

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 18, Chapter 8 continued

We'll continue to work our way through Romans chapter 8 today and I'll tell you in advance that we'll be knee deep in some important theology. Since chapter 8 sums up what Paul has been teaching and presents the conclusion to be drawn from it, I'm going to do some of the same. Even though we're only at the halfway point, we've studied enough of Romans that we should do this.

Thinking back to what I told you in the introduction to the Book of Romans, I remind you that the most common position held by Christian Bible Commentators is that the Book of Romans is aimed primarily at gentiles (this is why the Book of Romans has grown in stature to become preeminent in Christian theology and doctrine). The assertion is that in his letter Paul is speaking mainly to what today we'd call "the Church" (since the Church is generally envisioned as a nearly exclusively gentile religion) and considerably less to Jews (Believers and non-Believers). I hope our journey through Romans is demonstrating that this traditional viewpoint of Romans being mostly gentile oriented simply cannot be supported. Paul's choice of words reflects unique Jewish idioms and expressions, common Jewish cultural norms for his day, typical approaches as used by early rabbis to explain and debate Scripture, and even comments such as the first verse of chapter 7, which makes it explicit that in several parts of his letter to the Romans he is aiming mostly at Jews. The first verse of chapter 7 said: ***"Surely you know, brothers.....for I am speaking to those who understand law.....that law has authority over a person only so long as he lives?"*** Clearly "those who understand law" are Jews and not gentiles, especially since "law" in this case is referring to Jewish Law; ***Halakhah***.

So most everything Paul says in chapter 7 is aimed at the **Jews** in Rome (although the principles he elucidates apply to gentile Believers as well). Thus in chapter 8 Paul tells his readers what conclusions they ought to draw from what he has previously said (mainly pertaining to chapter 7 but also to the underlying principles of his letter up to this point) as it begins: ***"Therefore, there is no longer condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua"***. So this comment is (as is all of chapter 8) also equally aimed primarily at Jews who know law (***Halakhah***), and this can be deduced because chapter 8 is but an uninterrupted continuation of chapter 7. We can get lulled into a false notion that Paul has begun an entirely new thought pattern in chapter 8 merely because we have changed chapters. But Paul didn't write in chapters; chapters were artificially added by others 11 centuries after Paul's day. Paul didn't write using modern English literary and grammar conventions; he wrote using the standard Jewish literary and grammar conventions of his time, which did not include chapter breaks and verse numbers.

The point is this: while on the surface (especially to gentile Christians) it seems to be that Paul is instructing only the new Believers in Yeshua, Jew and gentile, just under the surface we find that he is also addressing Israel and the Jewish people as a whole; as a nation of people, if

you would. The nation of people is God's original chosen people (Israel), which is why he has used the promise given to Abraham as a foundational premise for his doctrines. But back in Romans chapter 3 he also alluded to the exclusive advantages given to Jews by God (such as being entrusted with God's Word) and he also says something else that can easily escape our attention.

Romans 3:1-4 CJB

CJB Romans 3:1 Then what advantage has the Jew? What is the value of being circumcised? ² Much in every way! In the first place, the Jews were entrusted with the very words of God. ³ If some of them were unfaithful, so what? Does their faithlessness cancel God's faithfulness? ⁴ Heaven forbid! God would be true even if everyone were a liar!- as the Tanakh says, "so that you, God, may be proved right in your words and win the verdict when you are put on trial."

When Paul's straw man asks the question in Romans 3:3: does the Jews' unfaithfulness to God cancel God's faithfulness to the Jews, Paul immediately answers and refutes his straw man by saying "Heaven forbid!" But what, exactly, does Paul have in mind when the discussion turns to God's faithfulness to the Jews? He is speaking of God remaining faithful to the covenants He has made with Israel; covenants that set them apart from all other nations. What every Jew in the 1st century would have understood is that the main point of God's covenants with Israel is that they are what make Israel, Israel. Those covenants are what set Israel apart as God's chosen. In fact in Matthew 15, in the famous story of Yeshua venturing outside the Holy Land and up to Tzor and Sidon, he met a Canaanite woman who begged Yeshua to exorcise a demon from her daughter. Although Yeshua eventually agreed to do so, His initial response is one that ought to prick the ears of the Church and cause us to take notice. ²⁴ **He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el."** Oh my! To whom did Our Lord Yeshua say He was sent? ONLY to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Yeshua, in theory, was **Israel's** Savior because the Lord's purpose in sending Christ was to solve the deadly problem of sin among His chosen and set apart people, Israel. In fact in Matthew 10 Yeshua explicitly instructed the 12 Disciples to go ONLY to the house of Israel with the Gospel and to avoid gentiles. Much later, of course, we find the risen Yeshua confront Paul on the road to Damascus and instruct him that the time has come to take the Gospel to the gentile world.

So if Yeshua was really only the Messiah for Israel, then on what basis could gentiles be included? There would be two basis for this: the first is that in Romans 4 we learn that gentiles who trust God through Yeshua become spiritual seed of Abraham and thus co-inheritors of the Kingdom of God; and second is what we'll study when we get to Romans chapter 11: gentile Believers have been divinely grafted into the covenants of Israel and thus effectively become part of Israel (from a spiritual, not a physical, perspective).

Here's where I'm going with this. Especially in chapters 7 and 8 Paul is not only addressing Believers, Jew and gentile, but on a secondary level he is also addressing Israel in general: national Israel. That is, from the near view that we discussed last time (it is necessary to study Scripture from the near, mid, and far view to obtain proper context), Paul is speaking to

Believers. But if we pull back from the few verses we've read and see it in the wider context of the entire Bible (the far view) then Paul's inclusion of Israel-in-general comes into focus. At the same time that he has been explaining why the Gospel works, and what exactly it does for humanity, he has also been defending Israel's election as God's set apart people (especially for his Jewish audience but also as a reminder to gentiles). So part of Paul's underlying message to his audience is that despite Israel's unfaithfulness to God and to the covenants meant to bind them to Him, God has remained faithful. And the chief way God is showing His faithfulness is 1) by not abandoning or rejecting Israel, and 2) this continuing love and concern for Israel is proven by God sending His only Son to give Israel a way out from the death penalty that they have earned for themselves by being disobedient to His covenants (especially as it applies to Covenant of Moses; The Law). So there is a dual meaning going on here; one meaning that many Jews would recognize as being about their Israelite heritage, and another meaning that explains why the Jews would have to begin to share that heritage (from a spiritual standpoint) with Believing gentiles. The part about Israelite heritage would mostly have flown right over the heads of the Roman gentile readers of Paul's letter, just as it does to this day within the Church. But many Jews in Rome would have immediately understood these thoughts in the perspective Paul intended because his choice of terms and his recounting of Israel's history centered on Abraham, and his constant mention of the role of The Law, would have resonated with them.

So now that you are informed, keep this dual purpose of Paul in mind as we continue our study of Romans chapter 8. Since we only addressed the first 3 verses of this chapter in our last lesson, we'll re-read the entire chapter for the sake of continuity.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 8 all

If you listened carefully you noticed that the word "spirit" is front and center in this chapter, being used 21 times. This is an important indicator because in the previous chapters of Romans it was the term "law" that Paul used so very often. So Paul is now moving on from his explanation of the effects of The Law and what God has done to counteract the curse that comes from disobeying it (which Paul sums up in verse 1), to explaining that it is the indwelling of the Spirit of God that marks and characterizes a Jew or gentile as having been righteous (justified) by his or her trust in Yeshua's perfect faithfulness. Thus in Paul's summation of verse 1 about the case he has been building for the last 7 chapters, he says that those who are in union with Messiah Yeshua are no longer under the condemnation (the death sentence) that is the consequence of breaking The Law of Moses.

In verse 2 he explains why this works as it does. And it is that the law of the spirit has set the Believer free from the law of sin and death. We talked about this last time but I'll expand it a bit. The term "law" as used here is an expression (perhaps even a metaphor); it is not meant in the legal sense or is it used to identify some particular holiness code or regulation. In our modern English this use of "law" more means something like "principle"; something that regulates. So the principle of the spirit has set the Believer free from the principle of sin and death. Most importantly it must be understood that the meaning of "the law of sin and death" does not mean "The Law of Moses whose substance is sin and death". So this statement is not setting The Law of Moses over and against the Spirit of God. Rather it is setting life over

and against death (“the law of the spirit, which produces life, has set me free from the law of sin and death”).

This interpretation is backed up when we read in verse 3 that what the Torah could not do was to change the human nature (because it was never designed to do it). It is our human nature controlled by our evil inclination that is the problem. The Law, because it is essentially words on scrolls, doesn't have any inherent power to reach in and affect the inner self and thus resist the evil inclination that is the Master of human beings (remember: this Mastery of the evil inclination is the result of everyone being related to Adam). So God sent His Son to deal with the problem of sin and death that resulted from disobedience to The Law, because God's Son DID have the inherent power to reach inside the inner self and change our nature. The irony is that in addition to having divine power, Yeshua also had the same flawed nature that ordinary human beings had. This was necessary because God's plan was to execute (put to death) that sinful human nature....to destroy it.....and God did so by allowing His Son Yeshua and the sinful nature that He carried to be literally executed with Christ behaving as a substitute to represent our sinful nature. It worked just as the Levitical sacrificial system operated and prefigured. Hebrew humans sinned (they broke The Law). But instead of them receiving the eternal death penalty (the curse of The Law), innocent animals could be substituted. The principle was that God allowed the sin that the human committed to be imputed upon the otherwise innocent animal, and then the animal was “executed” as a substitute or a representative for the guilty human. Likewise our sins were imputed upon the otherwise innocent Christ, and then He was “executed” as a substitute for us.

But we must be honest; while Paul says Believers have been set free from the law of sin and death and instead we are now under the law of the spirit, the reality is that Christians still sin. Our lives remain an illicit mixture of sinning and God-imputed righteousness. This unwelcome phenomenon was well recognized by Paul within himself such that he cries out in angry frustration near the end of Romans 7: “What a miserable creature I am!” So we are not entirely free from the power of sin and don't let any pious-sounding minister tell you that you are. However we are entirely free from the power of the **consequence** of sin, which is death. Thus we have to think of this freedom we have gained from the power of sin and death as not so much an event as an ongoing process. Just as we have not escaped the reality that no matter we are Believers, our fleshly bodies will still die and decay in the earth just as anyone else, on the other hand the other aspect of death (spiritual death) we already HAVE escaped thanks to Yeshua. It is not in process, it is finished. Thus while we have a new Master in the Spirit that empowers our good inclination, that doesn't mean that the residue of our old Master, our evil inclination to sin, has fled; we still have to contend with it. But through the Spirit we do have a power in us that is able to fight it effectively. ^{CJB} **1 John 4:4 You, children, are from God and have overcome the false prophets, because he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.**

So what are we to do in this present state whereby we are far better off than before we knew Yeshua; yet still we hang in suspension, seemingly neither fish nor fowl? We're saved and our spirits already have eternal life; yet our flesh still succumbs to sin as though we weren't saved. Back in Romans chapter 6 we read of Paul's approach to this problem that in some ways is a pleasant fiction, but in other ways is quite practical considering the fallen state of the world,

and the condition in which we live: ^{CJB} **Romans 6:11 *In the same way, consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God, by your union with the Messiah Yeshua.*** Notice the use of the word “consider”. In Greek it is *logizomai*, which means to infer or to count oneself as something. So to paraphrase: Paul says that even though it is not actually so, count yourselves as though you are dead to sin. In other words, our mindset as Believers.....the way we should understand this strange conundrum we find ourselves in....is to think of ourselves, and to do our best to behave, as though we are completely dead to the power of sin while at the same time we are more alive than ever to God’s will. We play a sort of game with ourselves while we are waiting for the reality of it to be actually true.

Don’t discount this. There is an old saying about how to change behavior: fake it until you feel it. That is, you know what you ought to do (the right thing) even though you sure feel like doing something else (the wrong thing). So do the right thing, even if not entirely sincere, until doing the right thing is what your inner self WANTS to do. Look: this frustrating position we find ourselves in is exactly what Paul was lamenting in verses 15 – 24 of Romans 7. This is why perseverance MUST be part of every Believer’s life, and we must pray for this perseverance every single day.

But now let me assure you: I’m not suggesting a self-help program of positive thinking. What Believers are doing by “counting” ourselves as dead to sin is less a matter of “faking it” and more a matter of steadily dying to self. God’s Law has revealed our sin, and now the Spirit gives us the power to fight against our former propensity to sin. Believers are in the process of learning how to disobey our old nature and instead to obey the new nature God has given to us. We are learning how to discern when something is our will versus God’s will, and how to choose to do God’s will. This is a hard and lifelong process; but immensely worthwhile. Paul says this in 1Corinthians:

1Corinthians 15:16-19 CJB

¹⁶ ***For if the dead are not raised, then the Messiah has not been raised either;***

¹⁷ ***and if the Messiah has not been raised, your trust is useless, and you are still in your sins.*** ¹⁸ ***Also, if this is the case, those who died in union with the Messiah are lost.***

¹⁹ ***If it is only for this life that we have put our hope in the Messiah, we are more pitiable than anyone.***

Indeed; if our eternal future is no better than this present life that we live as Believers (which is actually a constant struggle to do what we know is right despite how we might look to others) then we are to be pitied by others and not emulated. I’m not talking about a struggle for wealth and abundance in terms of the earthly economy; some of us may have plenty of that and others may not. I’m talking about our internal struggles, which no Believer will escape. The struggles of conscience when looking at ourselves in the mirror after doing what is wrong, and knowing better, and feeling defeated and ashamed, and asking ourselves how God could possibly continue to love us. But the Good News is that there is a divine power that Yeshua’s sacrificial actions have given to us that is so much greater than our old sinful nature. The Holy

Spirit has been given to guide us, instruct us, comfort us, forgive us, give us hope and perseverance, and show us the greatest mercy so that despite it all, we can live a life of joy and hope. This is the only real source of hope that mankind has. But it is also a source of hope that we can trust and depend upon because Our Creator has guaranteed it.

Verses 6 and 7 are a continuing *midrash* (discussion, exposition) on the doctrine of Two Masters or Two Spirits that Paul has used constantly throughout his letter. So he says that the mind controlled by the old nature (the mind that is a slave to the Master of the evil inclination) is death; but the mind controlled by God's spirit (the mind that is a slave to the Master of the good inclination) is life. And this is because our old nature is naturally hostile to God. Our old nature is virtually incapable of co-operating with God. Thus those who continue to willfully identify with their old nature (that is, those who have not accepted Messiah Yeshua and thus become identified with Him) cannot please God. Again: it is impossible to please Two Masters. We can't please our old nature and at the same time please God. We can't split time with each and we can't compromise between them.

Paul continues to expand his emphasis on the spirit in verse 9. He essentially equates the term Holy Spirit with the term Spirit of Messiah and with the term Spirit of God. In one sense Paul is making all three terms synonymous. But in another sense he is speaking of the mysterious nature of God, which is unity (the *echad* of God): Father (Spirit of God), Son (Spirit of Messiah), and Holy Spirit.

Whereas Paul has been speaking in a duality to Israel in general and to Believers in specific (at the least since Romans chapter 7), in verse 9 he is addressing **only** Believers because only Believers actually have the Spirit of God living in us. And he is also laying down a doctrine: if we don't have the Spirit in us, then we don't identify with Messiah. And if we don't identify with Messiah, then the only alternative is that we identify with our old sinful nature. There is no in-between. I don't wish to create a theological debate (but I probably will). Some Believers think that the New Testament envisions a process whereby first we are baptized into an identity with Christ and then sometime later we are baptized into the Holy Spirit. Essentially this means that we first identify with Messiah (that is we first come to believe in Yeshua), and then later at some point, if we believe correctly, the Holy Spirit will indwell us. If I am interpreting correctly what Paul seems to clearly say here in Romans 8:9, then such a thing cannot be accurate. Paul says that if you have the Holy Spirit you are identified with Christ; and if you have identified with Christ you have the Holy Spirit. So to me this destroys any thought that a new Believer can, for a time, be "saved" (identified with Christ) but has not yet received the Holy Spirit. This is because Paul sets up the dynamic that the one validates the other. Or to put it negatively: you can't have one without the other. In other words it operates like sin and death. Sin and death come as a fused pair; you can't have one without the other. So it is that identity with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit come as a fused pair; you can't have one without the other.

Let's move to verse 11 because I think Paul says something quite plainly that for some reason some Believers (or at least some denominations) have a hard time with. There is a belief among some versions of the Trinity doctrine that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are co-equal. That is, one has no authority or pre-eminence over the other. There is no hierarchy. However I find

that mindset is the result of the desire of the New Testament Church to shove God the Father to background in order to pull God the Son to the fore. Or to allow God the Father to remain the God of the Jews, but to make God the Son to become the God of Christians. So the solution is to simply make Father, Son and Holy Spirit co-equal if not virtually identical. Yet in verse 11, according to Paul, there was a specific one of these 3 identified and named Spirits that raised Yeshua from the dead (that is, the Spirit of Yeshua didn't raise Yeshua, it was a different spirit). And it is this same Spirit (the same one who resurrected Messiah) that lives in us as Believers. But the last half of verse 11 causes controversy. What does Paul mean that the same spirit that raised Yeshua from the dead will give life to our mortal bodies? Calvin says this is speaking of life in the sense of an ethical renewal of our bodies. David Stern says it is life in the sense of the Holy Spirit giving Believers hope. I find these both to be a reach. Rather in its plainest textual sense, since the topic is who or what raised Yeshua from the dead, then it is comparing our mortal bodies to Christ's mortal body that died. And just as it is the work of a certain Spirit that raised Christ from the dead, so it will be the work of the same Spirit that will raise us from the dead (resurrection). So Paul is speaking of a future time at the End of Days. And, by the way, the Believers of Paul's day thought that the End of Days was imminent; not hundreds or thousands of years into the future.

Verse 12 presents us with another point of summation for Paul. All that he has said in the first 11 verses of chapter 8 leads him to conclude what he states in verses 12 and 13. He introduces that summation by saying, "So then, brothers". And what he does is actually to speak of our relationship to our old nature in terms of debt. That is, we don't owe any kind of a debt to our old nature that would force us to keep giving it our allegiance and labors. On the contrary: by switching our allegiance to the Spirit then we are essentially killing our old nature who still thinks we owe it something. We should take this as but a rough illustration in the same way as Paul used the illustration of the widow remarrying in Romans chapter 7.

Verse 14 says that a Believer is God's son because anyone led by God's Spirit is a son to Him. This is a Jewish expression that reflects a universally understood Jewish cultural concept of the value of a son over a servant. Although several Bible characters will be called servants of God (a high status), those called sons of God are even higher. Thus while priests were called servants of God (a high status), Israel's kings were called sons of God (a higher status). Prophets were called servants of God; but Yeshua is called the Son of God. Thus the typical Levitical priests, although indeed properly serving God, do not have God's spirit in them so they can only be called servants. But any Believer is elevated above Levitical priests because we have God's spirit in us, so we are sons of God. And ladies, don't let this bother you. The issue is not a gender issue (son versus daughter). The issue is a status issue. From a status issue you gain the status as sons of God just as does a male if you trust Yeshua.

Next Paul explains that it is not a spirit of slavery that we get from God when He puts His spirit into us, but rather it is essentially a spirit of adoption that we gain. The notion here is that the character of God's indwelling spirit is not one of coercion that works by putting a Believer into a state of fear as it would be for a slave. That is, the reason that a slave is loyal to his master and does the master's bidding is because the master could severely harm him or kill him if he didn't. The slave has few rights and no choice so it is the fear of his Master that compels his loyalty. Instead, says Paul, the character of God's indwelling spirit operates more the way an

adopted son does towards his father; he operates out of love and gratitude, and not out of fear. The son obeys his father not from a fear of bad repercussions if he doesn't; but rather from a motive of sincere desire to reciprocate the love his father shows him by pleasing his father. This is reason that Paul employs the term **Abba**. **Abba** means father but it is a term of endearment and affection.

In verses 16 and 17 the other status benefit of being a son instead of servant to God is brought to bear. A son inherits from his father; a servant does not. So since God's spirit bears witness that Believers (those who have His spirit in them) are His sons, then there can be no doubt. In the biblical sense a witness is someone who attests or confirms the truth of a statement. Biblically (and in Tradition) is usually takes two witness to confirm. So here we have our own spirits and God's Spirit as the two witnesses. Therefore the proof of our being God's children means we have the right be heirs. Heirs to what? To the Kingdom of God. Yeshua was the first heir, and those who trust Him are now fellow heirs with Him.

I love the way that C.E.B. Cranfield speaks of the next several verses beginning with 17:

".....the subject with which this subsection is concerned (is) Christian hope. The life which is characterized by the Spirit of God, which is a life in which God's Law is established, is a life characterized by hope".

A Believer must have God's Law (which is of the same substance and principles as the Law of Moses) established within him. This happens by an act of God: the indwelling of the spirit. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31:30-33 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. ³³ No longer will any of them teach his fellow community member or his brother, 'Know ADONAI'; for all will know me, from the least of them to the greatest; because I will forgive their wickednesses and remember their sins no more."

Since Yeshua has put an end to the death sentence of the Law for His worshippers, all that remains is the Laws themselves....for worshippers. But my brothers and sister, if we should think to ourselves: if there is no eternal death sentence for disobedience, why would I, as a Believer, obey The Laws of God? That my friends is the attitude of a servant; that is the question a slave of the evil inclination would ask. For as Paul rightly says, a slave must be mastered through fear. However since the spirit of God indwells the Believer, and the spirit of God has written God's Law on the hearts (minds) of His worshippers; and since His worshippers have, by grace, been elevated to the lofty status of sons of God, we have the right

to call God **Abba** (Father). Therefore the Believer's following of God's Law comes not from fear of consequences if we don't (the death sentence, which Yeshua has already borne for Believers) but rather from our love of Our Father and the desire to please Him.

We'll stop for today and finish up Romans chapter 8 next time.