as another illustration of the sensitivities of (predominantly) Jewish Christians who are not prepared to relinquish their observance of such Jewish conventions. Compliance with dietary and festival/sabbath laws was so distinctive of Diaspora Judaism that continued loyalty to them is quite understandable on the part of Jewish Christians unsure of, or unconvinced about, Paul's (= "the strong's") interpretation of what God's action in Christ means for the normativity of such laws.<sup>88</sup>

The third exegetical clue confirming our identification of the parties in Rome is to be found in *the paragraph in*

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<sup>87</sup> If the concern cited in v 5 arose from a different source (than that of v 2), we would expect the apostle to give some indication of that source and the relation between the contentious issues.

<sup>88</sup> Dunn concludes that "the most obvious reference for v 5 is to a concern on the part of some Jewish Christians and others who had been proselytes or God-worshippers lest they abandon a practice of feast days and sabbath commanded by scripture and sanctified by tradition, a central concern lest they lose something of fundamental importance within their Jewish heritage, something close to the heart of the distinctiveness of the whole Jewish (and now Jewish-Christian) tradition and identity" (Romans 9-16, 806) On Paul's understanding of the role of the law, consider Rom 6:14-15; 7:4-6; 10:4. See Stephen Westerholm's excellent discussion, "The Law in God's Scheme," in Israel's Law And The Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 174-197.

which Paul concludes his treatment of the weak and the strong, 15:7-13. It is important to follow Paul's line of argumentation here. Beginning with v 1, where he identifies himself clearly and for the first time as one of the *dynatoi*, the apostle picks up and drives home the point that he made in 14:19, that the Christians in Rome (all of them, but particularly here the strong are in view) should "consider the things that make for *eirēnēs* and the things that make for *oikodomēs* for one another." The predominantly Gentile *dynatoi* are obliged to "bear with the weaknesses of the *adynatoi*" (v 1), and each one is called to "please the neighbour for the good unto *oikodomēn*" (v 2). At this point Paul introduces Christ as the model of such an other-serving attitude (v 3) and expresses the wish, in language reminiscent of Phil 2:5, *ho de theos...dōē hymin to auto phronein en allēlois kata Christon 'Iēsoun* (v 5). The purpose envisioned by this prayer is one which reveals the apostle's motivating passion in this entire paraenesis regarding the Jewish - Gentile tensions within Roman Christianity, *hina homothymadon en heni stomati doxazēte ton theon kai patera tou kyriou hēmōn 'Iēsou Christou* (v 6).

This leads to the concluding admonition of v 7, where Paul takes the imperative of 14:1 and broadens it as a mutual obligation for all concerned on the basis, and according to

the example, of Christ himself: *Dio proslambanesthe allēlous, kathōs kai ho Christos proselabeto hymas, eis doxan tou theou.* In the following two verses the servant disposition of Christ is again cited, with specific reference to the promise and purpose of God that the gentiles come to share in the God-glorifying praises of the Jews.<sup>89</sup> To underscore and confirm this long-standing and long-promised intention and desire of God to receive the joint adoration of Jews and Gentiles, Paul quotes from four OT passages indicating God's design for inclusion of Gentiles among his worshipping people.

Note the view of Karris on the role of vv 7-13 in the argument of this passage:

We have no evidence for the view that Rom 15:1-6 is related to 7-13 via the equation "the weak" = Jewish Christian and "the strong" = Gentile Christian. The link is via the love that should not please itself (15:1-3), a love that goes out to save all, to welcome all, despite distinctions of race (Rom 15:7-13).<sup>90</sup>

He believes the linkage between 15:1-6 and vv 7-13 is to be found in viewing this section in light of the discussion of 1 Cor 10:32 - 11:1. Verses 7-13 function in the same way as the

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<sup>89</sup> Note the threefold reference to the glorifying of God in vv 6-9.

<sup>90</sup> Robert J. Karris, "Romans 14:1 - 15:13 and the Occasion of Romans," in Debate, 80-81.

admonition of 1 Cor 11:1, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ." "The stress of Rom 15:7-13, therefore, is on the servant nature of Christ (15:7), who makes the two one. Christ is all things to all men, to Jews and Gentiles, so that he might save them all, so that they might give glory to God."<sup>91</sup>

Karris is correct in noting the stress on the servant nature of Christ, but fails to understand the purpose for this emphasis in Paul's unfolding (and climactic) argument. Paul is not just illustrating what Christ's love can or did accomplish in making Jews and Gentiles one. The reference to Christ's servant disposition functions to reinforce the apostle's admonition, in the context of the tensions existent within Roman Christianity, for the strong (still primarily in view) to exercise a Christ-like attitude so that God may be glorified by the unified praise of Jew and Gentile. All of the OT quotations cited in vv 9-12 speak of the fulfilment of that promised reality. It is precisely such unified praise that Paul desires to see in Rome in the place of the despising and condemning which presently characterizes the relationship between the weak and the strong. Verses 7-13 fit naturally and reasonably with our thesis that Paul was addressing a situation where he knew, or had reason to believe, that

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 80.

tension existed between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.<sup>92</sup>

A fourth exegetical clue in this pericope that we find consistent with our thesis is *the tone of Paul's address*. Cranfield echoes the consensus of current scholarship when he speaks of "the sympathetic gentleness of Paul's attitude to the weak in this section."<sup>93</sup> It is obvious that we are far removed here from the apostle's disposition toward the Judaizers in Galatia. Although he identifies himself with the perspective (not the attitude or behaviour) of the strong, he exhorts them to "accept" the weak as fellow believers (14:1), to avoid "quarrels" about their differences (14:1), to refrain from "despising" (14:3) and "judging" (14:13) the weak, to place no stumbling block before the weaker brother (14:13), to avoid "grieving" the brother (14:15), to "bear the weaknesses of the weak" (15:1), and, in short, to do whatever "edifies" the weak (14:19; 15:2). It is true that some of these

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<sup>92</sup> Among those scholars adopting the same basic understanding of this passage and its relation to the concrete circumstances of Rome, we cite C. E. B. Cranfield, (Romans, 2. 695), Karl P. Donfried ("False Presuppositions in the Study of Romans," in Debate, 51), James D. G. Dunn (Romans 9-16, 845f), Robert Jewett (Terms, 44f), Ernst Käsemann (Romans, 366), Francis Watson (Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986] 96f), and A. J. M. Wedderburn (Reasons, 32).

<sup>93</sup> Cranfield, Romans, 2. 696.

directives are presented as mutual obligations for both weak and strong, but, as we noted above (chapter 1), the onus of responsibility is primarily laid at the doorstep of the strong.

Scholarly consensus breaks down, of course, when it comes to accounting for this "sympathetic gentleness." Meeks' viewpoint is representative of an interpretive approach which runs counter to our own. First, he reminds us that the house-churches of Rome were not founded by Paul and therefore the apostle had to tread carefully, as an "outsider," in introducing his version of the gospel. Second, he affirms that Paul "takes up the topic out of his experience," thus denying that there was "any present crisis around this issue in the Roman groups."<sup>94</sup>

We believe, however, that Paul's "sympathetic gentleness" *vis-a'-vis* the weak reinforces our thesis regarding the identity of the weak and strong in Rome. In Chapter One we established the apparent vulnerability of the weak in Rom 14 - 15. The "weakness" of the weak in Rome consists of a certain immaturity of faith, a lack of insight and/or conviction regarding the implications of the righteousness proffered by

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<sup>94</sup> Meeks, "Judgment," 292.

God in the coming of Christ. The result is a measure of insecurity that leaves them open to being "grieved" (14:15) by the freedom of the strong. Although their sensitivity on matters of diet and days is best explained by their background in Judaism, Paul gives no indication that they are agitators at all, let alone opponents of the sort he confronts in Galatia. Paul does not embrace the Galatian Judaizers as fellow-believers. He charges them with wanting to "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7) by requiring the Gentile converts to submit to the law.<sup>95</sup> By contrast with the Galatian party, the weak apparently are not pressing the strong to comply with Mosaic laws. The issue of circumcision is conspicuous by its absence from Rom 14 - 15. Far from being resolute in their loyalty to Torah, the weak in Rome are somewhat shaky in their conviction about what God requires of

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<sup>95</sup> As Sanders observes, Paul (in Galatia) "was combatting the imposition of another admission requirement on his Gentile converts." Paul, The Law, And The Jewish People (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 42-3.

J. Christiaan Beker offers a helpful comparison between the circumstances of Galatia and those of Rome: "In Rome, he [Paul] is dealing with a mixed church, not a purely Gentile church as in Galatia; moreover, he is not dealing with a Judaizing heresy, that is, with Gentile Christians who desire circumcision, or with an anti-Pauline opposition in an organized form, as there is in Galatia... The Galatian Gentiles seek to complete and perfect their Christian status by submitting to circumcision, whereas in Rome the reverse may be the case, because Paul must warn Gentiles against showing any religious superiority over the Jews (Rom 11:13-25a)." Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 70.

them. It is striking that Paul does not explicitly mention their compliance with Mosaic regulations when he describes their dietary and calendar practices. Perhaps this is because they do not crusade for such allegiance. Paul can show "sympathetic gentleness" to the weak in their decision to honour calendar and food laws consistent with their background in Judaism. What he can not tolerate is the pressure exerted by the Galatian Judaizers to persuade Gentile Christians that they must be circumcised (Gal 5:2,3; 6:12) and begin observing "days, and months, and seasons, and years" (Gal 4:10).

Paul's "sympathetic gentleness" in Romans 14-15 is best accounted for by recognizing the "weak in faith" to be *Christians with a background in Judaism (primarily Jews) who are not fully convinced of the legitimacy of their position and are thus vulnerable in their faith.* We expect Paul to take a tough, uncompromising stance when dealing with persons unable or unwilling to make a break from a pagan past. We know also of his hardline posture *vis-a'-vis* Judaizers of the Galatian sort. But with fellow countrymen who are still somewhat shaky in their Christian belief, and who are not undermining Paul's gospel of grace by demanding obedience to the law, we can appreciate the apostle's sensitive insistence that the law-free, knowledgeable strong ones be accepting of

the weak and be careful lest they undo the work that God has begun to do in them (14:20).

In this chapter we have focused on four exegetical clues to the historical identity of the weak and the strong. As we have demonstrated, each clue, in itself, is strongly suggestive that our identification is correct. Taken together, they comprise overwhelming evidence that we are on the right track. Our case is bolstered even more by the exegetical indicators that we find in the rest of Romans. Identification of these is our next step.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: IDENTITY CLUES IN THE REST OF ROMANS

In this chapter we will elucidate clues within the rest of Romans which confirm our thesis regarding the identity of the weak and the strong. We shall consider three sets of clues regarding the identity, character, and communal composition of the addressees of Romans. We begin with the end, *the evidence of Romans 16*. Debate continues on the hypothesis of an original Ephesian destination for this chapter,<sup>96</sup> but support for this position has been considerably weakened by the outstanding studies of Harry Gamble<sup>97</sup> and Peter Lampe.<sup>98</sup> We proceed on the assumption, shared with many scholars today, that Romans 16 is an integral part of Paul's letter. As such, it provides

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<sup>96</sup> For an overview and history of the debate, see Werner Georg Kümmel's Introduction to the New Testament, Trans. Howard Clark Kee (New York: Abingdon, 1975) 314-20, and to T. W. Manson's 1962 restatement of the hypothesis in "St. Paul's Letter To The Romans -- And Others," in The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition, Ed. Karl P. Donfried (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991) 3-15.

<sup>97</sup> Harry Gamble Jr., The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans. Studies and Documents 42. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Lampe, "The Roman Christians Of Romans 16," in Debate, 216-30.

valuable information about the composition of the Roman Christian community which Paul addresses.

Our interest is particularly in vv 3-16, an unusually lengthy (by comparison with Paul's other letters) list of greetings to individuals in Rome. As Lampe observes, the length and individualization of the list are understandable in the light of chapters 1-15. "Not knowing the Roman church as a whole personally, Paul sends greetings to individuals whom he does know in person."<sup>99</sup> The name-dropping serves as an effective reference for Paul himself, indicating to his readers the degree of personal contact he has with trustworthy members of their community.<sup>100</sup> Paul knows twenty-six Christians in Rome (excluding Aristobulus and Narcissus, whom he does not refer to as believers). The number is not surprising considering the high degree of mobility and immigration within the Roman empire.<sup>101</sup> All or some of them

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>100</sup> As Lampe explains, "Paul certainly needed all the recommendations he could get after he and his law-free gospel had become so controversial in the east" (Ibid.). See also Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans, Trans Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 412.

<sup>101</sup> For our purposes, it is not necessary to establish how many of the twenty-six Paul knew personally. Lampe suggests twelve ("Romans 16," 220), Watson "at least nine" (Francis Watson, Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986] 209), and Käsemann argues that "the supposition is

may have been expelled from Rome under the edict of Claudius in 49 C.E., as was the case with Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:2), met Paul on the course of his missionary travels, and since returned to Rome after the edict was lifted. At any rate, Paul knows (or knows of) twenty-six believers in Rome, an indication that he has reliable sources by which to gain information about the difficulties faced by the Christian community in the capital city.

Of even greater significance for our thesis, we learn from the greetings that Roman Christianity was composed of Jews and Gentiles and that the Christian community was divided into a number of house congregations. The apostle identifies three of the twenty-six persons as fellow Jews. Andronicus, Junias, and Herodian are referred to as "my kinsmen" (vv 7, 11). Judging from the concerns of chapters 14-15 and the major themes of the letter (more on this below), we can appreciate Paul's "special interest in emphasizing the Jewish origin of Christians."<sup>102</sup> They are living proof that God has not rejected his people (Rom 11:1). If the small minority of Jewish Christians appearing in this list reflects a similar

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impermissible that he did not know all of the people mentioned personally and was instructed about them only through intermediaries" (Romans, 415).

<sup>102</sup> Lampe, "Romans 16," 224.

minority in the over-all composition of Roman Christianity,<sup>103</sup> it further strengthens our argument that the admonition of Rom 14:1 is addressed to the Gentile Christian component of the Christian community as the one bearing greatest responsibility for ensuring a more accepting fellowship with their Jewish counterparts. Apart from the question of compositional ratio within the community, the fact that most of Paul's personal connections are with Gentile believers is important. It means he has inside information about attitudes and behaviour within the Gentile camp that need to be addressed, and his personal connections with Gentile leaders gives him credibility and warrant to do so. This is the very thing we propose he is doing in Rom 14:1ff in admonishing the strong to be accepting of the weak.

We note further the divided nature of Roman Christianity reflected in these verses. Rather than being one large worshipping community, Christians in the Roman capital are divided into various house churches. There are at least three, the *ekklēsia* meeting in the house of Prisca and Aquila (v 5) plus circles of believers cited in vv 14-15. If "those who belong to the family of Aristobulus ...[and] Narcissus"

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<sup>103</sup> This is the conclusion of Lampe ("Romans 16," 225) and Watson (Approach, 209).

(vv 10-11) constitute additional units, then there are five.<sup>104</sup> Regardless of the number, the fact of their existence shows that a decentralized organizational structure has developed in Rome. It also indicates a movement away from synagogue congregations. This independence from the synagogue may have been the result of Claudius' edict, developing while Jews were absent from the city and persisting as the new order after their return. If it is true that a number of those greeted in Rom 16 are personally acquainted with Paul (as we know to be the case with Prisca and Aquila), it is not wildly imaginative to assume that at least some of them were persuaded by Paul's "law-free" understanding of the gospel and that they were instrumental in the spread of this Pauline influence upon their return to Rome.<sup>105</sup> This interpretation

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<sup>104</sup> Lampe argues for at least seven ("Romans 16," 230), Minear at least five (Paul S. Minear, The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans [London: SCM Press, 1971] 7), and Wiefel at least 3 (Wolfgang Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in Debate, 95).

<sup>105</sup> F. F. Bruce offers balanced judgment on the constituency of the house-churches in Rome, suggesting that "we should probably envisage a broad and continuous spectrum of varieties in thought and practice between the firm Jewish retention of the ancestral customs and Gentile remoteness from these customs, with some Jewish Christians found on the liberal side...and some Gentile Christians on the 'legalist' side" ("The Romans Debate -- Continued," in Debate, 186).

would certainly reinforce our thesis regarding the identity of the strong (in Rom 14-15) and Paul's affinity with them.<sup>106</sup>

We turn next to the signals of a Gentile Christian readership. Since we propose a predominantly Gentile Christian identity for the strong addressed in Rom 14:1ff, it would strengthen our case if we can establish that it is such a readership that Paul addresses throughout the letter. Although this is a disputed issue, we believe the evidence weighs in favour of our position. Four passages are most often cited as clear indicators of Gentile Christian addressees: Rom 1:5,6; 1:13-15; 11:13-32; 15:15-18.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Although Wiefel's reconstruction is impossible to prove exegetically, it is a noteworthy contribution to our reflection. He suggests that "creation of these semi-legal house churches eliminated the Jewish element which previously had been rooted in the synagogue assembly, ... [which] explains why Jewish Christianity did not regain its dominant position and why Paul, in his letter to the Romans, assumed that his readers were those who lived by the gospel of freedom from the law" ("Community," 95-6).

<sup>107</sup> This is the interpretation adopted in the commentaries by Barrett, Dunn, Käsemann, and Sanday and Headlam, all of whom also understand these passages to imply that the Gentiles comprised a majority within the Christian community in Rome. Kummel, referring to the same passages, agrees that "the letter [Romans] characterizes its readers unambiguously as *Gentile Christians*" (Introduction, 309). In addition, Kummel cites 9:3ff; 10:1; 11:23, 28, 31, as passages wherein Paul is clearly speaking to non-Jews concerning his own people.

In the first passage, Paul declares that he has been granted apostleship to bring about obedience of faith "among all the Gentiles (*en pasin tois ethnesin*), among whom are you also (*en hois este kai hymeis*), called ones of Jesus Christ." As with verse 13, it seems best to translate *ethnesin* as "Gentiles" instead of "nations" (RSV). The question is how to understand *en hois este kai hymeis*. Is Paul identifying his readers as persons belonging to "all the Gentiles," thus being among those for whose obedience Paul has been appointed an apostle?<sup>108</sup> Or is he simply locating his readers as persons living "in the midst of" Gentiles? Beker prefers the latter interpretation because it is more accommodating to a view of the Roman church as a mixed congregation.<sup>109</sup> The case cannot be solved exegetically because both translations are possible. However, in the context of Paul's apostolic activity as the one entrusted with the gospel for the Gentiles (Gal 2:8), we

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<sup>108</sup> As Sanday and Headlam contend, "St. Paul's commission as an Apostle was specially to the *Gentiles* (Gal 2:8), and it is more pointed to tell the Roman Christians that they thus belong to his special province, than to regard them merely as one among the mass of nations" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925] 11). The same position is taken in the commentaries by Barrett, Dunn, and Käsemann.

<sup>109</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 76. Cranfield agrees, arguing that the words of v 6 "may be understood as simply stating the fact that the Roman church is situated in the midst of the Gentile world" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975] 20).

believe Paul is referring to his readers as Gentiles who are part of that mission field to which he has been sent. This interpretation does not discount the mixed nature of the community. Nor does it prove a majority Gentile composition of the church, a point Cranfield makes repeatedly (*contra* Barrett, Bruce, Campbell, Dunn, Käsemann, Sanday and Headlam) with respect to each of the passages we are here considering.<sup>110</sup> What the text does indicate, we suggest, is that Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, is addressing himself particularly to that community of believers in Rome (whether they are the majority or not) who are part of the Gentile world that is Paul's special mission field!

Later in the same chapter, in vv 13-15, Paul declares his long-standing intention to come to Rome in order to reap some harvest among his readers "as among the rest of the Gentiles" (*kathōs kai en tois loipous ethnesin*). Cranfield believes this may be "a slightly inexact way of saying 'even as (I have already done) in the rest of the Gentile world.'"<sup>111</sup> He particularly objects to using the text to establish the numerical predominance of Gentiles in the Roman Christian community. Again, we concur with his caution on the latter

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<sup>110</sup> See Cranfield, Romans, 20-21.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

point, but the context seems clearly to qualify the readership as Gentile. Paul proceeds to declare his "obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians" (v 14), i.e. non-Jews, on the basis of which he proclaims his eagerness to preach "to you also who are in Rome" (v 15). We take this as a straightforward (*contra* Cranfield's "slightly inexact") way of locating his readers within that Gentile (here "Greeks and barbarians") world to which he is called to preach the gospel.

It is indisputable that Paul is addressing himself to Gentile believers in the Romans 11 passage (vv 13-32), doing so with the second person plural. Paul begins the section, *Hymin de lego tois ethnesin*. At the very least, in accord with Cranfield's interpretation, the passage reveals Paul addressing "that element in the Roman church which could be tempted by the situation referred to in 9:1ff to adopt an altogether unchristian attitude of self-complacency and contemptuousness with regard to the Jews."<sup>112</sup> That being the case, it is apparently the same element addressed in 14:1ff (see Chapter One). Consonant with our understanding of the previous passages considered in this section, we believe the apostle continues to hold before him the same Gentile Christian community in view at the start of the letter.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 21.

Finally, in 15:15ff., Paul acknowledges that he is able to write "very boldly" (*tolmēroteron*) to his readers "because of the grace which has been given to me by God in order to be a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles." According to Cranfield, "Paul may be mentioning his apostleship of the Gentiles as the basis of his right to address the Roman church *tolmēroteros* and to put them in remembrance (they are, by virtue of their geographical situation, included in the sphere of his authority), without implying anything particular about the proportion of Gentiles to Jews in their community."<sup>113</sup> But surely this is a strained interpretation. It takes more than residence in the proper geographical zone to fall within the sphere of Paul's authority. It is precisely their character as a Gentile Christian community that qualifies them as legitimate recipients of Paul's bold instruction.

To summarize, we contend that the passages we have reviewed are strong signals that Paul is addressing himself in Romans to a Gentile Christian community. Whether he understands this community to be in the majority, as many contend, or just an element of the whole, he nonetheless characterizes his readership as Gentiles. Although he is not the apostolic founder of the Christian community in Rome, Paul

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 20.

justifies his address to them on the ground that they are Gentiles and he has been commissioned by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. That there are also Jewish Christians within the community is evident from Romans 16, but Paul is writing with a view to a Gentile audience.

If Paul is writing to Gentile Christians, however, how do we explain those portions of Romans which seem to be a confrontation with Judaism (2:1-11, 17-29; 3:1-8, 9-20; 4:1; 6:1-15; 7:1, 4-6; 9-11)? Kümmel states the problem well:

Romans manifests a double character: it is essentially a debate between the Pauline gospel and Judaism, so that the conclusion seems obvious that the readers were Jewish Christians. Yet the letter contains statements which indicate specifically that the community was Gentile-Christian.<sup>114</sup>

Beker concludes that "the focus and scope of Paul's argument contradict the exclusively Gentile character of the Roman church."<sup>115</sup> He accounts for the Jewish form of argument by suggesting that the Gentile audience consisted mainly of "God-fearers" who had been attracted to the synagogue, but had subsequently been converted to the gospel. Thus the church in

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<sup>114</sup> Kümmel, Introduction, 309.

<sup>115</sup> Beker, Paul, 76.

Rome bears a "Jewish"-Gentile character.<sup>116</sup> Stuhlmacher argues that the rhetorical questions punctuating Paul's argument are not merely matters of style.<sup>117</sup>

In every case the Apostle is alluding to criticisms and challenges from his Jewish Christian opponents as they spread from Asia Minor and Greece to Rome. His intention is to refute and answer them. The dialogue we are witnessing in Romans is a real one in which Paul is wrestling for the hearts and minds of the Christians in Rome. In doing so he has in view the criticisms and objections which have been raised against his teaching and person mainly by his Jewish Christian opponents.<sup>118</sup>

Any resolution to the apparent contradiction between a Gentile Christian readership and a Jewish form of argumentation must begin with the textual evidence cited above (pp 64-68) which establishes the former. Simply put, Paul characterizes his readers as Gentile believers. It is well established that Paul utilizes the rhetorical style of the

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<sup>116</sup> See Ibid., 74-6.

<sup>117</sup> As examples, he cites 3:31; 4:1; 6:1, 15; 7:7,12,14. See Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Purpose of Romans," in Debate, 240.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 240. With respect to Rom 3:8, Ludemann finds it inconclusive that Paul intended this text to "repulse the attacks of Jewish Christians in Rome," but he does argue that "the anti-Pauline quotation can be located in its historical-theological context: it originates from the Jewish-Christian, anti-Pauline struggle from the period between the conference visit [Acts 15] to Jerusalem and the visit to deliver the collection and throws additional light on this struggle." Gerd Lüdemann, Opposition To Paul In Jewish Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 110-11.

diatribe to pose the accusations of his objectors and to respond to them. The fact that he presents himself in debate with Jewish (Christian) opponents does not mean, however, that they are his readers. Paul would have good reason to carry on such a debate before his Gentile Christian audience. On the one hand, the criticisms and challenges to which he is responding (Stuhlmacher) would be the very arguments which they are hearing and which they must be equipped to refute. On the other hand, as we shall presently observe, the objections posed may also be understood as originating within the Gentile Christian community on the part of persons who are misrepresenting the Pauline gospel and thus inviting reaction from their Jewish Christian counterparts. This can be illustrated by taking a closer look at two passages in question.

Rom 3:8 is often taken as a reference to charges laid against Paul by Jewish (Christian) objectors: "And why not do evil that good may come? -- as some slanderously accuse us of saying." The charge of antinomianism against Paul is quite understandable on the part of Jews and also Jewish Christians who suspect the apostle to be advocating lawlessness. However, as Barrett acknowledges, "it may be that some members of his own churches so far misrepresented him as to believe

and teach that moral evil did not matter."<sup>119</sup> Campbell agrees, finding 6:1f. to confirm this interpretation. In the latter passage, Paul responds to the slanderous report cited in 3:8. He emphasizes the ethical obligations incurred by his Christian readers as a result of their union with Christ's death and resurrection in baptism. Paul's second person address to the Roman Christians in vv 3f. and 11-13 is significant, as Campbell explains:

This is clear proof that the suggestion -- that continuing in sin in order that grace may abound represents a Jewish parody of Paul's gospel -- is a mistaken opinion. Paul is addressing baptized Christians and exhorting and commanding them not to live an antinomian existence. This suggests that those who slanderously reported Paul in 3:8 may be Gentile Christians who mistakenly attributed their own antinomianism to Paul's gospel of grace.<sup>120</sup>

The same party appears to be in view in 6:15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Some misunderstand what Paul means about Christians being "under grace" and "not under law". (6:14). They assume that disobedience does not matter any more. The diatribe may be raising an objection from the Jewish corner, but it is just as

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<sup>119</sup> C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962) 65.

<sup>120</sup> William S. Campbell, "Romans III as a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter," in Debate, 261-2.

likely, and consistent with our understanding of those addressed in the first part of chapter 16, that Paul is dealing with another misconception or misrepresentation of his gospel of grace and freedom on the part of Gentile Christians.

Probing beyond the signals of a Gentile Christian readership, we now attend to those *passages which illumine the character and disposition of these addressees*. On the positive side, Paul credits his readers with a reputable and knowledgable faith. He expresses thankfulness for his readers "because [their] faith is proclaimed in all the world" (1:8), and because they "have become obedient to the standard of teaching to which [they] were committed" (6:17).<sup>121</sup> He is thus able to praise them for being "full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another" (15:14). In 7:1, Paul acknowledges that he is speaking to persons who

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<sup>121</sup> Stuhlmacher suggests a common source for this "standard of teaching" and Paul's own tradition. "If it is true that Christianity reached Rome through Gentile missionaries from Jerusalem or Antioch, they must have brought a type of Christian faith which had many affinities with the gospel preached by Paul. Paul...had used Antioch as a base for his missionary work for several years (cf. Acts 11-15). And the local Christian tradition in that city was derived from the 'Hellenists' who were driven out from Jerusalem. It was this tradition that Paul himself adopted and shared with the Hellenists. Paul is therefore not being merely rhetorical when he expresses his gratitude for the 'standard of teaching' which was current in Rome (6:17). He really means it. Above all, this phrase is not the 'stupid interpolation' of a later copyist as Bultmann suggested" ("Purpose," 238).

"know the law," i.e. the OT law. This need not occasion any surprise as a description of Gentile Christians. The Gentile audience in Galatia was also well versed in the scriptures. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians would have a working knowledge of the OT scriptures. Furthermore, we may assume that, as happened in other Diaspora cities, many "God-fearers" were attracted to the Christian mission in Rome. As persons who associated with the synagogue, they were undoubtedly influenced by synagogue teaching. Stuhlmacher offers the following observation:

When Paul speaks of the Christians in Rome as former "Gentiles" this does not mean that from a religious point of view they were no better than pagan idolaters, incapable of understanding the gospel of Jesus as the Christ. The "Holy Scriptures," in the form of the Septuagint, the Decalogue, the prayers of the synagogue, the Jewish messianic hope, etc. were familiar to many of them. Therefore Paul is by no means exaggerating when he addresses the Gentiles in Rome ... as "those who know the law" [7:1].<sup>122</sup>

Other features of Paul's addressees emerge which are not so commendable, but are more illuminating with respect to the major themes of Romans and the paraenesis of Rom 14-15. We noted Rom 11:13f. earlier as a passage clearly directed to a Gentile Christian readership. In the course of presenting to this audience his understanding of the continued role of

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 238.

Israel in God's saving purposes, Paul issues a double warning against boasting over the plight of the unbelieving Jews. "Do not boast over the branches [that were broken off so that you could be grafted in]. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you" (v 18). "So do not become proud, but stand in awe" (v 20). Behind these warnings must be an awareness by the apostle that an anti-judaistic tendency is showing itself within Gentile Christianity in Rome.<sup>123</sup> This tendency is exacerbated by their presumption of superior insight into their favoured status *vis-a'-vis* unbelieving Jews, an overestimation of their knowledge that prompts Paul to clarify the "mystery" of Israel to them, "lest you be wise in your own conceits" (*hina mē ēte en heautois phronimoi*, 11:25). Warnings against conceit and high-mindedness appear also in Rom 12:3, 16, further betraying

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<sup>123</sup> Note Campbell's comment on the warnings of vv 18, 20: "This is no hypothetical situation, and the dialogue style gives no reason to believe that Paul does not address himself to a real situation in Rome where current anti-judaism was threatening the unity of the church" ("Romans III," 262). Beker suggests that the situation Paul faces in Rome is the reverse of that which he dealt with in Galatia. "The Galatian Gentiles seek to complete and perfect their Christian status by submitting to circumcision, whereas in Rome...Paul must warn Gentiles against showing any religious superiority over the Jews (Rom 11:13-25a)" (Paul, 70).

Paul's concern over the appearance of this character flaw among his readers.<sup>124</sup>

Coupled with the tendency to anti-Judaism is that of anti-nomianism (or libertinism), to which Paul responds in Romans 6 (note especially vv 1, 15). It appears that a deep sense of God's liberating grace was not accompanied by a corresponding sense of continued obligation to obedience. Surely Minear stretches the evidence when he states that "many members [of the predominantly Gentile law-free contingent in Rome] used their emancipation as added justification for pandering to the desires of the flesh."<sup>125</sup> Rom 13:13f., which he takes as proof of such revelry, may just as reasonably be interpreted as a typical Pauline warning against such works of darkness as libertines may be tempted to practice. Nonetheless, the tendency toward antinomianism is real among Paul's readers and he addresses it strongly (especially in

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<sup>124</sup> Marxsen observes that Rom 12:3 introduces the same theme as later emerges in Rom 14-15: "Was this then the situation in the church at Rome, that one thought more highly of himself than of others? When we remember that the theme of 'the weak and the strong' come later, we can see that in this passage the same theme is being dealt with, but in more general terms" (W. Marxsen, Introduction to the New Testament. Trans. G. Buswell. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 95).

<sup>125</sup> Minear, Obedience, 11.

chapter 6). Rom 13:13f. is, at the very least, the type of sobering admonition such persons need to hear occasionally.

To summarize, the Gentile Christian addressees of Romans are recognized by Paul to be of good repute, knowledgeable, and possessors of an acceptable (Pauline?) standard of teaching. Unfortunately, their knowledge and sense of freedom from the law have produced a distorted sense of pride of position *vis-a-vis* unbelieving Jews. Such characteristics are consistent with the behaviour and attitude of the strong which we have observed in Rom 14:1f. It is clear from the latter passage that their proud disdain is not only directed toward *unbelieving* Israel, but also toward the weak in faith, those (predominantly) Jewish Christians who still feel some degree of loyalty to the Torah. While Paul can endorse the fundamental insights of the strong ones, such as the conviction that "nothing is unclean in itself" (Rom 14:14) and "everything is clean" (Rom 14:20), he shows deep concern over the anti-Judaistic behaviour that this knowledge is producing.

In the final section of this chapter, we briefly consider how Paul's presentation of the gospel suits the scenario we have just described. Beker correctly observes that Romans is dominated by "the relation of peoples (Jews & Gentiles) in

God's salvation-historical plan."<sup>126</sup> Beginning with the thesis statement of 1:16-17, "Paul undertakes an exposition of the righteous purpose of God both for Jew and Gentile as fulfilled in Jesus Christ and revealed in the Gospel."<sup>127</sup> The emphasis and elaboration on God's justifying grace<sup>128</sup> is intended to clarify the significance of Christ for the church made up of Jew and Gentile. "In 3:21f. Paul interprets the meaning of the Christ event as the present eschatological activity of God which has transformed the relationship between Jew and Gentile."<sup>129</sup> Here Paul presents his gospel of justification as "the only saving revelation of the end-times salvation 'for everyone who believes,'" Gentiles and Jews.<sup>130</sup>

Campbell's survey of the argument provides insight into the correlation between the circumstances in Rome as we have

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<sup>126</sup> Beker, Paul, 71. Further on this theme, note the outstanding contribution of Krister Stendahl in Paul Among Jews and Gentiles And Other Essays (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>127</sup> William S. Campbell, "Why Did Paul Write Romans?," *Exp Tim* 85 (1973-4): 268.

<sup>128</sup> For recent discussions on the centrality of justification in Romans, see Campbell ("Romans III"), Stuhlmacher ("The Theme of Romans," in Debate), and Westerholm (Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] esp. chapter 8, "Justification by Faith").

<sup>129</sup> Campbell, "Romans III," 253.

<sup>130</sup> Stuhlmacher, "Theme," 337.

determined them and the content of Paul's gospel. He argues that Paul's stress upon the equality of Jew and Gentile in sin (3:20) and in the gospel (10:12) is intended "to counteract the animosity between the two groups," the "liberal-minded Gentile Christians (the strong in faith)...[and] the conservative Jewish Christian minority (the weak in faith)."<sup>131</sup> Such division has no place in that very community where God has purposed to make Abraham the father of all believers (4:11-12), "the father of us all" (4:16), both Jews and Gentiles.

As for the privileges incurred by the Jews through the Abrahamic covenant, "Paul is careful to stress that this priority (1:16; 2:9f.) has a religious and not a racial basis (2:28f.; 3:9)."<sup>132</sup> Covenantal advantages notwithstanding, Jews are not "any better off" than Gentiles (3:1-9). But on the other hand, Paul's Gentile readers must not be hasty to disregard the benefits of Israel (3:1-2; 9:4-5). God may be free to choose his people from within (9:6-11) and from outside (9:22ff.) Israel, but his saving purposes continue to include the Jews. "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (11:29).

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<sup>131</sup> Campbell, "Why," 268-9.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 269.

In Rom 9-11, Paul lands the heaviest blows against his readers' misconception and pride concerning their supposed superior status *vis-a'-vis* the Jews. Says Campbell:

Paul's response to the Gentile Christians' misunderstanding of *Heilsgeschichte* and their resulting presumptuous pride is to remind them that they have been grafted into the trunk of Abraham (11:18) and that the salvation of Jew and Gentile is interdependent in the purpose of God (11:28-32). The Christ whom Gentiles worship is none other than the fulfilment (*telos*) of the Law of Judaism (10:4). Election properly understood is not a question of Jew or Gentile but of Jew and Gentile. Thus there can be no foundation for the Gentile Christians' assumption that they have simply replaced the Jews in the Divine purpose. That this is unwarranted is evidenced by the fact that Paul sees his mission (11:13f.) like that of Jesus (15:8f.) as directed to both Jews and Gentiles. Paul aims a final blow at Gentile Christian conceit by claiming that the hardening of Israel is both partial and temporary (11:25f.), and that in any case the ways of God are beyond human comprehension (11:33f.). High-mindedness is therefore ruled out (11:25; 12:3f.) and Jewish and Gentile Christians ought to accept one another freely as Christ has accepted them (15:7).<sup>133</sup>

It appears, therefore, that the strained relations between strong and weak, Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians, evident in Rom 14-15, provides the backdrop for Paul's exposition of the gospel in the earlier portion of the letter. We share Campbell's conclusion:

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

The disunity provides a definite reason for Paul's writing to Rome. The harmful effects that reports of anti-Judaism among Gentile Christians in Rome would be likely to have upon the reception of Paul's collection in Jerusalem (and hence upon the unity of the entire church) explains why Paul should send such a letter to Rome at this time.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE IMPERATIVE OF ACCEPTANCE

Whereas the preceding chapters have been devoted to establishing the identity of the parties envisioned in Rom 14:1, this chapter focuses on the appeal issued by Paul in the text. In demonstrating the strenuous nature of the acceptance which the apostle demands, we will clarify both what he requires and prohibits with respect to the behaviour of the Gentile Christian strong *vis-a'-vis* the Jewish Christian weak.

*Ton de asthenounta tē pistei proslambanesthe...* Paul uses the present imperative here, as in 15:7, to challenge his readers to a continual obligation: "keep on accepting the one who is weak." He calls for a type of behaviour which should characterize relationships within the Christian community in Rome. Apart from Philemon, Rom 14-15 is the only place where Paul employs *proslambanō*, and, consistent with NT usage elsewhere, he does so only in the middle voice. According to BAG, Paul's use of the verb denotes the "receiving or accepting of someone into one's society, one's home, or one's circle of acquaintances."<sup>135</sup> In Rom 14-15, that "society" or "circle" is the fellowship of the Christian community. Just

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<sup>135</sup> BAG, s.v. *proslambanō* 2b, 724.

as Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus back into his fellowship (Philemon 17), so he admonishes the strong to receive the weak into Christian fellowship (Rom 14:1), and both parties to receive each other (Rom 15:7).

The force of this acceptance is especially illumined by Paul's theological/christological grounding of it in 14:3 (*ho theos gar auton proselabeto*) and 15:7 (*kathōs kai ho Christos proselabeto hūmas*). In each of these texts Paul uses the aorist middle of *proslambano* to cite the decisive, past action of God/Christ in accepting the believers in Rome. In 14:3, the judging of the strong by the weak is prohibited on the ground that God has already made a judgment to accept the strong one. In 15:7, continued mutual acceptance is enjoined by Paul on the basis that "Christ has already accepted you."<sup>136</sup>

The nature of this acceptance by God/Christ is clarified elsewhere in Romans. In fact, as Jewett argues, "the clause

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<sup>136</sup> We agree with Cranfield that "it is probably better to take *kathōs* in its causal sense and understand the clause as stating the reason why they must accept one another...than to take *kathōs* in its strictly comparative sense and understand the clause as bringing out the fact that in accepting each other they will be following the example of Christ." C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 2. 739.

'as Christ has welcomed you' succinctly summarizes the main argument of Romans, namely, that God accepts sinners who formerly made themselves into his enemies, and that they are justified by faith rather than by performance."<sup>137</sup> After demonstrating the culpability of Jews and Gentiles in Romans 1-3, Paul proceeds in 3:21-24 to announce the good news of what God has done through Christ to bring both Jew and Gentile into his fellowship. The same route of acceptance (= "righteousness") is valid for both. *ou gar estin diastolē* (3:22). Although "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23), they are nonetheless "justified freely by his grace through the redemption (*tēs apolytrōseōs*) that came by Christ Jesus" (3:24). The effect of God's new manifestation of righteousness is to justify those who had formerly been guilty, both Jew and Gentile, so that he now receives them back in his favour at the price of Christ's atoning blood (3:26). In Romans 5, Paul uses the language of reconciliation (*katalagein*) to describe the effect of God's justifying action. "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life" (v 10). As a result of God's initiative in Christ, the "ungodly" (*asēbon*, v 6), those who were God's "enemies" (*echthroi*), are

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<sup>137</sup> Robert Jewett, Christian Tolerance: Paul's Message to the Modern Church (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 36.

now at peace with God. They have been restored to fellowship with him.

We believe it is this whole complex of God's justifying, redeeming, reconciling activity that Paul has in mind in Rom 14:3 and 15:7 when he speaks of God's/Christ's acceptance of the believers in Rome (the strong in 14:3; both strong and weak in 15:7). What the apostle demands of the strong toward the weak (in 14:1), and of both toward each other (in 15:7), is that they "pass on the same unconditional acceptance to others that they themselves have already received."<sup>138</sup> Paul's appeal in Rom 14:1 obligates the strong "to receive the weak into their fellowship, recognizing them frankly and unreservedly as brothers in Christ."<sup>139</sup>

The pericope which our text opens (Rom 14:1 - 15:13), and for which it sets the keynote, provides further indicators

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 37. Similarly, Delling interprets Paul's admonition (in Rom 14:1, 3, and 15:7) as follows: "As God (or Christ) has taken every member of the Church into fellowship with Himself, so incorporate each other into your Christian circle with no inner reservation." *TDNT* IV, s.v. *proslambanō*, 15.

<sup>139</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 700. Regarding the call to mutual acceptance in Rom 15:7, Jewett interprets Paul's admonition to require both weak and strong believers "to accept others into full fellowship, to put an end to the hostile competition, and to admit the basic legitimacy of the other sides." Jewett, *Tolerance*, 29.

which assist us in understanding the strenuous nature of this acceptance. On the basis of Rom 14:15, it is clear that Paul recognizes acceptance of the weak as a concrete expression of love. "For if your brother is being grieved on account of your eating of food, you are no longer walking according to love." In other words, if the strong believer<sup>140</sup> would accept the weak brother in love, affirming his legitimate place in the Christian community, he would be willing to forego such behaviour as would hurt the faith of his weaker brother. As he does in 1 Corinthians 8, Paul acknowledges love, not knowledge or superior insight, as the guiding principle for Christian behaviour. Thus, love is "the means by which one's freedom in Christ is authentically realized."<sup>141</sup> We agree with Ridderbos:

For although Paul recognizes the freedom of Christians on the one hand, also in the use of meat and drink, etc., with an appeal to love he warns against every individualistic and spiritualistic application of this liberty, namely, whenever this might give the weak in faith an occasion to sin. If in that case "the strong" would not wish to impose restrictions on themselves, they

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<sup>140</sup> Note the use of the second person singular, which Paul employs to "drive home the earnestness of his exhortation." Cranfield, Romans, 714.

<sup>141</sup> Victor P. Furnish, Love Command in the New Testament (New York: Abingdon, 1972) 116.

would be sinning against love... Here love stands over against the "knowledge" out of which the strong live.<sup>142</sup>

There is an obvious correlation, therefore, between Paul's ethic of acceptance voiced in Rom 14:1 and the fundamental rule of love which he posits earlier in the ethical section of the letter (in 12:9; 13:8-10), and to which he refers again in 14:15.

Also flowing out of this ethic of acceptance are the exhortations of Rom 14:19 ("Let us consider the things that make for peace and the things that make for edification for one another") and 15:2 ("Let each of us please his neighbour for his good unto edification"). We note that "things of peace" and "things of edification" do not refer to two distinct sets of things. Rather, the latter fills out and clarifies the significance of the former. "What is required is an altogether earnest seeking to promote among brethren such a true peace (based on the fundamental peace with God which God Himself has established in Christ) as must manifest itself in mutual upbuilding."<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Herman N. Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, Trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 295. He concludes his point by citing 1 Cor 8:2; 10:23,24; and Rom 14:15.

<sup>143</sup> Cranfield, Romans, 721.

As elsewhere in Paul's letters, the call for "upbuilding" (*oikodomein*), together with that for love, constitutes the highest of ethical priorities governing relationships within the Christian community.<sup>144</sup> In relation to Paul's ethic of acceptance, it further illumines the nature of what the apostle requires of the strong in Rom 14:1. The strong are expected to do much more than passively "tolerate," or "put up with," the weak. They must actively seek the building up of the weak with a view to their growth in Christ and in the community. For Paul, such behaviour constitutes "pleasing the neighbour for his good" (Rom 15:2), and he cites Christ as the model for such edifying acceptance (Rom 15:3-6).<sup>145</sup>

Rom 15:1 further elucidates the acceptance which Paul requires of the strong. "We who are the strong ones ought to bear with (*bastazein*) the weaknesses of the powerless, but not to please ourselves." The apostle uses *bastazein* also in Gal 6:2, when he admonishes believers to "bear one another's burdens." There, as here, *bastazein* includes the idea of

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<sup>144</sup> In addition to the passages under consideration, we note 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Cor 8:1; 10:23; 14:5, 17. See further the discussion by Otto Michel in *TDNT* V, s.v. 140-42.

<sup>145</sup> On the presentation of Christ as model for such other-directed behaviour, note the parallel between Rom 15:3-6 and Phil 2:1-11.

"carry." "Paul is requiring from the strong something much more positive than that they should tolerate the weaknesses of the weak. What is required is that the strong should actually help the weak by taking something of the weight of the burden which they have to carry off their shoulders on to their own."<sup>146</sup> As is clear from the context, this requires of the strong that they accommodate the scruples of the weak. In this way the strong carry the reservations of the weak, allowing their own freedom to be limited for the sake of the others. Thus, counsels Paul, "it is better not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything in which your brother takes offense" (14:21).

We observe, then, that the positive thrust of Paul's imperative of acceptance in Rom 14:1 is very earnest. He reinforces the strenuousness of this acceptance by adding the qualifying purpose clause in v 1b: *mē eis diakriseis*

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<sup>146</sup> Cranfield, Romans, 730. Dunn agrees that we should take *bastazein* in this strong sense of carrying: "The parallel with Gal 6:2 suggests further that Paul made the double tie-up between Is 53:4, Christ's own ministry as the servant of Yahweh, and the obligation on the followers of Jesus to 'bear one another's burdens.'" James D. G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word Books, 1988) 837.

Barrett prefers the milder sense of "endure," but grants the possibility that "Paul means to make use of the ambiguity of the word and to play upon both meanings. Strong Christians must endure the vagaries of their weak brethren, and help them in their difficulties." C. K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1962) 269.

*dialogismōn*. We agree with Buchsel that this construction is "enigmatically brief and not very clear."<sup>147</sup> A variety of translations are offered in the literature:

- "but not for the purpose of getting into quarrels about opinions" (BAG);<sup>148</sup>
- "do not take him in simply for discussions of his scruples" (Barrett);<sup>149</sup>
- "but not for evaluation of thoughts" (Buchsel);<sup>150</sup>
- "but not in order to pass judgment on his scruples" (Cranfield);<sup>151</sup>
- "though not with a view to settling disputes" (Dunn);<sup>152</sup>
- "but not for judgments about debatable opinions" (Käsemann);<sup>153</sup>
- "but there is to be no disputing about trifles" (Schrenk).<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Buchsel, *TDNT* III, s.v. *diakrisis*, 949.

<sup>148</sup> BAG, s.v. *diakrisis* 2.

<sup>149</sup> Barrett, *Romans*, 257.

<sup>150</sup> Buchsel, *TDNT* III, s.v. *diakrisis*, 949-50.

<sup>151</sup> Cranfield, *Romans*, 701.

<sup>152</sup> Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 798.

<sup>153</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, Trans. Geoffrey W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 367.

<sup>154</sup> Schrenk, *TDNT* II, s.v. *dialogismos*, 97.

We favour a translation and interpretation which captures the "judgment" dimension of *diakriseis*. It is consistent with Paul's only other usage of the word, in 1 Cor 12:10, where he speaks of the Spirit giving to some persons *diakriseis pneumatōn* (the ability to make a judgment about [discriminate] spirits). It also fits the context, especially Rom 14:1-13, where Paul addresses the problem of (mutual) judging in the Roman Christian community.<sup>155</sup>

We also prefer to translate *dialogismōn* as "scruples." Neither "thoughts" or "opinions" adequately suit the context. In our earlier discussion (Chapter One), we argued that the weakness of "the weak in faith" is located in his uncertainty about what God requires relative to the prescriptions of Judaism. He does not share the insight, or "gnosis," of the strong concerning the implications of what God has done through Christ to bring righteousness to believers. The weak believer is thus vulnerable to being grieved by the convictions and practices of the strong. "Scruples" denotes the type of "thoughts" or "opinions" to which the weak holds.

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<sup>155</sup> Commenting on the appearance of *diakriseis* in Rom 14:1, Meeks calls it "the first pejorative use of a word on the root *krin-*, which becomes a leitmotif of our text." W. A. Meeks, "Judgment and the Brother: Rom 14:1 - 15:13," in Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament, FS E. E. Ellis, Ed. G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987; Tübingen: Mohr, 1987) 291. Note our earlier discussion of this motif of judgment in Chapter One.

His thoughts are not firm or fixed, but uncertain. They betray a degree of "anxious reflection" and "doubt," both of which are offered as possible translations (in BAG and *TDNT*).

We understand the genitive, *dialogismōn*, to be objective in this case. "Judgments about scruples" are in view, not "judgments of, or by, scruples." Paul is forbidding a judging activity on the part of the strong with respect to thoughts, or scruples, harboured by the weak.

What, therefore, is the nature of the acceptance which Paul requires of the strong in Rom 14:1? It is an acceptance that is full and unconditional. The strong must not welcome the weak for the purpose of scrutinizing the latter's sensitivities about ritual obligations before the Lord. Since the Lord is judge of all, and he has accepted both strong and weak into his fellowship (Rom 14:3; 15:7), the strong must demonstrate that same acceptance toward the weak in the Roman Christian community. In love, they must permit their own liberty to be curtailed for the sake of the weak and their salvation. In spite of their greater insight, the strong ones should conduct themselves in a way that will contribute to the building up of the weak. They must be willing to put their shoulders under the burdens of the weak and help them carry on with their sensitivities, even though they disagree with them

about the binding nature of the law as it relates to issues of food and days. Such a strenuous acceptance is commended by Paul as Christlike (Rom 15:3-9) and holds promise for the fulfilment of God's desire for Jew and Gentile to join voices in glorifying him for his mercy (Rom 15:8-12).

## CONCLUSION

As acknowledged in our introduction, the framework for our thesis is "the Romans debate," a debate principally concerned with the question, "Why did Paul write Romans?" A variety of issues are involved in seeking an answer, among them questions of historical context, literary integrity, rhetoric of argumentation, and theological content. Each of these offers a legitimate avenue of pursuit.

In the context of this broad investigation into the purpose of Romans, our focus has been very limited. We have zeroed in on a single text, a single admonition -- Rom 14:1. The text has a bearing on the question of the purpose and occasion of Romans, but we have confined ourselves to the question of the purpose and occasion of this particular exhortation. Nearly two thousand years ago, Paul wrote to believers in Rome, "Accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his scruples." Why? What reason did he have to write these words? To whom did he address them? What situation did he have in mind? What meaning did the admonition convey to the addressees?

Our task in answering such questions has been an exegetical one, devoted to interpreting Paul's original intent. This pursuit entailed examination of a number of factors, primary among them:

- the meaning of words and expressions used;
- the immediate literary context, Rom 14:1 - 15:13, as well as the larger context of the letter;
- the historical context of first century Christianity and Judaism.

We began with a weighty assumption, that Romans is as much an occasional letter as are the other NT documents written by him. Granting "the convergence of causes that motivate the letter,"<sup>156</sup> including factors in his own situation, we adopted the premise that Paul was aware of circumstances within the Roman Christian community that compelled him to address such a correspondence to them. We further assumed that those circumstances included particular relationship dynamics that warranted the specific admonition of our text. We set out to test our premise by means of a thorough exegetical examination, confident that the evidence is sufficient to demonstrate not only the nature of the

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<sup>156</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 77.

acceptance demanded by Paul, but also the identity of the addressees and the circumstances addressed.

Careful consideration of all factors has led us to conclude the following:

1. Paul is addressing his admonition to believers who share his insight and conviction about being set free from the law's demands by virtue of the righteousness which God has now provided through Jesus Christ. These believers, the "strong," may have included in their number Jews (like Paul), but were primarily Gentile Christians.
2. Paul is addressing a situation in which tension exists between the Gentile Christian "strong" and those who are "weak in faith." The latter are predominantly *Jewish* Christians who are uncertain about the implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ regarding the normativity of the Torah. Therefore, they are unable to assume the same posture of freedom as the "strong." Their weakness of faith is evident in their scruples concerning the observance of food and calendar laws. Although their vegetarianism exceeded the purity laws regarding food, we observed that such stringency was evident elsewhere in Diaspora Judaism.
3. In this situation, where both parties were guilty of judging and antagonizing the other, Paul admonishes the strong to take responsibility for embracing the weak as full partners

in the Christian community. He exhorts them to exhibit a strenuous God-/Christ-like acceptance that is borne of love and a desire to edify the weaker members in their faith, an acceptance which has no room for judging where God has already judged, and which is willing to accommodate the sensitivities of the powerless.

To summarize, in the words of our thesis, we have demonstrated that *in Rom 14:1, Paul launches an urgent appeal for the predominantly Gentile Christian "strong" ones in Rome to exercise vigorous acceptance of the predominantly Jewish Christian "weak in faith" who, although sharing in the righteousness of God in Christ, continue to exhibit scruples about food and calendar laws.*

It is our hope that this study will contribute, in some small way, to the ongoing "Romans debate." We have confirmed the plausibility of a concrete situation existing in Rome which warranted the address of this text. We have also shown how our interpretation harmonizes with the major themes of the letter, which are clearly concerned with the relationship between Jew and Gentile in the redemptive-historical moment inaugurated by God's action in Christ. Our study confirms the existence of a significant dimension of Jewish-Gentile relations in Rome, one which we believe contributes to a

clearer understanding of Paul's motivation not only for writing Rom 14:1 (- 15:13), but the entire letter.

As the (Jewish) apostle to the Gentiles, it was the burden of Paul's heart to see Jew and Gentile sharing together in the righteousness which God has now made available through Christ, and joining voices as one to glorify the God and Father of his Lord Jesus Christ. To that end, in one significant corner of the empire, and at a strategic juncture of his apostolic career, Paul judged it to be imperative for his fellow "strong" believers to "keep on accepting the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his scruples." Only by way of such strenuous acceptance could the apostle expect to realize his vision, and God's prophetic promise, for a church made up of Jew and Gentile.

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