A Symposium in Rom. 14:17?
A Note on Paul’s Terminology

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1. Introduction

The present paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of the Pauline interaction with meal etiquette and thus with the contemporary discourse on symposiastic ideology. In the discussion about this, most attention is commonly given to 1 Cor. 8, 10, 11:17-34, and Rom. 14:1-23. Of these texts, 1 Cor. 8, 10 and Rom. 14:1-23 deal with the question of eating sacrificial foodstuffs (especially meat) and 1 Cor. 11:17-34 deals with the ‘etiquette,’ or, for that matter, liturgy, of the Corinthian κυριακὸν δείπνον (1 Cor. 11:20). The overarching interest of all four texts is similar: securing the unity and order of the respective communities expressed as it is in their communal meals: the ‘weak’ should not be outplayed by the ‘strong’ as soon as it comes to eating foodstuffs sacrificed to ‘idols’ (1 Cor. 8, 10, Rom. 14) and class differences should play no role at the celebration of the Eucharist (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34, compare Jas. 2:2-5).

As the title indicates, here the focus will be on Paul’s characterization of ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ as it surfaces within his discussion of the Roman Christians’ diet (Rom. 14:17). Commonly, this vs. is interpreted within the context of Pauline theology,1 in which the concepts of δικαιοσύνη,2 εἰρήνη,3 and χαρά4 are, in descending order of importance, anything but insignificant

1) There are no exceptions known to the author.
2) See the occurrence of the noun δικαιοσύνη in: Rom. (29), 1 Cor. (1), 2 Cor. (7), Gal. (4), Phil. (3), and the verb δικαιοῦμαι occurring in Rom. (14), 1 Cor. (2), and Gal. (6).
3) See Rom. (10), 1 Cor. (4), 2 Cor. (2), Gal. (3), Phil. (3), 1 Thess. (3), Phlm. (1).
4) Compare χαρά in: Rom. (3), 2 Cor. (5), Phil. (5), 1 Thess., (4), and χαίρω in Rom. (3), 1 Cor. (3), 2 Cor. (8), Phil. (7), 1 Thess. (2).
concepts. This is, naturally, legitimate. The same applies to attention for the concepts of δικαιοσύνη, εἰρήνη, and χαρά as part of (popular) Hellenistic philosophical discourse, within which they were not insignificant. This paper merely aims at broadening up the interpretative perspective by showing that all three concepts are also parts of contemporary symposiastic ideology, which means that, despite Rom. 14:17a Rom. 14:17b draws on the image of a(n ideal) symposium as the blueprint for the communal life of the community in Rome, just as much as 1 Cor. 11:17-34 does. The association of Rom. 14:17 with symposiastic ideology suggests itself because of the occurrence of terminology central to contemporary symposiastic thought within the context of a conflict about precisely meal fellowship. By drawing attention to this aspect of Rom. 14:17 a lacuna in contemporary research may be filled up.

2. Four Contexts of Rom. 14:17

2.1. First Century Meals

First century Mediterranean society was in most if not all parts a society structured through and maintained by meal fellowship. The symposium, as the generic term for the (formal) dinner, was pivotal to much, if not all social interaction and constituted an important ‘carrier’ of values (in the form of etiquette) at the same time. The hierarchy of the strongly stratified society

