

VERSE 10 - BLACK

Paul, having previously underscored the imperative of welcoming weaker brothers into the fold with kindness and grace, shifts his focus to address the Roman Jews concerning the concept of ultimate judgment—referred to as the "judgment seat of Christ." Importantly, Paul aims to clarify that it is not the prerogative of his audience—the Roman Jews—to assume the roles of "judge and jury" in matters of moral and religious conduct.

When Paul articulates the notion of standing before the "judgment seat of Christ," he is specifically pointing to the judgment that will transpire at the Second Coming of Christ, an event also corroborated by Matthew 25:31, where it is stated that the Son of Man (Christ) will sit upon His throne of glory. In fact, Matthew 25 is the **only** place in the Bible where Christ sits at the judgment throne, since Revelation 20 (the Great White Throne) is inhabited by God the Father (Rev. 20:12). If we truly allow Scripture to be its own interpretive guide, then we must take Matthew 25:31 as the key to understanding the Judgment Seat of Christ. However, the prevailing interpretation among theologians is that Paul's reference here pertains to the collective body of Christ being judged at the rapture. I find this reading problematic for two key reasons.

First, let's consider the pronoun used by Paul: "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." In the original Greek text, the pronoun 'we' is a first person plural pronoun that is more logically connected to "we, the Jewish believers awaiting the Kingdom," rather than the inclusive "we, the body of Christ." The distinction is critical, especially when weighed against the backdrop of modern theological discourses that often amalgamate Kingdom theology with the concept of the body of Christ. This amalgamation primarily stems from the historical influence of Catholic doctrine which views the church as synonymous with the Kingdom, a viewpoint also endorsed by many who oppose replacement theology.

The second point of contention arises when one reads Romans 14:10 as a commentary on the body of Christ's role in judgment. This interpretation not only strains logic but is also at odds with the biblical portrayal of believers as already "complete in Him," as noted in Colossians 2:10. The question then becomes: Should our theology suggest that this completeness is conditional upon our deeds? Such a perspective is what Evangelical thought, broadly speaking, has endorsed, thus leaving it in an untenable position.

A case in point is a statement from GotQuestions, a theological website, that proposes,

"We believe the judgment seat of Christ is when the crowns will be awarded, and this will take place in heaven soon after the rapture of the church."¹

This position necessitates a convoluted schema of multiple judgments: one immediately following the rapture, a second at Christ's Second Coming where He is explicitly identified as the Judge, and a third at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:12).

Thus, it becomes evident that a failure to pay heed to the grammatical nuances in Romans contributes to an overly intricate and inconsistent theological landscape. Furthermore, this interpretation, with its inherent complexities, diminishes the unambiguous biblical teachings about the completeness of believers in Christ.

¹ "Judgment Seat of Christ." [GotQuestions.org](https://www.gotquestions.org/judgment-seat-Christ.html). Accessed Oct. 5, 2023. <https://www.gotquestions.org/judgment-seat-Christ.html>**

VERSE 11 - BLACK

In support of the concept of the judgment seat, Paul quotes Isaiah 45:23. This passage is also quoted by Paul in Philippians 2:11. The Isaiah passage is universally applicable, with no pronoun qualifiers as in verse 10. However, even evangelicals would agree that this verse does not prove that every person will stand before the judgment seat. It only affirms that every person will ultimately acknowledge the Messiah as Lord.

VERSE 12 - BLACK

Paul returns to the doctrine of verse 10 concerning every individual of Israel standing before the judgment seat at the inauguration of the kingdom. He does not say that "every one" but "every one of us" will stand in judgment. The pronoun us, as with the "we" in verse 10, refers to the Jewish nation. While every one will bow before the Messiah and acknowledge Him (v. 11), every one of the Jewish nation will "stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (v. 10).

Verse 13 - Green

Paul simplifies the preparation for judgment with this rule: instead of judging others, strive to avoid being a stumbling block to them. I have placed this under the green color coding because, although it is written to Roman Jews, it is good advice for anyone who wants to honor the Lord and help others along the way.

ROMANS 14:14-23 | PREPARING FOR THE KINGDOM IN THE AGE OF GRACE

Supplemental Resource: Romans Graphically Presented, pg. 49

VERSE 14 - BLUE

With verse 14, Paul clearly positions himself as within the dispensation of the grace of God. The words of verse 14 **only** fit in our dispensation. Imagine Moses saying, "whatever you consider to be clean is clean, and whatever you consider unclean is unclean." This is anathema to the entire program of kosher law, in which God and God alone determines cleanliness.

Consider these Torah passages:

1. **Leviticus 11:4-8** - "Nevertheless these shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the hoof: as the camel, because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof; he is unclean unto you."
2. **Deuteronomy 14:7-8** - "Nevertheless these ye shall not eat of them that chew the cud, or of them that divide the cloven hoof; as the camel, and the hare, and the coney: for they chew the cud, but divide not the hoof; therefore they are unclean unto you. And the swine, because it divideth the hoof, yet cheweth not the cud, it is unclean unto you: ye shall not eat of their flesh, nor touch their dead carcase."
3. **Leviticus 11:10-12** - "And all that have not fins and scales in the seas, and in the rivers, of all that move in the waters, and of any living thing which is in the waters, they shall be an abomination unto you."

These passages, and many more, give explicit declaration concerning what is clean and unclean. Now Paul declares, "decide for yourself." Yet, being in the age of grace, these Roman Jews were also recipients of national promises concerning the future Messianic Kingdom. They were both recipients of the promises of grace and the promises of Kingdom, at the same time. As such, their faith had a dual nature to it that is not found in our faith today, for they had to keep the kingdom focus in mind. Today, Christians live to honor the Savior in their lives by celebrating and proclaiming grace to others, and enjoying the world God has given us, learning and celebrating His Word along the way. Since neither we nor the Jews are currently being offered the Kingdom, living according to Kingdom rules and regulations has no direct value.

VERSES 15-16 - GREEN

A fundamental principle of leading a good life in any dispensation is to live with charity. This is precisely what Paul advocates for. He provides a specific example of refraining from eating meat that may cause a fellow believer to stumble, returning to the theme introduced at the beginning of the chapter. The "good" of the grace dispensation should not be used in a manner that prompts others to speak ill of it.

VERSE 17 - GREEN

This verse is often used to support the idea of an inaugurated kingdom that exists spiritually in our hearts, rather than physically on earth. This conclusion is reached by assuming that the book of Romans is entirely written to the Body of Christ. If we are Paul's intended audience, then why would he discuss Kingdom teaching unless the Kingdom were meant for us? Paul mentions the Kingdom in verse 17 because it relates to the instruction given in verses 15-16, so if 15-16 applies to us, then 17 does as well. The concept of the "kingdom/church" doctrine and the spiritualization of the Kingdom by Christendom has led to the interpretation of verse 17 as an inaugurated eschatology view.

However, when we examine the text itself, does it actually state that there is an invisible, overarching kingdom that replaces or overshadows the future Messianic kingdom? I don't believe so. The coming Kingdom is indeed physical, but it is described as "not meat and drink." If this means that there is no physical sustenance in the coming Kingdom, then much of Scripture would be rendered incorrect. Scripture consistently portrays the kingdom age as one of abundant food and drink. For example, Isaiah 25:6 speaks of the Kingdom, stating, "And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Amos 9:13 says, "the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine." Amos 9:14 says, "they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them." Even in these passages that mention "meat and drink" in relation to the Kingdom, one would not conclude that the Kingdom is solely about physical sustenance rather than righteousness, peace, and joy. So why do many theologians today remove the physical aspects of the Kingdom based on this verse? It is likely due to preconceived notions.

Examples of using this passage to downplay or outright deny a spiritual kingdom are "a dime a dozen." Consider this example from popular author and speaker John Piper. Piper was preaching on this verse and spoke about what Paul meant by the phrase "Kingdom of God." Piper's words downplay the physical nature of the kingdom.

First, he means the reign of God, not the realm of God. We tend to think of a kingdom as a place. But for Jesus and for Paul it almost never has that meaning. Rather it means the reign or the rule of God. You can see that here: Where the Holy Spirit is bringing about righteousness and peace and joy, the kingdom (that is, the reign of God) is being manifested.²

He goes on to say,

The saving, redeeming, sanctifying rule of God—the kingdom of God—has broken into this world in Jesus Christ, the Messiah—the King—and the evidence of his rule in your lives is **NOT** eating and drinking.³

In his comments, given under the heading, "What Paul Means by 'Kingdom of God'," Piper never mentioned a coming physical kingdom in which Jesus reigns over the nations of the earth on the Davidic throne. This displays the prevailing bias toward a spiritual rather than physical kingdom.

² Piper, John. "The Kingdom of God is Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit" <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-kingdom-of-god-is-righteousness-and-peace-and-joy-in-the-holy-spirit>. Accessed October 5, 2023.

³ Ibid