

Romans 14: 5-6

The following scripture is employed by some in an attempt to say that the Sabbath and annual holy days of God no longer need to be kept: “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....” (Rom. 14: 5-6).

What does this passage mean? Does it mean that every person can *decide for himself* which day to observe---or **whether** to observe *any* day? Does it mean that you can “let your *conscience* be your guide”?¹

These questions will now be answered by considering the following three points.

(1) The passage above says *nothing* about what *God* esteems---only what *man* esteems.¹ Yet, “...what is *highly* esteemed among men is an *abomination* in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15; Isa. 55: 8-9).

Notice, now, how the Sabbath is esteemed **by God**: Back at the time of the creation of Adam, “God *blessed* the seventh day and *sanctified* it” (Gen. 2:3); one of God’s ten *great* Commandments is to “Remember the Sabbath day, to **keep it holy**” (Ex. 20:8); God commanded its observance *forever* (Lev. 16:31); God sent Israel and Judah into *captivity* largely *because* they did not keep God’s Sabbath (Neh. 13: 15-18).¹

Yes, God Himself has very **high** esteem for His Sabbath. And He is quite concerned about whether we **keep** holy what He has *made* holy!¹

(2) We must worship God in the way that He *says* to worship Him. We are not to just decide for ourselves which day---if any---we want to observe.

When Moses went up into Mt. Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, after he had been gone for some weeks, the people urged Aaron to make a golden calf. Aaron did so, and then “made a proclamation and said, ‘Tomorrow is a feast **to the LORD**’” (Ex. 32:5). What was God’s response? Did He *approve* of this practice which was dedicated **to** His glory? Absolutely not! Verse 21 says it was a great sin! Furthermore, God saw to it that thousands of people paid with their *lives* for this terrible sin (verses 28 and 35).

Also, in Deut. 12, God is addressing the issue of pagan religious practices, and whether it’s

acceptable for His people to *apply* such practices to the worship of the true God: “You shall *not* worship the LORD your God in that way,” declared God. Rather, in their worship of Him, God said, “Whatever I command you, **be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it**” (verse 32).

God **commands** the keeping of His seventh day Sabbath---a day which He set apart and *made* holy! What, then, if you decide to keep a *different* day? “...you *reject* the commandment of God, that you may keep your *tradition*” (Mark 7: 9). “And **in vain they worship Me**, teaching as doctrines the commandments *of men*” (Matt. 15:9).

(3) Now, for the third and final point regarding Rom. 14: 5-6. This passage is not even *referring* to the Sabbath and holy days! Nowhere in the entire chapter---and for that matter, nowhere in the entire book of Romans---is the Sabbath (or the annual holy days) even mentioned!²

The subject of the entire chapter (from start to finish) has to do with what people eat! As a quick proof of that, notice that the following verses in chapter 14 all refer to eating: verses 2, 3, 6, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23.

Paul begins the chapter by stating, in verse 1, that the brethren should not enter into disputes over doubtful issues---issues which some weren't sure about.³ In verse 2, he states that some who were “weak” would eat *only* vegetables---not meat. Others argued that it was fine to eat meat. Consequently (and as shown in verse 4), the brethren were judging each other regarding this matter.

In I Cor. chapter 8, Paul explains why it was that a number of Christians had become vegetarians. *Most* of the meat in the marketplace of that day had been previously offered to idols.³ Consequently, Paul said this: “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one....*However* [said Paul], there is not in everyone that *knowledge*; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it **as** a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled” (I Cor. 8: 4, 7).

So, *some* new converts thought that eating such meat was equivalent to participating in idol-worship, but they went along with other Christians and ate it anyway. Yet, they should *not* have done so, as Paul shows in Rom. 14: “But he who *doubts* is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin” (verse 23).

Notice what W.J. Conybeare says concerning the issue in Romans chapter 14: He says that these vegetarians were 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*” (*The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, p. 530).

So, the entire chapter of Romans 14 concerns the issue of vegetarianism. Yet, in verses 5 and 6---and only in these 2 verses---Paul speaks of brethren esteeming “days.” Why does Paul begin speaking about “days” right in the *midst* of his discussion on “eating meat versus vegetarianism”?

First of all, there is *no* biblical connection between the Sabbath and vegetarianism.⁴ Verses 5 and 6 would have to be taken *totally out of context* to assume that Paul is referring in those two verses to the Sabbath and holy days. Again, the terms “Sabbath” and “holy days” are not found anywhere in the entire book of Romans!

So, what “days” is Paul referring to in verses 5 and 6? Notice what *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* says about verses 5-6: “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**” (1976 ed., Vol. 10, p.146).

The fact is that there were some “weak” new converts who thought that certain *days* were better for fasting or for eating---or for abstaining from *particular* foods.³ Jews and Gentiles both practiced “semifasts” on particular days of the week or month.³ Luke 18:12 shows that the Pharisees fasted, according to *custom*, “twice a week.” We see in Zech. 7: 4-7 that the Jewish people fasted during certain months.

However, *Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* shows that the Jews (and even the Gentiles) were **divided** over when---and if---to abstain from *certain* foods. ³

So, in Romans 14, Paul essentially told them that human opinion concerning vegetarianism (or concerning fasting on certain days) should be kept *private*. It's a matter between the individual *and God*; and that is *why* (concerning the issue of eating or fasting on specific days) that Paul made the comment that whatever a person feels he needs to do, he ought to do it "to the Lord"---seeking God's will. ⁵

Finally, consider this. In Romans 14, when Paul referred to those who were "weak in the faith" (verse 1), many people think he was referring to those Christians who kept the Sabbath and holy days. Yet, if that were true, then Paul would have to classify *himself* as "weak in the faith"---because Paul himself *observed* those days! Yet, Paul did **not** consider himself "weak." To the contrary, Paul said, "We then who are **strong**..." (chapter 15, verse 1). ⁴

Thus, we see that Paul was absolutely *not* referring to "the keeping of the Sabbath and the holy days" when he spoke of those who were "weak."

References:

1. "The Sabbath in the New Testament---COMMANDED or CONDEMNED?"
L. Leroy Neff, *The Good News*, Aug. 1983
2. "Does Galatians 4 condemn Sabbath and Holy Day observance?" Scott Ashley, *In Transition*, 7/21/95
3. *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* March 1997 booklet by Roderick C. Meredith
4. "Does Romans 14 do away with unclean meats and the Sabbath?" Scott Ashley, *In Transition*, 5/26/95
5. "Is That Really the Best They Can Do?" Clayton D. Steep, *The Good News*, Dec. 1985