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*“Every Knee Shall Bow”*

ROMANS 14:10-12

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## AT A GLANCE

Christians have a duty and the privilege of living together in unity and harmony. And we'll answer for our attitudes and actions that jeopardized that. In today's passage, Paul warns the Roman Christians what we're all going to give account for our lives and how we treat people with whom we disagree will matter. Every knee shall bow. Yours and mine.

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever gotten into a heated debate with someone about a spiritual topic or personal conviction that left the two of you unable to be around each other, or at best it kept you from going beyond the superficial in your conversations? It's a shame when that happens and it is preventable.

Christians have a duty and the privilege of living together in unity and harmony. And we'll answer for our attitudes and actions that jeopardized that. In today's passage, Paul warns the Roman Christians what we're all going to give account for our lives and how we treat people with whom we disagree will matter. Every knee shall bow. Yours and mine.

## ROMANS 14:10-12

**<sup>10</sup>Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup>for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.” <sup>12</sup>So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.**

## JUDGMENTALISM IS A TWO-WAY STREET

**Verse 10 Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother?** This brings us back to the what Paul said in verse 3, *“Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.”*

To remind us all, the one who has the free conscience and eats anything is warned not to despise the one who eats only vegetables as a matter of personal conviction. To despise is to treat others with disregard. “You're not like us, we don't really need you.”

But judgementalism is a two-way street. The ones with the personal conviction not to eat meat were told to not judge people who didn't have the same food convictions. That is, don't look down upon them thinking you're a better or more faithful Christian.

I want to reiterate that we're not talking about sin issues or gospel issues. Paul wrote clearly to other churches telling them to judge those who refuse to repent of sin and condemning those who pervert the Gospel. This is not an excuse to be spiritually lazy or undiscerning. But in matters that remain ambiguous, in matters the Lord has left up to our consciences, Paul warns the church not to judge one another.

## AND IT IS SIN FOR WHICH WE WILL GIVE ACCOUNT

We've so normalized individuality and individual preference and judgement of other genuine believers that we are hard pressed to see that most, if not all, of our judgment is self-incriminating. When we judge people's convictions, or despise them, we're the ones in sin. We need to repent from the heart for this.

I say this because what Paul says next should send chills down our spines if we don't. **For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; <sup>11</sup> for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."** <sup>12</sup> **So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.**

Let's remember the context. Paul quotes Isaiah 45 in this passage to address this specific issue. Paul warns that those who despise or judge their fellow Christians will answer to God.

That's the immediate context of the passage and I want to reemphasize that Paul warned Christians in Rome they would answer for how they treated one another. It is sin to judge fellow Christians over personal convictions.

If you are a Christian, it may surprise you to hear that you **will give account of [yourself] to God.** But this isn't the only place Paul warned Christians about this. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."* <sup>2</sup> *Corinthians 5:10*

Did you catch that? Paul said, "we all..." So we need to reckon with this and heed Paul's warning. Specifically, in the context of Romans 14, we need to stop judging our fellow believers and leave the judgement to God. They're going to give account of themselves, too.

## WHAT SORT OF JUDGMENT WILL CHRISTIANS FACE?

I'd like to address what sort of judgment Christians can expect because Paul also said, *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* *Romans 8:1*

Scripture does not contradict itself, so when Paul says we'll give account of our lives, those in Christ can know for certain that what is at stake is not condemnation. Paul is not speaking of heaven or hell here. There's a different judgment for Christians; one he described to the Corinthians.

*"According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire."* *1 Corinthians 3:10-15*

In Romans 1-11, Paul painstakingly presented the Gospel of justification of sinners by faith in Jesus Christ. He's not contradicting himself in Romans 14, nor 1 Corinthians 3.

When God justifies a sinner, He declares that person righteous forever. But as 1 Corinthians 3 makes clear, as well as today's passage in Romans, even those who have been justified by faith in Christ will give account of their lives.

It will not be that we have to pay for our sin, Jesus has done that for us! But how we live will be tested as by fire. Those who built on the foundation of Christ, meaning those who put their faith in Christ, their works will be disclosed – whether they lived lives of humility and selflessness and service to Christ, or whether they selfishly pursued their own interests.

The latter will still enter heaven because thankfully salvation is not based on works. But they'll enter with a heap of ashes in their hands, a life burned to nothing. Paul warned the Corinthians as well as the Romans that how we live here will impact our experience in eternity.

#### FOUR STEPS TO KEEP IT PEACEFUL

Which begs the question, how should we live in relation to fellow believers who do not believe as we do on non-essentials? While we must agree on essentials, we are bound to disagree on something that matters to us and the bible is going to leave us in ambiguity.

What do we do with that? One thing is clear: we don't judge and despise. When we do, we're the ones in sin and we're going to give account for that. That, the bible is clear about.

Daniel Doriani provides four helpful insights in his commentary; four things we ought to do when we disagree with fellow believers.

#### FIRST, WE ACCEPT THAT CHRISTIANS ARE PRONE TO DISAGREE

"First," Doriani says, "we accept that Christians are prone to disagree. Although we can't compromise on orthodoxy, we may let lesser matters go. Therefore, we must distinguish essentials from non-essentials."

Last week I shared with you that the one decisive question in heaven is, "Who did you say that I am?" That may sound overly reductionistic, like does the Bible not matter? On the contrary!

All of scripture reveals to us who God is, what He is like, who man is and what we are like, why we need Jesus, our Savior, and how we live in response to God's saving grace in submission to Jesus our Lord. There are 66 books of the bible wrapped up in that question, "Who do you say that I am?" I'm not minimizing the scriptures one bit. The scriptures reveal Jesus.

One lady asked me last week, "Is the inerrancy of scripture an essential thing?" Absolutely! If scripture is not the inerrant, authoritative, inspired Word of God, why would anyone believe we've understood the way to eternal life? Why would we believe that Jesus is Savior sent by God to rescue us?

When Peter answered Jesus' question saying, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" Jesus remarked that this did not come from man, but from God. God's revelation to us is essential, all of it! What the bible reveals, we don't get to question.

However, not everything we "believe" is expressly revealed in scripture. Take for instance the rapture of the church. The word rapture is not mentioned in the bible. Paul says we will be "caught up in the air" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17. You may be surprised to know that the historic church has not taken that to mean what some in the church over the last 200 years have believed.

The historic church did not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. That's a relatively new take on the study of the end times. The bible is not crystal clear on how things are going to go down in the end, but you wouldn't think that was the case when you speak to some Christians.

I don't mind that some Christians believe in the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, nor that they teach it and hold on to it with great tenacity. It's good for us to search the scriptures and debate things like the end times. It heightens our anticipation of the life that is to come.

#### SECOND, WE PRAY FOR HUMILITY TO REEXAMINE OUR CONVICTIONS

However, this is an open-handed issue that warrants, like many other issues, what Doriani advises next. "Second, if we are prone to judge, we pray for enough humility to reexamine our convictions..." Some of the most judgy people I've met are hung up on things that the bible is not clear about.

I believe in God's sovereignty over all things, including our salvation. I read Jesus' words to His disciples in John 6, Paul's words in Ephesians and Romans, Peter's, I read the creation story, I read the history of Israel, and I want to give glory to God for His sovereign grace in election.

I also read that man is responsible for his sin and will face judgment and I read that God does not desire that anyone should perish. Those do not seem to contradict God's sovereignty to me, but I can understand why my fellow believers struggle to embrace divine election.

God's sovereignty, if anything, ought to cause us to do exactly what Doriani suggests – humble ourselves and consider that maybe we don't know everything about everything.

There are things we can only explain as the mystery of God. We don't deny essentials like God's necessary work in our salvation, nor man's responsibility. But we can agree to disagree here and remain in fellowship with one another.

Now, there may be things that someone believes because they are uninformed. Or they may come from a tradition that perverts the gospel, and they may, out of ignorance, still believe things that contradict the bible.

For instance, someone may have come out of a tradition that taught a works-based salvation – maybe that you must be baptized to be saved, or speaking in tongues is the only real evidence of salvation, or that you can lose your salvation. In these situations, we apply Doriani's next step.

### THIRD WE PATIENTLY TEACH THOSE WHO ERR

“Third, when we come to conclusions, we patiently instruct those who err. If the issue is minor, we must learn to let it go,” *“For,”* as Doriani cites 2 Timothy, *“the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness....”* 2 Timothy 2:24-25

We tend to grow impatient with people who disagree with us, and especially when they are antagonistic in their disagreement. But we ought to be gentle and patient as we help others grow in their biblical worldview. Remember, someone has patiently taught you.

What the bible teaches matters. It is the *“light to [our] feet and a lamp to [our] path.”* Psalm 119:105 But how we respond to others who have an unbiblical understanding of things matters, too. It is a test of our spiritual maturity. Nothing reveals how much work the Lord still has to do in you than a confident, but biblically illiterate brother or sister in Christ.

Praise the Lord for such people because they force you to go back to number two and re-evaluate your own convictions and understandings to make sure you're standing on the Word of God and not traditions of men.

Then, assuming the Lord has chosen you to be the one to correct the erring brother or sister, you go to step three and *patiently* instruct them from the bible.

### FOURTH, WE WATCH OURSELVES

“Fourth” and finally Doriani tells us, “we watch ourselves.” He warns that those who enjoy a free conscience and exercise Christian liberty can grow weary of people Paul refers to as the weak, people whose consciences are restricted, despising them as legalists.

On the other hand, Doriani adds, “the weak can condemn their brothers for their pride and alleged indifference to God's law.” Those with a more restricted conscience can view those who enjoy their liberty as unserious in the faith.

The point Paul is making in Romans 14 is this: who are we to condemn the one God has justified? Who are we to reject the one God has welcomed? Who are we to judge the servant of another?

## WE CAN DISAGREE AND STILL GET ALONG

There are ways for Christians to disagree and dispute matters that will not end in eternal separation. We should be able to have debates and discussions about matters that are deeply important to us even when we disagree with our fellow believers. With a little humility, a lot of patience, and the Lord's help, we can do this and still get along! Amen?

Nothing should force us to commit to Doriani's four steps like communion. We observe communion together for a reason. It represents Christ's death and it's to be commemorated by the people He has formed together in the body of Christ, His Church.

Communion, observed faithfully, forces us to subordinate our differences and recognize our commonality: we are one in Christ. Let's examine our hearts and remind ourselves that what God has joined together, we have no business tearing apart! We will all give account of our lives. Every knee shall bow...including yours.

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