

another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.** NASB

He suggests that our eschatology ought to motivate us to godly living, and our union with Christ is a powerful antidote for victory over sin in our daily life.

**Romans 13:11-14** - 11 And this do, **knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed.** 12 **The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand.** Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. 14 But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh** in regard to its lusts. NASB

As we live out the Christian life, we will indeed run into issues of religious conviction and tradition which vary between Christians. Many of these issues arise simply from practical matters and do not have specific guidelines in Scripture that govern our practice. At times, even though there are sufficient guidelines in Scripture, some Christians hold certain convictions either from something they have been taught or practiced, or they have strong convictions about for one reason or another. Therefore it becomes incumbent upon us to develop convictions about these kinds of issues on the basis of principle, since there may not be very specific guidelines in Scripture, or for whatever reason we are unable to come to agreement with others and we want to be careful to preserve unity among us, insofar as it is possible. This no doubt then can and does cause situations where our beliefs and convictions clash with that of others Christians. What then shall we do? The section in Romans 14 deals with this very issue and Paul gives us principles by which to deal with these differing “*opinions.*” The words for “*opinions*” in Romans 14:1 is also translated as “*disputable matters*” or “*disputations.*” We must be careful to discern between issues of essential Christian orthodoxy and secondary or even tertiary issues. To be clear, these guidelines in Romans 14 deal more with less important issues of faith rather than essential issues as we do not sacrifice essential doctrinal issues for the sake of unity, but rather we must guard the essentials of the faith even if we stand as one man against the whole world (ex. Martin Luther).

**Romans 14:1-4** - 14 Now **accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.** 2 One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3 **Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.** 4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Paul clearly admonishes Christians to accept one another in the case of disputes. He explains further that we are not to “*accept*” them “*for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.*” He explains further that we are not to “*regard them with contempt*” for holding convictions over issues like whether or not they eat meat or not. This is not the kind of issue that Christians should divide over according to Paul. Rather we should “*accept*” others and “*not regard them with contempt*” who have such convictions. The obvious reason for this Paul states, “*for God has accepted him.*” He then points out that God will receive such a person by faith and justify them, who then are we to judge the person God has approved? He makes the point that each individual Christian stands before God on their own, and their own faith is regarded by God as sufficient, for “*the Lord is able to make them stand*” on the basis of Christ’s merit. He continues with this theme, of unity, acceptance and judgment bringing up the issue of special or holy days such as the Sabbath. He then puts the two issues of holy days or eating meat or vegetables only on the same par with each other by lumping them together as issues by which we are to accept one another over.

**Romans 14:5-6 - 5 One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.** 6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. NASB

See here that Paul lays down the same principle as earlier, “*let each man be fully convinced in his own mind,*” again appealing to the fact that each person is accountable to God personally for their own convictions. This an **imperative**, that is, that Christians must develop convictions about worship and the Christian life in order to be fully pleasing to God, Paul commands, “*let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.*” But one cannot escape the fact that Paul brings up the keeping of certain holy days, like the Sabbath or a feast, as an example of a disputable matter and one over which we are not to judge each other but rather accept each other. This is a loud commentary on the issue of Sabbath keeping because Paul clearly accepts the fact that some Christians do not keep holy days at all and that is totally acceptable in his view. This is clear by the statement “*one man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike, but let each one be fully convinced in his own mind.*” See here that Paul gives full acceptance to the idea that some Christians do not regard any holy days, and this he says is perfectly acceptable in the sight of God. This is also a loud commentary on the fact that the **4<sup>th</sup> commandment** must therefore be seen as an issue of ceremonial Law and **not a moral issue**, and therefore a secondary issue of which we are free to keep it or not. This is Paul’s teaching regarding this matter elsewhere in the New Testament as well.

**Colossians 2:16-17 - 16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day** — 17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Paul clearly says again here in Colossians 2 that we are not to judge one another regarding the issue of the keeping of holy days or Sabbath keeping. But notice how, by commanding each Christian **not to allow others to judge them** about such matters. Again see God’s imperative for us to develop our own convictions and to be fully convinced before God and not come under the burden of other people’s convictions but rather see ourselves with direct accountability to God on disputable matters. Moreover, these statements clearly show the nature of the Old Covenant Law as having been **abrogated** by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their ceremonial aspects like the keeping of holy days which were commanded as ceremonial imperatives in the OT Law. This of course is Paul’s teaching throughout the New Testament.

**Galatians 6:13-15 - 13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves**, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 **For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.** NASB

In these matters he clearly sets forth the fact that systems of legal obedience created by man-made religious rules, or even the reimplementation of OT ceremonial rituals are not regarded with apostolic authority but rather have no ability to impact the heart and Christian conscience because these legal rules set up false boundaries that “*are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.*”

**Colossians 2:18-23 - 18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels**, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, **why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,** 21 “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using) — **in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?** 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, **the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and**

**self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.**

NASB

He also taught in other places that such things as man-made rules or even any kind of **amoral boundaries** that we establish really have no true heart changing moral power because rules about things like the eating or not of certain foods, (for example because they have been sacrificed to an idol), do nothing to impact our real relationship before God because they are amoral and God is concerned with the matter of our heart before him regarding love toward Him and toward our neighbor. Things like food are amoral and really have no religious value, unless they cause us to be unloving toward our brother, something God is very concerned about.

**1 Corinthians 8:4-13** - 4 Therefore **concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world**, and that there is no God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, 6 yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him. 7 **However not all men have this knowledge**; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and **their conscience being weak is defiled**. 8 But **food will not commend us to God; we are neither the worse if we do not eat, nor the better if we do eat**. 9 **But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak**. 10 For if someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? 11 For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died. **12 And thus, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ**. 13 Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble. NASB

Notice then, that each one has his own conviction before God, and each of us is to respect him for it in regard to man-made religious rules or any kind of **amoral** issues. This respect we give by **not judging harshly but rather accepting** them in regard to their practice, and also being **careful not to offend** them by violation of their practice in their presence. Learn here, each man is accountable to God concerning his own Christian life, and we must be very careful about judging others in regard to man-made religious rules or any kind of **amoral** issues.

**Romans 14:7-9** - 7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8 **for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's**. 9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. NASB

It is important at this point to mention that in regard to **moral issues** it is in fact very important for Christians **to make judgments** in our Christian relations. This is because moral issues are issues of sin and purity before God. We are in fact our brother's keeper in regard to sin issues and commanded to bring judgment in the church (1 Cor 5:1-12), and even serious discipline in the church (Matt 18:15-20, 2 Thess 3:6-15), when a Christian brother lives in the continual practice of sin (1 John 3:4-10) and will not be persuaded to repentance (Gal 6:1-2). In this way, concerning moral issues, we are not only accountable to God, but also to the entire Christian church.

But concerning man-made religious rules and amoral issues, **each person is accountable to God concerning his/her own Christian life**, and we must be very careful about judging others in regard to man-made religious rules or any kind of **amoral** issues.

**Romans 14:10-12** - 10 But you, **why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we shall 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 one of us shall give account of himself to God**. NASB