

Romans 14:19 – 15:6

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Word Study

14:19

- ἄρα οὖν = is a strengthened οὖν—it sometimes indicates the return to the narrative or a continuing of it.
- διώκωμεν (διώκω) pres. act. subj. 1 plr. = pursue (in a hostile manner), N.I.V. – make every effort; some manuscripts διώκομεν (pres. act. ind. 1 plr.). The subjunctive mood is used in main clauses to convey exhortation, hortatory, or jussive “should,” “let,” etc.
- οἰκοδομῆς (οἰκοδομή – ῆς, ἡ) fem. gen. sg. = building, the operation (process) of building. Met. upbuilding, edification, i.e. the acts of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, holiness, happiness.

14:20

- κατάλυε (καταλύω) pres. act. imperative 2 sg. = breakup, overthrow, destroy, demolish, subvert.
- μέν = untranslatable particle - when followed by ἀλλά introduces a clause to be contrasted with the other.
- προσκόμματος (πρόσκομμα – ατος, τό) n. gen. sg. = an obstacle, a cause of stumbling; stumbling. cf. 14:13 D.W.
- ἐσθίοντι (ἐσθίω) pres. act. part. m. gen. sg. = eat, take a meal.

14:21

- φαγεῖν (ἐσθίω) II aor. act. inf. = eat (There is usually no difference of meaning between first and second aorist, the terms signify merely difference in formation).
- πιεῖν (πίνω) II aor. act. inf. = drink.
- προσκόπτει (προσκόπτω) pres. act. ind. 3 sg. = strike against, stumble, stumble at, to give offense.

14:22

- ἔχεις (ἔχω) pres. act. ind. 2 sg. = hold, have, possess, keep.
- ἔχε (ἔχω) pres. act. imperative 2 sg. = cf. same verse.
- κρίνων (κρίνω) pres. act. Part. m. nom. sg. = to separate, put asunder, judge, to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong; forensic sense – judge, condemn, pronounce judgment.
- δοκιμάζει (δοκιμάζω) pres. act. ind. 3 sg. = put to the test, prove, examine, approve after testing, think fit.

14:23

- διακρινόμενος (διακρίνω) pres. passive part. m. nom. sg. = separate, distinguish, discern one thing from another; in the passive (διακρίνομαι) = doubt, hesitate, waver.
- ἐάν conditional particle with subjunctive = if in case; with subj. aor. – is used of things which the speaker or writer thinks will certainly take place (condition of fact).

φάγη	(ἐσθίω) aor. act. subj. 3 sg. = eat, take a meal.
κατακέκριται	(κατακρίνω) perf. passive ind. 3 sg. = condemn, give judgment against; perfect tense – expresses action already completed.
ἐστίν	(εἰμί) pres. act. ind. 3 sg. = to be (v) is added after ὡς, οὐκ, εἰ, καί as well as after τοῦτ' and ἀλλ'.
15:1	
ὀφείλομεν	(ὀφείλω) pres. act. ind. 1 plr. = owe; with infinitive – ought; Lenski – under obligation.
βαστάζειν	(βαστάζω) pres. act. inf. = carry, bear.
ἀρέσκειν	(ἀρέσκω) pres. act. inf. = please, with the idea of willing service rendered to others; hence almost to serve, to accommodate one's self to the opinions, desires, interests of others.
15:2	
ἀρεσκέτω	(ἀρέσκω) cf. 15:1 pres. act. imperative 3 sg.
15:3	
ἤρεσεν	(ἀρέσκω) Cf. 15:1 aor. act. ind. 3 sg.
γέγραπται	(γράφω) ind. perf. passive 3 sg. = write; passive – it is written, it stands written.
ὀνειδίζοντων	(ὀνειδίζω) pres. act. part. m. gen. plr. = reproach, upbraid, revile.
ἐπέπεσαν	(ἐπιπίπτω) aor. act. ind. 3 plr. = fall upon, press upon.
15:4	
προέγραφη	(προγράφω) aor. pass. ind. 3 sg. = written before, written in the past.
ἐγράφη	(γράφω) aor. pass. ind. 3 sg. = write.
ἵνα	conj. adv. = in order that or to, that; final clauses are introduced by ἵνα, ὡς, ὅπως.
ὑπομονῆς	(ὑπομονή – ῆς, ἡ) f. gen. sg. = steadfast endurance, the virtue shown by martyrs, perseverance.
παρακλήσεως	(παρακλήσις – εως, ἡ) a calling near, summons, supplication, admonition, encouragement, consolation.
ἔχωμεν	(ἔχω) pres. act. subj. 1 plr. = hold, have, possess.
15:5	
δώη	(δίδωμι) contraction for δόιη – aor. act. opt. 3 sg. = give.
φρονεῖν	(φρονέω) pres. act. inf. = have in my mind, think of, set my mind upon, suggesting my moral interest, thought, study, and not a mere unreflecting opinion, think, cherish a habit of thought, to have understanding, be wise, to feel.
15:6	
δοξάζητε	(δοξάζω) pres. act. subj. 2 plr. = glorify, bestow glory on.

Literal Translation

14:19 Therefore let us pursue the things of peace and also the things of building up one another.

- 14:20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things are clean, but (it is) wrong for a man who through his eating causes stumbling.
- 14:21 (It is) good not to eat flesh or to drink wine or (to do that) in whatever your brother stumbles at.
- 14:22 The faith (or belief) which you have toward (these things) keep it in the eyes of (or between) yourself and God. Blessed is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.
- 14:23 But he who doubts has been condemned if he eats, because (it is) not (done) out of faith, and everything which (is) not (done) out of faith is sin.
- 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves.
- 15:2 Each of us should please his neighbor for the (his) good toward (his) edification.
- 15:3 For even Christ pleased not himself, but according as it has been written: “The reproaches of those reproaching you they fell upon me.”
- 15:4 For as many things as were written before were written for our instruction, in order that through steadfast endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
- 15:5 May the God of steadfast endurance and of encouragement give to you the same thing to think among one another according to Christ Jesus,
- 15:6 so that with one accord with one mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Comments

Verse nineteen starts out with the words ἄρα οὖν, which is a strengthened οὖν, and generally indicates a return to the narrative or a continuing of it. Be that as it may, St. Paul as well as we ourselves return to the subject of adiaphora. These verses then are another section of St. Paul’s discussion of Christian conduct in matters of adiaphora toward such persons who are weak in the faith. In application of these truths concerning Christian conduct in matters of adiaphora, we dare not exclude in our lives our Christian conduct toward all people both believers and unbelievers, even though the apostle Paul here expressly directs our attention toward our conduct between fellow brothers and sisters in the faith. Our attitude in these matters should be much like the story about the man who was blind. Everyone in the village where he lived knew he was blind from birth. One night he was seen carrying a lantern down the street at night. “Why are you carrying a lantern,” a friend asked, “when you cannot see anyway?” He responded, “Because I don’t want anyone to stumble over me!”

As Christ Jesus is the light of the world and lights our path spiritually so we don’t stumble or become a cause of stumbling to others, so too the opposite is true of Satan. He is the darkness of the world and darkens our path spiritually so we stumble or become a cause of stumbling to others. Referring to Satan Jesus said to Peter of him, “You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:23). We should strive, therefore, in all matters to let Christ light our ways, our words, and our actions and reactions toward others so that we do not become a stumbling block of Satan who minds not the things of God. But as with self-confident Peter, we all too often fall prey to Satan and become exactly what we don’t want to be—a stumbling to ourselves and a stumbling to others. A veteran pastor once said, “The reason the world does not know Jesus better is because it knows us too well!” Our old Adam is always there fighting against our new man, and whether we want them to or not, the world sees both at work in our lives. Paul is very much aware of this when he uses the subjunctive mood in spurring on our new man as it shows itself in its Christian conduct.

The subjunctive mood in main clauses, you will recall, conveys the usage of exhortation, hortatory or jussive. Thus we have the translation, “Let us,” and this applies here not to the doctrines of scripture, but to those things wherein we have Christian liberty, in those things where so many think that each of us is free to do just as he personally pleases under all circumstances. It is in this very gray area of Christian liberty that St. Paul tells us, “let us pursue” “διώκωμεν” (pres. act. subj. 1 plr.), which is not just a one-time thing, but one which we should actively keep on doing. The N.I.V. translates this as, “let us make every effort,” which certainly conveys

the idea that we are to do our utmost in maintaining “peace” and the “building up of one another” even if it means a giving up of one’s personal freedom in a genuine adiaphora.

The thrust of the exhortation is for the establishment and continuation of peace between one another and above all, between us and God, that “peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). This latter peace which we have with God, I’m sure, is what St. Paul had in mind when he connected it with “οἰκοδομῆς,” “a building up” or “edification.” From the word list you can see that the word refers to the act of one who promotes another’s growth in Christian wisdom, piety, and holiness. St. Paul is hereby encouraging Christians who have a good understanding of God’s Word and who knows what is commanded and what is forbidden in it to have forbearance toward those who do not and to abstain from those things which would destroy the words of God in the heart of the weaker brother or sister.

“κατάλυε,” a present active imperative, is not just a pious wish, but a command. “Do not destroy!” “Destroy,” is the opposite of the noun “upbuilding.” Thus the injunction of v. 19 is reinforced by the prohibition stated in v. 20. Concerning this imperative Lenski says,

The present imperative is used for the same reason as was the present imperative in v. 15b. There Paul says: “Be not destroying the person!” Here he says: “Be not tearing down the work!” By tearing down and wrecking the work the person is being destroyed. The positive is plural, “Let us pursue,” all of us; the negative is singular, “Be not tearing down,” because this pertains only to the strong who might be inclined to use their liberty unscrupulously and even to set at naught and to mock the overscrupulous and weak. The motive stated in v. 15, regarding the person is that Christ died for that person; here, regarding the work, the motive is that it is God’s work. (Lenski, *The Interpretation of Romans*, p. 846).

The untranslatable particle μέν in verse 20 when followed by ἀλλά, which is the case here, introduces a clause to be contrasted with the other. St. Paul, in using this construction, wishes to impress upon his readers the fact that even though something may be clean and wholesome in and of itself, when contrasted with its causing someone to stumble in his faith, it is no longer morally good but wrong.

In verse 21 we have a type of ellipsis as St. Paul describes for his readers what they should avoid that causes a brother in the faith to stumble. Concerning this Hodge says,

There is an ellipsis in the middle clause of this verse which has been variously supplied. “Nor to drink wine, nor to (drink) anything;” others, “nor to (do) any thing whereby,” etc. According to the first method of supplying the ellipsis, the meaning is, “We should not drink wine nor any other intoxicating drink, when our doing so is injurious to others.” But the latter method is more natural and forcible, and includes the other, “We should do nothing which injures others.” The ground on which some of the early Christians thought it incumbent on them to abstain from wine, was not any general ascetic principle, but because they feared they might be led to use wine which had been offered to the gods; to which they had the same objection as to meat which had been presented in sacrifice. (Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 426).

The infinitives in verse 21 are second aorist active infinitives. Here the idea is that we don’t always have to abstain from doing something. The aorists are to be understood as a punctiliar eating or drinking at one time, in a given case, where offense would be caused. Permanent abstinence is not advocated here. We must be careful on the one hand not to cause offense in a given circumstance, but on the other hand we must also be careful not to allow others to bind our consciences with the yoke of slavery to that which Christ has made us free, cf. Galatians 5:1, and to allow ourselves to be condemned by that which is not sinful in and of itself. So St. Paul would tell us in verse 22, “So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.” Concerning this verse, Hodge says,

Paul presents in this verse, more distinctly than he had before done, the idea that he required no concession of principle or renunciation of truth. He did not wish them to believe a thing to be sinful which was not sinful, or to trammel their own conscience with the scruples of their weaker brethren. He simply required them to use their liberty in a considerate and charitable manner. (Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, p. 427).

“But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.” If a person in a given case has doubts and he goes against his conscience (be he the doubter or the doubttee—the one who considers something to be sinful when it is not and the one who knows it is not sinful but is unsure it is in this instance) he is condemned and when it is not done out of faith, it is sin. We are reminded here of Luther’s closing words at the Diet of Worms where he said, “To act against one’s conscience is neither safe nor salutary.” The conditional clause in this verse is a condition of fact – ἐάν plus the subjunctive. It is used of things which the speaker or writer thinks will certainly take place. In fact, he is so sure of it that he uses in the apodosis or conclusion of the condition κατακέκριται a perfect passive indicative 3rd person singular to indicate that the person who doubts is already condemned. The perfect tense expresses action already completed. The first part of this verse deals more with the weaker Christian than it does with the stronger one. It speaks about the one who considers eating something to false gods a sin. Whereas the latter part of this verse could incorporate everyone, be he a strong Christian, a weak brother in the faith, or an unbeliever. “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.”

Concerning the unbeliever Luther says,

Therefore the question is whether the ungodly person sins, when he does not believe, because he is not acting out of faith, and thus not contrary to conscience, in fact, he believes falsely; and thus acting falsely out of this kind of faith, does he not sin? The answer is this: The passage “whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” means that every person who does not wish to sin must believe. For faith alone is without sin. Therefore he who does something he does not believe sins. Thus he who eats what he thinks is unclean sins, not so much because he sins against his thinking as because he is lacking in faith, whereby he would know that it is not unclean. And thus weakness of faith which is present and strength of faith which is lacking brings it about that he sins when he eats. Therefore he who does not have faith must not eat, that is, he must not perform a work of faith. For a work of faith must come from faith, otherwise he who eats because he does not believe it is permissible but concludes that it is forbidden (this is lack of faith) sins and thus goes against his own conscience. A corollary of this is that everyone who is lacking in faith sins even when he does a good work. For this is the meaning of this passage. (Luther, *Luther’s Works* Vol. 25, pp. 506-507).

Hodge in his remarks on this verse says,

If a man thinks a thing to be wrong, to him it is wrong. He, therefore, who is uncertain whether God has commanded him to abstain from certain meats, and who notwithstanding indulges in them, evidently sins; he brings himself under condemnation. Because whatever is not of faith is sin; i.e., whatever we do which we are not certain is right, to us is wrong. The sentiment of this verse, therefore, is nearly the same as of ver. 14. “To him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” There is evidently a sinful disregard of the divine authority on the part of a man who does anything which he supposes God has forbidden, or which he is not certain he has allowed. The principle of morals contained in this verse is so obvious, that it occurs frequently in the writings of ancient philosophers...this passage has an obvious bearing on the design of the

apostle. He wished to convince the stronger Christians that it was unreasonable in them to expect their weaker brethren to act according to their faith; and that it was sinful in them so to use their liberty as to induce these scrupulous Christians to violate their own consciences. (Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 427-428).

Before we lapse over into the next chapter, it would do well for us to recall the words of St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians Chapter 10, verses 23-33, where he speaks about one's conscience concerning the things which we have been speaking about. "Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible'—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.' If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake—the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by an other's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God—even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

The first six verses of Chapter fifteen here in Romans continues the thought of Chapter fourteen, but with this difference. In these verses St. Paul speaks of the behavior of Christians in general with reference to the example of Christ. It really serves as a conclusion for the preceding verses and adds a prayer for blessings upon those who follow his preceding and present advice. The δέ certainly links this chapter with the preceding one, and the context shows that St. Paul still has in mind the attitude of the strong towards the weak. The reference, as Stoeckhardt infers, "is not to the weak in faith but to the weak in general—such Christians as are still sick with habitual moral weaknesses" (Stoeckhardt, *Roemerbrief*, p. 614).

"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." I'm not sure whether or not St. Paul is using reverse psychology here when he refers to, "we who are the strong." Would his readers readily admit that they are the weak ones or would they assume that they are the strong ones who will take it upon themselves to bear the weaknesses or failings of the weak. In the eyes of the beholder, who were the strong and who were the weak and who would not now please themselves but work toward the goal of pleasing his neighbor for his spiritual edification. Whatever the case may be, St. Paul draws on an example of such "bearing" that his readers cannot help but follow—Christ who pleased not himself. ἡρέσεν, aorist active indicative 3 sg. from ἀρέσκω is, according to Blass and Debrunner, a complexive (constative) aorist whose action is conceived as a whole irrespective of its duration. The sense here is that, in his whole earthly life, Christ pleased not himself. Surely He, above all else, must be considered among the strong. No fault, no sin, whatever in His entire life—perfection personified. He surely could have been eternally happy without coming into this sinful world. But He came, because He did not live for himself. He came to live and die for us and for those who insult or reproach us. If there ever was an unselfish life who bore the weaknesses and failings of the weak, it was His life. St. Paul in setting forth Christ as an example of one who pleased not himself strengthens his statement with quoting from Psalm 69:9, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." The quotation is verbatim and to the point that He came to bear our burdens for us through sacrificing his life for us in order to please God. The desired result for the Christian is that he will be strong enough to bear the weaknesses and failings of the weak not to please oneself, but to edify our neighbor in his faith and so please our God.

St. Paul in verse four directs his readers to the Holy Scriptures as a source of sanctification for their daily Christian lives. The object of this verse is not so much to support the passage quoted from Psalm 69:9, but to show that what is recorded in the Scriptures is written for our instruction. St. Paul now uses a ἵνα clause to indicate that this is his final statement on his preceding discourse. The conj. adv. ἵνα as well as ὡς or ὅπως

introduce final clauses. This final clause directs our attention to have steadfast endurance, to have martyr perseverance through the encouragement or consolation of the Scriptures in order that we might have hope both temporal and eternal.

The word *προέγραφη* in verse 4 meaning “written before” or “written in the past” is a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures. Concerning this Kretzmann says,

The reference of the apostle is to the entire Old Testament as it was then in use. The books which were known under the collective title “The Scriptures” were not composed by their authors to serve only their own contemporaries, but the Holy Ghost, the Editor-in-chief, the real Author of the Bible, had in mind the conditions of all times to the end of time. The Bible, therefore, is the teacher, the instructor, of the Church after Christ as well as before Christ. Such an application of Scripture, then, as here made by the apostle is entirely in accord with the purpose of the holy Book; it should serve for strengthening Christians in their faith. One of the aims of Scriptures is named by the apostle, namely, to give us instruction, in order that we through the patience and the consolation which Scripture produces and works in us might have and hold firmly the hope of the future glory. This object may be attained in us because the Bible not only admonishes us to hold out patiently and steadfastly to the end, but also comforts us with the assurance of the help of the Holy Spirit, and thus works in us both patience and consolation to wait and to endure, since the realization of our hope is a matter of only a short time. If we use Scripture regularly and properly, then we draw out of it from day to day more strength, comfort, courage, and confidence, and thus ever keep before our eyes the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls. (Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, N. T., Vol. II, p. 78).

St. Paul closes this whole section on his admonition concerning matters of adiaphora with a prayerful wish for unity among them in order that they may glorify God. “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 5-6). This concluding wish in our exegesis turns our attention to St. Paul’s deep concern for oneness in the church which can only be achieved through the instruction of the Holy Scriptures. All Christians are to be fully taught and are to be fully clear on what the Scriptures teach. Then we will let adiaphora take its rightful place in the back seat of our lives. It’s a shame, however, that there are so many back-seat drivers. Such persons are ever present in and around us—always ready to make adiaphora an issue and always ready to be very critical toward someone in regard to their pet “Adi.” If in the light of God’s instruction such a person still finds fault or persists in his ways and you realize that their particular pet “Adi” will not hinder their salvation and is not a direct refutation of Scripture, then leave them alone. As God has winked at the shortcomings of man and has forgiven us our sins, so we must do likewise for the sake of unity.

In closing, the idea of Christian forbearance in the realm of adiaphora reminds me of a story I read about two taxidermists who stopped before a window in which an owl was on display. They both had their own opinions and immediately began to criticize the way it was mounted. Its eyes were not natural; its wings were not in proportion with its head; its feathers were not neatly arranged; and its feet could certainly be improved. When they had finished with their opinions and criticisms, the old owl turned his head...and winked at them!