

Romans 14:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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—Kalon to mē phagein krea mēde piein oinon mēde en hō ho adelphos sou proskoptei (καλὸν τὸ μὴ φαγεῖν κρέα μηδὲ πιεῖν οἶνον μηδὲ ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἀδελφός σου προσκόπτει). Kalon (καλός, good/noble) elevates voluntary abstinence to virtue—not legalistic requirement but loving self-limitation. Krea (meat), oinon (wine), and en hō proskoptei (anything in which he stumbles) cover all disputable matters.

Proskoptō (προσκόπτω, stumble/take offense) indicates causing spiritual harm. Paul's principle: if your freedom wounds a brother, abstain—even from objectively permissible things. This is radical: limit liberty not merely when sinful but when potentially harmful to others. Love outweighs rights. This isn't capitulation to hypersensitivity but pastoral wisdom: where genuine conscience is at stake (not mere preference), strong believers bear responsibility to limit freedom for weak believers' spiritual welfare (15:1, 'we...strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak').

Historical Context

Wine was daily beverage in antiquity; abstaining would be notable. Yet Paul says it's 'good' to abstain if it causes stumbling. Early Christian communities varied: some abstained entirely (influenced by Nazirite vows or reaction to pagan

drunkenness), others partook moderately. Paul allows both, provided they don't destroy others. This shaped Christian temperance movements: total abstinence isn't mandated biblically, but may be wise contextually (where alcoholism is rampant, weaker believers struggle). The principle applies broadly: limit freedom where it harms others' faith.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What liberties (food, drink, entertainment, speech) might be 'good' (kalon) for you to limit for weaker believers' sake?
2. How do you distinguish between genuine conscience issues requiring sensitivity versus mere preferences demanding conformity?
3. In what areas might you be prioritizing your 'rights' over love for those who might stumble (proskoptei) due to your freedom?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|
| καλὸν | τὸ | μὴ | φαγεῖν | κρέα | μηδὲ | πιεῖν | οἶνον | μηδὲ |
| It is good | G3588 | neither | to eat | flesh | nor | to drink | wine | nor |
| G2570 | | G3361 | G5315 | G2907 | G3366 | G4095 | G3631 | G3366 |
| ἐν | ῳ | ό | ἀδελφός | σου | προσκόπτει | ἢ | | |
| any thing whereby | G3739 | G3588 | brother | thy | stumbleth | or | | |
| G1722 | | | G80 | G4675 | G4350 | G2228 | | |
| σκανδαλίζεται | ἢ | | ἀσθενεῖ | | | | | |
| is offended | or | | is made weak | | | | | |
| G4624 | G2228 | | G770 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 8:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Romans 14:13 (Parallel theme): Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Matthew 16:23 (Parallel theme): But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Malachi 2:8 (Parallel theme): But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.