



May 9, 2025

Sabbath Observance and Vegetarianism

Warm hellos once again friends, brethren, fellow laborers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast of lower Alabama. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

As I've mentioned before, sometimes we receive questions or comments from our public audience. At times a repetition over a specific verse, or verses, and in this case some personal ideas concerning Romans 14.

Many commentaries adopt the viewpoint that Paul (in Romans 14) is discussing the weekly Sabbath and annual Biblical festivals and whether they are still to be observed by Christ's disciples. They conclude that observing them is no longer necessary. However, one can search the entire chapter and he/she will not find the words "Sabbath" or "Holy Day".

Let's read what Paul wrote, *"One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks."* (Romans 14:5-6)

Okay, so what is the point of Paul's instruction in Romans 14?

Was Paul claiming that a believer could take it or leave it regarding observing the Sabbath day?

Does this mean that the Sabbath is no different from any other day, or that we are free to choose whatever day we wish to observe or not observe?

To come to that conclusion, one must read words that are not written there into the chapter, because as I stated, the Sabbath is nowhere mentioned here.

Keep in mind that Paul, earlier in this same epistle, had said: "*The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good*" (Romans 7:12); "*The doers of the law will be justified*" (Romans 2:13), and "*I delight in the law of God*" (Romans 7:22).

If he were saying here that Sabbath observance is irrelevant, such an assertion would be completely inconsistent with his other clear statements about the law in this same letter.

The apostle Paul warns that we need to beware of the fleshly mind that leads us away from obedience to God and His laws. "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*" (Romans 8:7)

The passage I'm referring to that is in question about "days" is in verses 5 and 6, immediately between references to eating meat and vegetarianism in verses 2, 3 and 6. In verses 2 and 3 Paul discussed vegetarianism ("*he who is weak eats only vegetables*") and continued this theme in verse 6 ("*he who eats . . . and he who does not eat*").

There's no biblical connection between Sabbath observance and vegetarianism, so these verses would have to be taken out of context to assume that Paul was referring to the Sabbath. "The close contextual association with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day set apart for observance as a time for feasting or as a time for fasting" (Everett Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 1976, Vol. 10, p. 146).

The context shows us that some members of the congregation there were eating meat, while others were abstaining from eating meat. The vegetarians were most likely members who "feared lest they should (without knowing it) eat meat which had been offered to idols or was otherwise ceremonially unclean (which might easily happen in such a place as Rome), that they abstained from meat altogether" (W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 1974, p. 530).

Romans 14 is, in part, a chapter on Christian reflection on one's relationship with God and acting according to one's conscience within the framework of God's laws as they pertained to eating meat and especially eating meat sacrificed to idols.

Depending upon their consciences, early believers had several choices they could make while traveling and/or residing in their communities. If they did not want to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols, they could choose to fast or eat only vegetables to make sure they did not consume any meat of suspicious background that might offend their consciences. If their consciences were not bothered by eating meat sacrificed to idols, they could choose from the options. Within this context, said Paul, "*let each be fully convinced in his own mind*" (verse 5) because "*whatever is not of faith is sin*" (verse 23).

To properly understand the Bible we must look at each verse in context, and often the entire chapter as well. Both the immediate context of what is being discussed, and in the larger social and historical context influencing the author and his audience at the time must also be considered. You and I must also be careful not to read our own preconceived notions into the text in God's Word.

Many assume, that once we have faith in Jesus Christ, there is no more need to keep the law.

Paul himself addressed this concept in Romans 3:31: "*Do we then make void [Greek katargeo, meaning 'destroy' or 'abolish'] the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish [Greek histemi, meaning 'erect' or 'make to stand'] the law.*" Faith doesn't abolish the law, said Paul; it establishes and upholds it.

In Acts 24 he defended himself before the Roman governor Felix against charges of dissension and sedition brought by Jewish religious leaders.

Replying to the accusations against him, he said, "*I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets*" (verse 14). Here, some 25 to 30 years after Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, Paul plainly said he believed "*all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets*"

(terms used for the books of the Old Testament) and had done nothing against the law!

Okay, so we started this letter discussing Romans 14. The principle of pursuing peace, and accommodating different points of view of members about disputable and debatable matters is important.

But, observing the Commandments (including the Sabbath command) is not one of those disputable matters. We must look at the rest of the story and assemble those statements that bear weight and truth on a particular subject and all be workers "*approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



T. S. Hoefker

Senior Pastor, CGM

Church of God Ministries (CGM)/(Ministerios de la Iglesias de Dios)

tshoefker@cogministries.org / www.cogministries.org

P.O. Box 983, Daphne, AL, 36526-0983 / 251-930-1797 Offices