

(16) Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come --- but the substance belongs to Christ!

(18) Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

(20) If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations --- “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (referring to things that all perish as they are used) --- according to human precepts and teachings?

(23) These have indeed an *appearance of wisdom* promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of NO value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

NOTE: “Asceticism” is defined as ‘the doctrine that a person can attain a high spiritual and moral state (i.e., be nobly righteous in the sight of self and others) by practicing rigorous self-denial, extreme abstinence, and austere living.’ Synonyms include self-control, self-restraint, self-denial, and doing without something you want or depend on (abstinence). Austere living refers to being without excess, luxury or ease --- think of the simple, rigid and disciplined life of joining a convent or monastery.

Think on these things:

- 1) Should Christians worship on Saturday (Sabbath) or Sunday? Is it okay to eat pork (or meat) or not? Are we to celebrate Hanukkah or Christmas...or both? How are we to observe the Lord's Supper, as a special worship observance in church or daily as we enjoy our meals? Should we baptize by dunking or sprinkling, as children or adults, or give testimony by wearing a uniform? Can women be our preachers and teachers? Is it okay to smoke and/or drink alcohol? --- These and so many other topics can be divisive, and sometimes sharp disagreements have led to new Christian denominations. What advice is every Christian given in v. 16?

Don't let people pass judgment on us as it relates to food, drink, and religious observances (and, likewise, let us not pass judgment on fellow Christians in these matters).

- 2) “Practices” that we observe are called what in v. 17? Where is the reality of faith found?

Paul calls them “shadows of the things to come”, mere earthly representations for heavenly realities. True substance for our religious practices and disciplines are found in Jesus Christ.

- 3) Who do you think has the right to “disqualify” you from heaven (v. 18)? How would you describe the person whose characteristics are listed in this verse? More importantly, why are they out-of-sync with Jesus (v. 19)? Consider this thought: is it more prudent to follow God's Word or to follow visions and dreams one believes God (or angels) have given them?

Jesus is the only one qualified to “disqualify” any human from heaven (Revelation 20:11-15). These people who relay religious ideas, advice and guidance based on their mystical experiences with dreams and angels are described as “puffed up” in their minds and lacking self-restraint (following their passions). Inside they're filled with pride and haughtiness. We should always follow God's Word in the Bible, subjecting dreams and/or angels to God's revealed truth.

- 4) V. 19 speaks about true Christian growth coming from Christ. How did Jesus say the same thing in John 15:1-8? Is it possible to become disconnected and stop growing? Consider specifically John 15:6 and Colossians 2:18b.

The “Body” of Christ grows as God gives it growth, and this pertains to both individual growth as a disciple and to church sizes/ministries. In John, Jesus says that we cannot grow (produce fruit) unless we abide in Him. On our own, isolated, we are unproductive, and Jesus says the Father will remove any branches that don’t produce fruit (pruned off, gathered and burned).

- 5) How does Paul refer to man’s sin nature in v. 20a? **He refers to the nature we “died” to as of the ‘elemental spirits of the world.’ It is an earthly-based focus and existence driven by one’s passions, drives, wants, and physical needs.**
- 6) The Bible has a lot to say about the information in vs. 20-21. It will take a few moments, but skim Romans 14:1-15:2 (especially 17-19) and 1 Corinthians 10:23-32. In Galatians, Paul asks the believers, “Who has bewitched you?” (Galatians 3:1-2 and 5:1). Starting the Christian walk by faith, they slipped back into legalism (following rules). Paul asks the Colossians, “Why --- as if you were still alive in the world --- do you submit to regulations?” What is to be our relationship to the world if we come to faith in Christ? (See Romans 6:1-2 and 11-14).

Paul says in Romans that we are not to continue to live in sin because, by grace, we have been brought from death to life by faith in Christ. Therefore, we are to present ourselves to God as instruments for righteousness and never again let sin have dominion over us.

How should we approach belief differences (Romans 14:5, 13, 19, and 22)? **We are to follow our own convictions (v. 5). However, we should not judge others, nor act in ways that hurt their faith because we insist on following our own convictions (v. 13, 20). Rather, we should pursue actions that build up others and bring peace (v. 19). Sometimes it is best to keep our convictions (religious opinions) to ourselves...(v. 22).**

What is God’s Kingdom NOT about (Romans 14:17)? **Eating and drinking...but righteousness**
What should we remember about our “freedom” in Christ (Romans 14:1; 1 Corinthians 10:23-24; and Galatians 5:1).

1 Corinthians 10 - While all things may be okay (fine, ‘lawful’) for me to do, not everything I do (or say) is helpful or builds up others. Romans 14:1 encourages us NOT to argue about our opinions related to Christian living. Still, Galatians 5 says to stand firm in the freedoms Christ gave us, and don’t become enslaved again to a life of rules-following!

What is an important goal of Christian living (1 Corinthians 10:31-32)? **Whatever I believe is okay to eat, drink or observe, do it to God’s glory and give no offense to others.**

- 7) According to v. 22, what is the problem with most (church) “rules” (e.g., the Jewish Talmud)? They seem to make sense --- they *appear* to be proper (v. 23) --- but there is a flaw! What is that flaw (see v. 23b and Romans 7:10-13)? Why do some say that Christianity is not a religion?

Rules are (often) - **Human precepts and teachings (stressing many self-denials), not God’s**

The flaw? **Rules arising from self-made religions can reveal human failures but not solve them**

Christianity is -**The saying is that Christianity is a personal “relationship with Christ”, based on faith and love, not a religion built on obeying rules and Laws (commandments).**

People and situations I want to pray for this week: