

Are Christians Judged?
Romans 14:10-12
ABC 4/23/17

In light of our discussion on debatable & divisive grey issues we've been looking at in Rom 14, here's an illustration for you:

An old farmer went to the city one weekend & attended the big city church. He came home & his wife asked him how it was.

Well, said the farmer, it was good. They did something different, though. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns.

Praise choruses? asked the wife. *What are those?*

Oh, they're okay, they're sort of like hymns, only different, the farmer said.

Well, what's the difference? asked his wife.

The farmer explained, *Well, it's like this. If I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you,*

'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, Martha, Martha, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the cows, the COWS, the COWS, COWS, COWS, are in the corn, corn, corn, they're in the coooooorrrrrnnnnn.' Then, *I repeated it 3 times, that would be a praise chorus.*

Wouldn't you know it, that farmer's little church had a visitor from the big city church that same Sunday. He went home to his wife & she asked him how it went. He said, *Oh, it was okay, except they don't sing choruses, they sing hymns.*

She asked, *What's a hymn?*

He said, *Well, it's like a chorus, only different.*

She said, *What do you mean, different?*

He explained, *Well, if I said to you, 'Martha, the cows are in corn,' but said it like this:*

*'Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear the words of my mouth,
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear to this glorious truth;
For the way of the animals who can explain;
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God's sun or His rain,
Unless from the mild corn they are fenced;
Yea those cows in glad, rebellious delight,
Have loosed their shackles, their warm pens eschew,
Yea goaded by minions of darkness & night,
They all my sweet corn are now destined to chew.
Martha, look to that bright day when earth is reborn,
And I shall not see those cows in my corn.'*

That would be a hymn!

Whichever side of that issue you are on, you must admit there are pros & cons for both. For example, there are bad songs in our hymnal & bad songs being made & sung today. There are also great songs in our hymnal & great songs being written today. Songs that are rich doctrinally & beautiful to sing. I loved the song we sang last Sunday at the end of the service which wasn't in our hymnal. Debatable matters, including hymnals or projected songs, are often not laughing matters to those who have strong feelings on either side. If we were to go back to the 1700's, the days of Jonathan Edwards, the debates over music were there, but different. There were 2 controversies that were common:

One surrounded whether or not everyone should sing together. We have Kent or Scott who keep us all singing together & usually in the same key. In those days, everyone often started when they wanted, in the key they wanted, & sort of sang their own way through the lyrics, which were usually the psalms.¹ The other controversy was whether or not women could sing at the same time as men.² Would they be violating their place of submission to sing alongside their husbands? When we're led in singing together, all at the same time &, for some of us, in the same key, had it been the 1700's, we'd be doing something highly controversial. Ever since the Pharisees were challenged by the Lord for teaching their traditions as doctrine (Mk 7:5-8), we've been dividing & arguing over methods & mannerisms & mechanics & minutia. Paul tells us to accept & not to judge each other in these areas where the Bible doesn't speak. **1-12 PRAY**

Paul didn't write all this great doctrinal stuff about how God saves undeserving sinners so we who believe would remain unchanged. We're to live transformed lives. One huge aspect of that is to get along with each other as we disagree about what's best. Obviously, there are some things we must be unified on. The central & clear doctrines of the Bible are non-negotiable. These debatable areas aren't in matters of doctrine but in lifestyle. This debate isn't over beliefs, but over behaviors. For the Roman Christians, this included what to eat & what days to celebrate. They were divided over these issues of lifestyle & liberty. In Rom 14, Paul delivers a surprising

¹ www.history1700s.com/index.php/articles/156-home-life-in-colonial-days/819-sunday-in-the-colonies.html

² www.nytimes.com/1990/05/04/arts/the-sound-of-the-middle-ages-through-research-and-intuition.html

guideline for determining what to do in grey areas or areas in which the Bible is silent or inconclusive. **5b-6a**

Now in vs 10, Paul drives us to remember something else that really matters.

1. To Judge or Not to Judge 10a

Do you see a word that appears twice there? The word **brother**. This is a family matter. We're having issues with family members over issues colored in grey, traditions we're trying to define as doctrine. A few weeks ago I told you about Charles Spurgeon & Joseph Parker. These 2 well known London preachers exchanged pulpits & enjoyed fellowship together, until Parker criticized Spurgeon for smoking his cigars & Spurgeon criticized Parker for attending the theater. They broke off their fellowship, if not their friendship. In another incident,

DL Moody was visiting Spurgeon & preaching for him. They got into a small tiff that was widely reported, when Moody asked Spurgeon when he was going to give up those awful cigars. Spurgeon pointed a finger at Moody's considerable midsection & said, *When you put down your fork.*³

I say this to remind us that even great men of faith can bicker & argue & divide over issues far less significant than the issues facing the Romans. The entire nation of Jews had built their worship on the Sabbath day & kosher diets. The Gentiles had left their lives of idolatry & wanted nothing more to do with the temples, while others didn't see anything wrong with eating non-kosher meat offered to idols. & they were judging, condemning, & criticizing each other. Paul says, *Stop looking down on your brother with contempt!* It's as if to say, *What good does it do?* We could ask: What church is more unified after an argument over hymns & choruses? What church experiences unity as it advances the cause of Christ because it uses only a piano or a band or no instruments at all? What church is strengthened by arguing over schooling choices? What group of believers was ever edified by fighting over the color of the carpet or whether they sat in pews or chairs? Paul says, *Make up your mind & then do it as unto the Lord with thanksgiving.* As individuals, we love to compare & compete & criticize & command. But Paul writes in vs 4a, **Who are you to judge** other Christians? Now in vs 10 he writes, Don't **judge your brother . . . why do you regard your brother with contempt?** You might ask, *Is it ever right to judge*

³ <http://frankviola.org/2012/06/19/spurgeonandmoody/>

anyone for anything? & the answer is, *absolutely!* The NT makes it clear we're to make several judgments. Let me give a few of them.

A. We're to judge sin. Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for refusing to remove an unrepentant man from their midst. He wrote in 1 Cor 5:1-3,

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you ... You have become arrogant & have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this ...

Paul said, *I've already judged him.* He didn't commend them for being tolerant; he rebuked them for being arrogant. This church thought they knew better than God. Paul demanded the church to judge this unrepentant man & remove him from their fellowship.

B. We're to judge false teachers, those who distort or ignore the gospel. Our culture & many churches are resisting theological absolutes. Doctrine is considered too dogmatic & divisive. They believe doctrine divides, therefore believe what you want. *Let us just worship God together & not be bogged down His attributes like justice & mercy & wrath & love.* That may be politically correct, but it's unbiblical to the core. Rom 16:17 says, **Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions & hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, & turn away from them.** In other words, don't unite in love if they deny sound doctrine. One Protestant denomination publicly wrestled with the issue of homosexual ordination several years ago. One of their homosexual leaders was elevated to Bishop. One of his colleagues spoke up, trying to keep the denomination from splintering & dividing. He included this in his speech: *If the church must make a choice between heresy & schism (or division), we must always choose heresy.*⁴ In other words, if sound doctrine brings division, abandon the Scriptures & stay together. Paul would judge them & warn us to stay away from them.

C. We're to judge cultural trends. Paul wrote also to the Corinthians believers, **he who is spiritual appraises (judges) all things** (1 Cor 2:15). Paul says in light of the wisdom of this world & the natural reason of man, the believer should always walk with alertness & spiritual wisdom, pursuing the mind of Christ.

⁴ www.washingtontimes.com/news/2004/jan/31/20040131-120323-2290r/

D. We're to judge ourselves. 1 Cor 11 is filled with exhortations for the Christian to judge & hold himself accountable to the pure standard of holy living.

Paul is not saying in Rom 14 that we shouldn't judge anyone. Neither is he saying to do whatever you want & don't listen to anyone else. Paul is talking about judging one another on issues that aren't related to doctrine, unrepentant sin, or some other area that's clearly black & white. This is the difference between biblical judging & simply being judgmental. There's a huge difference between being a critical thinker & being everyone's critic. Paul's saying, *Stop being judgmental & critical toward one another over grey matters!* Why aren't we to do this? Paul gives the reason in the latter part of **vs 10**.

2. God Will Judge ALL Christians Think of it this way: You who are looking down on your brother will one day be looking up at your sovereign Judge. If you want to circle a very convicting word, circle the word **all**. Every one of us who claim to know Christ as our personal Lord & Savior will **all** stand before Him one day. Those who don't know & haven't put their faith in Jesus will also have an appointment with God. It's another, entirely different judgment called the Great White Throne. In Rev 20 that awful moment is recorded in which all unbelievers will be given the guilty verdict & cast into eternal hell. Those of us who know Jesus, by the grace of God, through faith in the work of Christ alone, will also have an awesome moment in which we all will stand before the Son of God because the Father **has given all judgment to the Son** (Jn 5:22). When Paul described this to the Corinthians, he wrote, **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ** (2 Cor 5:10). Paul says **God** in Rom 14 & here he says **Christ**. Seeing as Christ is God, Jesus will be our Judge. We will all stand before Jesus, the One who came to earth as Savior, but now sits in the heavens as the Judge of all things. Paul calls that place the *judgment seat* or the *Bema*. What does that mean? The Greek word means a step or a pace. It's translated in Acts 7:5 as a footprint or a place for your feet.⁵ This word came to be used for platforms or raised areas that were accessed by steps; places where one stood & spoke. During the time of Paul the word was used of the raised platform upon which the Roman tribunal sat. This was a place for judges who sat &

⁵ Vine's, p612

rendered verdicts. The word *bema* is used for the seat of Pilate who judged Jesus (Mt 27:19). There was also the *bema* at Corinth, where Gallio, the governor, judged Paul (Acts 18). When Paul said, *You're going to stand one day before the Bema of God*, the Christians in Rome immediately got the picture. But how can we stand before Christ as Judge, since He's already our Savior? Let me tell you 1st what the judgment seat is not!

A. It's not a place where your future is decided. The only people at the Bema are believers. Sin was judged in Christ on the cross & because we stand in Christ, who was already judged, we'll never be condemned for our sins. 1 Pt 2:24 says, **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin & live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.** We will stand at the judgment seat without fear of rejection, because God has no charges against those who trust in His Son & will allow no one else to bring charges against them (Rom 8:31-34). Romans 8:1 is one of my favorite verses because of one little word that it contains, the word **now**. **Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** Not later, not maybe, but **now!!!** The Bema isn't a place where your future is decided. Your future has already been decided, that's the reason you'll be there.

B. The Bema isn't a place where forgiveness will be determined. You'll stand at the Bema, not to be forgiven, but because you have been forgiven. Listen to what God says about your settled state:

When you were dead in your transgressions ... He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions (not some, but all), having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees (the record of all our sins) against us, which was hostile to us; & He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col 2:13-14).

The Bema isn't a place where our future is decided or our forgiveness is determined; that's already been granted & decided. That is forever secure.

So what is this place called the Bema for us as Christians? It's a personal one-on-one encounter with the living Christ, where He won't judge our position in Him, but our performance for Him. We are there because we're His bride. What kind of bride have we been? What kind of children of His & our Father have we been? What's the record of our deeds? It will be a place somehow I think of sorrow; a place of loss of reward that we could have had; a place where we're confronted with

what we missed. But it will also be a place of great joy & relief; a place of grace & deep love because there's no deeper love than to offend Someone & still be loved by Him. What's it going to be like at the Bema? Paul uses 4...

C. Illustrations or metaphors to describe this awesome encounter with Christ.

1) The 1st is of a divine smelting furnace. In 1 Cor 3:12-15 Paul writes,

If any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; & the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

The fire mentioned here is used elsewhere in Scripture as an emblem of deity, God as a consuming fire (Dt 4:24). This means the holiness of God.⁶ This isn't a reference to a place like purgatory where we go to have our faults burned away over time. This is a reference to that moment when we stand before God & have our lives evaluated by His purity & holiness & faithfulness. What will stand the purifying gaze of our holy God? Evidently, there will be those who have nothing left; nothing of value, as if they have come through the fire with nothing but their salvation intact. John wrote the warning, **Watch yourselves, that you do not lose ... your full reward** (2 Jn 1:8). So build your life & you get to choose the material. You can choose valuable things that would honor God or worthless things that are trivial & earthly & self-centered.

I'm not sure what it means to **suffer loss** at the judgment, but I don't want it to happen to me! It must involve a moment of deep regret & shame over what I've done or not done with what God has entrusted to me & commanded of me. But, clearly, I should live in light of that certain day ahead when I will stand before the Lord to give an account. Have I lived in light of His purposes? Have I used my time, talents, & treasure to seek 1st His kingdom & righteousness (Mt 6:33)? Will I be able to say, with Paul, **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith** (2 Tim 4:7)?

2) Paul uses another image, not only a smelting furnace, but, in our modern world we could refer to it as, a supernatural x-ray machine. A chapter later, Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

⁶ Roy Laurin, *First Corinthians*, p 79

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 darkness & disclose the motives of men's hearts (1 Cor 4:5).

It's not the quantity of work for God but the quality of the work. It isn't the magnificence of the task, but the motive of the heart. Rewards at the Bema will have nothing to do with our position or education or number of friends or fame. I'm convinced there will be many Christians, completely unknown to the world, & perhaps hardly known to fellow believers, who will receive reward after reward after reward from the Lord's hands. Why? Because their works were motivated purely for His glory.⁷ Spurgeon put it this way:

Don't hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul's; be content to talk to 1 or 2 in a cottage—very good wheat grows in little fields. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, wake up the master, & save the house. A spark is fire. A sentence of truth has heaven in it. Do what you do right thoroughly, pray over it heartily, & leave the result to God.⁸

3) Paul also pictures the judgment seat as an award ceremony. This raised platform was also the place that the judges of athletic contests sat. It was the place where the victorious athletes would stand to receive their laurel wreaths. For them, it would be the moment of a lifetime. Paul wrote,

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (the wreath of a victorious athlete), which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day (2 Tim 4:7-8).

Even now Olympic winners mount a platform to receive their awards, which goes back to the ancient *bema*. Watch their faces & see the tears brimming in their eyes; look at their joy & their honorable pride. Paul & all the other Romans had undoubtedly seen the victorious athletes step up to the *bema* to receive their crown. Paul said, *I'm going to be there one day – only this Bema will be the Bema of the Living Lord.*

4) The judgment seat is like a smelting furnace, a divine X-ray machine, an awards ceremony, & finally, it's like a performance review. Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed (paid back) for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (profitable or unprofitable) (2 Cor 5:10).

⁷ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, p 102

⁸ www.chapellibrary.org/files/5214/7742/8127/jpta.pdf

It isn't sin that's judged, it's service, our deeds & motives & thoughts. Paul says in vs 12.

With that thought in mind...

- What kind of testimony do you have?
- What's your work ethic?
- How do you spend your money?
- How do you serve the church with your gifts & talents?
- How closely do you walk with Jesus?

Paul's principle is pretty simple: We must all make our decisions about secondary issues in light of the reality of God's judgment. Our job isn't to judge each other, it's to live in light of the reality of our own judgment by the Lord. Here's a fictional story that has to do with rewards in heaven being related to the impact & influence we had on people while on earth.

A minister died & was waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him was a scruffy looking guy, beat up leather jacket & worn out jeans. Peter finally comes & says to the guy, *Who are you, so that I may know your position in the Kingdom of Heaven?*

The guy says, *I'm Joe Cohen, taxi driver from New York City.*

Peter looks at his list, smiles & says, *Oh, you're Joe! Take this silk robe & golden staff & enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*

The taxi driver struts into heaven with his fancy robe & solid gold staff. Now it's the preacher's turn. Peter asks, *& who might you be?*

He says, *I'm Joseph Snow, pastor of more than 40 years.*

Peter looks at his list & says, *Oh, so you're Pastor Snow. Take this cotton robe & wooden staff & go on in.*

The minister says, *Now just a minute, Peter! That man ahead of me was a taxi driver, & he got a silk robe & golden staff. I get a cotton robe & a lousy wooden stick – I want an explanation!*

Peter said, *While you preached, people slept; while he drove, people prayed!*

Aren't you glad your performance review will be taken up with none other than Jesus Christ? His evaluation will be perfect. It won't be prejudiced. It can't be wrongly motivated. He won't miss anything. It will be right. When you stand before the Lord, He won't quiz you about what Mr Jones did or how Mrs Smith lived. You'll answer for yourself & for no one else. I don't know about you, but I have more than enough to answer for myself! I should be more concerned about judging myself than anyone else. God will judge your friends, why should you get involved? He knows them better than you do, He loves them more than you do, & He reads the thoughts & intents of

the heart, which you can't read at all. Furthermore, if we all spent more time worrying about ourselves, we'd have very little time left to worry about other people. Be slow to judge others in these debatable areas & be quick to judge yourself.

In vs 11, Paul cites a phrase from Is 49:18, **'As I live,' says the Lord**, followed by Is 45:23, **Every knee shall bow to Me, & every tongue shall give praise to God**. We will bow our knee in submission to His righteous evaluation, & we will say, *You are Lord*. We'll open our mouths to praise Him at the end of our performance review because He is God. He is both holy & loving; awesome & personal; terrible & yet terribly gracious. At that *Bema Seat*, the Son, the righteous Judge will make everything right! If...

- someone has cheated you on earth – God will make it right;
- someone has passed you over – God will make it right;
- someone abandoned you; someone left you for another – God will give you that reward for following Him still; He will make it right;
- someone has stolen your money; someone has stolen your good name – God will make it right;
- someone applauded your failure; someone rejoiced when you suffered – God will make it right;
- someone failed to love you; someone failed to care for you; someone failed to take up your cause – God will make it right;
- someone refused to encourage you; someone never cheered you on; someone hoped you would lose in life & fail in business – God will make it right;
- someone has betrayed you; someone has physically & emotionally hurt you – God will make it right;
- someone has misled you, mocked you; ridiculed you, & slandered you – God will make it right;
- someone has convinced you to believe you'll never amount to anything; God will have something to say about that – God will make it right.

There you are, at the Bema Seat of God & you won't be able to stop the tears until He wipes them away; you will never be able to hold back the praise (& that will continue forever) because every tongue shall give praise to God (Rom 14:11b)!

Christ was the Lord of all before He came to this earth. He is the eternal Son of God. But in coming to this earth as a man, Jesus subjected Himself to death on our behalf. When God raised Him from the dead, He conquered death once & for all. God highly exalted Him to His right hand

& put all things in subjection to Him as the crucified & risen Lord (Eph 1:19-23; Phil 2:5-11). By virtue of His death & resurrection, He is **Lord both of the dead & of the living** (14:9). This means He's the Judge of the living & the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pt 4:5). As Paul told the Athenians, **God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead** (Acts 17:31). Or, as Jesus Himself told the Jews,

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him (Jn 5:22-23).

By the way, that's a strong claim of Jesus' deity. You see the same thing in our text, where Paul freely moves between **Lord** (referring to Jesus) & **God** (referring to the Father).

Since God is the Judge of all, we must not judge other believers on secondary issues or regard them with contempt. & the fact that I will stand before God's judgment seat should cause me to refrain from speaking against a brother who may have different views on these debatable, grey areas. If I think what he's doing or saying is spiritually immature or will cause him or others spiritual harm, I may need to gently come alongside & offer correction at the proper time. But if it's a neutral matter, then I should assume he's doing it for the Lord & let the Lord be his judge. Perhaps our text can best be summed up by saying, *Don't judge your brother on non-essential matters, because God will judge him. Judge yourself, because God will judge you.*⁹ Worthy are You, Son of God, all praise to You, our righteous, gracious Judge, Redeemer, Lord, & King!

⁹ F. Godet, *Commentary on Romans*, p 459