

Romans 14:10-12 Our most important examination

Introduction

I remember well the appointments I made to sit my car driving test as a seventeen-year-old. The first one was not great as I made a mistake and failed it. The second one should have been okay but a person unknown decided to release air from at least one of my tyres on the road outside the test centre. I was offered twenty minutes to fix it or reschedule the test. Sensibly but annoyed I opted for the latter! On the third visit around my eighteenth birthday I was successful. What a relief I felt that day, not least because living out in the country where there was no public transport learning to drive was absolutely essential. Each one of us can recall tests or examinations that may have been at school or in some other life setting but we felt the pressure of those days and can recall something of that challenge even though it took place many years ago.

These events undoubtedly were important to us but though our life experiences on earth will vary there is one forthcoming encounter that will be of unparalleled importance for us all; that is the day when we stand before the Lord to give our account to Him. Although we only have some of the details about this future event the Bible divides humanity into two categories, those who have put their faith and trust in the Lord and those who have rejected the knowledge and light of God's truth and revelation presented to them. The latter category will give account before the Lord and hear of the eternal consequences of their choice apart from God. There is reference to this Day of Judgement in Revelation 20:11-12: *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from His presence, and there was no place for them.*¹¹ *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.*

1. Is there a judgement day for Christians? (Romans 14:10-12)

*You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.*¹¹ *It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "Every knee will bow before Me; every tongue will acknowledge God."*¹² *So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.*

(a) **Solving the puzzle** This passage and similar ones about judgement can seem a puzzle to some Christians on first reading. After all we are saved not by our own merits or efforts but by the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. We receive this gift of grace through faith alone. Ephesians 2:8-9 states: *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.* In addition in John 5:24 Jesus reminds us: *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.* So how does the message of these verses fit with Bible passages that reference to judgement? The simple answer is that there are different forms of judgement. An examination script may be judged (marked) for someone at the upper end of High School to determine the grade they may get in a Higher or Advanced Higher Award. A very limited number of students did so well that their work may be reviewed or judged for a possible prize. These are two distinctive assessments of the same work that is easy for us to grasp. What these two verses state very clearly is that our eternal salvation and place with Jesus in eternity is determined through His sacrifice alone, a completely objective and definitive atonement! Therefore, Paul is not questioning this clear truth, but instead referring to something else that we will look at in this message.

(b) **Judgement in the Bible** There are a number of judgments mentioned in the Bible that it is worth outlining here in passing. The detailed significance of each will depend to a significant degree on the particular view of the end times held by each Christian. (I will simply note the list of judgements compiled in James Boice, *Romans* Vol.4, p. 1756) (i) **The judgement of believers at the judgement seat of Jesus** (Romans 14:10-12; I Corinthians 3:1-15 and II Corinthians 5:10). (ii) **Judgements on the earth** (Revelation 6-11, 15-16); (iii) **A Judgement of the unidentified beast and false prophet, at the time of the imprisonment of Satan** (Revelation 19:20; 20:1-3); (iv) **A judgement of Gentile nations** (Psalm 2); (v) **A judgement of the nation of Israel** (Ezekiel 20:32-38); (vi) **The final judgement of Satan** (Revelation 20:1-10); (vii) **The final judgement of unbelievers at the Great White Throne** (Revelation 20:11-15). Leaving aside the judgement of Christians –the first one on this list – which is in a separate category, all the other judgements refer to God’s response to human sinfulness whether in this life or beyond it. By contrast, our accounting of our lives to the Lord Jesus is not about our eternal salvation or whether we will spent eternity with Him or not, as that was taken care of in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. We were accepted into God’s family by His unmerited favour because Jesus was good enough! We would never be good enough to earn our salvation. Therefore, we have eternal security in Christ as believers. This is an incredible privilege. It does though place upon us a responsibility for how we behave as His ambassadors because we are called to honour Him in the choices we make and the way we live day by day.

2. **What will I be judged for as a Christian?** (I Corinthians 3:11-15)

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames (I Corinthians 3:11-15).

(a) **We will be judged by our service for God** Our faith is not just agreement with a doctrinal statement or other summary of the truths of the faith, though it includes acceptance of foundational teaching about the Lord Jesus and other basic convictions. It begins by a personal commitment to follow Jesus and then it is followed through by a lifestyle that honours Him. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared: ‘*Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but **only the one who does the will of My Father** who is in heaven’ (Matthew 7:21). A person who has genuinely professed faith in Christ will show evidence in their lives that this is the case. James in his letter to newly formed Christian Churches in AD48 made exactly the same point that faith that is real will be worked out in practical commitment to God through service to other people (James 2:14-26). We are not saved by our works, but saved in order to do them –a crucial difference. *For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).**

(b) **We will be judged by our motive in doing good works** (I Corinthians 3:13) *...their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. Jesus in Matthew 6:1-4 addressed this topic in the Sermon on the Mount. ‘Be careful not to practise your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

² *‘So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret,*

will reward you. This is impossible to discern with respect to other people as only God knows a person's motivation. Did this person say or do something to impress other people or to avoid criticism that would have followed had they not made that choice? If so then if their action achieves the desired result it is a closed matter. If however, a person's motivation for service is to please God and honour Him then one day God will honour them for this choice. You and I know the difference in our own lives when we have done good things with very different forms of motivation. Paul in I Thessalonians 2:3-4 explained his motivation for evangelising and church-planting around the Roman world. *For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts.* God promises to honour those that honour Him (I Samuel 2:30).

3. Why might some Christians have regrets on that day?

(a) **They did not give Jesus first place in their priorities** (I John 2:28) *And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.* In life there are constant pressures upon each one of us and it is so easy to choose priorities that are not consistent with our Christian calling. There have also in fairness been some Christians that have only attended to their Christian vocation and neglected their families or their duties at work. The person who believes they have got the balance right in their commitment to God and to the local church; to their family and their employer; is rare indeed! The vast majority of us will live with the frustration of knowing that we have on a not infrequent basis failed to get the balance right! However, if we genuinely put God first as a non-negotiable commitment it can then help at the human level is determining how we fulfil our necessary duties with joy in daily living!

(b) **They were not rewarded by God because their motivation was temporal and not eternal** (I Corinthians 3:15) *If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.* The Bible is very clear that we saved by grace but saved to serve in Jesus' name! In heaven there will be surprises because there will be some who on earth were seem as 'successful' Christians whose motivation was not honouring to God who will receive no further recognition in heaven. There will also be Christians completely unacknowledged on earth whom God will honour publicly in heaven because in secret they served others with a view to living for Him.

(c) **They lost rewards for living in some form of sin** Paul acknowledged this in his words recorded in II Corinthians 5:10: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.* It is deeply damaging to the cause of Christ when His people proclaim principles and values yet are found to be living in a contrary way. There are those who are uncovered in this life. In the secular world this can be amusing to an outsider. In China not that long ago a man was involved in an accident and was taken to hospital. There was a public appeal of some form for his wife to go to the hospital. His lawful marriage partner duly showed up, but to her shock and horror so did ten other women who thought they also were 'the one' in his life! When he recovered his health I think there would be some explaining to do! On a more serious note I have never forgotten the media frenzy over the downfall of a prominent American Evangelical pastor. He preached a fierce sermon to his mega-church congregation one Sunday denouncing a particular form of sin, with a particular example of someone who had committed it in the minds of those people present, and was unusually emphatic in stating that he would never commit that sin. Exactly one year later his congregation voted to remove him from his post for committing that particular form of sinful behaviour. Yet not everyone is

required to confront their wrongful choices in this life. Some people, including some professing Christians, will hide their sin successfully from other human beings, but unconfessed sin may be revealed on the Day of Judgement. Or if not declared by the Lord it will prevent some Christians from being honoured by the Lord as would otherwise have been the case.

(d) **Outward appearances can be deceiving** Jesus in a heated conversation with a group of Pharisees had a significant disagreement with them concerning money and material prosperity. Jesus declared: *You cannot serve both God and Money.*¹⁴ *The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.*¹⁵ *He said to them, 'You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight* (Luke 16:13b-15). Appearances can be very deceptive. Every one is driven by something. What is it that drives or motivates you? Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21,33 provided a clear challenge to us. *'Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.*²⁰ *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*²¹ ***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also ... But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*** May God help us both in our hearts and in our outward conduct to live in a manner that is pleasing to Him.

4. **Why should we be looking forward to that day?**

(a) **The Crown of Righteousness** (II Timothy 4:8) *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.* That is the people of God who consistently have kept their focus on living for Jesus, whether in a quiet way or a more public way, but year after year seeking to live a God-honouring life looking forward to the coming of Jesus. People that endure who are like those described in I Corinthians 15:58: *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.* I thank the Lord for the people of this congregation who year after year can be counted on to be faithful in worship on God's day; faithful in service week by week; totally reliable and consistent in their Christian service. It is most encouraging to think of and pray for such people as a pastor.

(b) **The Crown of Life** (Revelation 2:10) *Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.* This is primarily the martyr's crown for those who are faithful to the point of death. Every week brothers and sisters in Christ enter eternity because they have laid down their lives for Jesus. It is also a crown awarded to those who endure great temptation. James 1:12: *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.* Each of us are different in temperament and in the life situations we will experience. The Lord knows who these people are whose commitment to the cause merits such an honour.

(c) **The Incorruptible Crown** (I Corinthians 9:25) *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.* Paul appears to be speaking of spiritual self-discipline in personal devotions and commitment to Christ-likeness in my character and conduct. Am I striving to be the best I can be for God? Will I keep on keeping on for my good and supremely for His glory? I will not turn my eyes to see what others are doing, rather I will discipline myself to honour Christ looking only to Him for inspiration and as my role model. *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its*

shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ **Consider Him** who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart (Hebrews 12:1-3).

(d) **The Crown of Rejoicing** (I Thessalonians 2:19) *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you?*²⁰ **Indeed, you are our glory and joy.** This is the reward for leading someone else to Jesus. The highest achievement a Christian can accomplish in this life is seeing someone else come to faith. There is no greater pleasure than playing a part at the human level in another person professing faith in Jesus and then going on with Him. Jesus wants to give you and me this honour. Will you pray that between now and the day He calls you home to glory that each one of us can have the privilege of leading someone to faith in Jesus? This rejoicing we need to remember is not only on earth but also in heaven. Jesus in Luke 15:8-10 made this amazing statement: *Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?*⁹ *And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin."*¹⁰ *In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* Hallelujah!

(e) **The Crown of Glory** (I Peter 5:4) *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:*² *be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;*³ *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*⁴ **And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.** This is the reward for faithful pastoral care of God's people. Some individuals will have a formal title that designates their responsibility for the pastoral care of God's people. Other Christians may never be designated as a pastor or a member of a pastoral team with responsibilities for the wellbeing of others in a local church, but in accordance with our care for God's people He notices our love and care for one another –or the lack of it. Will you and I have a heart for other people to serve and care for them in Jesus' name.

5. **How should I be living in the light of that coming day?**

(a) **With Patience** James gives us this advice. *Be patient, then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains.*⁸ **You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near** (James 5:7-8). There are plenty of things in life that are frustrating and confusing, but they will not go on for ever. Keep your focus in the short time left!

(b) **With Peace** *Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.*¹⁴ *For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.*¹⁵ *According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.*¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*¹⁷ *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord for ever.*¹⁸ **Therefore encourage one another with these words** (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). God has the future under His control.

(c) **With Joy** *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?*²⁰ **Indeed, you are our glory and joy.** (I Thessalonians 2:19-20) Jesus is building His Church. More people come to faith each year and the blessings we have received from the Lord have multiplied since last year. We may have challenges too

but in a context where we have a Lord who loves us and cares for us. Therefore, we can be encouraged about the future.

(d) **With Holiness** Paul wrote: *May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.* (I Thessalonians 3:13). John likewise declared: *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.*² *Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*³ ***All who have this hope in Him purify themselves, just as He is pure*** (I John 3:1-3). There is no higher motivation for Christ-honouring living. Even though it may get harder and harder in an increasingly secular culture that fails to understand the principles by which we live our lives.

(e) **With Confidence** May we share Paul's confidence in our and other believers' future: *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus* (Philippians 1:6). John write in a similar vein: *And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming.* (I John 2:28).

(f) **With diligent service** *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom, I give you this charge:*² *preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction* (II Timothy 4:1-2). Do the ordinary things well with faithfulness to God and one another year by year. Be someone who can be counted on when a hand is needed!

(g) **With faith even in adverse times** Peter's words in his first letter seem so appropriate to believers in so much of the contemporary world. *This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,*⁵ *who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*⁶ *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*⁷ *These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.* (I Peter 1:4b-7).

Jesus is coming soon and we will then give an account of our stewardship to Him. May each of us be found as faithful stewards committed to carrying out our master's business to the best of our abilities, for His glory, Amen