

ROMANS 14:5–6 IN ITS SOCIAL SETTING

NORMAN H. YOUNG
Avondale College of Higher Education

It is generally accepted that the communities in Rome that Paul addressed were composed of both Gentiles and Jews.¹ At the time Paul wrote, the Gentiles probably outnumbered the Jews in the Roman churches.² However, it is also recognized that the dispute in Rome was more complex than merely an ethnic distinction.³ Porter identifies the “strong” with the Gentiles (and some Jews) and the “weak” with the Jews, but he then qualifies it: “However, the major focus of this part of the letter is not Jewish-Christian relations at all, but, for Paul at least, the much more important issue of how Christians who disagree with each other even over fundamental theological issues, treat each other.”⁴

Probably many of the Gentiles were previously proselytes and God-fearers; hence the Jewish influence in the Roman churches may have been stronger than the number of Jewish Christians present in the congregations might indicate.⁵ Paul’s language regarding the “strong” and the “weak” in Romans

¹James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 680–89; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, ed. Marshall D. Johnson, trans. Michael Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 115–16. There are some dissenters, such as S. K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 22–33, 287–89; A. A. Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 54–69. Raphael Rodríguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew: Reappraising Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 257–62.

²The writer favors the view that the “strong” were mainly Gentile believers (including God-fearers) and the “weak” were predominantly Jewish believers (including proselytes). However, resolving this difficult issue is not germane to the thesis of this essay. Despite parallels, he also sees the emphasis in 1 Cor 8–10 on food sacrificed to idols as distinct from the issue Paul faces in Rom 14–15.

³For example, Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*, 321; 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 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 78. Luke Timothy Johnson concludes that “the Jew-Gentile aspect is muted” (*Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smythe & Helwys, 2012 [1996]), 209.

⁴Stanley E. Porter, *The Letter to the Romans: Linguistic and Literary Commentary*, NTM 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2015), 258.

⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 359; P. Stuhlmacher, “The Purpose of Romans,” in *The Romans Debate*, 238; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 75.

14–15 may or may not refer specifically to Gentiles and Jews. Indeed, there has been considerable debate over the identity of those that Paul occasionally refers to as “strong” and “weak” in Romans 14–15, and over the affinities of these terms with the similar language used in 1 Corinthians 8.⁶ Be that as it may, for the purpose of this essay we do not need to enter into these discussions other than to note that most agree that in the context of the worshipping communities in Rome the “strong” appear to be freer in their attitude toward Jewish customs concerning food and days compared with the stricter adherence of the “weak.”⁷ Therefore, Longenecker is justified in concluding that “the early Christian faith at Rome had a distinctly Jewish character.”⁸

Therefore, leaving the Jew-Gentile debate aside, this essay will argue, contrary to the majority, that the second clause in Rom 14:5b (ὅς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) is positive; that “every day” means just what it says; that Paul deals first with the “strong” and then with the “weak;” that the issue over diet is inseparable from the dispute over the “days;” that both the diet and the days in the tension between the “strong” and the “weak” had a Jewish background; that the days were the communal festivals of Judaism as incorporated into Christian fellowship; and finally, that Paul’s main purpose in Romans 14–15 was to maintain harmonious relationships between the two parties in the congregational fellowship, especially in the communal meals. The implications of these points for understanding Romans 14–15 will be developed in the rest of this essay.

⁶J. P. Sampley, “The Weak and the Strong: Paul’s Careful and Crafty Rhetorical Strategy in Romans 14:1–15:13,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 40–52; Mark Reasoner, “The Theology of Romans 12:1–15:13,” in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 297; idem, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1–15.13 in Context*, SNTSMS 103 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 136–37; Volker Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom: zu Herkunft und Funktion der Antithese in 1 Kor 8,1–11,1 und in Röm 14,1–15,13*, WUNT 2/200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 438–40, passim.

⁷The majority of commentators do in fact relate the “strong” to Gentiles and the “weak” to Jews, although there are several dissenters such as Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 95–115; James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-Definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1993), 85–91; see also n. 1 above.

⁸R. N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical Issues in Paul’s Most Famous Letter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 72.

The Translation of Romans 14:5ab

Crucial to a correct understanding of Rom 14:5 is the translation of the verb κρίνω. Lexically, it has a wide range of meanings: “to judge,” “to distinguish,” “to adjudge,” “to prefer,” “to separate,” “to decide,” “to value,” “to approve,” and “to select.”⁹ In Rom 14:5ab (ὅς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ’ ἡμέραν, ὅς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) it clearly means “making a considered decision or value judgment.” I shall generally follow the NEB and the NET and translate the verb κρίνει in v. 5ab as “regard.” The preposition παρά with the accusative ἡμέραν is comparative, and it can have either an exclusive or an inclusive meaning. In an exclusive sense, one element in the comparison may virtually be ignored and the significance then becomes “instead of,” “rather than,” or “to the exclusion of.”¹⁰ In an inclusive sense, the comparison is a matter of degree and not exclusion; both elements share more or less in the action of the verb and παρά then conveys the meaning “more than,” “over and above,” or “beyond.”¹¹

The context favors an inclusive sense for παρά in v. 5a. Thus v. 5a (ὅς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ’ ἡμέραν) may be translated as “one prefers one day to another,”¹² which makes a smooth attachment of both nouns (ἡμέραν) to the same verb κρίνει: “some regard one day more than they regard another day.” To regard one day as more important than another day implies that both days are esteemed to some degree. How then do we understand the second clause in v. 5b (ὅς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν)?

The coupling of ὅς μὲν with ὅς δὲ in v. 5ab emphasizes an alternative, that is, “on the one hand one regards this . . . but on the other hand another regards that,” and this construction ties the two clauses closely together.¹³ This means that κρίνει should have the same nuance in both clauses.¹⁴ Hence, if

⁹“κρίνω,” *LSJ* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 996; “κρίνω,” *BDAG* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 567–68, Büchsel, “κρίνω,” *TDNT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–1976), 3:922–23.

¹⁰See Luke 18:14 (“this man went down to his house having been justified instead of that other”); Rom 1:25 (“they served the creation instead of the One who created it”); 1 Cor 3:11 (“no-one can lay another foundation instead of the one that has been laid”).

¹¹In Luke 13:2 and 4 both groups are sinners, in Heb 3:3 both Moses and Jesus have glory, and in Heb 9:23 both the pattern and the heavenly things are dedicated with sacrifice. In these cases the difference is a matter of degree.

¹²“κρίνω,” *BDAG*, 567.

¹³This is, as in v. 2, where ὅς μὲν and ὅς δὲ contrast the “strong” and the “weak” (see Ulrich Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 3 vols., EKKNT 6 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978], 3:83).

¹⁴Herold Weiss, “Paul and the Judging of Days,” *ZNW* 86 (1995): 143. For a criticism see Gäckle, *Starken*, 358–59.

the first clause makes a positive statement, so then ought the second. One would then translate v. 5ab as, “one regards a certain day as above another day, while another regards every day.”¹⁵ If the first clause implies the recognition of *selected* days, the second implies the recognition of *all* (πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) the days. It is possible that the πᾶσαν in v. 5b is as exaggerated as the πάντα in v. 2.¹⁶ To regard every day, of course, requires that there be more than one day.

Given the clear indications that Romans 14 is addressing Jewish issues, it will be argued below that both clauses are referring to Jewish festival days, and that both are positive. The contrast between the two groups is that one regards certain holy days as essential (possibly Passover, Pentecost, and Sabbath), while another thinks that all the Jewish holy days should be honored.¹⁷ In contrast, many commentators take v. 5b negatively and read the verse as indicating that “some members of the Roman community of Christians are committed to a liturgical calendar . . . while others feel free from the obligation to observe holy days.”¹⁸ Gundry speaks of “observers and nonobservers of holy days” and equates them respectively with the vegetarians and the non-vegetarians.¹⁹ Barclay likewise describes the difference between the “strong” and the “weak” as “eating or not eating [meat], observing or not observing special days.”²⁰ This effectively reverses what the text actually says: “Another regards every day” does not, indeed cannot, mean “no day at all.”²¹

¹⁵The singular ἡμέραν does not oblige us to think that the selection is literally of one single day over another day.

¹⁶Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 837.

¹⁷Colin G. Kruse translates v. 5 literally as, “for one man regards a day distinct from [another] day; one man regards every day” (*Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, PNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 515).

¹⁸Robert Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul’s Message to the Modern Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 131. Similarly R. A. Culpepper, “God’s Righteousness in the Life of His People Romans 12–15,” *RevExp* 73 (1976): 460; John M. G. Barclay, “‘Do We Undermine the Law?’ A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 293; Eduard Lohse, *Der Brief an die Römer*, KEK 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), 371; Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2007), 181, 353.

¹⁹Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 182.

²⁰John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 513. Later he says the “strong” “observe every day alike,” which has the “strong” observing and not observing days. This contradiction results because he takes “observe every day alike” to mean treats every day in the week as ordinary days.

²¹BDAG translates Rom 14:5b with “the other holds every day in esteem” (567).

The common translation—“whereas that man regards all days alike” (NEB, but also KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, JBP, GNB, CEV, NLT)—is particularly misleading as it is invariably taken to mean “no holy day;” whereas it ought to be understood as saying “regarding every festival day alike as holy.” One might paraphrase the majority view as follows: One regards one day [of the holy feasts] as religiously superior to the other days [of the holy feasts], but others regard every day [in the week] as of equal value [that is, of no religious significance]. This not only takes the first κρίνει positively and the second negatively, it also changes the meaning of the accusative ἡμέραν in the one sentence from a specific holy day to an ordinary week day. The fact of the matter is that the text has no “alike” and makes perfectly good sense when translated for what it actually says, namely, “but another regards every day” (ὄς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν).

At this stage five conclusions can be drawn:

1. The two clauses in Rom 14:5ab (ὄς μὲν . . . ὄς δέ) are tightly bound together in a contrast. This contrast between days is lost with a contrast between days and no day.
2. The verb κρίνω consequently has the same positive meaning in both clauses.
3. Some regard one day above another day in a group of days (v. 5a).
4. Others regard every day in the same group of days (v. 5b)
5. Point 4 follows from taking κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν as it reads without expansion, namely, “regards every day.”
6. Paul consistently uses ἡμέραν in vv. 5–6 to mean “feast days.”

Paul’s Order in Addressing the “Strong” and the “Weak”

Although the actual terms “strong” and “weak” are found only in Rom 14:2 (ὁ ἀσθενῶν) and 15:1 (οἱ δυνάτατοι, τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ἀδυνάτων), the contrast between the two groups is clearly the issue throughout the two chapters. The majority of commentators assume that Rom 14:5 has the order “weak” then “strong,” whereas I shall argue for the order “strong” then “weak.”²² This would mean the “strong” κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ’ ἡμέραν (regard a day above a day), and the “weak” κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν (regard every day). The language “every day” implies more than one day, that is, a group of associated days. So the first clause indicates that “the strong” regard certain day[s] in the group more than other day[s] (v. 5a), while the second clause denotes that the “weak” regard “every day” in the group (κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν, v. 5b).

In contrast, Thomas Tobin argues that the “strong” observe no day while the “weak” observe the Sabbath: “The strong do not distinguish one day from

²²James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38B (Dallas: Word, 1988), 805, 11–12; Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 139; Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” 293; Jewett, *Romans*, 832.

another, but the weak do.”²³ D. R. de Lacey takes the opposite view and argues that “the parallelism in vv. 2, 5, and 6 suggests that it is the strong and not the weak who observe ‘days.’”²⁴ This essay agrees with de Lacey’s referring of v. 5a to the “strong,” but against Tobin and de Lacey it will argue that both the “strong” and the “weak” regard days.²⁵

Since Paul generally states the attitude of the “strong” first, and then the position of the “weak,” it is likely that vv. 5–6 would also follow this order. This would mean it is the “strong” that are being selective regarding the days on which to meet for fellowship meals, while the “weak” would be those who wish to gather on most of the holy days. The texts of table 1 demonstrate Paul’s tendency to deal with the “strong” first, especially in antithetical sentences.²⁶

The admonitions in Romans 14 (and even 15) are largely directed at the “strong,” as the following list demonstrates, and as a consequence we can conclude that ἀδελφός generally refers to the “weak brother” (vv. 10b, 13, 15, 21).²⁷

- V. 1: Τὸν δὲ ἀσθενοῦντα τῇ πίστει προσλαμβάνεσθε
 V. 13b: τοῦτο κρίνατε μᾶλλον, τὸ μὴ τιθέναι πρόσκομμα τῷ ἀδελφῷ.²⁸
 V. 15a: εἰ γὰρ διὰ βρώμα ὁ ἀδελφός σου λυπεῖται
 V. 15b: οὐκέτι κατὰ ἀγάπην περιπατεῖς
 V. 15c: μὴ τῷ βρώματί σου ἐκείνον ἀπόλλυε
 V. 16: μὴ βλασφημείσθω οὖν ὑμῶν τὸ ἀγαθόν
 V. 20: μὴ ἔνεκεν βρώματος κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ
 V. 22: σὺ πίστιν [ἦν] ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ.²⁹

²³Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in its Contexts: The Argument of Romans* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 41.

²⁴D. R. de Lacey, “The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 182.

²⁵Ross Cole, “But Everyone Keeps the Day! A Novel Reading of Rom 14:5, 6” (unpublished manuscript, nd), 6.

²⁶The same pattern of addressing the “strong” first and then the “weak” is evident also in 1 Cor 8.

²⁷Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “‘Everything Is Clean’ and ‘Everything That Is Not of Faith Is Sin’: The Logic of Pauline Casuistry in Romans 14.1–15.13,” in *Paul, Grace and Freedom: Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, ed. Paul Middleton et al. (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 23–25, 29.

²⁸Jewett, argues that both vv. 13a and 13b refer to the “strong” and the “weak.” However, it seems to me that v. 13b applies more readily to the “strong” (*Romans*, 856–57).

²⁹This sentence is somewhat inclusive, though the sentiments apply more to the “strong” than to the “weak.”

Thus Paul in Rom 14, with hardly an exception, deals with the two groups in the order of the “strong” first and then the “weak.”

Table 1. Strong and weak in Romans 14 and 15

Strong	Weak
ὁς μὲν πιστεύει φαγεῖν πάντα (14:2a)	ὁ δὲ ἀσθενῶν λάχανα ἐσθίει (14:2b)
ὁ ἐσθίων τὸν μὴ ἐσθιοντα μὴ ἐξουθενεῖτω (14:3a)	ὁ δὲ μὴ ἐσθίων τὸν ἐσθιοντα μὴ κρινέτω (14:3b)
ὁς μὲν γὰρ κρίνει ἡμέραν παρ’ ἡμέραν (14:5a)	ὁς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν (14:5b)
ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ φρονεῖ (14:6a)	
καὶ ὁ ἐσθίων κυρίῳ ἐσθίει (14:6b)	καὶ ὁ μὴ ἐσθίων κυρίῳ οὐκ ἐσθίει (14:6c)
μακάριος ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτὸν ἐν ᾧ δοκιμάζει (14:22b)	ὁ δὲ διακρινόμενος ἐὰν φάγη κατακέκριται, ὅτι οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως (14:23a)
ὀφείλομεν δὲ ἡμεῖς οἱ δυνατοὶ (15:1a)	τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ἀδυνάτων βαστάζειν (15:1b)

Notes: The shaded row illustrates the parallel nature of v. 5 with the other verses, but also recognizes that this is the issue to be proved. 14:10 reverses this order in that “σὺ δὲ τί κρίνεις” refers to “ὁ μὴ ἐσθίων, ἢ καὶ σὺ το ὁ ἐσθίων,” which places the “weak” first. The use of ἢ καὶ and the same verbs κρίνω and ἐξουθενέω as in v. 3 makes it difficult to apply both clauses to the “strong” (William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 5th ed., ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902], 389).

Sabbath Day, Sunday, Feast Day, or Fast Day?

John Barclay provides a good example of the tendency to take the contrast in Rom 14:5ab to mean observance versus non-observance: “Thus the alternative to sabbath-and-synagogue has to be not some partial sabbath of lighting lamps or shutting up shop, but treating every day alike.”³⁰ For Barclay, v. 5ab means the “weak” observe Sabbath and the “strong” treat every day in the week as ordinary days, that is, the “strong” have no special day of worship.³¹ Cranfield is quite adamant that “the words κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν can only

³⁰Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” 305.

³¹The “weak” “keep *kasbrut* and observe Sabbaths” (Barclay, *Gift*, 517).

mean ‘esteems every day alike,’ ‘makes no difference between days.’”³² This would be meaningful in the context if it meant “esteems every festival day alike as holy, makes no difference between holy days;” but generally it is assumed to mean “makes no difference between days but treats every day in the week as just another day.”

The view that the Sabbath is especially in focus is so widely accepted by scholars that most take it as a given.³³ Even those scholars who begin by mentioning the OT festivals usually then go on to concentrate especially on the Sabbath.³⁴ Brian Rosner appeals to Rom 14:5b (and Gal 4:9–11) for his proof that Paul “explicitly sets aside” the Sabbath, which again forces Paul’s positive κρίνει to become negative.³⁵ However, if one takes the first clause as particularly referring to the Sabbath, then of course a positive reading of the second κρίνει must also include the Sabbath, since the text refers to some who regard, or who want the congregations to regard, every day (κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν, v. 5b).³⁶ The meaning would then be “some regard the Sabbath, Passover, and Pentecost as more important than the other holy days, while others regard all the holy days including the Sabbath as equally holy.”

If, as has been argued, the second clause (v. 5b) cannot mean that some in the Roman churches regarded no day as holy, could it be understood metaphorically as referring to sabbatizing the whole week through the believer’s ethical life?³⁷ This position requires expanding v. 5b to read “one

³²Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 705.

³³Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 715–16; Douglas J. Moo, *Romans: From Biblical Text, to Contemporary Life*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 449–53; Wayne Meeks, “Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1–15:3,” in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Otto Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 292; Reasoner, “The Theology of Romans 12:1–15:13,” 297; Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in its Contexts*, 405; Gäckle, *Starken*, 358 (“die Identifikation mit der Sabbatproblematik als plausibelste Lösung erscheinen”), 361; Rodríguez, *If You Call*, 268–74.

³⁴Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 805; Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, 3rd ed., THNT 6 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006), 316–17; Carl N. Toney, *Paul’s Inclusive Ethic*, WUNT 2/252 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 61–63.

³⁵Brian Rosner, “Paul’s Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 214.

³⁶By negative I mean taking κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν as “esteeming every day alike as of no religious significance.”

³⁷F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., TNTC (London: Tyndale, 1985), 231; Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, trans. A. A. K. Graham (E.T. London: SCM, 1968), 102–5; Dieter Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer: Übersetzt und erklärt*, RNT (Regensburg: Pustet, 1985), 225; Weiss, “Paul and the

regards every day [of the week as a Sabbath],” rather than the more likely meaning that “one regards every [festival] day.”³⁸ Peter J. Tomson appeals to Hillel,³⁹ and even the Cynics, in an attempt to support the every-day-of-the-week-a-Sabbath view.⁴⁰ Hillel and Philo are of course extending the sanctity of the Sabbath to the other days of the week, but they are not substituting the ethical life for the Sabbath. There is nothing in the context of Rom 14:5–6 to indicate that Paul is construing the Sabbath as a metaphor for the whole life. The fatal flaw in the argument is that it assumes the order “weak” then “strong,” which reverses Paul’s usual sequence in the immediate context.

A further difficulty for the sabbatizing position is that it changes the meaning of κρίνω compared with the first clause, for in fact no day is actually given any regard. It also gives a literal meaning to ἡμέραν in the first clause (v. 5a) and a metaphorical one in the second (v. 5b). A religious community having no specific holy day would be an oxymoron in the first century. As Kruse notes, why would those who regard every day as a Sabbath condemn those who regard the Sabbath as a Sabbath?⁴¹ Another suggestion is that the contrast is between those who observe Sabbath and those who gather on Sunday, but this entirely misconstrues the nature of the juxtaposition.⁴²

The difference is not between one who regards one day and another who regards an alternative day, but rather between one who regards some days as more important than other days in a group of holy days, and one who regards every day in the same group of holy days as equally important. The Sabbath-Sunday view also reverses Paul’s order by placing the “weak” first instead of the “strong.” However, at least this minority position acknowledges that both the “strong” and the “weak” are observing days. However, this would not be true if v. 5a meant the “weak” preferred Sunday rather than the Sabbath, while the “strong” dismissed both; but this still places the “weak” first in the contrast, which is contrary to Paul’s habit. Furthermore, it is hard to conceive that the second clause (ὅς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) means “another regards every Lord’s Day.” The nature of Paul’s language makes such a specific identity unlikely.

Judging of Days,” 142–48; Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 157; Haacker, *Römer*, 314; Jewett, *Romans*, 845.

³⁸For a survey of the idea of keeping Sabbath in one’s daily ethical life as espoused by Justin Martyr and others see Rordorf, *Sunday*, 102–5, and to his list we may add Saying 27 from the Gospel of Thomas.

³⁹*Pesiq. Rab.* 23 (115b), *b. Beṣah.* 16a; Philo, *Spec.* 2.41–42.

⁴⁰*Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, CRINT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 245–49.

⁴¹Kruse, *Romans*, 515.

⁴²Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, trans. Siegfried Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 254–55; Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 149.

Indeed, both groups are celebrating days, even if one regards only some of the holy days while another regards all of them. And this is exactly what Paul says: ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ φρονεῖ (v. 6a). Unlike the issue over meals—where both the one eating and the one not eating do it to the Lord (v. 6b)—Paul does not say “he who does not consider the day, does not consider it to the Lord.” He has only the positive statement: “He who considers the day, considers it to the Lord” (v. 6a). This is because both groups are still regarding days whether certain days are considered more important than other days or every day is considered equally important. As David Bolton points out, “the whole community was functioning out of a Torah-based framework.”⁴³ Paul does not write, “he who does not consider the day, does not consider it to the Lord” for the simple reason that such a thing was not what was happening in the Roman churches. All were regarding days, some less and some more, yet all were considering the feasts to some degree. Some ancient scribes were bemused at the lack of balance and added ὁ μὴ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ οὐ φρονεῖ, as even some moderns also unconsciously do.⁴⁴

Does Paul include the Sabbath in his description of the situation in the Roman churches? Probably he does, though this is simply a reasonable inference, as the Sabbath is not directly mentioned in the text.⁴⁵ Both the OT and later Judaism placed the Sabbath within the annual festive days, but they also distinguished it from them.⁴⁶ The text refers to a group of holy days on which the Roman communities were gathering for their fellowship meals. There is nothing in the text to indicate that the focus is especially on the Sabbath; in fact, the emphasis is on a group of festival days. Hence, the Sabbath is probably one of the days in the group, but it should not be isolated from the other festival days and made the exclusive focus of the issue addressed in Rom 14:5–6.

So far, this essay has suggested that the days in vv. 5–6a are feast days; it is time to provide some evidence. It is well-attested that the early Christians continued to celebrate the Jewish festivals. Dunn appeals to 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:6, 16; 27:9, as proof “for the continuing importance of the Jewish festivals

⁴³David J. Bolton, “Who Are You Calling ‘Weak?’ A Short Critique on James Dunn’s Reading of Rom 14,1–15,6,” in *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Udo Schnell (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 622.

⁴⁴For the data on this variant see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 468.

⁴⁵Sampley, “The Weak and the Strong,” 42.

⁴⁶Lev 23:2–3; 4–8. Note the repeated “these are the appointed festivals” in vv. 2 and 4. See Heather A. McKay, *Sabbath and Synagogue: The Question of Sabbath Worship in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 37; J. W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 501–5; Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 388, 393–95.

at this [early] period of Christian development.⁴⁷ James Burtchaell has argued persuasively that the early Christians took over many of the worship structures of the Jewish synagogue.⁴⁸ So the synagogue's practice is probably a good guide to early Christian observation of the festivals. It should also be borne in mind that "there is evidence throughout Romans, and especially in chaps. 14–15, of a form of Christianity that is still attached to the synagogue."⁴⁹

There is little data as to how Diaspora Jews observed the feasts in practice in the synagogues, but it is clear that they kept Sabbath and the festivals "all over the Roman empire."⁵⁰ The evidence indicates that the emphasis was on prayer, scripture-reading, singing hymns, and fellowship meals.⁵¹ Victor Tcherikover notes that "the festivals celebrated in Palestine were also brought to the Diaspora, and these included not only the traditional celebrations such as Passover and Tabernacles, but also the new festivals of Purim and Hanukah."⁵² E. P. Sanders also recognizes that there is evidence for the keeping of the Passover sacrifice in the Diaspora.⁵³ Thus, there is a good case for the position of Burtchaell and others that the early Christians took over many of the worship structures of the Jewish synagogue, though usually with a change in the terms used. Burtchaell notes that the beliefs and practices of churches like Corinth and Rome were strongly influenced by their Jewish Christian membership during the late first century when Acts was written.⁵⁴ Although some deny it, there is good evidence that synagogue worship was

⁴⁷Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 806.

⁴⁸"There is an antecedent likelihood that the first Christians, being Jews, organized themselves in the familiar and conventional ways of the synagogue" (*From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 274, 193–200, passim).

⁴⁹William S. Campbell, "The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1–15:13: The Obligation of Humble Obedience to Christ as the Only Adequate Response to the Mercies of God," in *Pauline Theology, Volume III: Romans*, ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 265. For the contrary see Chrys Caragounis, "From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and 1 Clement" in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 255.

⁵⁰S. Stern, "Jewish Calendar Reckoning in the Graeco-Roman Cities," in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*, ed. John R. Bartlett (London: Routledge, 2002), 107.

⁵¹Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, 175B.C.–A.D. 135*, 2nd ed., 4 vols., ed. Martin Goodman, Fergus Millar, and Geza Vermes, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), 3:1, 144–45, nn. 26–29.

⁵²*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1959; repr. New York: Atheneum, 1979), 355.

⁵³*Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 133–34.

⁵⁴Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*, 192, n. 5.

well established in Judaism at the start of the Christian era, and that it had a profound influence on the worship forms of the early church.⁵⁵

The Issue over Diet and Days

The presence in Rom 14 of the adjectives κοινός (unclean, v. 14) and καθαρός (clean, v. 20) in the context of statements regarding consuming food (βρῶμα) and drink (πόσις) (vv. 15, 17, 20, 21, 23) demonstrate that the dispute over diet and days in vv. 1–6 is Jewish. Indeed, the formation of the early church's communal meals was no doubt influenced by Jesus's practice of eating with a diversity of guests in a Jewish context.⁵⁶

Unless the “strong” and the “weak” were eating together on some mutually agreed days, there could be no dispute over the acceptability of the food being served. Disputes between the “strong” and the “weak” were occurring in the context of their community worship. According to Barclay, “it is in communal practice that the newly formed *habitus* of life in Christ will, or will not, be displayed.”⁵⁷ At home, the “weak” quite likely ate the whole range of foods on the kosher menu—including meat. It was only in the context of the mixed fellowship of the Roman churches that they exercised caution against any inadvertent breach of their dietary scruples.⁵⁸ There is considerable evidence of pious Jews limiting their diet to vegetables when Gentiles were in control of the food preparation.⁵⁹

It is clear that synagogue worship involved fellowship meals.⁶⁰ The only place where Jews felt in sympathetic company was “the domestic sabbath suppers It was inevitable that those suppers would become the treasured occasions for worship among the Jesus people.”⁶¹ As Charlotte Hempel

⁵⁵Pieter W. van der Horst, “Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship before 70 CE?” in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Greco-Roman Period*, ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 33.

⁵⁶Thomas Esposito, *Jesus' Meals with Pharisees and their Liturgical Roots*, AnBib 209 (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical, 2015), 346–49, passim.

⁵⁷Barclay, *Gift*, 517.

⁵⁸Rodríguez, *If You Call*, 265–66.

⁵⁹Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 180–84. See Dan 1:8–16; Tob 1:10 f.; Judith 10:5; 12:2, 9 f., 19; 13:8. See also Esth 14:17; 2 Macc 5:2; 3 Macc 3:4–7; 4 Macc 5:2; Jos. and Asen. 7:1; 8:5; 18:5; 20:8; Josephus, *Life* 14.

⁶⁰Although they did not eat in the synagogue itself on Sabbath, Jews certainly celebrated fellowship meals on the Sabbath (S. Safrai, “Gatherings in the Synagogues on Festivals, Sabbaths and Weekdays,” in *Ancient Synagogues in Israel, Third–Seventh Century CE*, ed. R. Hachlili, BARIS 499, [Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1989], 7; Luke 14:1; 20:46; Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 36–37).

⁶¹Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church*, 285.

observes, “in the context of the Second Temple period it is almost impossible to overstate the significance of table-fellowship both in early Judaism and nascent Christianity.”⁶² There is evidence from Jericho, Ostia, and Stobi of synagogues designed with a *triclinium* as part of their architecture.⁶³ Josephus also provides testimony that the synagogue provided the venue “to hold common meals.”⁶⁴ It should also be noted that the Roman permission for Jews to import certain foods occurred in the context of official approval for them to have places of worship and feast days. Dennis Smith observes that “separate sects within Judaism tended to celebrate their separateness and cohesiveness by holding special meals together.”⁶⁵ Christians likewise practiced their worship at the table, and coming together meant assembling to eat together.⁶⁶ “The reference to ‘giving thanks’ [Rom 14:6] is probably a telltale sign that Paul is thinking of these actions transpiring at the table, when food is shared within the Christian community.”⁶⁷

The issues at Antioch, Rome, and Corinth, to which we may add Caesarea and Colossae, are “related to Jewish dietary laws.”⁶⁸ This is even true regarding the matter of εἰδωλόθυτα, for, though the word does not occur in Romans 14, purity and food were closely related within Judaism. As Carl Toney notes, the fact that Paul uses terms like κοινός (Rom 14:14) and καθαρός (Rom

⁶²Charlotte Hempel, “Who Is Making Dinner at Qumran?” *JTS* 63 (2012): 51.

⁶³Dennis E. Smith, “Dinner with Jesus and Paul: The Social Role of Meals in the Greco-Roman World,” *BRev* 20.4 (2004): 33–34; Peter Richardson, “An Architectural Case for Synagogues as Associations,” in *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins until 200 C. E.*, ed. Birger Olsson and Magnus Zetterholm (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2003), 95, 99; C. Claussen, “Meeting, Community, Synagogue—Different Frameworks of Ancient Jewish Congregations in the Diaspora,” in *The Ancient Synagogue*, 155, 158.

⁶⁴*Ant.*, 14.214–15, 259–61.

⁶⁵Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 133, 150.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 178–79; Robert Jewett, “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10,” *BR* 38 (1993), 32–33. Christians “provide a communal table, but not a communal bed” (τράπεζαν κοινήν παρατίθενται, ἀλλ’ οὐ κοιτὴν, Diogn. 5.7).

⁶⁷Ben Witherington, III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 336.

⁶⁸Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 180. For the dispute over communal meals in Antioch see Nicholas Taylor, *Paul, Antioch and Jerusalem: A Study in Relationships and Authority in Earliest Christianity*, JSNTSup 66 (Sheffield: Academic, 1992), 123–39. There are obvious similarities between Rom 14 and 1 Cor 8–10, but there are also important differences. Nevertheless, despite the absence of the term in Rom 14, εἰδωλόθυτον may have been one of the concerns the “weak” had regarding the fare that the “strong” brought to the common table.

14:20) “indicates that the issue is grounded in Jewish purity concerns.”⁶⁹ Not only was the occasion of the fellowship meals inherited from Judaism, but also the practice of eating together on these festival days came from that tradition. Hence, Paul’s discussion of the days in Rom 14:5–6 should not be separated from the matter of foods in vv. 1–4, 14–23; they are inextricably related. The conjoining of days and food together in v. 6 confirms this. Tomson is unpersuasive in judging the matter of the days to be “a side issue.”⁷⁰

To the contrary, early Christians celebrated their fellowship meals on Jewish festival days, but they debated which days should be celebrated and what food should be eaten at them. So the reference to the days is not a minor unrelated matter that Paul throws in as an aside. The days and the communal meals are the two sides of the same dispute. But were the “when” they were to gather and the “what” they were to eat the only causes of the disruption? Paul was determined to settle the issue over eating and drinking at the Christian fellowship meals and spent two chapters in Romans in an attempt to do so.⁷¹ This would seem to indicate that for Paul the unity of the “strong” and the “weak” in the Christian fellowship was more important than simply the matter of days and food.⁷²

The communal nature of Paul’s discussion concerning days indicates the context was the worship of the congregations. The reference then is not to private practice, but to corporate conduct. Hence Paul’s concern was for peace and for the mutual up-building of believers (v. 19; 15:2), and he, therefore, addressed his readers in the plural (14:7, 8, 12, 13; 15:1, 14). Accordingly, the vegetarianism (14:2–3), the abstinence from wine (v. 21), and the concern over the festival days (vv. 5–6) occurred in the context of the worshipping life of the Roman churches. Barclay has appropriately noted this.⁷³ Paul was discussing here not the general practices of the Roman Christians, but their specific behavior when they met and ate together. The disputes arose when they did (or did not) welcome one another to meals (Rom 14:1–3); and their

⁶⁹Toney, *Paul’s Inclusive Ethic*, 57; Haacker, *Römer*, 51.

⁷⁰Tomson, “Table Fellowship of Jews and Gentiles,” 237.

⁷¹“Table-fellowship, or early Christian meal practice, is one of the most important and appropriate contexts in which the members of the early Christian community . . . seem to experience and experiment with the most intimate and public social interaction. My concern in this chapter lay at the issue of the relationship between difference and equality at the table fellowship of the Roman Christian community” (Jae Won Lee, *Paul and the Politics of Difference: A Contextual Study of the Jewish-Gentile Difference in Galatians and Romans* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014], 160).

⁷²“Paul endeavored to put into practice his conviction of equality of Jews and Gentiles so that Jews maintain their Jewish identity and Gentiles their Gentile identity, that is, equality with difference” (ibid., 165).

⁷³Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?,” 291.

debates were given urgency not as general discussions of lifestyle, but as specific arguments about the food set before them on such occasions. The point is that Gentiles, being in the majority, probably brought much of the food that was served at the communal meals. This is true whether the Gentile Christians were bringing their own food or wealthy Gentile Christian benefactors were supplying the provisions.⁷⁴

That being the case, it is safe to rule out fast days⁷⁵ or asceticism as in any way relevant to the context of Romans 14.⁷⁶ This is true whether it is a Friday or a Sabbath fast.⁷⁷ Paul uses the verb “to eat” (ἐσθίω) thirteen times in Romans 14 and nowhere else in the letter, which does not seem to indicate that fasting was the issue. Dederen treats the matter of “days” as separate from the issue over “eating,” but it is unlikely that Paul “interjected” into the dispute regarding “days” an entirely unrelated matter of a selective diet.⁷⁸ The avoidance of meat and wine was not a lifestyle issue, but resulted from a reluctance on the part of some Christians to eating meat within an ethnically diverse congregation.⁷⁹ The vegetarianism was a radical but pragmatic solution to avoid the risk of pollution when eating food prepared by former pagans. As Francis Watson notes, “abstention from meat and from wine was practiced by Roman

⁷⁴John M. G. Barclay, “Money and Meetings: Group Formation among Diaspora Jews and Early Christians,” in *Vereine, Synagogen und Gemeinden im kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien*, ed. Andreas Gutsfeld and Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 25* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 120; Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 148.

⁷⁵Raoul Dederen, “On Esteeming One Day Better than Another,” *AUSS* 9.1 (1971): 16–35; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 690.

⁷⁶Indeed, as Zeller points out, the suggestion of a fast day scarcely makes sense of the last part of v. 5 (“Bei den ‘Tagen’ handelt es sich wohl nicht um Fasttage, weil sonst V. b kaum sinnvoll ist,” *Römer*, 225). Even if the early church observed *Yom Kippurim*, as a solemn fast it would not have been a kosher issue in the Roman churches (Daniel Stökl, “Christians’ Celebrating ‘Jewish’ Festivals of Autumn,” in *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature: Papers Delivered at the Colloquium of the Institutium Iudaicum, Brussels 18–19 November 2001*, ed. P. J. Tomson and D. Lambers-Petry, WUNT 158 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 53–73).

⁷⁷Margaret Williams, “Being a Jew in Rome: Sabbath Fasting as an Expression of Romano-Jewish Identity,” in *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, ed. John M. G. Barclay, LSTS 45 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 16–18; A. J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: a Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 500–501. Wilckens (*Römer*, 83) leaves it open whether the issue is over fast days or the Sabbath day.

⁷⁸Dederen, “Esteeming,” 18. Dederen notes that “abstinence is the predominant feature,” (“Esteeming,” 30). However, the “not eating” (vv. 3, 6, 21) is not total abstinence as in the case of fasting, but refers only to the avoidance of meat.

⁷⁹Witherington, *Romans*, 336, 346–49.

Jewish Christians (or Christian Jews) *in the context of a predominantly Gentile environment*.⁸⁰ It is true that Jews could and did eat with Gentiles, but “there is a difference, psychological and halakhic, between a meal prepared and offered in a Jewish home by Jews to Gentiles, and a certainly non-kosher one, cooked and served by Gentiles to Jews in a pagan setting. The former may have been acceptable to a Jew who could not stomach the latter.”⁸¹

It is one thing for *kashrut*-observant hosts, who had control of the viands, to invite a Gentile to their table, and quite another for the same scrupulous persons to accept from Gentiles an invitation to eat with them, since in the latter case they would have no control over the fare served. Given the shared nature of early Christian meals (1 Cor 11:18–22, 33–34), any person dedicated to obeying the Jewish customs might find it difficult to eat the food provided by an uncircumcised host. As Tobin points out, the issue was not concerning what they ate at home, but “rather, the issue was about what they ate or drank when they were together.”⁸² Drinking just water and eating only vegetables might be the sole safe course for such a *kashrut*-observant mind.⁸³ Thus their vegetarianism and teetotalism were temporary expedients to overcome what they perceived as a problem during the Christian fellowship meals.⁸⁴

Paul’s admonitions in Rom 15 address this diversity. They are not to please themselves (v. 1), but to live in harmony with one another (v. 5) and to glorify God with one voice (v. 6), for the Gentiles too are to glorify God (v. 9). Paul quotes four biblical texts, all containing the plural εἶθνη, to prove that the inclusion of the Gentiles into the worshipping Christian community was always God’s intention.⁸⁵ God is praised among the Gentiles (2 Sam 22:50 LXX; Pss 17:50 LXX; 116:1 LXX in vv. 9b, 11), they rejoice with his people

⁸⁰Watson, Paul, *Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 176 (emphasis original).

⁸¹Bengt Holmberg, “The Life in the Diaspora Synagogues: An Evaluation,” in *The Ancient Synagogue*, 230. See also E. P. Sanders, “Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11–14,” in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 178; Tomson, “Table Fellowship of Jews and Gentiles,” 230–36; Neil Elliott, “Asceticism among the ‘Weak’ and ‘Strong’ in Romans 14–15,” in *Asceticism and the New Testament*, Leif E. Vaage and Vincent L. Wimbush (New York: Routledge, 1999), 237.

⁸²Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in its Contexts*, 407.

⁸³Andrew McGowan, *Ascetic Eucharists: Food and Drink in Early Christian Ritual Meals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 218–50.

⁸⁴Hence there is no need to resort to pagan practices (for example, Pythagorism) to overcome the fact that Judaism advocated neither vegetarianism nor total abstinence. That their vegetarianism morphed into a permanent protest against Rome is possible (see Gary S. Shogren, “Is the Kingdom of God about Eating and Drinking or Isn’t It?” (Romans 14:17),” *NovT* 42 [2000]: 238–56).

⁸⁵Craig S. Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*, NCCS (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2009), 219–20.

(Deut 32:43 LXX in v. 10), and their hope is centered in Christ (Isa 11:10 LXX in v. 12). Both groups, the “strong” and the “weak,” are therefore to welcome one another (v. 7).⁸⁶

Paul’s concern was that whenever the Christians gathered for a fellowship meal, they did so with mutual acceptance. The frequent use of the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων in chapters 12–16 emphasized Paul’s concern for unity.⁸⁷ They were members of one another in the one body of Christ (12:5); they were to love one another with sibling love (12:10; 13:8); they were to have mutual respect for one another (τὸ αὐτὸ εἰς ἀλλήλους φρονοῦντες, 12:16; 15:5); they were no longer to judge one another (14:13); they were to affirm one another (14:19), welcome one another (15:7), and instruct one another (15:14).

The admonitions in Rom 15:1–14 seem to be directed at the several house churches in Rome to cultivate an integrated worship.⁸⁸ In Lampe’s well researched opinion, because of “. . . the lack of a central worship place in Rome throughout the centuries, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that these (at least) eight circles also worshipped separately—in separate dwellings somewhere in the different quarters of the city.”⁸⁹ The OT quotations are all directed towards mutual acceptance within the congregations of Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul’s desire was for a united worship of the diverse social groups. According to Watson “the purpose of Romans is to encourage Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, divided over the question of the law [concerning *kashrut* and festival days], to set aside their differences and to worship together.”⁹⁰

Festive Days and Food

The crisis over acceptable food was clearly Jewish in nature, and it was threatening the unity of the ethnically diverse Roman churches. This was not a debate over personal dietary preferences, such as vegetarianism versus an omnivore diet, but a tension brought about by adherence to or neglect of

⁸⁶Engberg-Pedersen limits even Rom 15:7 to the “strong” (non-Jewish Christians) (“Everything Is Clean,” 21).

⁸⁷The pronoun ἀλλήλων occurs 100 times in the NT. Romans has 14 of these, which is second in frequency to the 15 occurrences in the Fourth Gospel. Eleven of the examples in Romans occur in chapters 12–16, and three in chapters 1–2.

⁸⁸Andrew D. Clark, “Jew and Greek, Slave and Free, Male and Female: Paul’s Theology of Ethnic, Social and Gender Inclusiveness in Romans 16,” in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*, ed. Peter Oakes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 109–10.

⁸⁹Peter Lampe, “The Roman Christians of Romans 16,” in *The Romans Debate*, 2nd ed., ed. Karl P. Donfried (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 230.

⁹⁰Francis Watson, “The Two Roman Congregations: Romans 14:1–15:13,” in *The Romans Debate*, 211.

kashrut when the communities gathered together on set days to participate in fellowship meals. The set days were inherited from the Jewish synagogue, but some regarded “certain days in preference to others,” while others regarded them all. Some days, such as Passover and the Sabbath, were probably common to both sides.⁹¹ Obviously, if the community was to gather together, there needed to be a common meeting place and an agreed time. There was no reason for the Christian community to turn from the days inherited from Judaism.

Therefore, it is important to realize that Paul’s reference to the “days” was not simply a passing allusion of no major consequence, as some believe, but a major element in the total debate.⁹² The days and the food are inseparable, since, as many note, the tension occurred when the congregations assembled for worship and communal meals, that is, on the festival days.⁹³ Hence, Barclay is convincing in seeing the “days” as “the subject of a significant controversy” and “that they are a *regular* problem.”⁹⁴ The “days” might not be a major issue in and of themselves, but they were mentioned because they were the occasion when the real dispute over food took place. And it was not simply kosher laws that were the nub of the dispute; it was the eating of viands provided by predominantly Gentile communities.

However, if it is true, as many argue, that “the ‘weak’ maintain Jewish kosher laws and observe the Sabbath while the ‘strong’ do not,” it is hard to see the reason for the dispute.⁹⁵ If the “strong” and the “weak” were meeting and eating separately on different worship days, *kashrut* would cease to be a problem. Having separate worship times would divide the church; but doing so would solve the problem regarding communal meals. Those who were sensitive concerning *kashrut* would worship together on the set feast days including the Sabbath, while those who had no such scruples would eat together independently at no fixed time. Such a division was the very situation Paul hoped to avoid. Thus, when the “strong” and the “weak” gathered together in fellowship, and the Gentiles provided most of the provisions, the communal meal became an occasion of division and dispute instead of unity and loving harmony.

Toney has emphasized the missionary purpose behind Paul’s concern for unity among the Roman churches.⁹⁶ According to him, Rom 15:7–13 is not so much concerned with a Gentile mission, but rather more with a

⁹¹Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” 289.

⁹²Toney, *Paul’s Inclusive Ethic*, 63; Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 177.

⁹³Tobin, *Paul’s Rhetoric in its Contexts*, 407; Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 177; Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” 291. *Pace* Gäckle, *Starken*, 352.

⁹⁴Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?” 292.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, 293.

⁹⁶Toney, *Paul’s Inclusive Ethic*, 91–125.

Gentile mission *within* a mission for unbelieving Jews.⁹⁷ Paul, Toney argues, is concerned “for both inner unity and outward mission.”⁹⁸ Earlier, he notes that “Paul’s advice has the potential to make the Christian community gatherings socially compatible with the wider Jewish community.”⁹⁹ Paul’s admonition to the “strong” allowed the church to be a place where unbelieving Jews could attend and be converted. In other words, Paul’s advice was conditioned by a missiological concern for the salvation of his fellow Jews.

If this is the case, it is hard to see how he could totally abandon the observance of OT holy days, including the Sabbath. Paul himself, if Acts is to be trusted, often entered the synagogue fellowship with a missionary purpose (13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). So Toney’s thesis is plausible that Paul now wished for the reverse to happen, that is, that Christian gatherings might be missionary vehicles for visiting *ἰδιῶται ἢ ἄπιστοι Ἰουδαῖοι* (my adaptation of 1 Cor 14:23). That implies the Jewish holy days were the occasions when the “strong” and the “weak” were gathering for their worship and communal meals. So long as the community membership contained a significant number of former Jews, God-fearers, and proselytes it is hard to imagine the Christians meeting regularly on any other days.

If Paul’s intention was to unite the “strong” and the “weak” at a common table-fellowship, there had to be some concessions on both sides. One thing is certain, if Paul allowed the “strong” to go about their daily business without distinction of days, while the “weak” regarded Passover, Pentecost, the Sabbath, and the like, then worship or fellowship while reclining around a common table would have been impossible.¹⁰⁰

Conclusions

The analysis brings us to ten conclusions.

1. The verb κρίνω has the same positive sense in each of the two tightly bound clauses in Rom 14:5ab.

2. The Greek of v. 5b (ὅς δὲ κρίνει πᾶσαν ἡμέραν) means what it says, namely, “one regards every day.” Thus, this clause does not and cannot mean “disregards every feast day.”

3. It follows from the first two points above that some were positively regarding one day above another day, whereas others were positively regarding every day. Thus, the language indicates a group of days.

⁹⁷Ibid., 163. For an exclusively Gentile mission see Jewett, *Romans*, 892–95.

⁹⁸Toney, *Paul’s Inclusive Ethic*, 190.

⁹⁹Ibid., 69.

¹⁰⁰Pace Robert Jewett, who thinks Paul advised Jews to go one way and Gentiles another (“The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans,” *Int* 39 [1985]: 349).

4. Paul generally addressed the “strong” first and then the “weak.” Hence, it was the “strong” who regarded one day above another day, and the “weak” who regarded every day. So both the “strong” and the “weak” were regarding days and that explains why Paul gives only a positive summary in v. 6a (ὁ φρονῶν τὴν ἡμέραν κυρίῳ φρονεῖ), which contrasts with v. 6bc where both eating and not eating are referred to.

5. The “days” in vv. 5–6 are Jewish *feast days*, which rules out *fast days* as an option. It was on these communal feast days that the difficulty over food arose.

6. The noun ἡμέρα is used with a consistent meaning in its four occurrences in Rom 14:5–6, namely, holy feast day(s). The common view is obliged to interpret v. 5 as saying that one regards some *feast days* (or Sabbaths) while another regards every *week day*, giving ἡμέρα two different meanings.

7. The Roman congregations consisted of Gentile and Jewish believers, and some were concerned that not all the food brought to the common table on the festival days was kosher. To avoid the risk of “pollution” (v. 14) some took the pragmatic option of eating only greens and drinking only water. This behavior was restricted to the fellowship meals; it was not their dietary habit in general.

8. Consequently, the issue over “days” and “food” (βρῶμα, vv. 15, 17, 20) is inextricably linked to the matters with which Paul is dealing in Rom 14–15.

9. If the Sabbath is included as an important feast day, then both the “strong” and the “weak” would include it as one of the days they regarded positively.¹⁰¹ As Bolton says, “importantly, Paul is not at any point arguing for non-observance, rather he is taking observance of the day/s for granted.”¹⁰²

10. Paul’s major concern was to maintain the culturally diverse Roman communities in a unified fellowship (note the use of προσλαμβάνομαι in 14:1 and 15:7 and the frequent use of the reciprocal pronoun ἀλλήλων).¹⁰³

¹⁰¹For the Sabbath issue in early Christianity see Gerhard Rouwhorst, “The Reception of the Jewish Sabbath in Early Christianity,” in *Christian Feast and Festival: The Dynamics of Western Liturgy and Culture*, ed. P. G. J. Post et al., Liturgia Condenda 12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 307–81.

¹⁰²Bolton, “Who Are You Calling ‘Weak?’” 624.

¹⁰³Porter, *Romans*, 261–72.