

Romans 14:7-12

“Standing Before the Judgment Seat of God”

“For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 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. For to this end Messiah died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, ‘AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME, AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD’ [Isaiah 49:18; 45:23]. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God.”

Having just admonished various Believers in Rome,⁸⁷ mostly non-Jewish Believers, about the need for them to not judge regarding the issues of eating and sacred days (Romans 14:2-6),⁸⁸ Paul’s instruction about not looking down with disdain or contempt over opinions is noticeably intensified. He communicates, “This indeed is how matters stand. None of us lives to be his own master, and none of us dies to be his own master. When we live we live serving the Lord, and when we die we die serving the Lord. Whether we live, then, or whether we die, we belong to the Lord” (Romans 14:7-8, God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). The whole spectrum of serving the Lord Yeshua, *from life to death*, is presented before the audience. The actions of conviction, held by the presumed “weak,” are actions performed to the Lord. Further, it should be obvious with a spectrum of *from life to death* in view, how all of one’s opinions mean relatively little in comparison to the important good deeds of hard service of the Kingdom—which in many cases for the First Century Believers led to hardship, ostracism, harassment and imprisonment, or even martyrdom.

All of a born again Believer’s activities are to be conducted with Yeshua the Messiah as the central focus. Yeshua is the Lord of all who have acknowledged Him, as a result of His death and resurrection: “It was for this that Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living” (Romans 14:9, God’s New Covenant-Cassirer). The paraphrase offered by The Message for Romans 14:9 is worth noting: “That’s why Jesus lived and died and then lived again: so that he could be our Master across the entire range of life and death, and free us from the petty tyrannies of each other.” Differences of opinion, and worthwhile matters of conscience, mean very little in light of the ministry, example, and sacrifice of the Son of God.

Perhaps some of Paul’s word about judging another is rhetorical, and perhaps some of it is representative of how nasty a few things had gotten among the Roman Believers. He inquires, “But why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you look down on your brother or sister? We all will stand in front of the judgment seat of God” (Romans 14:10, Common English Bible). All Believers will have to give some account of their actions before the Lord (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10), in an evaluation of their service to Him. Demonstrating a harsh attitude of contempt toward fellow brothers and sisters in the present, and having a less-than-positive evaluation of one’s service to the Messiah in the future, is not something that mature Believers should at all want.

The Apostle Paul highlights the importance of Believers’ works being evaluated in the future, by appealing to Tanach Scripture: “for it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee

⁸⁷ This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

⁸⁸ If necessary, do consult the discussions on Romans 14, and related topics, in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* and *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Romans 14:11, ESV). Romans 14:11 includes a quotation from Isaiah 45:23, with Isaiah 45:21-23 in total detailing how the Lord God of Israel is the only Savior, the only place in which true salvation can be found, and how all will be forced to acknowledge Him:

“Declare and set forth *your case*; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*.”

The significance of Paul’s statement, for the situation in Rome, is of course highlighted in how all Believers will have to stand before the God of all Creation, for their works to be evaluated and eschatological rewards granted. In terms of the nature of the Messiah, there is excellent reason for us to consider “the Lord” of Romans 14:11 and Isaiah 45:23 to actually be Yeshua. Paul has stated in 2 Corinthians 5:10, “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah.” And in the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, the Lord to whom all must bow down, is certainly Yeshua the Messiah:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Messiah Yeshua, who, existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a wooden scaffold. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Yeshua EVERY KNEE WILL BOW [Isaiah 45:23], in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth, and every tongue will confess that Yeshua the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (PME).

Yeshua being “the Lord” (YHWH) of Isaiah 45:23 is notably highlighted by what is asserted in Isaiah 42:8, “I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images.” Either Yeshua the Son is authentically and truly God, by the application of Isaiah 45:23—or Paul has committed blasphemy against the God of Israel (cf. Romans 10:13). Wright is entirely correct to state how this “indicates how strong and high Paul’s underlying christology is at this point.”⁸⁹

For the purposes of Paul’s admonition in Romans 14, those who would unfairly judge others who hold to opinions regarding eating and sacred days, may be regarded as though they have usurped the position of the ultimate Judge Himself.⁹⁰ This is not something that the presumed “strong” in Rome needed to be doing, as “each of us will be answerable to God” (Romans 14:12, REB).

⁸⁹ Wright, in *NIB*, 10:738.

⁹⁰ Dunn, *Romans*, 38b:809.