

Parson to Person

ROMANS 14 PART 7

(Thoughts on The Judgment Seat of Christ—Continued—Part 3)

The mention of “*bema*” in 2 Corinthians 4–5 is related to ministry fatigue and Paul’s encouragement to perseverance. In this case, Paul shows that his interest in persevering ministry is that of “persuading men” (vs. 11). He said, “...we must all appear before the judgment seat [*bema*] of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10 NKJV). The context not only suggests evaluatory and revelatory examination but overtly avoids the concept of the event being focused on rewards without the mention of sin and consequence. He said, “that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (vs. 10b). Therefore, “good” might be rewarded but “bad” certainly not. Furthermore, “bad” does not imply less than good, or short of best, as has often been proposed. It can be shown that the word for “bad” (“κακός,” *kakov*) is translated as “evil” 42 of 51 times, and as “bad” in only 1 out of the 51 occurrences. Otherwise it is translated as “foul,” “evil things,” or “wicked,” 1 time each, and as “harm” 5 times. Therefore, Paul must be indicating that the “*bema*” is an event where “good” may be rewarded but also where “bad” is remembered and accounted for.

I do recognize that in all but two events where “*bema*” is used the persons under scrutiny were “righteous.” The list includes Jesus, Paul, and the Christians addressed in Romans 14. The one case in which the man under judgment was with certainty unrighteous was the judgment of Herod Agrippa I (see Acts 12:21–23). The only other occasion allows for some discussion.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is indicating that as “ambassadors for Christ,” those engaged in ministry must persevere on behalf of those they seek to serve and “reconcile” to God. He said, “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men...” (vs. 11).

There is no question about the fact that all men and women are sinful and accountable to God. Every person will, at some point in time, see that there is only one true and living God—the final authority and judge—and that they each must answer to Him. Some answer to Him at the cross, and others will answer for themselves at the Great White Throne! Therefore, Paul explains his motivation to persevere in ministry for the purpose of reaching lost men and women with the Gospel (see the whole of 2 Corinthians 4–5).

In the text, Paul expresses that works, “good or bad,” are in view at the “*bema*.” Then he adds, “knowing therefore the terror of the Lord we persuade men.” Therefore, it is possible that he is including those he is working to “persuade” in the expression “we” of verse 10. Otherwise one might suggest that he was indicating that believers should, could, or will be “terrified” when their “good or bad” works are evaluated. I reject this view.

Finally, later in the same chapter (vs. 21), Paul says that the believer has been made “the righteousness of God” in Christ. It makes no sense to think that a believer, who is said to be “the righteousness of God in Him,” should be thought to have “bad” that must still be examined or dealt with.

Simply stated, “bad” could be directly associated with sin. Sin is anything less than perfect—it is bad. The word “sin” is translated from the Greek word “ἁμαρτία” (*hamartia*), and is an archery term meaning “to miss the mark.” Of the 174 times it is used in the New Testament, it is most often translated “sin.” Otherwise it is translated as “failure,” “being evil,” “wrongdoing,” or “guilt.” Sin is bad, and “bad” is sin! Therefore, one could suggest that the “bad” deeds in view at the “*bema*” of 2 Corinthians 4–5 may properly relate to anything that misses the mark—and thus, to sin. Therefore, Paul’s use of “*bema*” when communicating to the Corinthians could not have implied a believer-only presence since “bad” is still referred to as present and visible. It makes no sense! God said that once a believer’s “bad” has been forgiven, “their sins and their lawless deeds will [be] remember[ed] no more” (see Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12 and 10:17). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NKJV).

I love you all,
Pastor Paul