Romans 12-16

The Bēma Seat of God

A Bible Study by Deanna Grabill

Putting on Christ

Rom 14:1-12 LSB

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

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

3 The one who eats must not view the one who does not eat with contempt, and the one who does not eat must not judge the one who eats, for God accepted him.

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.

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

6 He who regards the day, regards it for the Lord, and he who eats, eats for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who does not eat, for the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks to God.

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

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.

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

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

11 For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to Me every knee shall bow, And every tongue shall confess to God."

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

Theme

Romans 14:1–12 reminds us that because we belong to Christ, we must receive one another without judging personal convictions. Rather than criticizing those with differing views or treating them with contempt, Paul calls believers to focus on personal accountability before God, for we will all stand before the judgment (Bēma) seat of God, where our works will be judged. The Church's unity rests on shared faith in Christ, not on agreement on non-essential matters.

Memory Verse

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

Charles Spurgeon (19th C.)

"We shall not be judged by a jury of our peers, but by the King himself. If the search-light of the Great Audit is to be turned upon my secret thoughts and private motives, what time have I to be a spy upon my brother's table or a critic of his fasts?"

Introduction

In Romans 12, Paul urges believers to become a "living sacrifice" by rejecting worldly ways and renewing their minds. This transformation is evident in humility, the use of diverse gifts to serve one another, and responding to evil with good. In chapter 13, he instructs the church to submit to governing authorities and to fulfill their obligations. Paul emphasizes that love is the only debt we owe, and it is one we can never fully repay. He urges them to cast off darkness, put on Christ, and live as children of the light.

Christian Liberties (1-3)

In Romans 14:1-3, Paul addresses the tension between Jewish and non-Jewish believers over non-essential convictions, specifically dietary laws and sacred days. He advocates proslambanō—a full, welcoming acceptance—rather than judgment, recognizing that each person's faith journey is unique. Paul affirms that there is room for differing views and that we should prioritize love over personal opinions to maintain unity in the church. The strong must not despise (exoutheneō) the weak, nor should the weak judge (diakrino) the strong for the freedom they exercise. Since both are sincere in their convictions and God has welcomed them, the community holds no authority to reject those whom He has already accepted.

The Household Servant (4)

In verse 4, Paul asks, "Who are you to judge another's servant?" Paul uses the term oiketēs (household servant, from the term "oikos"—house) to establish a specific legal and social boundary. In a Roman household, an oiketēs was under the pater familias' (head of the household's) exclusive authority and was considered part of the family. The head of the household held absolute legal and social authority over everything within the home—including children, the spouse, and the servants (oiketēs). Paul uses this concept to establish God's exclusive authority. Because God is the pater familias of His own household, He alone has the right to approve or disapprove of those who belong to Him. God alone determines whether the servant stands (stēkō) or falls (piptō) by deciding whether the servant meets expectations, and He has the power and ability to make them stand.

A Persuaded Heart (5-6)

In verses 5–6, Paul moves from external practices to internal motivation. He addresses disputable matters—specifically the friction

Key Greek Words

προσλαμβάνω (proslambanō) [1, 3] "accept" - to treat with kindness and hospitality, to welcome someone

ἀσθενέω(astheneō) [1, 2] "weak" - to be sick, deficient in strength, to be weak in faith, to doubt, hesitate, to lack moral strength, courage, or will

διάκρισις (diakrisis) [1, 3, 10] "pass judgment" - the act of discerning or distinguishing, a distinction made especially in a contentious manner

διαλογισμός (dialogismos) [1] "opinions" - reasoning, a position, opinion, or judgment reached after consideration

ἐξουθενέω (exoutheneō) [3, 10] "view with contempt" - despise, treat with contempt and scorn, disregard, reject with contempt, look down on; ridicule.

κρίνω (krino) [4, 5, 10] "judge" -to separate; to make a distinction between; to exercise judgment

οἰκέτης (oiketēs) [4] "servant" - a domestic servant, household slave, a servant who lives in the same house as their master, household servant

κύριος/κυριεύω (kyrio/kyrieuō) [3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11] "master, Lord"/"be lord" a lord, master, an owner, possessor, to be lord over, to be possessed of, mastery over, to exercise control over someone as their master

between Jewish and Gentile believers over sacred days and dietary laws—to show that pleasing God lies in obedience to one's conviction (plērophoreō), not in outward uniformity. The Lord permits differing practices, provided they stem from a sincere desire to honor the Master. A heart fully persuaded (plērophoreō) in its choices and anchored in genuine gratitude (eucharisteō) transforms these personal decisions into acts of worship. Ultimately, if both the one who eats and the one who abstains offer sincere thanks, both stand in the Lord's favor and approval.

In Life and Death (7-9)

In Romans 14:7–9, Paul establishes that the Christian's life is not their own. Because we are not our own, but God's, whether we live (zaō) or die (apothnēskō), we belong to the Lord (Kyrios), a term used for the lawful owner (including the owner of slaves). Because He alone holds this legal and spiritual claim over us, any attempt to judge or control a brother's or sister's conscience directly usurps His authority. When we occupy the seat of judgment, we act as though we are the master (kyrios), forgetting that since we are not their Lord, we have no right to claim that authority.

The Bema Seat (10-12)

Paul again uses exoutheneō (to view with contempt) to describe the posture of the strong towards the weak. To treat a brother or sister with scorn or ridicule is to assume a superiority that does not exist. Paul reveals the absurdity of one "owned" servant judging another "owned" servant, both serving the same Master. By evoking the imagery of standing before God's Judgment Seat (the Bēma), Paul draws on the Roman court. In ancient Greek culture, the Bēma was a raised judicial bench or magistrate's seat where officials issued decrees and awarded prizes to athletes. Paul uses this imagery to show that because Christ exercises kyrieuō (absolute Lordship) over us, He alone has the right to sit on that platform. In v. 11, Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23, which prophesies the future day of judgment when every knee will bow to the Lord, and every tongue will confess (exomologemomai) His Lordship (Phil 2:11; Rev 3:5). The Bēma is the platform of ultimate accountability. There, each of us will give an account (logos) of our lives to God. Although those who have believed in Jesus have already been justified by faith (Rom 5:1) and will not face condemnation on the final day (John 5:24; Rom 8:1, 33), God will still judge our works (1 Cor 3:10-17; 2 Cor 5:10) to test what sort of work we have done, and reward us accordingly (Matt 6:1-6, 16, 18, 10:41-42). May we serve Him well!

Key Greek Words

στήκω (stēkō) [3, 4, 10] "stand" - met. to stand when under judgment, to be approved, to stand firm, a building that is still standing intact

πίπτω (piptō) [3] "fall" - to fall down, fall in ruins, to fall in judgment, to suffer defeat, failure, or ruin

πληροφορέω (plērophoreō) [5] "fully convinced" - to be certaint, assured, to be completely confident or certain of something

εὐχαριστέω (eucharisteō) [6] "give thanks" - to thank, to express gratitude or appreciation

ζάω (zaō) [7, 8, 9, 10] "to live" - to be possessed of vitality, to exercise the functions of life, to be alive in a state of salvation from spiritual death

ἀποθνήσκω (apothnēskō) [7, 8, 9] "to die" - to pass from physical life and lose bodily functions needed to sustain life, final condemnation, utter separation,

βῆμα (bēma) [10] "judgment seat" - an elevated place tribunal, throne, the site at which a judge is present to issue official decisions

ἐξομολογέομαι exomologeomai) "confess" - to agree, to profess *openly, to praise, celebrate*

λόγος (logos) [12] "account" - speech, language, a narrative or description of past events especially for determination of accountability

Questions

Fill in the blank:

1. Paul affirms that there is room for _____ views and that we should prioritize love over personal _____.
2. A heart fully _____ (plērophoreō) in its choices and anchored in genuine _____ (eucharisteō) transforms these personal decisions into acts of worship.
3. In a Roman household, a servant (oiketēs) was under the pater familias' (head of the household's) exclusive _____.
4. The strong must not _____ (exoutheneō) the weak, nor should the weak _____ (diakrino) the strong for the freedom they exercise.
5. To treat a brother or sister with scorn or ridicule is to assume a _____ that does not exist.

Greek word matching:

	English	*Greek*
1.	give thanks	1. bēma
2.	judgment seat	2. oiketēs
3.	accept	3. proslambanō
4.	account/speech	4. eucharisteō
5.	servant	5. logos

Multiple Choice

1. Paul uses the term "oiketēs" (household servant) in Romans 14:4:
    a. In a Roman household, an oiketēs could be disciplined or approved by another servant.
    b. Because God is the pater familias (head of household), He alone has exclusive authority over those who belong to Him.
    c. Paul uses the idea of the oiketēs to teach us that because we are all servants of God, it is not our place to judge another of God's servants for their opinions on non-essential matters. God has exclusive authority over them.
    d. Both b and c
2. Paul speaks of God's Judgment Seat (the Bēma):
    a. In ancient Greek culture, the bema was a raised judicial bench or magistrate's seat where officials issued decrees and awarded prizes to athletes.
    b. Paul uses this imagery to show that because Christ exercises absolute mastery (Lordship) over us, He alone has the right to sit on that platform and judge us.
    c. The Bēma Seat of God is the platform of ultimate accountability.
    d. There, each of us will give an account of our lives to God.
    e. All of the above.

Memory work: Write out Romans 14:10: