

Romans 14:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

Analysis

For meat destroy not the work of God—*Mē heneken brōmatos katalye to ergon tou theou* (μὴ ἔνεκεν βρώματος κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ). *Katalyō* (καταλύω, destroy/tear down) is violent—demolish, dismantle. To ergon tou theou (the work of God) is the believer God has regenerated, the church God is building. Paul's rhetorical question shocks: will you demolish what God is constructing over brōmatos (food)? The disproportion is staggering—food is temporal, God's work eternal. Heneken (for the sake of) reveals twisted priorities: sacrificing eternal treasure for temporal appetite.

All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence—*Panta men kathara, alla kakon tō anthrōpō tō dia proskommatos esthionti* (πάντα μὲν καθαρά, ἀλλὰ κακὸν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τῷ διὰ προσκόμματος ἔσθιοντι). *Panta kathara* (all things clean) echoes v. 14—Paul affirms the strong's theology. Yet *kakon* (evil/wrong) for the person eating dia proskommatos (with stumbling block/offense)—either causing others to stumble or stumbling yourself by violating conscience. Objective purity doesn't equal subjective permission—context, conscience, and love govern application.

Historical Context

Paul's 'all things pure' echoes Jesus' declaration (Mark 7:19, 'This he said, making all meats clean') and Peter's vision (Acts 10:15, 'What God has cleansed, call not common'). The New Covenant abolishes OT food laws (Colossians 2:16-17,

Hebrews 9:10). Yet Paul doesn't wield this truth as weapon—love constrains liberty. This pastoral balance shaped Christian ethics: affirm truth robustly while applying it sensitively. The Reformers rediscovered this: freedom in Christ from human traditions (Galatians 5:1) yet voluntarily limiting freedom for weaker believers' sake.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the phrase 'destroy the work of God' (katalye to ergon tou theou) reframe your attachment to personal freedoms?
2. What's the difference between affirming 'all things are pure' (panta kathara) theologically while recognizing it's 'evil' to eat in certain contexts?
3. How do you balance holding firm on truth (nothing unclean) with pastoral wisdom (don't cause others to stumble)?

Interlinear Text

μὴ	ἔνεκεν	βρώματος	κατάλυε	τὸ	ἔργον	τοῦ	θεοῦ
not	For	meat	destroy	G3588	the work	G3588	of God
G3361	G1752	G1033	G2647		G2041		G2316
πάντα	μὲν	καθαρά	ἀλλὰ	κακὸν	τῷ	ἀνθρώπῳ	τῷ διὰ
All things	indeed	are pure	but	it is evil	G3588	for that man	G3588 with
G3956	G3303	G2513	G235	G2556		G444	G1223
προσκόμματος	ἐσθίοντι						
offence	who eateth						
G4348	G2068						

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 18:6 (Parallel theme): But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Acts 10:15 (References God): And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

Titus 1:15 (Parallel theme): Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Romans 14:21 (Parallel theme): It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

Matthew 15:11 (Parallel theme): Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.

Ephesians 2:10 (References God): For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.