

Romans

Bible Study

Judgment Seat of Christ

Romans 14:10–12

The weaker brother is a believer who is weak in the faith and therefore is lacking proper understanding of his position in Christ in this Dispensation of Grace. He often mixes Law with Grace because he does not understand the differences of how God dealt with Israel as a nation, and how He deals with us in the Body of Christ. Our understanding of Pauline doctrine is all-important in being able to live a proper Grace-life. If we don't know what God expects of us then how can we live to please Him?

There are two common pitfalls for people trying to live according to godly principles. The first is not studying Scripture. Many somehow think that God will give them special guidance by praying without knowledge and then listening to what He has to say to them. God has already told us everything we need to know about what He expects from us in Scripture.

The second pitfall is in applying biblical information that was meant for another group of people. The doctrine written directly for people in the Church, the Body of Christ, is contained in Paul's 13 books. These books contain information that was hidden from previous generations until it was revealed through the Apostle Paul. This information was hidden because it would not have been pertinent in past dispensations. It was revealed only after Israel rejected Jesus Christ by stoning Stephen in Acts 7. People who read the Old Testament, or Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and try to apply this information to their lives are actually trying to live under the Law and according to promises given to the nation of Israel. It is as correct to try to live under Israel's program today as it would be to follow instructions given to Noah. If a person desired to play basketball he would not do well to follow the rules of baseball. The same is true of the Christian's walk in this Dispensation of Grace. We need to follow the information given to the Body of Christ, not what was given to Israel. The weaker brother often follows the wrong set of directions, and puts themselves and others under rules that don't exist in this age.

Paul makes it clear that the weaker brother is not to condemn the stronger Christian for not following what he thinks is right, and the stronger brother is not to condemn the weaker Christian for putting himself under rules and regulations that are not applicable today. Instead, the stronger brother is to lovingly and gently help the weaker brother to grow up in the faith. Keep in mind that we will all be growing in the faith until we die. This means that we are all the weaker brother in some area of our life.

Judge or judged

Paul's focus is always on the edification of the Body and helping each other grow up in Christ. He does not teach us how to judge and criticize each other's weaknesses. When we judge others negatively and harshly for not understanding some doctrine, we cause division within the Body. Paul reminds us that we should be mindful that God is the ultimate Judge, and that we will all be judged by Him in the future. This will happen after the Rapture when we stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ to be judged according to what we did. This judgment has nothing to do with our salvation, but rather is an evaluation of the things that we did for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. We will be required to give an account of our actions.

Knowing that we will be judged should affect our behavior. As we live out our life, our ultimate goal should be to please God. When we live a life of love towards others, we not only will be approved by men, our actions will be acceptable to God (Romans 14:18). This is introduced in Romans 12:1–2 where we are told to give our bodies over to God as a living sacrifice. We do this by not conforming to the world, but by transforming ourselves through the renewing of our minds. This renewal process involves feeding our minds the right information (Scripture, rightly divided), and allowing the Holy Spirit to change us from within. When we are operating in the flesh, we will not produce the fruit that is pleasing

to the Lord (Galatians 5:19–21). When we are operating in the Spirit, we will naturally produce the fruit listed in Galatians 5:22–23. This is the standard by which we will be judged.

Since it is the Lord who will be judging us, our aim should be to please Him in all we do. It is in our nature to do things that will bring us praise from others. We are not to work to get praise from these temporal judges, our focus should be on the Judge we will be facing once we leave this earth. Paul faced much harsh judgment from men, but always acted with eternity foremost in his mind (1 Corinthians 4:3–5; 2 Corinthians 10:17–18).

The basis of reward

Rewards will be given out at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The Greek word is *bema* which can refer to the raised platform from which an athlete receives a reward. Paul compares our Christian walk to an athletic competition (2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Corinthians 9:24–26; Philippians 2:16). He also shows that there will be rewards, not punishment, given out at the end of our “competition.”

God will judge us on our faithfulness as servants of Christ. As Paul calls himself a servant, we too need to put ourselves into the position of being a servant. If Paul were to minister to please men, he would not be a servant of God (Galatians 1:10). When we serve God from the heart, we have become a servant. An important distinction between Israel and the Body of Christ is that Israel was called a servant by God (Ezekiel 28:25; 37:25; Jeremiah 30:10; 46:27; Isaiah 41:8; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21), but God never calls the Body of Christ His servant. Paul, and every believer, is to put themselves into the position of a servant.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10–15, Paul calls himself a master builder who has laid a foundation on Jesus Christ. We are now responsible to build on the foundation laid by Paul, which is the Mystery doctrine. If a man builds on the wrong foundation, such as Peter’s doctrine of the Kingdom, that will all be burned up at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Only those things done according to Pauline doctrine will have eternal ramifications and worth. Why should God reward us for conforming to the wrong doctrine?

Judgment confusion

There are many who confuse the Judgment Seat of Christ with the Great White Throne judgment found in Revelation 20. These judgments are often thought to be the same event which will occur at the Second Coming. The confusion is brought about because the distinct nature of Paul’s doctrine has been tainted with doctrine meant for the nation of Israel. Those who do this frequently see progressions in God’s dealings with His people, but fail to see distinct changes in how He deals with mankind. In other words, they fail to distinguish between doctrine for Israel and doctrine for the Church. They see no difference between Law and Grace or between Prophecy and Mystery. As a result, the Rapture becomes the Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom becomes a spiritual kingdom, the seven-year Tribulation becomes merely trials and tribulations, the physical promises to Israel will be fulfilled spiritually through the Church, and so on. They think the next event will be the Second Coming and the Judgment of all people.

Those who do not rightly divide Scripture will not have a proper understanding about how God is going to judge the believer. It is impossible to please God by using the wrong set of instructions. According to 2 Timothy 2:15 the unashamed workman will study Scripture properly divided. Those who bring in doctrine not appropriate for this Dispensation of Grace will be judged accordingly, and, by implication, will be the workers who stand ashamed in front of Christ after the Rapture. The fire will reveal the type of work that was done while on earth (1 Corinthians 3:13). Those works that were not built on Paul’s foundation will burn up (1 Corinthians 3:10).

When we give our account to God, it will be about how we lived and worked for Him. We please the Lord when we do what He said, which is found in the 13 books penned by Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

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