

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 16, chapter 7

We're going to walk our way very thoughtfully through Romans chapter 7, which many theologians consider as perhaps the most important chapter in the entire New Testament as pertains to Christian doctrine. So let's continue with Romans chapter 7 by having a brief review of two significant points we discussed last time.

First: the opening 3 verses of chapter 7 appear to be Paul paraphrasing a Levitical law (one of the Laws of Moses from the Biblical Torah) about why it is acceptable to God for a widow to remarry. He will use this paraphrase as a loose illustration to make a point about what he means when he says that Believers have "died to the law". But upon closer examination we discover that there exists no such law regarding widows within the Torah (the Law of Moses). There is no specific, direct commandment that allows a widow to remarry other than in the case of widow who has not given birth to a son. In that case then the laws of Levirate marriage apply. This law reflects the family requirement that when a man dies without his wife having produced a son as an heir for him, the brother of the deceased man is to marry the widow for the primary purpose of him producing a son with her. However that son would be seen, spiritually and legally, as actually belonging to the deceased man. The son then allows the deceased man's bloodline to continue, along with his living essence. Of course Paul's example in no way contemplates the Levirate marriage circumstance. And in fact the Torah makes it an act of adultery should a widow remarry and thus in principle it prohibits such a thing. The penalty for adultery is death by stoning.

So what source is Paul referring to as the law about widows being able to remarry? It is Jewish law; Tradition; **Halakhah**. It is something that most Pharisees would have supported (Paul was a self-professed Pharisee) but the Sadducees (the Priests) likely would not have supported it. Not only is this an important distinction but it also reveals Paul's attitude towards **Halakhah**. While he would not have supported all **Halakah** (lock, stock and barrel), he obviously supported Jewish law in general, provided to his way of thinking it did not directly refute the Torah or Christ or Paul's messianic theology. But it also signals that we have to be cautious when reading Paul not to assume that because he purports something to be "law" that he always means the Law of Moses. Further, English translations tend to obscure one of the grammatical indicators that tells us which of the 4 different kinds of law Paul is referring to because often Bible translators will insert the word "the" before the word "law" thus producing the term "The Law". "The Law" is a standard Jewish abbreviation for The Law of Moses. However in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the definite article "the" is not there. So in this instance of verses 1 -3 of chapter 7, the reference is NOT to "The Law" but simply to "law". And as we learned, in this case the term "law" means Jewish law; **Halakhah**.

The second important point is this: we have to examine the term "died to the law" quite carefully. Indeed in this case the definite article "the" IS present in the Greek manuscripts, so the term "The Law" (the Law of Moses) certainly seems to be Paul's meaning. Thus: "died to

the Law of Moses” is the intended sense of it. This is usually taken to mean that Christians are no longer beholden to the Torah and so it just goes to prove that The Law is dead. However when we back away for a moment we notice something important: who or what died in this passage? Did Paul say The Law died to the Believer? NO! It is the Believer who died. And since the penalty for violating a Law of Moses (sinning) is God’s wrath and the sinner’s death, then Paul is explaining that through the death of Christ on the cross, worshippers who trust in Yeshua and identify in baptism with Him have died along with Him. Thus it is the Believer who has had a change of status, and not The Law. By symbolically dying we have paid the penalty that the Law requires for our sins so Paul can say that we have already died to The Law. Since all humans are destined to die only once, we owe no further penalty for our sins.

It has become quite muddled in Christianity to even define what a sin is. Most often it is this: sin is doing anything God doesn’t want me to do. However that thought is usually tempered with the belief that what is sin for me is not necessarily sin for you and vice versa. Sin is now individualistic and customized, Believer by Believer, and that customized definition is delivered to us by the Holy Spirit. Thus unless God specifically tells you that such and such is a sin (as He did with Adam regarding eating the forbidden fruit), then for you nothing is sin. Sin no longer has any universal standard. And since you can’t possibly know what God told me I’m not to do (or even to do), then you can’t judge me when I do something that to you is wrong because God may not have told me that. I’ll say it straightaway: that is the worst sort of manmade doctrine. It defies the Bible including the New Testament. One authoritative person who defines sin the clearest is the Apostle John. I’ll quote him using the KJV since it is not only well accepted but it also eliminates the dynamic translation that the CJB prefers to use : ^{KJV} **1 John 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*** Sin is the transgression of The Law....the Law of Moses. That is the direct Biblical, New Testament definition of sin as pronounced by the Apostle John. Sin is not whatever we choose to make it. Neither the Church nor a single Believer can unilaterally decide that there is no longer a universal standard for sin or that every individual carries his or her own truth, and thus is required to obey ONLY their own private set of divine rules. Those who adhere to this erroneous doctrine then accuse those who obey any written Biblical law of committing something called Legalism. But John says that when you or I violate one of the commandments of the Law of Moses, that is precisely what sin is. True; Christ has paid the price for our sin. But just as Paul has already covered a couple of times, does that mean we just go right on sinning....right on breaking The Law.... because there’s plenty of grace available so that we don’t pay the consequences for our sinning? Heaven forbid!

Wake up Believers! Our ambivalence and our long slumber are over. Just as before you first believed, the moment you heard the Gospel of Christ any excuse you may have had before God to plead ignorance and thus obtain mercy because of it, evaporated. You have now been taught, and have been shown it in Holy Scripture, that even the direct words of the Savior Himself in Matthew 5 say that The Law is anything but dead and gone and He fully expects all of His followers to obey it. There is no more excuse. Sin has a standard and the standard is the Law of Moses; it is **not** our personal standards that God uses and it is not the standard that any particular denomination decides upon. And just as Christ pointed out, while it is **not** obedience to The Law, but rather our trust in His faithfulness that brings us acquittal before the Father, even so our level of obedience to the Law of Moses will be the determining factor for

the status we will hold for an eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven. If you want to live an eternity as the least before God, so be it. But if you want to be more than that, then obey Him. If you keep on denying the ongoing validity of The Law, and keep on sinning as a result, it is deliberate; you know better. You have made the decision in your free will to be disobedient; it is conscious, it is intentional. You have decided to follow your comfortable ways and not God's ways because you like your ways more than God's ways and see them as far easier or even superior. The Bible labels that sort of attitude; it is called rebellion. And men, when you lead your family that way, you take on further responsibility.

Let's re-read most of Romans chapter 7.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 7:4 – end

Verse 6 makes the case that a very important prophecy has been fulfilled. Does your Bible say that? No, of course it doesn't; but indeed that is what Paul is alluding to. He says we have been released or delivered from The Law, and thus we are no longer held captive because we have died to it. Therefore we are now able to serve God in Spirit and not only in the letter of the Law. Again notice who or what died. Did The Law die? No. Did **we** die? Yes. Thus our death has released us. Released us from what? From the need to be obedient to God's commandments? Paul has said time and again to this misunderstanding: Heaven forbid! Rather we have been released from the aspect of The Law that the Old Testament sometimes calls the curse of The Law. The curse of The Law is not an adjective that characterizes the Law, and it is not the Law itself. Rather the Law consists of two fundamental parts: Blessings (for obedience) and curses (for disobedience). The curse of The Law is death. So are we released from the blessings of The Law? Of course not. Rather we are released from the curses of The Law, which is death. Or as Paul says to begin Romans chapter 8: ***"Therefore there is no longer any condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua."*** Curses, condemnation, death; these are all Biblical equivalents for the divine consequence of our sins.

Back to verse 6. Perhaps the most important part of this verse is the words that say that now we are able to operate in the Spirit instead of the letter of The Law. This is prophecy fulfilled.

Jeremiah 31:30-32 CJB

³⁰ ***"Here, the days are coming," says ADONAI, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Isra'el and with the house of Y'hudah.***

³¹ ***It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers on the day I took them by their hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt; because they, for their part, violated my covenant, even though I, for my part, was a husband to them," says ADONAI.***

³² ***"For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra'el after those days," says ADONAI: "I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people.***

The New Testament holds the Spirit and the Letter in antithesis to one another. That is, one is the opposite of the other. The Spirit of The Law means what the Law intends for us to understand as the God-principle it demonstrates and from that understanding we are to act rightly. The letter of The Law means to act upon the Law mechanically, rigidly, technically, by looking only at its instructions but disregarding the underlying God-principles behind those words. But it also means that when The Law is applied without the Holy Spirit directing our thoughts and actions, it can be wrongly applied. However it is important to remember that acting in the Spirit of The Law doesn't do away with the written Law of Moses anymore than Jeremiah's prophecy of putting The Law on our hearts means that the Holy Spirit created and put an entirely new and different (even opposite) divine instruction within us. It is not meant that God replaced an old and failed Law with something new and better.

Yeshua, in His Sermon on the Mount, spoke extensively about the Spirit of the Law as opposed to the Letter. And frankly, the Spirit of the Law is far more demanding than the Letter. For example; as He says in Matthew 5, the letter of The Law says not to murder. But the Spirit of The Law says that the divine intent of the law prohibiting murder means to not even be angry with your brother. And just as Yeshua felt the need to pause in His famous sermon and make it clear that nothing He was saying should be taken as Him suggesting that He has abolished or changed The Law of Moses, so now in Romans 7 Paul pauses and feels the need to say in verse 7: ^{CJB} **Romans 7:7 *Therefore, what are we to say? That the Torah is sinful? Heaven forbid! Rather, the function of the Torah was that without it, I would not have known what sin is. For example, I would not have become conscious of what greed is if the Torah had not said, "Thou shalt not covet."***

Here's the thing: does not much of modern day Christianity advocate (or at least heavily imply) that for Believers The Law of Moses has become sin for us? That for us to "go back to The Law" (as it is often slanderously put) is somehow an affront to God because of what Yeshua has done for us? As an aside: many of you have no doubt been asked by well-meaning Believers: 'Why would I want to go back to The Law'? And my response to that is: please tell me what it was like when you were living under The Law. I usually get blank stares. Their inference is that non-Believers, or perhaps new Believers, had been living their lives under the Law of Moses. Right. The vast majority of non-Believers and new Believers have no idea what the Law of Moses is (if they had ever even heard of it). As I mentioned many times when I taught the Torah, the Law of Moses was only ever for the redeemed. First Israel was redeemed from Egypt, AND THEN a few weeks later they received The Law. The Law is ONLY for the redeemed; Believers. And we usually have no knowledge of it, or any awareness of its importance to us, until AFTER we are redeemed.

So are we to think that what God described as goodness, life and protection for Israel (The Torah) was actually in practice a defective covenant and ultimately a failure that merely led to sin; so it had to be replaced with a better one with more bells and whistles? Listen to what the Lord told Moses and Israel about the Torah in Deuteronomy chapter 30.

Deuteronomy 30:10-20 CJB

¹⁰ ***"However, all this will happen only if you pay attention to what ADONAI your God***

says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the Torah, if you turn to ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being.

¹¹ For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach.

¹² It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'

¹³ Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'

¹⁴ On the contrary, the word is very close to you- in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!

¹⁵ "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil-

¹⁶ in that I am ordering you today to love ADONAI your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings; for if you do, you will live and increase your numbers; and ADONAI your God will bless you in the land you are entering in order to take possession of it.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, if you refuse to listen, if you are drawn away to prostrate yourselves before other gods and serve them;

¹⁸ I am announcing to you today that you will certainly perish; you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Yarden to enter and possess.

¹⁹ "I call on heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have presented you with life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, so that you will live, you and your descendants,

²⁰ loving ADONAI your God, paying attention to what he says and clinging to him- for that is the purpose of your life! On this depends the length of time you will live in the land ADONAI swore he would give to your ancestors Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov."

Did the Lord actually pull the most cosmically monumental bait and switch operation in history upon mankind by first giving Israel The Law of Moses, saying that this covenant meant blessing and life, demanding that it is obeyed, but then later retracting it all as defective and a bad idea? Was this entire thing perhaps a deception and a ruse? Because as I have said before in all seriousness, if God would do that then why would I believe in the long term efficacy of ANY covenant He would make? Why wouldn't He offer us all this forgiveness and mercy through Christ, but then one day simply decide that it wasn't working out all that well and abolish it and create something else entirely? Or even more; tell us that to continue to trust in Yeshua is actually foolishness if not sin because He has come up with an even newer and

even better covenant? This is what we are asked to accept about the Covenants of Moses and Abraham, and I deny it and condemn it in the strongest possible way. But I'm also ashamed to admit that I believed it until perhaps 20 years ago.

But even more: do we find anything in this statement in Deuteronomy (or anywhere else in the Torah) that its entire purpose was to merely show us what sin is? Of course not. Thus when Paul says at the end of verse 7 that without The Law he wouldn't have known what sin is he is only doing what Paul regularly does as his teaching and writing style: he will highlight a certain aspect of a larger theological matter in order to make a point. He is in no way indicating that the several other aspects of the pertinent theological principle don't exist or matter. So for Believers to ever imagine that Paul is saying that the single and only purpose for the Torah, The Law, to exist was for God to show humans what sin is, completely defies what the Torah tells us about itself.

In verse 8 Paul says that apart from The Law, sin is dead. This goes along with his declaration in verse 7 that the Torah tells us what sin is. The point of the next 3 verses is to say that while on the one hand The Law certainly is not sin; on the other hand it can't be denied that The Law has been exploited by sin for its own wicked purposes. Then he goes on to explain something he also said earlier: that when God makes a law, our mere knowledge of that law causes our evil inclinations to kick into overdrive. So what are we to think that Paul is saying about the relationship between laws and sin? Is it truly an issue of direct cause and effect? Much of Christianity says that Paul's solution to the problem, then, is to simply have no laws! You can't get a speeding ticket if there are no speed limits. You can't go to jail for robbing a bank if there is no law against robbing banks. So if we apply this mindset to civil society, we find that God's solution to the crime problem would be to get rid of all laws and let people do whatever they want to. No laws, no crimes; no criminals. Easy! Frankly, what is usually proposed as Paul's solution is absurd; just get rid of all of God's divine laws and sinning becomes impossible.

Paul then explores the reality that the same Torah that God meant to bring life also brings death. This fits exactly with what we read in Deuteronomy chapter 30. God means for the Torah to bring life and security to His worshippers. Blessings. However, that only happens when one is obedient to God's laws. Disobedience to The Law brings death and chaos with it. Curses. So because people still allow their evil inclinations to remain as their Masters, The Law of Moses causes curses upon them in the sense that there is a deadly consequence for breaking God's laws. Yet, as he says in verse 12, that doesn't mean that the Torah is defective. Rather, says Paul, ***“So the Torah is holy; that is, the commandment is holy, just, and good.”*** Let me paraphrase that: the Law itself (as a Covenant and a justice system) is just and it is good. So the problem that the death of Christ remedies is not to repair or repeal the Torah (The Law), which is already holy and just. The problem that is solved by Christ's death is that a divine pardon is made available for the many that disobey the holy commandments of the Torah and thus deserves God's wrath, which amounts to curses and death.

After all of this is explored, Paul, in rabbinic fashion, has his straw man issue a ruling, which Paul will strongly disagree with. The straw man says: “then I guess from all you have said The

Law that was good somehow, over time, became instead a source of corruption and death". To which Rabbi Paul responds: Heaven forbid! Rather the Torah remains good and pure; it is only that because my disobedience to what is good clearly exposed that my behaviors were wrong and my nature was bad well beyond what I ever imagined they might be. So I finally realized that part of me (as a Believer and possessor of the Holy Spirit) was STILL bound to my slave Master; my evil inclination. And folks this is one of those theological principles that is so very hard for us to hear and at the same time we inherently know that it is true. It is this: as Believers we are currently hanging, as if suspended, somewhere between Christ's death and His resurrection. That is, we have a certain unity in Christ in regards to His death and burial (Paul has spent much time on this aspect of our identity in Christ). But the reality is that we do not yet share or identify in the same way with His resurrection. That is, Christ is the firstfruits of the resurrection; He arose and then after some time on earth ascended to Heaven in a glorified body completely free from whatever part of Him represented His old nature and vulnerable flesh. We have not yet followed suit; we have not yet been resurrected into glorified bodies. We still have these same corrupt, frail bodies and so remnants of our former nature complete with evil inclinations, remain in us. We are living ironies. We are changed, but not entirely. We are holy before God, but not every aspect of us is actually holy. We live with God's Spirit in us, yet our evil inclinations still operate and bedevil us as well. We know what sin is, and how destructive it is to our relationship with God and at times to our fellow humans, but sometimes we do it anyway. So as Paul puts it in verse 17, the real me (that part of me that is the new nature that the Holy Spirit has given to me) resides side by side with the old sin nature still housed inside of me. So there is a constant tug-of-war going on; sometimes the new me wins, sometimes the old me prevails.

While this probably isn't good news for us to hear, at least it explains why we at times behave the way we do and have the kinds of thoughts we're glad no one else knows about. We can also be comforted by knowing that the Apostle Paul openly admits that he, too, is plagued by this uncomfortable duality in his own life; so we probably shouldn't feel too bad about it for ourselves. I call this condition Spiritual Schizophrenia. It indeed is partially the result of our being suspended between our own death in Yeshua that has already happened, and our resurrection into new and glorified bodies (which has not yet happened).

Although the English masks it, we find the Greek word **nomos** appear in these last few verses a number of times, and the uses can denote various things. Remember that the word **nomos** is typically rendered in English as law. Usually Bible translators want us to accept that all uses of the word **nomos** (law) refer to the Old Testament Law. But that is not the case and verse 21 gives us yet another use of the word. It makes "law" mean a kind a general, non-specific law that Paul is using more as metaphor than real. It would be like a Dad who has had it with the kids today, and says, "I'm laying down the law in this house". He doesn't mean any specific civil law or formal Biblical law; probably not even a quotable house rule. He just means that he's going to require his kids to do what he says and if they don't there will be consequences. So Paul's informal "law" is that whenever he tries to do what is good (in the Jewish context this means to let the Master of his good inclination rule), the influence of his evil inclination is right there to cause trouble.

In verses 22 and 23 Paul speaks of his inner self versus his "other parts". His inner self is his

regenerated mind; it is that “spiritual” part of him that is therefore directly affected by God’s Holy Spirit dwelling with him. And this part of him naturally loves the Torah and completely agrees with God’s Torah. Let’s pause for a second. Do you love God’s Law or do you hate God’s Law? Do you agree with God’s Torah or do you disagree with it? Do you seek to know and do God’s Law or do you seek to avoid it and keep it separate from your life? Paul uses the inner self that loves and agrees with God’s Torah over and against other parts of his body that operate based on sin’s laws. He is once again paraphrasing the standard doctrine of Judaism of the 1st century A.D. that is called the Doctrine of Two Masters. God’s Laws is one Master, and sin’s laws is another and opposing Master. But always with Paul it is The Law of Moses that is equated to God’s Laws, and also with the good inclination. Paul continues to make the case that the hallmark of a true Believer is that God’s Laws are what he or she goes by and strives to be obedient to. When we fail, we are in reality being obedient to sin’s laws.

I realize that so much of what we have talked about in the Book of Romans is The Law of Moses. That is because Paul constantly brings it up, weaving it into his letter as a central feature. But it is also for the same reason that most of my time for Seed of Abraham Torah Class has been spent creating and teaching Bible lessons on the Old Testament. It is because the Old Testament and the Law of Moses, so vital for Christian spiritual health and as a guide for Christian living, have been neglected if not thrown into the dust bin as irrelevant mostly due to manmade doctrines beginning with the earliest gentile controlled Church that were openly anti-Jewish. The Old Testament and The Law is something quite unfamiliar and thus foreign sounding and materially misunderstood by the Church in general. So a great deal of time is needed to explain what it is and what it isn’t; where it fits, how to apply its principles, and to make clear a proposition that most Christians have been told that we must avoid: that obedience to the Covenant of Moses, and our direct connection to the Covenant of Abraham (as spiritual seeds of Abraham), is the missing link to our faith. It is the Rosetta Stone that helps us to properly understand Yeshua and the New Testament, that leads us to rekindle our brotherhood with Israel and the Jewish people, and it enables us to know God as He truly is (at least as much as a human is capable of knowing).

Verse 24 is almost a primal scream. It comes from a righteous man, Paul, who realizes his predicament. Some of his predicament has already been solved by Messiah (he has been granted righteousness and eternal life with God). But the rest of his predicament is a work in progress, as it is for us all, and there are no easy solutions. Part of him pays attention to his evil Master; part of him to his good Master. This leads him to cry out: “What a miserable creature I am!” Many Bible commentators, ancient and modern, are deeply troubled by what they read here. Some go so far as to allege that this must be an addition by a person who cannot possibly be a Believer. After all; how can a Christian be miserable and have these internal conflicts? How can a Christian so readily admit that even after being saved there are parts of him that are still controlled by sin? Surely this cannot be a man regenerated by the work of Messiah Yeshua. But to think this way I believe betrays an allegation that I have made numerous times; too often Bible commentators begin with settled doctrine and then work backwards from it to make Scripture fit it. If only they would begin by reading and studying the Old Testament. If only they would see the struggles (and failures) of faith in some of our greatest Bible heroes. And yet, how much God loved them and held them up as righteous. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Judah, son of Jacob. King David.

If these great Patriarchs can fail and can have never ending internal battles between good and evil, then so can we. And the ones I mentioned didn't have the benefit of Yeshua HaMashiach and the Holy Spirit indwelling them, as do we. I'm not sure that outside of Yeshua Himself there is a stronger, bolder figure than Paul. And yet he is honest enough to admit that while we like to speak of Jesus' finished work on the cross, in fact His work is not finished and even the effects of the marvelous things He has already done have not fully taken hold.

This is why I have urged you to listen and take to heart Paul's words in Romans when he doesn't demand that we must somehow muster up more faith from the pit of our souls no matter our circumstance. A greater or larger faith in us is not the issue. Rather we must have and maintain an unshakeable trust in the perfect faithfulness of Yeshua. We must determine to remain obedient to God, even knowing ahead of time that we won't always be. This is why Paul ends chapter 7 by asking the rhetorical question: "Who will rescue me from this body bound for death?" And with great relief and thanksgiving he answers his own question; God will rescue him through Yeshua our Lord. This is not the cry of a Seeker or a man who is walking the line between belief and unbelief. This is the cry of a man who knows God, and who well understands where the human race currently stands. This is a cry we should all utter when we stumble and we wonder how God could still love us after everything He has done for us.

Paul sums up his present line of thought in verse 25 with a truth that represents the condition of every Believer no matter how together, how pious, or how nearly perfect some may appear. It is that in his mind (his inner self), because he knows what he knows to be true, he has given himself over as a slave to his new Master, God's Law. Yet in his sin nature that is still there, still not fully conquered, other parts of him will follow sin's law and so this righteous man will stumble as will we all.

Next week we'll study Romans chapter 8.