

**14:1 Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.**

**14:2 One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only.**

**14:3 The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him.**

In Romans 12:3,6 Paul told us that “God has allotted to each a measure of faith” and we are to exercise our spiritual gifts “according to the measure of our faith.” This means that God gives different quantities (measurements) of faith to different people. Whether we have a lot of faith or a little faith, the amount of faith we have is apportioned to us by God. In Romans 12 the recognition of the differences in faith was needed to use spiritual gifts properly. Here it is applied to Christian behavior.

In this context, “faith” means to be persuaded of the truth (Hodge, 417). Every Christian has faith in the person and work of Christ (10:9–10), but for whatever reason, some were not persuaded that their salvation gave them certain freedoms. Paul is not addressing people who have a little faith in Christ as their Lord and Savior; rather, he is referring to those who trust Him fully but lack insight about how their salvation plays out in their lives. Their faith was not strong enough to allow them to enjoy the full liberty they could have in Christ. For this reason, Paul calls them weak in faith. The weak in faith are identified as those who eat vegetables only (14:2) and observe holy days (14:5).

In verse 1 Paul tells the Christian community to “accept the one who is weak in faith” and “not to pass judgment on their opinions.” In other words, Paul wants every believer to be treated equally; the weak should be afforded the same intimate fellowship that is given to all believers. “Not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions” could mean a number of things. Stott is probably correct when he says that the verse means “we must receive the weak person with a warm and genuine welcome, ‘without debate over his misgivings’ or scruples (REB), or ‘not for the purpose of getting into quarrels about opinions’ (BAGD)” (Stott, 360).

Verse 2 states one of the disputed matters: one person believes that he may eat all things, while another believes that he should eat only vegetables.

No reason is given as to why some only ate vegetables, but Paul could be referring to a number of different situations in his day. Some believe that he is referring to Jewish converts who still believed that Christians should keep the OT dietary restrictions. However, the law did not forbid eating meat so it’s unlikely that Paul had this in mind. Others think that he is speaking of those who had problems eating meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:23–33). However, Paul doesn’t state that this is the meat being spoken of. Still others believe that he is referring to a strict sect of Jews who were vegetarians because they were fearful of eating anything unclean; their vegetarianism was their way of practicing piety. Other suggestions have been made as well, but it is clear that this is not simply addressing a lifestyle choice to be a vegetarian. The rest of the chapter seems to indicate that the weak in faith were Jews who had difficulties adjusting to the freedom they had in Christ (14:5–6).

Of course, if either group was outspoken in their beliefs, it is easy to see how conflicts might arise and from the wording of verses 1 and 3 it appears they already had. In verse one Paul had

to tell the strong in faith to accept the weak, and not to judge their opinions. In verse 3 he warns them about having contempt for one another and judging one another.

Paul's theological bottom line is, if God accepts both the weak and the strong (14:3b), contempt should not exist. Even though believers may hold different convictions, their convictions should not become a source of conflict and division in the church (14:3). Christians have no right to reject someone whom God has accepted. They must receive whom God has received.

***14:4 Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.***

Verses 4–9 elaborate on why the believer should receive the one God has accepted (14:3).

Paul begins by asking what right do we have in judging a fellow believer. This is at the heart of Paul's concern. A fellow believer is not *our* servant; he is God's servant, so we should let God decide if He approves or disapproves of his behavior. We are not to interfere with a believer's relationship to his Savior.

Paul is convinced that when God judges the acts of men, the believer will not be condemned for the weaknesses in his faith; God will supply sufficient grace for him to stand at the judgment; that is, God will sustain both the weak and the strong at the judgment.

***14:5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.***

***14:6 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.***

Paul interrupts his theological argument to cite another disagreement between the weak and the strong in faith (Moo, 841). Just as some were not convinced that Christian freedom extended to what they ate, there were also those who did not believe that they had the liberty to ignore the holy days established by Moses (such as the Sabbath, days set aside for fasting, or Jewish festivals, etc. cf. Gal. 4:10; Col. 2:16).

Paul makes the assertion that Christians who disagree on non-essentials can do opposite things and yet, both glorify God. Both the weak and the strong act in ways that they believe would please God. This is evidenced by the fact that they are both doing it "for the Lord" and both are giving thanks. Though the weak are acting out of ignorance, their actions are not evil and so they should not be treated as such. They are acting according to their own understanding of the higher Christian principle that a Christian lives to serve God, not self (14:7). People who are trying to please their Master are to be regarded as true Christians even though they differ in what they believe God's will is.

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

Celebrating holy days was just a “shadow” of the reality that had come in Christ so observance of these days was not required under the new covenant; therefore, instead of trying to force one person to act according to another man’s conscience, it is more important that each person is convinced in his own mind about what he thinks would please God and then be careful to do it.

Paul is establishing the principle that one man’s conscience should not dictate what another believer does. It was not sinful to celebrate the holy days as long as one saw them from the perspective of fulfillment. A Jewish believer could still celebrate the Passover, and even sacrifice the Passover lamb knowing that the lamb foretold of the death of the Lamb of God even though celebrating the Passover was not commanded any more. Therefore, those who continued to observe the holy days could not look at themselves as spiritually superior, nor could the non-participants look at the others with contempt.

We should be absolutely clear that the context is related to *non-essentials*. Believers should never accept sinful behavior. No one has the freedom to disobey what God has clearly commanded. But non-essentials involve behavior that deals with the inner workings of an individual’s conscience. It may be possible for two people to do the same thing and one feel like he has sinned in his heart and the other not (1 Cor. 10:28). Therefore, in matters of conscience, there should be mutual tolerance.

Paul is not saying that every opinion is equally valid; the weak in faith are mistaken in their practices. Rather, he is saying that even if someone does not completely grasp the full extent of their justification, their ignorance is not inconsistent with their devotion to Christ. This is the first reason why we should accept those who have different convictions about non-essential beliefs. If God has accepted both the strong and the weak in faith as heirs of the kingdom of God, we have no right to despise each other. We should not be sidetracked in our love for one another over non-essential issues.

*In conclusion, when Paul says that “each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (14:5), he means that each of us needs to be convinced that our own actions 1) are not sinful, 2) are honoring to Christ, and 3) are the best way that we can act in a given situation. Paul is not saying that we must be fully convinced that our way is the only way to honor God or the only way to avoid sin. Rather, it’s the belief that what we have decided to do is the best course of action. However, it is difficult to believe “my way is best” and yet not judge others who believe differently. Therefore, in the verses to follow, Paul encourages us to focus on the reasons behind the actions of others rather than the actions themselves.*

***14:7 For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;***

***14:8 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.***

***14:9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.***

Verses 7–8 remind the readers that whatever a believer does, he should do it for the Lord “for not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself.” This is what should motivate our actions.

As verse 8 says, every aspect of our earthly experience is for Him. Both life and death are in God's hands. Both are determined by His will and both are to reflect His glory. He is Lord of both the living and the dead. To consciously have this in mind is to reflect a true Christian perspective about life.

We belong to the Lord in both life and death because Christ is Lord of life and death. This is evidenced by His resurrection (14:9).

Verse 9 is confusing to some. How can we say Christ died that He might be Lord? Though Christ was appropriately called Lord before He died, the title took on a deeper meaning after the resurrection. After the resurrection, Scripture places Christ in a position of absolute lordship (Phil. 2:8–9; Eph. 1:18–23; Matt. 28:19, etc.), and this lordship extends both to our present life and our life beyond the grave.

***14:10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.***

***14:11 For it is written, "AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD."***

***14:12 So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.***

Verses 7–9 have given the rationale for not judging each other. In verse 10 Paul returns to using the second person singular “you” in his diatribe style. He is back to exhorting his readers again. Both the weak and the strong need to stop accusing each other for they are members of the same spiritual family (they are brothers).

If God is Lord of all in both life and death, what possible reason could we have feeling justified in judging or looking down on a fellow believer who is doing all that he can to submit to Christ's lordship? We need not be obsessed about someone else's convictions; we should be concerned about our own lives when we stand before our Lord.

In the end God alone will be the judge of all humanity. Verse 11 is a quote from Isaiah 45:23. The conclusion in verse 12 is that everyone, including Christians (each of *us*) will give account to God for our actions. When we stand before God it will be abundantly clear what we got right and what we got wrong. The very thought of facing God and being accountable for our actions is intended to “scare us straight.” Our concern should be in personally glorifying God, not in trying to convince others to think and act like us in matters of conscience.

In the end we will not be punished for our sin. We have been justified (declared right with God; Ro. 3:24); we have been given the righteousness of the Son (Ro. 5:17–21); there is no condemnation for those in Christ (8:1); we will stand, for God will make us stand (Ro. 14:4).

Though we will be saved, we will still be held accountable for our actions. The Son of Man will come in glory and will then repay every man according to his deeds (Matt.16:27). Jesus said, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every person according to what he has done” (Rev. 22:12). Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:4–5, “For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's

hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Our deeds will reveal who enters the age to come, and our deeds will reveal the measure of our reward in the age to come. As Piper says,

Ephesians 2:8–9 says, "By grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God — not of works lest anyone should boast." Salvation is not "of works." That is, works do not earn salvation. Works do not put God in our debt so that He must pay wages. That would contradict grace. "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 6:23). Grace gives salvation as a free gift to be received by faith, not earned by works.

How then can I say that the judgment of believers will not only be the public declaration of the measure of our reward in the kingdom of God according to our deeds, but will also be the public declaration of our salvation — our entering the kingdom — according to our deeds?

The answer in a couple sentences is that our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth in Christ's courtroom to demonstrate that our faith is real. And our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth to demonstrate the varying measures of our obedience of faith (see Romans 12:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11). In other words, salvation is by faith, and rewards are by faith, but the evidence of invisible faith in the judgment hall of Christ will be a transformed life. Our deeds are not the basis of our salvation; they are the evidence of our salvation. They are not the foundation; they are the demonstration.

(Piper; <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-happens-when-you-die-all-appear-before-the-judgment-seat-of-christ>)

In conclusion, verses 10–12 state that we should not judge for two reasons: (1) We do not fill the role of judge, God does. (2) Since we will be judged by God, so we should be primarily concerned that our own lives honor Him.

All of this means that our lives and behavior matter.

To summarize Romans 14:1–12:

Christians with weak consciences should not be condemned but warmly received (14:1) because...

1. God has accepted them — weakness and all (14:3).
2. Christians have no right judging others concerning non-essentials (14:4).
3. God can and will preserve every believer at the judgment in spite of their weaknesses (14:4).
4. even the weaker brother is living out the great Christian principle that no one lives to himself but to God (14:6–9).
5. we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (14:10–13).