

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 29, Chapter 12

Romans chapter 12 is one of those that has a bit more depth to it than a casual read of it might suggest. So we're going to get a little technical today to add some background to what it is we will read.

One of the unsatisfactory, even risky, results of divesting from the Apostle Paul his Jewishness and his high level of Jewish religious education at the elite rabbinical Academy of Gamaliel is that when we read his words we lose not just the all important context but the tone and the fabric of his underlying self. That is, who he is, where he came from, and what his deeply ingrained worldview is. Within institutional Christianity it is implied (at times outright stated) that Paul is essentially a Jew who, because of Christ, now identifies more as a gentile; and that when we read his epistles he is making all this up as he goes. That is, he is essentially inventing Christianity and establishing Church doctrine on the fly in the same way Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone and designed the first telephone network starting with a blank sheet of paper. In other words something new was created where it had never before existed, not even in concept. Just as Bell created the manual of telephony, so did Paul create the manual of Christianity.

While I've endeavored at several points to show you how that is not at all the case, I'm going to show you in yet another way why this erroneous platform for understanding Paul needs to be replaced with a reality that ought to have been self-evident even before something near hard proof has emerged. The main source I'll use comes from the Essene community of Jews who, about 150 years before Christ, separated themselves from regular Jewish society primarily because they felt that the Priesthood and the institutional Temple system had become completely corrupt and wicked. Since they saw the Torah ordained Temple and Priesthood as the molten core of worship of the God of Israel, they went off to prepare themselves as a new order of priests that would eventually replace the corrupt priesthood as it currently existed and restore the Temple and Priesthood to its God intended purity. My effort to help to restore Paul more closely to his actual self will also involve the great series of documents that the Essenes wrote collectively called the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Most Christians think of the Dead Sea Scrolls as but the Bible copied and written down in Hebrew by this strange Dead Sea sect around 100 B.C. And the great news about finding this treasure trove of documents in the mid 1940's is that it has proved just how faithfully the Old Testament has been preserved and handed down over the centuries so we can trust what we have in our Bibles today. But in fact the Dead Sea Scrolls is much more than only the copied books of the Old Testament; it also contains the theology, the philosophy, and the community rules for the Essenes that were recorded quite meticulously. After being discovered in some caves near the Dead Sea in Israel, the Scrolls were controlled for decades by a very small group of scholars and only fairly recently released for public consumption.

As researchers around the world have poured over these ancient documents it has become clear that our modern views of the New Testament, and therefore of the writers who wrote the various books, were going to be effected.....more so in some cases, less so in others. To be clear: some of these scrolls were written as much as 2 centuries before the gospels and letters of the New Testament were first penned, and well more than 3 centuries before those gospels and letters were collected and turned into the New Testament. So, of course, no remnant of any New Testament document was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls; they represent an earlier time. Nevertheless, because of what was found, Paul and his epistles especially were going to have to be rethought not because of errors in the biblical manuscripts, but because of errors in interpreting Paul's meaning and in understanding his perspective and even the sources of some of his thoughts. However the response of the many mainstream Christian denominations around the world, whether of Western Christianity, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox, Slavic, Coptic, or any other, has been muted to the say the least. Why? Probably because while the scholars and academics that represent these denominations are gleefully excited over the new information that these documents are giving to them, and they are open to its significance, for the various Church governments it feels more like an unwelcome threat to the carefully guarded status quo.

Is this sense of threat because the content of the Dead Sea Scrolls in any way contests or calls to question our faith in Yeshua of Nazareth as Messiah? No. Does it in any way contest or calls to question the Holy Scriptures as reliable? No. What the Dead Sea Scrolls does contest and call to question are the beliefs and motives and even the theology of Judaism in that era, and where the ideas that especially Paul presents in his many letters originally came from. Were those ideas entirely fresh from his own mind? Or were they from divine inspiration by the risen Yeshua? Or where, exactly, did they come from? Ideas that to the gentile early Church Fathers seemed so "new" and innovative that it caused the Church for the past 1800 years to see less and less use for the Old Testament. As we'll soon find out, many of those supposed new and original thoughts of Paul were already in existence and being taught and practiced in the Essene community, and known in the broader Jewish community, more than 100 years before Yeshua, and 150 years before Paul; often using the exact same terminology that Paul is found using to explain some of his theology (in fact, even Yeshua employed some of those Essenes' terms). Coincidence? Hardly. So why does Church government, in general, seem so disinterested in what these documents reveal? Because it puts a different face on the meaning of Paul's words at times, and it more completely describes what the true nature of Jewishness and Judaism at that time looked like, and it reinforces the unmistakable Jewish nature and source of the New Testament concepts and information.

Open your Bibles to Romans chapter 12.

READ ROMANS CHAPTER 12 all

Chapters 1 – 11 of Romans accomplished several things. First they had Paul attempting to assert his authority over the believing congregation in Rome as the Christ-chosen Apostle to the Gentiles. He is doing this long-distance; a first so far as we know since he had never been to Rome so he had no hand in organizing the congregation or teaching it his doctrine. Second, in keeping with the protocol of his several other letters to various congregations, he is writing to

the Romans about matters that he perceives directly concern them. He must have heard some things about the Rome congregation that he felt needed his attention and so he wrote to them. The rather standard Christian position is that in Romans Paul is creating a brand new Christian systematic theology and presenting it to the Roman Believers almost like a trial run. I don't buy this and thankfully many modern NT scholars don't either. Third, Paul has been setting the foundation and purpose for God's inclusion of gentiles into what was otherwise but a rather new branch of Judaism; a branch that worshiped Yeshua as Lord and Savior. Paul of course saw this gentile inclusion as membership into the Kingdom of God and into the body of the elect that up to now had consisted solely of Jews.

However chapter 12 begins a new direction in Paul's letter. To use more familiar Church language, Paul was moving from theory to application. But from the more apropos Jewish perspective (and especially from that of a trained Rabbi like Paul), Paul was going to draw out some **Halakhot** (religious rulings) that the Jewish and gentile Believers of Rome should follow based on what Paul had taught them in the 11 previous chapters. This new focus of chapter 12 will continue until about midway through Romans chapter 15.

Verse 1: when Paul says he exhorts, or urges, the Romans to do a certain thing, it is Paul exercising his authority as an Apostle. His intent would have been understood by the letter recipients. Whether some or all of the Believers of Rome would have accepted the authority he claimed is another matter. And from what we find in the Book of Acts, when a few years later he found himself in Rome as a prisoner in chains, the implication is that not much of the Roman congregation had accepted Paul's authority over them. The challenging issue of verse 1 is what Paul means when he speaks about the need for the Roman Believers to offer themselves up to God as a sacrifice: living, and set apart for the Lord. But even more, what does he mean when he continues that being a sacrifice is the logical Temple worship for these Roman Believers.

The CJB is the only one that states it quite that way. More typical is like we see it in the KJV.

^{KJV} **Romans 12:1** *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Or, as in the NAS version: ^{NAS} **Romans 12:1** *I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.* However in the original Greek, neither the term spiritual nor worship is actually there.

In fact, including the word "spiritual" practically turns the impact of this portion of the verse on its head. The key Greek word near the end of this sentence is **logikos**. As you might already be guessing it is where we get the English word logic. And indeed **logikos** means reason or logic. However this logic pertains to the following Greek word **latreia**, which means a service that is about something religious. So this difficult phrase means something like, "The logical service of worship". Here, I believe, is the point: Paul is saying that by making ourselves like a sacrifice to God, living and holy, that this is the intelligent, logical, reason-based response to

becoming a Believer. Hear that? It is not about a feeling. Offering ourselves up to God is not an ecstatic response; it is not an emotional response; and it should not be a knee-jerk reaction. Rather, knowing what we now know about Yeshua and redemption means that it is the perfectly logical thing for any thinking Believer to do to offer ourselves up to God as a sacrifice. Our response to our salvation needs to begin with our mind. Saying it in the negative would be: NOT becoming a sacrifice, living and holy to God, would defy any kind of normal, intelligent human response to receiving such a great gift.

However slicing that onion a bit thinner, what does Paul mean by the phrase: “a sacrifice, living and holy”? Some versions have rearranged the word order to “a living and holy sacrifice”. In other words, the sacrifice (us) remains alive and gains holiness. That would be fine except that it ignores how the sacrificial system worked. Clearly the way the CJB says it is much closer to what Paul had in mind because the logical “service” refers to the religious services that take place at the Temple just as the sacrifice also refers to actions that take place ONLY at the Temple. We must take this in its natural, entirely Jewish context. Where else than the Temple would a Jew offer religious service? What else to a Jew is a sacrifice except a living creature that is given to God as an offering of atonement, upon the Holy Altar, at the Holy Temple? This is not some generalized, universal, gentile oriented statement. Paul is making use of metaphor just as he regularly does (he does not literally mean for a Believer to go to the Temple and throw himself on the altar as a human sacrifice); but the setting and the motif of Paul’s metaphor is of course the Jerusalem Temple and the sacrificial Laws of Moses.

So what of the underlying concept of a living and holy sacrifice? First, this is nothing new; all Temple sacrifices are to be presented to God living and holy. Dead animals are not presented to God. They are given to Him first as alive, and only shortly before being burned up on the Altar are they killed. From the moment they are given by the worshipper; the moment they are selected out from the flock or herd for sacrifice, they become set apart as God’s holy property. Let me set something before you that at first might not seem so apparent. Paul regularly uses the Temple system as the underlying subject of his metaphors. But he’s not the only NT writer to do this; Peter did as well. ^{CJB} **1 Peter 2:9** *But you are a chosen people, the King’s cohanim, a holy nation, a people for God to possess! Why? In order for you to declare the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.* Or as you are more used to hearing it:

^{NAS} **1 Peter 2:9** *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

A royal priesthood; in numerous places in the New Testament Believers are called priests. But for the most part, this is metaphor since biblically priests can only be Levites. But what mental image is this metaphor meant to conjure up? It is the image of Temple service since the underlying subject of the metaphor is the Holy Temple and its ritual services that must be performed by Levitical priests. You can’t get much more Jewish than that!

Indeed, Paul spent a great deal of time speaking about Believers dying to ourselves in earlier chapters of Romans. And that like Christ, we are to voluntarily die (in our case die to our sin

and to our former ways). Thus the sacrificial altar at the Holy Temple is the backdrop for Paul's concept as the place where Believers are to die to ourselves, but only after presenting ourselves to God holy and living, just as with any sacrifice. So, Believers, this is not a new concept that Paul is suggesting. And even more, the Essenes thought the same way 1 ½ centuries before Paul. Here is an excerpt from Dead Sea Scroll 1QS 5. I'm only going to partially quote it for time's sake.

And this is the rule for the members of the Community, for those who volunteer to be converted from all evil and to cling to all His commands according to His will; to separate themselves from the congregation of perverse men, to become a community in The Law.....The shall practice truth....humility and righteousness and justice and loving charity.....But in the Community they shall circumcise the foreskin of the evil inclination and of disobedience in order to lay a foundation of truth for Israel, for the community of the everlasting covenant; that they may atone for all who are volunteers for the holiness of Aaron.....

So we see the Essenes use the Temple motif as metaphor, and when they speak of atoning it is the same as when Paul speaks of being a sacrifice, living and holy, because the purpose of an animal sacrifice is atonement. Temple service is what righteous men do, logically. And yet, we are confronted with this irony that both the Essenes and Paul noted: the logical rational thing for a man made righteous by trust in God is his SPIRITUAL worship of God. Today, as it has been since the European Enlightenment of the early 18th century, logic and spirit are seen as mutually exclusive concepts; they can't be spoken of in the same sentence. In fact, logic and reason replace spirit and inspiration. To be spiritual is not logical, it is thought, and vice versa. This is the basis of secular humanism.

Paul continues the concept of the logical-rational mind being the location where spiritual renewal takes place in verse 2. And the ruling from Paul is straightforward: if you want to agree with God and please Him then turn away from the standards of this world that have always been your standards because until you believed, you were part of the world. Here's the point Paul is making: since renewal begins in your mind then you must make the correct mental decisions. Now that we are saved, and have the Holy Spirit in us, it is our responsibility to consciously make different choices than we used to make before we knew Yeshua. We must think before we act and cease acting instinctively, because our instincts are of this world. Of course, as Paul pointed out in Romans chapter 7, humans are caught in a conundrum when it comes to choices and our behavior:

Romans 7:15-20 CJB

¹⁵ I don't understand my own behavior- I don't do what I want to do; instead, I do the very thing I hate! ¹⁶ Now if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am agreeing that the Torah is good. ¹⁷ But now it is no longer "the real me" doing it, but the sin housed inside me.

¹⁸ For I know that there is nothing good housed inside me- that is, inside my old nature. I can want what is good, but I can't do it! ¹⁹ For I don't do the good I want; instead, the evil

that I don't want is what I do!²⁰ But if I am doing what "the real me" doesn't want, it is no longer "the real me" doing it but the sin housed inside me.

And he ends this crying out in frustration by saying:

²⁴ What a miserable creature I am! Who will rescue me from this body bound for death?

²⁵ Thanks be to God [, he will]!- through Yeshua the Messiah, our Lord! To sum up: with my mind, I am a slave of God's Torah; but with my old nature, I am a slave of sin's "Torah."

So this is kind of a good news/bad news situation for Believers. The bad news is that although we are saved, we still live in the world with all its pulls and temptations and reminders of our past life. The good news is that we are no longer helpless victims of our evil inclinations that keep us bound to this world. There is now a power in us, the Holy Spirit, to help us overcome. However, we can't go take a nap and leave it to the Holy Spirit to do all the work. We have to put this new reality into practice, being aware that it will be hard and not easy and it begins with our conscious choices. It means fighting our knee-jerk reactions. The problem that any psychologist or counselor will tell you is that it is the human nature to want approval from our peers, and there will be constant pressure on us to conform to whatever the social norms might be. A popular term for this today is political correctness.

So in verse 3 Paul commands (he creates a religious ruling) that no one should exaggerate their own importance but rather should view oneself by the standard that God uses; and that standard is trust in His Son. When Paul says, "Through the grace that has been given to me" he is speaking about grace as the position of authority that the Lord has graciously given him; he's speaking of being an Apostle. Most other versions of the Bible than the CJB gives this verse a different meaning. The NAS says this: ^{NAS} ***Romans 12:3 For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.***

What does the phrase "measure of faith" mean to tell us? If we take the way the NAS and most other versions interpret it, it means measure in the sense of "amount" or "quantity". That is, God has allotted to each of us a certain amount of faith. And since what a Believer can do is based on the quantity of faith he or she has, then those whom God has given a large amount of faith can do miracles, and those whom God has given a little tiny bit of faith can do next to nothing. If this is the case, brotherly unity among Believers becomes exceedingly difficult if not impossible, especially in light of what is being said in the following verses about how we are each a different part of the same body, and we must not think that our part is better than another and different part. So this idea of faith being measured in terms of quantity or amount cannot be what Paul has in mind.

Rather, the term "measure of faith" is better expressed in English as "standard of faith". One legitimate definition of the word measure is "standard"; but the modern English language doesn't use the word measure that way very much. What is the standard of faith that God

measures us by? Trust. So, says Paul, we need to evaluate ourselves honestly to see where we are on God's trust scale. We shouldn't deceive ourselves about ourselves. Our trust in Yeshua is the measure by which God views us and deals with us. This has much bearing on what he says next.

Now that Paul has explained the preliminaries, he is going to install general guidelines that Believers, Jews and gentiles, are to follow as members of the Believing community. He is essentially following the same pattern of community building that we find the Essenes used as they recorded it in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Remember: while for us all that remains of the Essenes is the Dead Sea Scrolls, for Paul the Essenes community was current. Essenes walked among the people of the Holy Land. They were a long established, alive and thriving Jewish community. They were well known, well accepted, and quite influential among the common folks, hated by the Priesthood, and admired among the theologians of Judaism.....like Paul. So not surprisingly he approaches setting out community rules for the Messianic community very similarly to how the Essenes did it.

So the first community principle that Paul must establish is that while everyone is equal **spiritually** in God's eyes, not everyone has been given the same abilities or purpose. Thus using the metaphor of the human body there is not one part of the body that can say it is more valuable than another; all parts of a body are needed to achieve wholeness. Even so, each part is for a different purpose; they cannot all be the same or perform the same function. But here's the crux: all the many parts must understand that they are there for the well-being of the entire body. Some parts may have more visibility and so get more attention and more credit than the others. Some parts may get the dirty work while other parts seem to get the glory. And in the body of Christ even one more step of complexity exists: some parts will be Jews and other parts will be gentiles so the possibility of jealousy, cultural misunderstanding, and the want of dominance is a clear and present danger at all times. However if community unity is Christ centered, and not self centered, then it can work properly. If we see ourselves as belonging to the others of our community, then our function will not rate ourselves based on our sense of importance but rather on how well we achieve our particular purpose for the good of the entire body.

In verse 6 we again see the rather unique way that Paul uses the term "grace" when he says that gifts will differ and are meant to be used according to the grace given to each person. Grace in this instance is used by Paul almost to mean the substance of the gift; that is, the grace is the nature of the gift to Believers just as for Paul the grace he received was the apostolic authority he was given. But now Paul begins to list some of these gifts that are usually called in Western Christian circles "spiritual" gifts. Some think that the order that Paul lists them indicates the order of importance that God sees them; that is, they are listed from the greater gifts to the lesser gifts. I disagree with that and there is nothing in these words to indicate such a thing. Why the order he chose? There is nothing to indicate what that might be. Might there be lesser and greater gifts in God's eyes? It certainly seems possible. However on the other hand it would sort of go against Paul's thought that while all parts of the body are equal, they will also be different with none more valuable than the other. So to set the spiritual gifts up in a pecking order of value or importance in the next verse would seem to conflict with what he just said.

So without assigning value or importance, here are the gifts: Prophecy, serving, teaching, counseling, giving, leading, and doing acts of mercy. In the New Testament, prophecy most often means discerning and explaining Scripture (OT Scripture). However in this case, since prophecy and teaching are listed as two separate gifts, then prophecy must mean something else. If we take prophecy as meaning something a little closer to revelation that is probably the best idea. That is, prophets in the Old Testament were generally directly attached to specific kings of Israel, and they heard directly from God and delivered His oracles to Israel's kings. They were often given the ability to see into the future, or better, were given information about the future. There is no such claim to this in the New Testament except perhaps by John in Revelation. However, there is still inspiration and revelation of already existing truths that until now had not been correctly understood or fully revealed. So in this sense Paul could be said to have this gift of prophecy. In fact, since Judaism is the cultural backdrop for the New Testament, it is good for you to know that about a half century before Paul's day the Sages had declared that prophecy as it was known and practiced in the **Tanakh** (the Old Testament) had come to a halt. But just few years later, Rabbis shifted and claimed that they were the new prophets. However, they too meant it more in the sense of revealing truth than seeing the future. Paul's era was a time of transition as regards how prophecy was thought about. Rabbis once again believed that OT style prophecy was still possible and yet exactly what that amounted to differed according to different Rabbis. Thus we see in the New Testament a fuzzy definition of prophecy and use of the term that, depending on the writer, the character, and the situation, can mean anything from merely teaching Scripture all the way up to bringing a new oracle from the Lord, and even in a limited sense to seeing into the future.

The gift of serving is more meant in the realm of service, and service is meant in the realm of Temple worship (not like doing the good deed of washing your elderly neighbor's windows). This service would include things like prayer, teaching about the Torah, making financial contributions to the Temple (or perhaps to the Synagogue) and doing everything generously and without seeking compensation. So service is meant entirely in the religious sense and not in the humanitarian sense.

The gift of teaching was center stage during Paul's era. The purpose of a teacher was to instruct others on how to walk in the ways of God. The reference material for a teacher was Holy Scripture, and his job was not to add to it or make bold predictions from it, but rather it was to show people how to know God's will and to another extent to make application. Interestingly the most revered person in the community of the Essenes was called the Teacher of Righteousness. I think for us to better understand the office of Teacher in 2nd Temple Judaism, it is good to hear from the Essene Teacher of Righteousness himself.

Taken from the Dead Sea Scrolls 1QH, the Teacher of Righteousness says this:

And thou hast created me for Thy sake to fulfill The Law and to teach by my mouth the men of thy council in the midst of the sons of men, that They marvels may be told to everlasting generations and Thy mighty deeds be contemplated without end. And all the nations shall know Thy truth and all the peoples Thy glory. For Thou hast caused them to enter Thy glorious Covenant with all the men of Thy council and into a common lot with the Angels of the Face and none shall treat with insolence the sons...and they shall

be converted by Thy glorious mouth and shall be Thy princes in the lot of light.

So the office of teacher was purely about teaching God's Word, and fulfilling The Law of Moses by teaching it to others so that God's marvels and mighty deeds will be known forever. And the hope is that all the nations (meaning the gentiles) will hear of it and revere the God of Israel. Does not that sound exactly like Paul's purpose as an Apostle to the Gentiles and Christ's exhortation to Believers in the New Testament? And speaking of exhortation, the term councilor in verse 8 has much to do with exhortation. In fact, to again inject the Jewish perspective into this that Paul would of course have had, a person who exhorted was a councilor or a preacher (those two terms were generally synonymous). A councilor was a person who gave sermons and dealt more with life questions like 'why do bad things happen to good people', and the nature of morality; they kept the stories of Israel's great heroes alive, spoke about what proper justice is, when vengeance is warranted and when it's not, and so on. A preacher or a councilor did **not** teach God's Holy Scriptures exegetically, and especially did not teach exegetically on the Torah, The Law of Moses; that privilege belonged to the office of the Teacher.

I want to pause for a moment for you to notice something critical in everything I've told you. I've told you before that there were parallel religious systems operating within Judaism in Paul's day that the people just took for granted: the Temple and the Synagogue. All of these offices and jobs and gifts were thought of by Paul as operating within the definitions and rules of the Synagogue system led by Rabbis; not with the Temple rules overseen by Priests. While the Temple system was still venerated for the purpose of the biblical feasts, appointed times, and sacrificing, the Priesthood (especially the High Priest) was no longer trusted and in fact earned the title Sons of Darkness from the Essenes. So while Temple imagery is used especially by Paul in the several metaphors he employs in his writings, this is not to be confused with thinking that Paul had any more to do with that system than did any typical Jew. The typical Jew was far more tied to the Synagogue system.

The gift of giving is pretty straight forward. While it certainly includes supporting the Temple and the Synagogue, it just as easily included being hospitable to strangers (this was a high virtue social custom in the Middle East anyway).

The gift of leading can be seen mainly as a task that fell to Israel's elders. Elders in this era were also known as overseers. Included in this gift category was the President of the Synagogue who was tasked with finding speakers, assuring the maintenance of the Synagogue building, and serving on elder boards. It also included presiding over meetings. Leading was not political, nor was it in any official government capacity. It, too, was meant as leading within the religious realm

It is difficult to find what was in the Jewish mind a person who did acts of mercy, especially if it is seen as a special spiritual gift. It is my position that this is not meant to be a job a person did, or an office like teacher or prophet. Rather it is more a highly revered character trait that all Believers should desire to have rather than a separate gifting. But the main point Paul makes about doing acts of mercy (charity) is to always do it cheerfully as opposed to doing it grudgingly, or as little as possible but still maintaining a good reputation before your peers.

Since this ends the section about gifts, we'll stop here and continue with the remainder of chapter 12 next time.