

FAQ – Romans 14:5 – Fasting or Sabbath?

Most already know that the writings of Paul are difficult to understand. What many fail to consider is that we were even warned beforehand by Peter that Paul's letters can be misunderstood by those lacking a strong foundation in God's Word. Alarming, according to Peter, the most common Paul – study - related error results in breaking God's law (lawlessness/wickedness) simply because Paul can be misunderstood (a theological error) to teach against all of or some of God's law (2 Peter 3:14-17).

Romans 14 is simply another unfortunate instance (amongst many) where teachers fail to exercise due diligence in studying God's Word to understand exactly what Paul is teaching, as a result many accidentally dismiss Peter's clear warning and mistakenly render any application meaningless. Instead, either because of intellectual laziness or placing too much unchecked faith in the doctrines of men, Romans 14 is continuously used to support a law abolishing paradigm. More specifically, the commandments considered abolished via Romans 14 are the commandments found in Leviticus 11 (Dietary) and Leviticus 23 (Sabbath).

We are even told by Paul himself to test everything and only hold on to what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). The root cause of why we still fail is that we often allow our flesh to define good versus using God's Word as the establishment of the true definition. In fact, what is often defined as good (God's law) in scripture, men call bad. We are to test everything to God's established Word, not to what our corrupted and deceiving hearts want to be true. Paul even commended those who tested everything Paul said and practiced to God's Word (Acts 17:10-11). If we were to test everything to scripture as Paul recommends, then using his letters to generate the error of lawless men would be actually quite a difficult feat.

Most do not consider that the only Word the Bereans could have been searching daily to prove Paul right or wrong was what we now call the Old Testament. That should put things into a new perspective. Many only test Paul's writings against Paul's writings, which is a process that is quite disturbing in and of itself. How much of today's interpretation of Paul's letters could pass the test that uses only the Old Testament? That is certainly what a true Berean would ask. In reading the Old Testament we quickly discover that God's law as delivered to us on Sinai, is intended to exist forever, and is defined as light, liberty, the way, the truth, the life, and absolutely perfect. Yet some accuse God of removing such blessings from us. Some even accuse Paul of defining God's law as bondage, broken, or worthless, and, in Romans 14, doubtful disputations. Though most will not want to admit it, that is a clear case of defining "good" as evil and defining "evil" as good.

We not only discover that in both the New and Old Testaments that there is no support of the notion that Paul taught against God's law, but that Paul actually taught the exact opposite. Paul taught that the law is good, holy, just, delightful, and spiritual. Contrary to most teachers today, he stated that he believes in all of the Law and Prophets (Acts 24:13-14). He practiced God's feast days (Acts 18:20-21)(Acts 20:17)(Acts 27:9-10). In Acts 21, James directs Paul to perform a Nazarene vow (Numbers 6) with four other believers, just to prove the law abolishing accusations against Paul to be false. He proved that he did indeed teach and practice the Law of Moses (Acts 21:20-26). These false accusations directed to Paul in the first century required that he defend himself relentlessly. These are the exact same accusations today, resulting from a poor interpretation of Paul's letters by mainstream theology. After 2,000 years, Paul still has to defend himself against these false accusations. After 2,000 years, and a couple languages removed, Paul is even more difficult to understand in matters of God's law, yet we pretend otherwise and send those new in the faith to read and study Paul first. According to Peter, we should read and understand the Old Testament and Gospels first, then read Paul, once a stable and educated foundation is established. How often do we hear such advice?

Even if we test Paul's words that supposedly abolish or change God's law, we would then find several disturbing contradictions in his own writings. If we would have read the preceding 13 chapters of Romans and considered the audience and debate at hand (as Paul certainly intended his letter to be read), we would

find that it proves very difficult to make the error of lawless men. Here are some simple and straightforward examples:

Romans 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Romans 7:12 Therefore the law *is* holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.

Paul obviously believed and taught in the Law of God. If the above is established as true, what sense can we make of Romans 14, which supposedly teaches against God's law? Clearly that would be quite difficult. How can Paul state all of these wonderful and positive things about the law to those who know God's law (7:1) and then, in the same letter, abolish them?

In case there is any confusion on how Paul defines the Law of God, Paul declares to the Jews that they are those who understand the law. Paul is not inventing some new mystical Law of God, but the same one that was passed down through the ages.

Romans 7:1 Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law)

This is why Paul states the Jews had the advantage in understanding these things.

Romans 3:1-2 What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

When was Israel given the "oracles of God"? Stephen tells us in Acts 7 that it was at Mount Sinai.

Acts 7:38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spoke to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

When Paul says the "Law of God," then he means the "Law of God"!

If Paul taught and practiced God's law, then it begs the question, what is Romans 14 addressing?

Paul begins the chapter by declaring we are to still receive those who are weak in the faith and to not dispute over doubtful things.

Romans 14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but* not to disputes over doubtful things.

We need to keep in mind that Romans 14 is often used to support the abolishment the Sabbath day (Leviticus 23) and the dietary instructions (Leviticus 11). These commandments have always been clear and have never been matters of "doubtful things." On the contrary, God's law is given to us to clearly define sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7)(1 John 3:4) and to enable us to correct and rebuke others (i.e. 2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Paul was speaking of things outside of God's law which became matters of contention for believers in the first century. These matters required reasoned discussions because they are not clear matters established in God's law. Given that this is a letter to a specific group of people about a specific debate, we must extract various clues to assist us in piecing together exactly what Paul is teaching.

There are two debates Paul focuses on in Romans 14. Paul outlines these points of contention in the very next two verses (2 & 3). The first matter of discussion and correction from Paul is a matter of eating all things or eating only vegetables.

Debate #1

Romans 14:2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

The second matter Paul establishes as a focus in chapter 13 is related to what day(s) believers should fast.

Debate #2

Romans 14:3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats;

Paul answers debate #1 in verses 14-23.

These verses are often used in mainstream Christian doctrine to suggest that all animals are now clean and suitable for food. The proof verse to support this understanding is supposedly established in verse 14.

Paul answers debate #2 in verses 5-13.

These verses are often used in mainstream Christian doctrine to suggest that God abolished the Sabbath day and now all days are alike, unless, in your mind, all days are not alike and the Sabbath still exists. It somehow depends on if you are doing it for the Lord or not. Therefore, anyone can determine where God's law stands on this matter solely, based on what one wants to believe. Supposedly, we can decide what God's law now is or what God wants us to observe. This matter is no longer established by what is written in God's Word about the Sabbath, or even by what was practiced by Yeshua (Jesus) as an example for us to follow, but purely based on how convinced we now are in our own mind. This interpretation is still promoted even though the context is clearly about food which has nothing to do with the Sabbath. The proof verse to support this understanding is supposedly established in verse 5.

Romans 14:5

The focus of this study is Romans 14:5 which Paul establishes as debate #2.

Romans 14:5 One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

The question is this: Is Paul teaching that the Sabbath is a matter of what we believe in our own minds versus what is established in God's law, or is Paul discussing another matter entirely? The difference has significant impact on what value and understanding we are able to extract from Romans 14. If Paul is teaching on a different matter than the Sabbath day, then clearly we cannot teach that Paul is teaching anything related to the Sabbath day. That should make sense. These are basic hermeneutical principles that we need to apply.

As this study already established, Paul taught in agreement with God's law and not against it. That should be a concern for anyone teaching Paul that taught against God's law. However, for those who believe that Paul can be both for and against the same law in the same letter, Romans 14:5 still needs to be addressed.

Paul was teaching to those who knew God's law. Paul was writing to those who believed God's law to be clear, and not doubtful matters. It should already be clear that the context is not God's Sabbath because God's Sabbath is clearly part of God's law. In the first century, those who knew God's law (7:1) already understood this and no one disputed the establishment of the Sabbath day in God's law (especially Jews who were given the oracles of God – Romans 3:1-2). Paul is certainly not going to appeal the benefit of knowing God's law and then throw it in the trash can. There is value in knowing and understanding what still has application for the believer, not what has supposedly been done away with.

It should also be noted that the Sabbath is nowhere to be mentioned in Romans 14, or even the entire letter, except generically under the umbrella of the "Law of God." We already covered what Paul directly taught in Romans on the subject of the "Law of God" and thus what he indirectly taught on the Sabbath. We need to ensure that our interpretation of Romans 14 is consistent with what Paul taught earlier in the very same letter. We cannot teach that Paul taught both against the Law of God and in agreement with the Law of

God in the same letter. We cannot ignore the fact that the Sabbath is part of the Law of God that was given to the Jews (and all of the tribes of Israel) at Mount Sinai.

We can only conclude that Paul was teaching on something outside of God's law in Romans 14, something more related to tradition or doctrines of men and that would be considered doubtful disputations to Jews. Remember, many Jews had been deceived by the mainstream theological education system of the day that men's traditions and doctrines (oral law/talmud) actually mattered. At best, these doctrines and traditions of men were the source of bickering and debate, as in Romans 14. At worst, Yeshua (Jesus) taught that these traditions conflicted against the Law of Moses (Mark 7:6-13). Paul calls these things "doubtful disputations" because they are not of God's law but of man's.

We need to define the tradition or doctrine that is the source of the debate in Romans 14:5. As with most of Paul's letters, if we simply continue reading Paul explains himself.

Romans 14:6-7 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. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

Verses 6-7 provide the context. Paul mentions that "the day" (5) that he is referring to is a matter of eating or not eating (7). In more Biblical terms, the doubtful disputation outside of God's law that is being discussed here is the matter of weekly fasting (when to fast and when not to fast). Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) is the only day when God's people are commanded to fast. If anything, we might have a case that we no longer need to fast on Yom Kippur. However, since we know Paul is not teaching on God's law, but traditions and doctrines of men, we need to discover if that many Jews in the first century had quarrels about what days to fast according to tradition.

In Yeshua's (Jesus') time, the Pharisees fasted twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays. In Luke 18:12, Yeshua (Jesus) gives a parable in which a Pharisee prayed "I fast twice a week." Gentile converts that continued the tradition of weekly fasting observed it on Wednesdays and Friday so that they could be different than the Pharisees and their corrupted "oral law," which was contrary to the Law of Moses. The Didache (Teachings of the Apostles – First Century Writing), chapter 8: "*But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week. Rather, fast on the fourth day and the Preparation.*" (Wednesday and Friday).

An interesting point to consider is that they (Gentile converts) continued to consider Friday as the "day of preparation." What they were preparing for, ironically enough, was the Sabbath day of rest. As the Book of Acts establishes, the pattern is a Sabbath observance for all believers. This continued to be the case for several hundred years.

What Paul was simply trying to resolve in Romans 14 is whether weekly fasting matters or not in relation to the commandments and teachings of men ("oral law"). As Paul concludes, what really matters is what we do for God. That may or may not include weekly fasting. Weekly fasting is not to be a status symbol. It is to not be projected as a commandment or directive to others. Anyone who fasts for such a reason is weak in the faith. They are placing more faith in man's traditions and missing the whole point of fasting in the first place. This is the mentality that Yeshua (Jesus) taught against during the majority of his ministry. This is not a new problem that Paul is dealing with, though many try to turn it into a new debate.

Those that teach that Romans 14 argues against the Sabbath, which is arguing against God's law, have completely missed the point Paul was making. They ignored the warning from Peter and proceeded with the error he warns about. They have been deceived and are deceiving others. The irony is that Paul clearly teaches in chapters 6-9 of Romans that it is those who are flesh - minded who do not go after God's law, but those who are spiritually minded that delightfully serve in God's law. Teaching against the Sabbath is serving the flesh only and denying the spiritual pursuit of God's law. Those who teach such law - abolishing doctrine in Romans 14 or elsewhere are catering to itching ears.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves many teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Simply said, Romans 14:5 is specific to a debate about which days believers should fast. Paul's entire point is their weak faith is evident from their debating and judging of others. Being obedient to God's law is never defined as weakness in the faith. We are even called to judge others in sin (breaking God's law) and correct/rebuke with God's Word. This is why Paul has license to say to not judge others when we know that scripture commands us to address sin in ourselves and in others. Paul can say this because he is not teaching on matters of God's law, but tradition and commandments of men related to fasting. Weakness in the faith is the definitive pattern of those who place too much value in traditions and commandments of men outside of scripture. Weakness in the faith is also defined as those who abolish and deny the Word which is to be the foundation of our faith.

Here is how Scripture defines God's law:

1. The Law blesses (obey) and curses (disobey).

(Deut 11:26-27)(Ps 112:1)(Ps 119:1-2)(Ps 128:1)(Prov 8:32)(Is 56:2)(Mat 5:6)(Mat 5:10)(Luke 11:28)(Jam 1:25)(1 Pe 3:14)(Rev 22:14)

2. The Law defines sin (disobey).

(Jer 44:23)(Ez 18:21)(Dan 9:11)(Ro 3:20)(Ro 7:7)(1 Jo 3:4)

3. The Law is perfect.

(Ps 19:7)(Jam 1:25)

4. The Law is liberty/freedom.

(Ps 119:45)(Jam 1:25, 2:12)

5. The Law is the way.

(Ex 18:20)(Deut 10:12)(Josh 22:5)(1 King 2:3)(Ps 119:1)(Prov 6:23)(Is 2:3)(Mal 2:8)(Mark 12:14)(Ac 24:14)

6. The Law is the truth.

(Ps 119:142)(Mal 2:6)(Ro 2:20)(Gal 5:7)(Ps 43:2-4)(Jo 8:31-32)

7. The Law is life.

(Job 33:30)(Ps 36:9)(Prov 6:23)(Rev 22:14)

8. The Law is light.

(Job 24:13)(Job 29:3)(Ps 36:9)(Ps 43:2-4)(Ps 119:105)(Prov 6:23)(Is 2:5) (Is 8:20)(Is 51:4)(2 Cor 6:14)(1 John 1:7)

9. The Law is Yeshua (Jesus), the Word made flesh.

(PERFECT+FREEDOM+WAY+TRUTH+LIFE+LIGHT= Law/Jesus).

(Ps 27:1)(Jo 1:1-14)(Jo 14:5-11)(1 Jo 1:7)

10. The Law is also for those who were once Gentiles (foreigner/alien) but now are grafted in to Israel.

(Ex 12:19) (Ex 12:38) (Ex 12:49) (Lev 19:34) (Lev 24:22) (Num 9:14) (Num 15:15-16) (Num 15:29) (ie: Ruth) (Is 42:6) (Is 60:3) (Mat 5:14) (Eph 2:10-13) (Ac 13:47) (Ro 11:16-27) (Jer31:31-34) (Ez 37) (1 Jo 2:10) (1 Jo 1:7)

11. The Law is God's instructions on how to love God, how to love others, and how to not love yourself.

(Ex 20:6)(Deut 5:10)(Deut 7:10)(Deut 11:13)(Deut 11:22)(Deut 30:16)(Deut 6:5)(Lev 19:18)(Neh 1:5)(Dan 9:4)(Mat 22:35-37)(Matthew 10:39)(Mat 16:25)(Jo 14:15)(Jo 14:21)(Ro 13:9)(1 Jo 5:2-3)(2 Jo

1:6)

Ask yourself the hard questions. Ask others. Ask the Word. Test your faith. Challenge yourself. Test everything.

119 Ministries

www.TestEverything.net

