In the text that we will be looking at today the Apostle Paul continues with his discussion about people in the church who are obsessed with food. Back in the 1980’s the term “foodie” was coined to describe people who not only enjoy food, but who revel in it; people who are concerned about every facet of the preparation. A foodie is someone who wants to know about every single ingredient in the dish, where it came from, the exact style of preparation. Foodies talk about the taste, the texture, the smell and the presentation. One person who considers himself a foodie said this:

The great difference between a foodie and a person, who just likes to eat, comes down to those who make it their mission to try every new restaurant and cuisine, those who spare no expense when it comes to eating out, and those who consider their free time to be a search for gastronomic delight; a foodie will go above and beyond, both budget and means, in an attempt to try the latest and greatest food around

People used to call these folks “gourmets” but that sounded a little elitist. So now they are called “foodies.” Of course, the term has its detractors. One person said,

A foodie is a dumbed-down term used by corporate marketing forces to infantilize and increase consumerism in a simple-minded American magazine reading audience.

Wait a minute. I read magazines. What’s wrong with that?

It was foodies that gave rise to the Food Network and other specialized programming. It was foodies who created a market for specialized cookbooks, specialized periodicals such as *Gourmet Magazine* and *Cooks Illustrated*, a growing popularity of Farmers Markets, food-oriented websites like Zagots and Yelp, specialized kitchenware stores like Williams Sonoma, the institution of the Celebrity Chef.

Folks in America pay a huge amount of attention to food as we have been able to produce enough that America’s large middle class has not worried about starving, our attention is drawn to other aspects of food – its preparation, its taste, the experience of eating.
But obsessions with food can go in pathological directions as millions of American teens, older women, and now an increasing number of boys and men wrestle with various eating disorders. One woman wrote:

> In my lifelong quest for perfection (what I incorrectly referred to as “excellence”), I became obsessed with my body image. I’ve always been a sturdy, athletically built gal of average weight. I was content with this reality for a brief period of my young life. Then came Junior High, when everything started changing, and I became painfully aware of my imperfect figure. Criticisms by my mom about my weight increased my obsession with how I looked.

> When High School ended, so did my sports career, and I was faced with the reality that unless I kept up regular exercise on my own, my body was going to become even more imperfect. I began to exercise like a crazy woman, to eat very little during the day, and to binge my way through most late nights in an effort to stuff down whatever insecurities and fears were eating away at my heart. I should mention from the time I was 12 years old, I served on the worship team at my church and put up a convincing front for everyone to see that I had it together and was fit for kingdom service.

> I kept up this cycle of over exercising and overeating for three years before I tried laxatives in an effort to shed more weight. At the age of 23 I first tried to force myself to vomit after a binge. I lied to myself and anyone else growing concerned about my obsession with weight loss and food. I hid the whole thing from those closest to me by limiting my binges and purges to times when I was alone. And then I worked feverishly to hide the evidence – cleaning up whatever mess was made in the bathroom, and restocking the kitchen I had raided.

Food is a big deal. For tens of millions of us, our lives really circle around our relationship to food. For many, many people food is a basic organizing principle of life.

Back in the 1st century as the gospel message was being introduced first to Jewish people and then to Gentiles, people's concern about food reached a fever pitch. Jews wouldn't eat with Gentiles because of Old Testament laws regarding what was and was not acceptable to God regarding what they ate. And as Jews placed their faith in Jesus as Messiah and the fulfillment of all that the Hebrew scriptures promised, and as Gentiles placed their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, this barrier of food, what people could eat and not eat, threatened to split the early church.

So in the chapter that we’re going to read today Paul writes about an early food fight that was going to destroy everything he sought to build. Have you ever
participated in a food fight in camp, in high school, or college, in a frat house, or in a lunchroom or on a picnic?

VIDEO Insert – Food Fight

We've been talking about our relationships with each other in the church in a series this fall that I've called Building the Beloved Community. I borrowed that phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he talked about the church as being an alternative society, having relationships with each other and with God that were different than the larger world. Today I’ve called my message: Building the Beloved Community By Avoiding Food Fights. Let’s pray.

**Romans 14:13-23**

13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. 14 I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean. 15 If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother or sister for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil. 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. 21 It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall. 22 So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve. 23 But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because their eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Now for those of you who weren’t here last week and even for those of you who were, let me just repeat a little ground that I covered last week as we looked at the food fight that was taking place at the church in Rome in the 1st century. I want to underline again Paul’s approach to controversies.

Paul’s approach to controversies

Paul went everywhere in the Roman Empire preaching the gospel, the message that God’s long-awaited kingdom had broken into the world in and through Jesus of Nazareth. That Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment and completion of the story of Israel. God brought the story of Israel to this grand climax in Jesus. And
that through Jesus’ sinless life, his sacrificial death, his glorious resurrection, his gift of the Holy Spirit and his future return everyone in the world both Jew and Gentile who turned to Jesus in faith and repentance would find ultimate salvation from all that kept them in bondage whether it was sins or addictions, demonic powers, fears and anxiety, everything that controlled people and kept our lives in chains. Paul went around preaching that folks could be liberated, set free from everything that kept them in chains, by turning to Jesus in faith and repentance.

What the Apostle Paul didn’t do was go around the Roman Empire offering an encyclopedia length set of rules governing every aspect of life. Here are the television shows your children should watch and should not watch when they finally invent TV in the 20th century. Here is what you should do with Halloween. Here is how you should educate your kids. Here is my counsel regarding breast feeding versus bottle feeding. Here is how you should vote.

The Apostle Paul didn’t go around the Roman Empire with a sack of encyclopedias detailing out for people what they should do in every situation in life when we need wisdom and direction and guidance. Instead, in creating the beloved community, Paul said you need to work out the implications of the gospel that I’ve preached to you for all of life whether its in Galatia and the issue of circumcision and food, or in Colossae and the controversy there about the place of angels and ascetic practices of extreme self-denial, or in Corinth and some of the sexual immorality and divisions that were taking place in that church. Paul repeatedly came back to the gospel. He said, “Brothers and sisters, you haven’t thought deeply enough about the message I’ve preached to you. What does it mean that salvation is now offered through repentance and faith in Jesus? Why would you want to go back to bondage?”

What does it mean that God has introduced into the world a new center for life that Jesus and his rulership is to be the organizing principle for your life – not food, not video games, not your sexual orientation, not sex, not religious practices – Jesus. Life is supposed to revolve around him. Work it out.

So in this text in Romans 14 regarding food fights, Paul doesn’t pick sides and say, “Hey, Jewish people, loosen up and have a bacon cheeseburger every once in a while.” He doesn’t say, “Gentiles, as a Jew, what you Gentiles eat for breakfast – a bowl of greasy sausage gravy, makes me want to throw up.” He doesn’t pick sides in the food fight. He says, “I want you to go deeper. Think through the gospel.”

Let’s look at his counsel. Paul begins with

Personal relational counsel

Romans 14:13
Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Literally, in v. 13 Paul says:

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but judge instead to not put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way.

So the first real practical bit of relational counsel that Paul gives is that if you want to avoid a food fight, don’t judge.

Don’t judge

Stop looking down on people. Stop taking this self-superior view concerning your brothers and sisters on secondary issues – what people choose to do with their kids’ schooling, what people choose to eat and drink, your brother or sister’s politics. If you want to avoid a food fight, don’t judge. And if you insist on judging, judge how you can avoid attacking a Christian brother or sister.

And the second thing he says is don’t hurt.

Don’t hurt

Romans 14:15
If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother or sister for whom Christ died.

I don’t believe that Paul is saying that your brother or sister by violating their conscience by what they’re eating is going to suffer final judgment by God and go to hell. Hell is reserved for the stubborn, for those who completely reject and refuse God’s offer of forgiveness, for those who willfully persist in wrongdoing. That’s what Paul says in Romans 2.

But we can severely injure another person’s relationship with Christ by a food fight. As people feel judged and condemned about a secondary issue – politics, childraising, secondary theological points – they can be alienated from the beloved community, pushed out by a small group, hurt by snide remarks and jokes. Do you want to know how it is that we’re supposed to love each other, at the very least follow the Hippocratic oath that doctors take. First of all, do no harm.

And the third bit of personal relational counsel Paul gives is

Don’t announce
Romans 14:22
So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve.

In other words, you don’t have to tell people everything you think about every issue. If you want to avoid a food fight, then exercise self control over your opinions. God is perfectly able to straighten out other people about breast feeding and get them to align up with the correct opinion about every single issue without us announcing our views and alienating one another, tearing the church apart, and offending each other.

Don’t judge, don’t hurt, and don’t announce.

But the core of Paul’s approach is not this personal relational practical counsel. The core of his approach is working out the implications of the gospel for all of life. I want you to see Paul’s principled theological counsel.

Principled theological counsel

Romans 14:15
If your brother or sister is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother or sister for whom Christ died.

Paul is saying that if you want to avoid food fights, having lots of tears in relationships with other Christians, having people upset all the time, having churches experiencing multiple splits:

Imitate the example of Christ

Be willing to give up your rights. This brother or sister that you are having a problem with is someone, Paul reminds us, for whom Christ died. You see, Jesus redefined success by his pattern of life. Here is what Jesus said in John 12:23-26:

John 12:23-26
23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. 25 Those who love their life will lose it, while those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.
He redefined the way of success in these words. We would say the way of success is through self-assertion. You push yourself forward. You don’t let anyone step on you. Be aggressive. Make sure everyone notices you. Insist on your rights. Don’t let anyone push you around. Maximize your freedom; look out for #1.

Jesus taught an entirely different way of success. He said, “Here’s the law of my kingdom. Only when you die to yourself will you experience the abundant life that I came to bring. Only when you give up your life and lay down your rights will you ever finally experience the life of the kingdom.”

Here’s the idea. Let’s say your marriage is struggling. You have a difficult relationship and you want your marriage to succeed. You want it to be a life-giving marriage, a marriage that refreshes and refuels you instead of sucks the life out of you. You want your marriage to be mutually nurturing and encouraging, an up-building relationship. Right now, it is life destroying; its deadening. How do you save your marriage?

One approach you could take, to use Jesus’ phrase, is to love your own life. In other words, assert yourself, demand that your needs be met. When you and your partner go to a counselor, battle in front of the counselor regarding who’s right and who’s wrong. Use all of your persuasive power to overwhelm your spouse and beat them into submission. Don’t give an inch. Don’t compromise; don’t be weak.

Jesus said whoever holds on to his or her life, will lose it. The self-assertive approach of pushing your point and never giving an inch will kill your marriage as its killed the marriages of millions and millions of other people in America.

Do you know how to find life in your marriage, the life of the kingdom? Two people choose to deny themselves. They say, “We’re servants of Jesus. We need to follow the pattern of life of Jesus. I need to go where Jesus went.” Where did Jesus go? He went to the cross. Therefore, if I’m going to follow Jesus, I must go to the cross as a husband. Marlene must go to the cross as a wife. I must stop asserting my rights. I must stop arguing for my point. Your spouse must stop asserting their rights. How do we find life? First, by dying. Dying to our rights, dying to our selves.

Finding life in a family sometimes means I die to my career ambitions. I have dreams about what I would be able to do. But if I take this new position, it is going to injure my son or daughter. Therefore I take my career and put it on the altar and I say I am going to sacrifice this promotion in order to bring life to the next generation, so my son or daughter will flourish. I’m not going to put my son or daughter on the altar and sacrifice them, so I can move up the corporate ladder.
The pattern of life of Jesus is I will die so others can live.

Now, I immediately need to say that God doesn’t demand that we always give up our rights. God doesn’t say that there is never a time to assert your rights. Those of you who are taking notes may want to jot down Acts 16:35-40 where the Apostle Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen. He did the same thing again in Acts 22:25-29. He asserted his rights as a Roman citizen. Sometimes its appropriate; in fact, sometimes it is the least self-willed thing that a person could do is to stand up to an aggressor, or a wife to stand up to an abuser and claim her rights to be free from abuse may be the least self-willed thing she’ll ever do. A wife may be afraid; she may have a lifelong habit of taking abuse, a wife may have her self-esteem so destroyed that standing up to an aggressor or abuser is the hardest thing she will ever do. She may be afraid. She may find it so unnatural that for her to stand up she really is sacrificing her will on the altar of God and say: God, I’m only going to do this because you tell me to. Because you say I’m worth something, even though I’ve had it pounded into my head a thousand times that I’m worth nothing.

Standing up to an alcoholic, standing up to a controlling parent who wants to run every aspect of your life, may be the hardest, most unnatural, least self-willed thing you’ll ever do.

But very often, especially in self-assertive America, a country dominated by talk of rights, we’re all so very conscious of every single slight and offense against us by any other person, Paul says, if you want to avoid a food fight, give in, give up, and surrender. And because there is a God, he will bless your life; he will let you enjoy the life of the kingdom of God in your surrender. Do you know this one?

Abraham, the great Jewish patriarch, got into a dispute between him and his nephew, Lot. It could have turned into a terrible food fight. Abraham was the older man; in that culture he was entitled to respect to the lion’s share of everything. In Genesis 13 Abraham’s servants fight with Lot’s servants. Here is what we read:

**Genesis 13:5-7**

5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram’s herders and the herders of Lot. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

Now Abram, like many Americans, could have said: Here’s the way we’re going to handle this, Lot. I win. I’m going to court. I’m going to assert my rights. I’m going to demand my share of the estate down to the last penny. I’m going to sit with an adding machine and add up every single dime that was spent and I’m
going to get mine down to the last coffee cup in the cabinet, the last washcloth in
the closet. I’m going to make sure that in this divorce, I get mine.

But Abram was a follower of God. He understood that meekness is not
weakness. In fact, it requires way more strength to take a punch than to deliver
one. Proverbs 16:32 says this:

Proverbs 16:32
Better a patient person than a warrior, those with self-control than those
who take a city.

It takes way more strength to control your temper and to bite your tongue than to

Genesis 13:8-9
8 So Abram said to Lot, “Let’s not have any quarreling between you and
me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. 9 Is not
the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go
to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.”

See what someone does, who is a follower of Christ in the way of Christ? They
let someone else get in front of them. They say: If you want to step in front of me
in the line, go ahead. Sometimes it is God’s will to have someone cut in front of
you. Sometimes God does not want you to assert your rights. Followers of
Jesus look to God and submit to God’s will.

Abram’s nephew Lot was the very opposite of that. Here is what we read in vv.
10-13:

Genesis 13:10-13
10 Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well
watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar.
(This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot
chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the
east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan,
while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near
Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning
greatly against the Lord.

Lot said, “I’m going after it. I’m going to pick the best part of the land for myself.”
He pushed ahead and asserted his rights. And he went to Sodom. And that is
the guy driving the massive Hummer down the highway, laughing, and doesn’t
see the curve ahead. It turns out by his self-assertion, by his ruthless grasping,
he loses it all. When God destroyed Sodom everything that Lot owned, every
single thing including his wife, was taken. He lost all of his belongings. He
barely escaped with the clothes on his back and the lives of his two daughters.
What happened to Abram? God held up his end.

**Genesis 13:14-17**
14 The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, “Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you.”

Do you know, if you listen to God, if you refuse to get into food fights with people, if you give up your rights in certain instances, God will give you so much more than you could ever grab for yourself? You know, if you choose to not retaliate because God’s Word tells you to not retaliate, that God will sometimes do a way better job than you ever could. We saw this in Romans 12.19,

**Romans 12:19**
Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.

Paul says to follow the example of Christ, who gave up his rights. And what happened to Jesus? Jesus was raised from the dead and made Lord and King over all.

What was Paul’s approach? He was principled and theological. He said to follow the example of Christ. And second,

*Live under the rule of Christ*

Look with me at Romans 14:17:

**Romans 14:17**
For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,

Paul begins by telling us

What God’s Kingdom is **not about**

It is not about food. You don’t have more of God in your life by what you eat, or less of God in your life by what you refuse to eat. Food choices won’t get you nearer to God.

Now, there are lots of laws in the Old Testament about food.
Food in the Old Testament

If you ask people why there were these restrictions on certain foods in the Old Testament, they will most likely tell you that these were ancient health provisions. Back then they didn’t have a Food and Drug Administration and so people were told not to eat pork because pork can carry trichinosis. It is an interesting explanation, but it doesn’t explain why kosher fish need fins and tails, or why fruit from trees can’t be eaten until the fourth year, or why animals had to be slaughtered in a certain way.

The main reason for having all these food laws is to keep the Jewish people separated from the nations around them. A special diet requires special food providers. It keeps us together as a people. Intermarriage is really hard when you go to your perspective mother-in-law’s house and you can’t eat anything that she serves. She’s not going to be very happy with you! Intermarriage is really hard when the only place you can take a date is to a kosher restaurant and you can’t go out to that great new Chinese or Italian restaurant that everyone in town is raving about. These laws were designed to keep Jews separate, to keep them distinct, and to preserve them from being overwhelmed in a much larger culture.

But we have something very different in the New Testament

Food in the New Testament

In the New Testament and under the new covenant, everything is changed. The Apostle Peter, who is Jewish, had a three-fold vision while he was at Simon the Tanner’s house of sheet covered with non-kosher food. What all was on it? Bob Evans sausage, lobsters, cheeseburgers. But Jewish Peter heard God three times command him to take and eat. Peter protested saying: Lord, I’ve never eaten unclean food. I can’t do that. God responded and said: Don’t call that which I have made clean unclean. God was changing Peter’s diet in order to take down the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles. God wants the beloved community to have no walls between people. We can have our cultural preferences; he is not asking for a homogenous mass. But he wants us to be able to have free and open fellowship with one another.

I believe that local churches ought to be visible pointers to what the kingdom of God will one day look like when it is fully manifested in our midst. There are few things that thrill me more as a pastor than the fact that Vineyard Columbus has people from over 110 nations worshipping here, that we have the wealthy and the poor, blacks and whites, Latinos and Asians, men and women, young and old, educated and uneducated, urban and suburban. We all come together. The kingdom of God is not about food and drink or any of the things that separate us. The kingdom of God is about what brings us together – our common faith in one Lord Jesus Christ.
Food is the mark of almost every religion outside of Christianity.

**Food in various religions**

Islam prohibits the eating of pork. There are foods that can be eaten, *halel*, and food that is forbidden, *haram*. In Hinduism there is a prohibition against the eating of animal flesh outside of lamb and chicken. Of course, in Judaism one can’t eat anything that is not kosher. Sikhs, Buddhists, Mormons, and Rastafarians – virtually every religion outside of Christianity restricts diets. Virtually every other religion besides the Kingdom of God is about food. It is about what you eat and drink.

And food is central in eating disorders.

**Food and eating disorders**

I read a testimony of a woman who struggled for years with various eating disorders. Here is what she said:

> I’m a recovering anorexic, a recovering bulimic, and a woman whose life has been dominated by food.

Writer Anne Lamott described the spectrum of her lifelong, eating-disordered behavior:

> It is a long dull story. I had lots of secrets and worries about me and food in my body. It was very scary and obsessive, the way it must feel if somebody is secretly entirely illiterate.

In other words, Ann Lamott is saying that there is shame attached to these secrets that the person who is eating-disordered has about food. Food is wrapped with so many other feelings – shame, desire, obsession, defiance, independence, guilt, self-control, domination, destruction, distraction. Some of the roots of an eating-disordered life comes from media. The body type portrayed in advertising as the ideal is possessed by about 1 out of every 20-25 American women. The vast majority of 5th grade girls say that their view of a perfect body has been strongly influenced by magazines. The majority of 5th grade girls say they want to lose weight.

Occasionally some of the roots of an eating-disordered life can be traced to parental influence and parental criticism. Don’t you think you’re getting a little plump?

Certainly, some of the roots have to do with an escape from pain. My dad was in construction when I was growing up. I used to work with him every Saturday; I
did that for about a decade. One of the guys on his crew was a guy named Kevin. We used to call him Kevy. He had a terrible problem with alcohol. I remember Dad going to a bar and literally picking Kevy up. My dad was big and really strong. Kevy was just a skinny little guy. Dad would literally pick him up from the bar and carry him out of the bar. He would throw him in the back of the pickup truck that we had and drove him home to his wife.

One day I asked my dad, “Dad, what’s wrong with Kevy? Why does he drink so much?”

Dad said, “Years ago Kevy came home and discovered his wife murdered in their apartment. And he began to drink.” He drank to medicate away the pain he couldn’t otherwise handle. He had no place to take his pain, and so he drank. That’s the root of many of our struggles, isn’t it? That at bottom, our turning to this or that substance, this or that behavior is a way to self-medicate. That the root of a disordered life, whether it is an eating-disordered life, or some other disorder is that the roots go down to unhealed pain. You know, any wound that we don’t bring into the light can’t be healed.

And by the way, if you struggle with an eating disorder, you might want to pick up a book in our bookstore titled Made to Crave: Satisfying Your Deepest Desire with God, Not Food by Lysa Terkeurst.

Book Cover: Made to Crave: Satisfying Your Deepest Desire with God, Not Food by Lysa Terkeurst.

Here in the Vineyard, we have support groups for people who struggle with eating disorders. We will be starting in January, two groups – one group for women of all ages, and a second group for 20-something women.

HUNGRY – Beginning January 10th at 7:00 p.m.

HUNGRY is an eight-week support group offering hope, healing, encouragement, and accountability for women who want to be more hungry for God and less dependent on food (compulsive or emotional eating), or dieting (obsession with weight or exercise) to meet emotional needs. The meetings will include a short teaching, group discussion, and prayer. There is no cost, but space is limited so preregistration is requested. For more information, why not contact Meg Kuta at megkuta@yahoo.com.

But the Apostle Paul says there is something deeper here. The issue of food and drink is deeper even than the issue of pain, or the media, or what mom says. The issue is the kingdom of God.
Romans 14:17
For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit…

The Kingdom of God is a short hand for the rule of God, the reign of God. The Kingdom of God is what or who rules in your life – God or something else. If something or someone other than God rules or dominates your life – food, alcohol, sex, drugs, video games, another person - the Bible calls that thing or person an idol.

A therapist named Paul Tripp said:

An idol is anything that rules me other than God. And idols exercise the principle of an inescapable influence, which says that whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person’s heart and behavior. We set up idols in our hearts and we worship them with our lives.

The ultimate root of an eating-disordered life is idolatry. An idol is the organizing principle of your life. It is not just one thing on your to-do list, it is an organizing principle that you structure your whole day around. That’s an idol. It could be cigarettes. You must walk out of the office every hour and a half and have another cigarette. You order your day around this thing. You might organize your day around a relationship, or around exercise, or around sex. For the eating-disordered life, the organizing principle of life is food.

Michelle Bennett wrote this:

The consumption of food, the rituals surrounding the consumption, and the bargaining made room for the gluttonness “one more” – this is how my days have passed. Food is my comfort and the source of my private joy; food is my penance and the place where I am punished; it offers a standard by which I can measure success or failure on my own terms. This idol has promised to mold me and make me – not after its will, but after my own will. As Ed Welch says, “The purpose of all idolatry is to manipulate the idol for our own benefit.” And yet I find myself enslaved to the very thing that promised me control and pleasure.

What are we seeking by food and other idols?

Food and what we are seeking

Look at Romans 14:17 again.

Romans 14:17
For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit…

Here is what we are seeking. We are seeking through food, through some other object, righteousness, peace and joy.

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Writer, Tim Keller, says that there are two great substitutes to the gospel message today. One is moralism – that you can make yourself acceptable by what you do. The other is hedonism – that you can find joy and life through some pursuit of pleasure. For the anorexic or bulimic, we find a substitute for the gospel by seeking perfection in what you eat and fulfillment in binging and purging.

Paul says there is only one way to righteousness, peace and joy.

What the Kingdom of God is about

They’re found in the Kingdom of God, having God’s rule and reign over your life. If you organize your life around anything else other than Christ, you are always going to be frustrated in your search for perfection, for being acceptable. You’re always going to be frustrated in the search for inner peace. If you organize your life around anything else other than God and his rule, you are going to be frustrated in your search for real joy and real pleasure.

Everything else in life is a dead-end except Jesus and his Kingdom. Jesus will supply you with the acceptance that you and I crave. Jesus will give us the peace inside that we so desperately need in these anxious times. And Jesus will fill your life with joy as you live under his rule. Let’s pray.
I. Paul’s approach to controversies

A. Personal relational counsel

1. Don’t judge

2. Don’t hurt

3. Don’t announce

B. Principled theological counsel

1. Imitate the example of Christ

2. Live under the rule of Christ

   a. What God’s Kingdom is not about

      i. Food in the Old Testament

      ii. Food in the New Testament

      iii. Food in various religions

      iv. Food and eating disorders

      v. Food and what we are seeking

   b. What God’s Kingdom is about