

A Meaty Subject

A man walks into a butcher shop and asks the butcher, "Are you a gambling man?"

The butcher says, "Yes."

The man says, "I bet you \$50 you can't reach up and touch the meat hanging on those hooks up there."

The butcher looks up at the meat hanging on the hooks and says, "I won't take that bet."

"But I thought you were a gambling man!"

"I am," says the butcher, "but the steaks are too high."

There's more to what we eat than just eating it. Whether it's a matter of nutrition, making a joke or a question of faith, food takes on quite an important role in our lives. This week, we will see how it was central to a point Paul was making about growing in our faith, and helping others do the same.

Monday – Stumbling Blocks

"Take heed of little sins." John Bunyan, *A Discourse on Prayer*

1. Please read Romans 14:13-23. What imagery does Paul use to describe obstacles in a person's relationship with God?
2. For more on food and faith, see 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. What is emphasized in verses 31-33?

Text Insight: The meat purchased in the Corinthian market place often came from the pagan temples, left over from animal sacrifices to pagan gods.

3. In Romans 14:13, what does Paul mean by *a stumbling block*? What did Jesus say in Matthew 18:1-6 about stumbling?

Making it Personal: How does today's theme apply in your life? How can you encourage those who may be younger in their faith than you?

Tuesday – Eating Right

"If you look upon ham and eggs with lust, you have already committed breakfast in your heart." C.S. Lewis

1. Please read Romans 14:14 and Acts 10:1-8. How would you describe Cornelius's faith at this point?
2. Now read Acts 10:9-23. Peter is a mature believer and a leader in the church. What did he still have to learn?
3. Acts 10:23-48 finishes this story. How did Peter and Cornelius each grow in their faith in God?

Text Insight: The food laws central to Peter's vision can be found in Leviticus 11:1-47. Read all or a portion of this passage for an idea of what he was thinking during the visit with Cornelius.

Wednesday – Living Worthy Lives

"As long as I see any thing to be done for God, life is worth having; but O how vain and unworthy it is to live for any lower end!" David Brainerd, 18th c. American missionary

1. Please read Romans 14:15-16. The meaning of verse 16 is best understood in the context of verse 15. Under what circumstances might your exercise of freedom result in someone speaking of it "as evil"?
2. What advice do you find in Ephesians 4:1-6 for living so that you do not leave yourself open to such criticism?

Making it Personal: Which of Paul's instructions in Eph. 4 apply to your life or situation today? Pray, asking God to develop in you those qualities which honor him.

Thursday – Righteousness, Peace and Joy

"The joy of the Lord will arm us against the assaults of our spiritual enemies and put our mouths out of taste for those pleasures with which the tempter baits his hooks." Matthew Henry, 17th-18th c. English pastor

1. Please read Romans 14:17-18. According to Paul, there is something more important than matters of eating and drinking. What is it that is really important?
2. Imagine the kind of life that Paul is describing in Romans 14:16-18. Do you know anyone who is living this kind of life right now? What makes such a life possible?
3. Isaiah 55:6-13 speaks of those who turn to God. How are peace and joy highlighted in verse 12? What insights does Isaiah give us to better understand the kind of life Paul spoke of in Romans 14:16-18?

Prayer Focus: Isaiah 55:11 promises that God always accomplishes his purposes. Ask God to enable the Body of Christ (you, me and all believers) to be used by him for those purposes.

Friday – Faith

"Without Christ, not one step; with Him, anywhere!" David Livingstone, 19th c. Scottish missionary

1. Please read Romans 14:19-23. What rule of conduct does Paul espouse in verse 19?
2. What is Paul's point about faith in verses 22-23?
3. What does Hebrews 11:6 say about the importance of faith? How does this apply to your life?
4. Now look at James 1:17-18. What does this reveal about the other side of the relationship, God's side?

Making it Personal: Do you have faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If so, thank God for this wonderful gift. If not, pray now, accept him as your Savior and Lord. Or make plans to talk to a mature Christian about it.

For the Weekend: Re-read Romans 14:13-23, and pay particular attention to verse 16. Spend some time thinking about how this passage applies to you, so that you will live a life full of God's goodness without leaving yourself open to someone speaking of it as evil.