

Romans 14

Welcome: The Messianic Sociality

“In order to be clear about this [this new politics, this new sociality, that exhibits justice beyond the law], it is helpful to recall the sociality or, rather, the antisociality that Paul had described at the beginning of his letter: they were filled with all injustice, flesh-obsessed, covetousness, evil, full of envy, murder, strive, guile, malignity, gossipers, slanderers, god haters, insult arrogant, boasters, inventors of all evils... foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. That is the social [dis]order within which the new sociality is to take shape, one constituted through a renovation of mind-set that will demonstrate or embody the aim of divine justice (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 200).”

Romans 14:1

“Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions.”

“Here we touch upon the most basic feature of messianic politics, a polity that instead of closing itself to the other, the stranger, the different, actually welcomes the advent of the other as distinctly other (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 200).”

“The great stresses in the national political life of the so-called nation states have typically had to do with the stranger. Often the polity is one of exclusion, sometimes assimilation or integration, which demands of the newcomer to become as we are, hide the differences (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 201).”

“Thus, one who has and obeys a number of rules about how to be faithful is regarded as weak, while one who seems on principle to be more or less indiscriminate is said to be strong (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 201).”

Romans 14:2-3

“Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3 Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.”

“Why are the former weak in faithfulness? Perhaps because they suppose that faithfulness consists in rules and regulations, so seem nearer to the compliance with the law from which the gift of the divine has set us free. Meanwhile, those who eat anything are not anxious. Above all, they do not place limits on the gifts of God, they do not regard them with suspicion, and so on (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 203).”

“Paul is by no means concerned to resolve the dispute in terms of deciding which is right... Instead, Paul will insist that these very important differences remain side by side. The eater is not to despise the non-eater, and the non-eater is not to judge the eater. Whether in despising or in judging, what each seeks is the elimination of the difference. This is precisely what Paul does not want, for in this elimination of difference, whether as despising or as judging, is found the true or greater violence (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 203).”

Romans 14:5-6

“Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6 Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.”

“Here then is the basic principle: Give thanks. What matters is whether what we do or don't do is an expression not of anxiety but of thanksgiving, and so of gratitude. In this way the doing or not doing is oriented to the messianic as gratitude to God. Gratitude is what marks the orientation to the gift and produces justice as a gift or on the basis of gift (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 205).”

Romans 14:7-9

“We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8 If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.”

“Far more dramatic than the difference between eating or not eating a certain food or observing or not a particular day is the difference between life and death. But even in the difference, living or dead, we belong to one another. We live or die in the direction of, or in orientation upon, another (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 205).”

Romans 14:10-13

“Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11 For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,
and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

12 So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

13 Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another.”

“This is the turning point in the argument. Until now, it has been simply that there is to be an end to that judging and condemnation or even contempt that rends the fabric of sociality, especially in matters that may be termed ‘religious’ (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 207).”

Romans 14:14-15

“I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.”

“It should be clear that we are caught here between irreconcilable imperatives; on the one hand, the imperative of openness to all [including all foods and so on] and, on the other hand, a love for the other that sacrifices even the privilege of faithful freedom. For if I yield to the conscience of the weak, I am in danger of imposing law; but if I do not, I am in danger of violating her or his conscience. There is here a seeming aporia (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 208).”

Aporia: “an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory.”

Romans 14:16-19

“So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 The one who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and has human approval. 19 Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”

“It can never be the case that rules about eating and drinking can become the condition of the reign of God... It is here that we become responsible, where there is a kind of aporia. But we are responsible not only for ourselves [for we must explain ourselves to God] but for our neighbor as well (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 208).”

Romans 14:20-21

“Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for you to make others fall by what you eat; 21 it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother or sister stumble.”

“This is a concrete attempt on Paul’s part to show how love for the neighbor and the welcoming of the other takes shape in an emerging messianic sociality (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 208).”

Romans 14:22-23

“The faith [faithfulness] that you have, have as your own conviction before God. Blessed are those who have no reason to condemn themselves because of what they approve. 23 But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith [confident faithfulness]; for whatever does not proceed from faith [confident faithfulness] is sin.

“This is rather difficult, but it seems to me that the test here is not a rule or law but free confidence and loyalty... This does not mean that what I do is decided for me by a programmed response dictated by rules... The messianic form of life is improvisational. This improvisation, however, is oriented not to what pleases me but toward another: to the lord, to the neighbor. And this double orientation is in fact single, for the messianic is precisely the openness to care for the other (Jennings, *Outlaw Justice*, 209).”