

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 3, Chapter 1 cont.

The subject matter of the Book of Romans necessarily lends itself to much interpretation, application, and preaching. We won't be shying away from any of it, so here we go.

Last week we dealt with the opening words of Romans chapter 1 because how one interprets it sets Paul's tone for the entire letter. The first 6 verses behave as a sort of preamble. And let us remember that while in Christendom the rather lofty term Epistles is used of the books that Paul wrote, in common speech each of these books is but a letter written and sent to either a person or a specific congregation in a specific city, and each is meant to address certain issues pertinent to that person or group. There is no universal agreement among Bible scholars on how many New Testament books were actually written by Paul; the number is as few as 8 and varies up to as many as 13. However Paul is universally agreed as the author of the Book of Romans. This letter is to Believers in the **city** of Rome; not Rome in the sense of the entire Roman Empire, and so not "Romans" in the sense of all citizens of the Empire.

Paul's preamble contains some important information that applies to our faith. This information has been historically misconstrued and we dealt with that in depth in our previous lesson. As a reminder: there were two terms or phrases that together define the opening tone. Those terms were "slave of Messiah Yeshua" and "Apostle". Unlike what it might seem at first glance, the phrase "slave of Messiah Yeshua" is not meant to indicate exceptional humility or even self-effacing. Rather in Hebrew thought pattern those words indicate a high honor; a position of high status. Second, the term Apostle (an English word) comes from the Greek word *apostolos*. *Apostolos* more or less indicates someone who has been sent with instructions to carry out an assignment. In Roman society this word was used in the realm of the military and in commercial shipping. However its use misses the mark on the concept that the Jewish Paul was trying to get across. The term Paul would have preferred to use was ***shaliach*** (a Hebrew word). However there is no direct equivalent to ***shaliach*** in Greek, so he chose the best approximation the Greek language offered: *apostolos*. ***Shaliach*** carries more weight and authority than *apostolos*. A ***shaliach*** is an agent who carries all the power and authority of his master. A ***shaliach*** has a great deal of personal choice and autonomy (acknowledging, of course, that whatever he does he does on behalf of, and in the name of, his Master). In Christian thinking an Apostle is more or less an authoritative messenger; but the original 12 Apostles, and Paul as the 13<sup>th</sup> Apostle, were far more than mere messengers. This is why they were able to do miracles, and it is why the Apostles expected Believers to obey them.

Paul begins his letter by telling the Believers of the congregations in Rome that they were obligated to consider him as their ultimate earthly authority. He says this is so on the grounds that since Yeshua personally appointed Paul as His ***shaliach*** to the gentiles, and since Yeshua also called (or elected) those gentiles in Rome to faith as Believers, then it follows that regardless that it was NOT Paul who established these Believing congregations in Rome, they should, nonetheless, subject themselves to his authority.

Bottom line: Paul was not being humble; rather he was being insistent and authoritative, and he had every reason to believe that he was right in being so.

Let's continue by starting at verse 7. We'll re-read most of chapter 1 beginning there.

### **RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 1:7 – end**

The words of verse 7 are basically the way Paul starts most of his letters. It is a customary greeting and it states to whom the letter is intended. Although without doubt this letter addresses mostly the gentile Believers of Rome, it also includes the Jewish Believers. So when Paul says “to all in Rome whom God loves, who have been called by Yeshua and set apart for him”, it is referring to all **Believers** in the city of Rome, Jew and gentile.

Notice something important at the end of verse 7; Paul refers separately to God the Father and to Yeshua the Messiah. Paul sees the Father and Yeshua as two distinct entities. Or perhaps as two identifiable parts of a whole. Thus for Christians who believe that essentially the essence of the Father has been rolled into the essence of the Son (Christ), and thus the Father has either retreated from the scene or is no longer relevant, that is certainly not how Paul sees it. Some in Christianity make this claim of irrelevance of the Father in modern times because of Yeshua's statement in John 14 that if “you've seen me you've seen the Father”. They are wrong. Rather it is that just as Paul is an agent of Yeshua, but still is subordinate to Him, so we find Christ pronounce that while He has been given all authority on earth and in heaven, He is still effectively an agent of God and thus subordinate to His Father. I don't want to get hung up here on a controversial theological issue of the substance and nature of God. However just know that Paul's theology does not allow for the Father and the Son to be the same person or for one to have abdicated his position. Both exist, both are relevant, and both have their own attributes and functions. There is a definite hierarchy with the Father at the top.

Now one other important item. The CJB doesn't do a good job with verse 7 as it leaves out a word; the word is hagios. Typically hagios is translated into English as “saints”. So here is this verse in the much more literal KJV.

**<sup>KJV</sup> Romans 1:7 *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.***

“Beloved of God” and “saints” are essentially synonyms and they are Old Testament terms used of God's chosen people, the Hebrews. So Paul is extending the use of those terms to Believers, Jew and gentile. The reason I point that out is that it is often erroneously claimed in Christianity that “saints” is a more or less a new and exclusive term coined for New Testament Believers in Christ.

In verse 8 thanksgiving is Paul's priority (as it should be for all of us in all of our prayers). What is Paul thanking God for? It is for the living reality of the trust exhibited by some Jews and gentiles in Rome to accept Yeshua as Messiah. But what ought to draw our attention is where Paul says “I thank my God **through** Messiah Yeshua”. This word through (dia in Greek) is there in all extant Greek manuscripts of the Book of Romans and I am yet to find an English

translation that leaves it out. I'm sure Paul didn't mean to create a heated doctrinal argument by inserting that word "through", but he did.

If he means what he said (and I see no reason to believe otherwise), then he envisions Christ as an intermediary between God and Man. Now while some Jews today claim that such a concept as there being a heavenly intermediary is a show-stopper, in fact in the non-Biblical but authoritative Jewish writings of Enoch and Tobit, and a few other ancient Jewish sources, 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism believed that archangels were intermediaries between Man and God. And perhaps if "intermediary" isn't the perfect English word to use, then maybe "intercessor" helps to define what is meant. We could spend significant time on this theological issue, but I don't want to get parked here. What is unambiguous as it appears in ALL NT versions is that Paul is rendering thanksgiving NOT to Yeshua, but rather to the Father THROUGH Yeshua (with Yeshua providing the understood mediating role that many Jews in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple era took for granted). So the issue that Judaism would have had with Paul is not the concept of there being an intermediary; but rather who or what fulfilled that role? And Paul says that it is Jesus Christ who is the intermediary (at least He is from now on).

As an application then, to whom do we direct our prayers? The Father or to the Son? Are we to pray to Yeshua or are we to pray to the Father? Or does it make any difference? Yeshua knew with His advent that this was already an issue among His disciples, so rather than leave them hanging He told them (and us) exactly how we should pray. I'll use the King James Version because it is by far the most familiar to Christians.

### **Matthew 6:9-13 KJV**

**<sup>9</sup> After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

**<sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**

**<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.**

**<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

Just as Yeshua instructed us in the previous chapter of Matthew (chapter 5) that He did NOT abolish the Law, here in Matthew 6 He instructs us to pray to the Father. Pretty definitive. So it is as Paul said: we pray to and deal with the Father; but we do it through the agency of Yeshua. How that all happens and is processed in the Heavens I don't know. But the protocol and what our mindset about it is to be is clear. The Father remains not only relevant, but supreme; nothing has changed. And why would it? The Father has always had a Son, since eternity past. It is only that at a point in temporal history His Son, Yeshua, became flesh and appeared on earth.

Paul tells the Believers in the city of Rome that not only is he aware of them, but that they are important to him such that he prays for them. Remembering that Paul is a Pharisee, then when he says that he regularly remembers them "in his prayers", what he is referring to is the standard 3 times per day prayers that the most pious of Jews (the Pharisees) followed as a tradition. I'll repeat what I'm about to tell you at regular intervals because it is the Rosetta Stone for what we are studying: Paul thinks like a Jew, and behaves like a Jew, because he is a Jew. When we read his writings, we need to see them from his Jewish viewpoint. Thus when he writes his letters (his Epistles) he unconsciously does so from a Jewish perspective. Why? Because he is not a gentile, even though he has some familiarity with gentiles. More, as he has stated plainly, he is a Hebrew of Hebrews and a Pharisee of Pharisees; he is among the most pious and most strict of Jews. He said this many years after becoming a Believer and an Apostle. His zealous and highly educated Jewishness is the underlying context atop which he has layered the meaning and impact of the arrival of the Messiah. It is the context upon which he understands what a Messiah is, what a Messiah does, and how people are to relate to the Messiah. Paul's Pharisee training under Gamaliel is also his underlying context upon which he builds an understanding of who Messiah is in relation to God. And, Paul believes that Yeshua, as Messiah, is the Son of God who sits at the Father's right hand (he got this from Daniel). This is not the Tom Bradford perspective; it is what Paul says. And very recently this is also the so-called new perspective on Paul that has been adopted by many eminent Bible scholars such as E.P. Sanders, Douglas Moo and James D.G. Dunn.

This won't be the last time I say these things to you because I know firsthand how difficult it can be to let go of the Christian doctrines we've been taught most of our lives in exchange for the Scriptural truth. We unconsciously read the Bible through the lens of gentile Western Christianity as formed and defined by our early Church Fathers. They were right about much of it; but wrong about some critical areas that their anti-Jewish bias blinded them to. And it has fallen to us, in this present generation, to try to right these wrongs so that we can see God for who He really is, His plan of redemption for what it really is, His Jewish people for who they are to Him, and where we (as His followers) fit in to all that. Why is this revelation happening now, in our day? I think it is a sure sign that Messiah is getting ready for His return, and the Holy Spirit is preparing us.

At the end of verse 10 Paul expresses his desire to come to Rome to visit this congregation. He indeed will, in about 4 years, go to Rome; but it will be in chains and there is no evidence that he ever had contact with those to whom he was writing this letter. He follows this up by explaining why he's so eager to come to Rome; he wants to impart some spiritual gift that may encourage and strengthen them. I've read many comments about exactly what Paul has in mind here but I think it is a general comment that comes from a Jewish mindset of his day and that Paul fully expects that no matter which congregation he visits he will, through God's grace, impart a spiritual gift at God's discretion because he is, after all, Yeshua's Apostle to the gentiles.

This concept of spiritual gifts is not a New Testament concept. The Essene community at Qumran believed in spiritual gifts and wrote about it. When I compare what I read in the Dead Sea Scrolls with certain words and terms used by both Yeshua and Paul, it is clear there was close contact between them. I'm in no way saying that Paul or Yeshua were Essenes. At the

same time, Essene theology is very close to New Testament theology and clearly Yeshua and Paul were familiar with it. Listen to this short excerpt from one of the Dead Sea Scrolls called 1QS.

***And these are the ways of these Spirits in the world. It is of the Spirit of truth to enlighten the heart of man, and to level him in the ways of true righteousness.....and to it belongs the Spirit of humility and forbearance, of abundant mercy and eternal goodness.....and almighty wisdom with faith in all the works of God and trust in His abundant grace.....and the spirit of knowledge in every design and zeal for just ordinances.....Such are the councils of the Spirit to the sons of truth in the world.....The fountain of righteousness, the reservoir of power, and the dwelling place of glory but God has given them an everlasting possession to those who He has chosen. He has granted them a share in the lot of the Saints....***

To our ears this sounds like it could have come straight out of the New Testament. It is full of truths and principles and terms that, for centuries, have been said to exist only in the New Testament. But the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has changed all that. So Paul had something rather culturally familiar in mind when he spoke about imparting spiritual gifts to the Believers in Rome and it would have fallen along the lines of what I just read to you.

Interestingly in verse 12 we find Paul backtracking a bit on what he just said. Rather than defining the spiritual gifts as something rather ethereal that he will bestow upon them he now says that what he meant to say was that there would be mutual encouragement from what they give to each other. There have been a number of theories as to what Paul was backtracking from. The one that makes the most sense to me is that he realized that gentiles would have had no understanding of what he means by spiritual gifts (such a thing is only known within Jewish society). So he sort of redefines his term “spiritual gifts” as meaning a gift of mutual encouragement that Believers ought to give one another.

Paul proceeds to explain why he hasn't shown up in Rome. He says that he has wanted to come for some time, but circumstances have conspired to prevent it. Anyone with Paul's aspirations would of course want to establish a congregation in the capital of the known world: Rome. But because unforeseen conditions arose to prevent Paul from going, other evangelists went and established the Believing congregations. This meant that they would have also planted their doctrines and their understanding of Yeshua. Paul wanted in. As he says, he was hoping to come and to have some fruit in their congregation, just as he has fruit in so many other congregations where gentiles are a part. Translation: I'd like to have a role in your congregation so that my efforts and teaching would directly produce some good and righteous outcomes.

Let's never forget that as inspired a man of God as Paul was, he was just a man. Paul felt much ownership for the gentile congregations that were established. He was used to selecting the leadership and laying down the rules and regulations, and it was his doctrinal viewpoints that were adopted. The truth is, what little reward on earth that he would ever get for his hard word and dedication was that he would see good fruit come from it. He didn't want Rome to be the exception, especially when (outside of Jerusalem) it was the most important and influential

place on earth at this time.

In verse 14 Paul continues his explanation by essentially saying, “Sorry but I’ve been very busy”. And because he had begun his letter by describing himself in the lofty term “slave of Messiah Yeshua”, he continues this thought by saying that he has an obligation (to Yeshua) to go to both civilized Greeks and uncivilized barbarians. In our CJB where it says “uncivilized people”, that is incorrect. The Greek says barbarians. Barbarians were first and foremost people who didn’t speak Greek. Non-Greek speakers were considered less civilized according to the worldview of the Roman Empire. Together Greeks and barbarians constituted the gentiles of the world. Paul then adds that he is also to bring the Gospel to both the educated and uneducated. So every gentile, regardless of language or intelligence or status, is entitled to hear the Gospel and he intends to see to it that it happens. He concludes that thought by saying that therefore he is also eager to proclaim the Good News to citizens of Rome. In other words, they certainly fall within the definition of the people he is obligated to evangelize.

Clearly verses 16 and 17 are the powerful theme of the entire letter. The principle emphasis is on the saving power of the Gospel. But the “why” of it is also briefly explained; that is, **why** is the Gospel able to save? The answer is that the Gospel manifests God’s righteousness. These verses (and what follows) are so dense with theological principles that are the heart and soul of our faith that we’ll take as much time as needed to flesh them out.

Paul begins with the strange statement that he is “not ashamed” of the Gospel. What does that mean? Very likely it is a Jewish expression. First, understand that there is a difference between being shamed, and being ashamed. Being shamed is a social condition. Middle Eastern societies were shame and honor societies. That is, perhaps the supreme societal goal of all the people was to be living in a state of honor. The worst thing that could happen was to be shamed and thus have the social status of “shame” assigned to you. Shame was so serious of a societal status that there was literally no limit on how far one would go to regain their honor; it often involved killing the person who brought shame upon you.

Ashamed, far from being a social status, is a psychological condition. It involves guilt, the deepest sense of regret, and feeling very badly about yourself for having done something, or somehow being associated with something, which society says is socially unacceptable. Being ashamed does not change your societal status, and one cannot do something to solve being ashamed since indeed it is a state of mind and not a state of your actual status among your community. In a shame and honor society, being in a state of shame means that people will shun you; you have lost your place in the community.

So Paul is not talking about being ashamed of the Gospel in the sense of shame and honor; it has nothing to do with social status. Many language experts believe that this was a well known expression in Paul’s day, even if it has been lost to history, because one would have to ask why anyone might feel a sense of deep regret or guilt (be ashamed) over the Gospel message? It doesn’t fit. Rather, very likely it is a negative way of communicating that one has the fullest confidence in the Gospel, or perhaps only to confess or declare the Gospel. It is not uncommon in English to use the negative to express something positive. For instance: I was not unimpressed means I was impressed. I was not disappointed means I was pleased. So I

maintain that Paul was using a negative (not ashamed) to express a positive (I have confidence in) as merely a figure of speech or a manner of speaking in his day.

The next clause in verse 16 is not expressed well in the CJB. A more literal translation is: ***for it is the power of God to everyone who believes***. What does this mean? To Paul “the power of God” is a mysterious, but real, force that has the ability to bring about a strong, transforming effect on human beings. This is not the only place that he uses the term “the power of God” or “God’s power” or “power” in relation to God.

**1Corinthians 1:18 CJB <sup>18</sup> *For the message about the execution-stake is nonsense to those in the process of being destroyed, but to us in the process of being saved it is the power of God.***

**1Corinthians 2:3-5 CJB <sup>3</sup> *Also I myself was with you as somebody weak, nervous and shaking all over from fear; <sup>4</sup> and neither the delivery nor the content of my message relied on compelling words of "wisdom" but on a demonstration of the power of the Spirit, <sup>5</sup> so that your trust might not rest on human wisdom but on God's power.***

**2Corinthians 6:6-7 CJB <sup>6</sup> *We commend ourselves by our purity, knowledge, patience and kindness; by the Ruach HaKodesh; by genuineness of love <sup>7</sup> and truthfulness of speech; and by God's power.***

Paul uses this “power of God” concept in several more places as well. Even more this same force, this “Power of God”, is a continuing divine force that sustains the new and better life that it creates.

So the saving nature of the Gospel is a transformative force that only God wields. But the main point is that it is from God the Father. One can trust in Christ for salvation; but the actual force that brings about salvation is the Father’s. The idea that God’s word has actual power to transform and save is an Old Testament idea and one of the most obvious references has to be in Psalm 107. There we find this:

**Psalm 107:19-20 CJB <sup>19</sup> *In their trouble they cried to ADONAI, and he rescued them from their distress; <sup>20</sup> he sent his word and healed them, he delivered them from destruction.***

There is a change, however, in Paul’s idea of the concept of salvation as it refers to Christ and to His Believers. In the Old Testament, saving or delivering was about being rescued from an actual situation. There was danger, but the person was rescued from that danger. There was a probability of death, but the person was rescued from that deadly circumstance. In the context of the Gospel salvation is a spiritual matter. In fact, its immediate effects may be minimal from an earthly perspective. One can be in a dire situation, receive salvation in the forgiveness of sins, but yet one’s physical life might not be delivered. In fact Paul tends to see the primary importance of salvation as a delivery from a future judgment of God that occurs in the End Times. So while one can be “saved” immediately, its most important effect (being spared from eternal death) will not come until later.

There is another interesting, and I think nearly lost, aspect of salvation that regards the person who is being saved. While it is long held Christian doctrine that "trust" in Yeshua as Savior is the requirement to obtain salvation, that is not exactly what Paul says. Here the CJB gets it correct as opposed to most other English translations that say, "salvation to everyone who believes". The Greek verb used is in the present tense; so this means that we have a continuing action. One must continue, persistently, to keep on trusting or believing. The doctrine of Eternal Security, once saved always saved, essentially says that one can believe briefly, and then it simply doesn't matter from that time forward. If I believed for awhile, but now I fell away and stopped believing, I'm still saved because "once saved, always saved". That is not what Paul says; he says that salvation continues only so long as we continue trusting. If our trust ends, our salvation ends.

I have heard all manner of theological apology for the once saved always saved doctrine and it usually revolves around a severe twisting of God's Word and instead injecting a personal opinion. The most common rebuttal is that once a person is saved, they would never recant their salvation at any time, ever, for any reason either because 1) they have lost the freedom to make such a choice, or 2) if they do recant (they renounce Christ) then they never actually believed in the first place; they were just pretenders. And why is that? In a circular argument it is because it is not possible for a person who believed to stop believing. Nowhere in the Scriptures is that idea supported, but in many places the opposite is said. Here is a very small sampling.

**Matthew 7:21-23 CJB <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. <sup>22</sup> On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!"**

**Hebrews 6:4-6 CJB <sup>4</sup> For when people have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become sharers in the Ruach HaKodesh, <sup>5</sup> and tasted the goodness of God's Word and the powers of the 'olam haba- <sup>6</sup> and then have fallen away- it is impossible to renew them so that they turn from their sin, as long as for themselves they keep executing the Son of God on the stake all over again and keep holding him up to public contempt.**

**James 5:19-20 CJB <sup>19</sup> My brothers, if one of you wanders from the truth, and someone causes him to return, <sup>20</sup> you should know that whoever turns a sinner from his wandering path will save him from death and cover many sins.**

**2Peter 2:20-22 CJB <sup>20</sup> Indeed, if they have once escaped the pollutions of the world through knowing our Lord and Deliverer, Yeshua the Messiah, and then have again become entangled and defeated by them, their latter condition has become worse than their former. <sup>21</sup> It would have been better for them not to have known the Way of righteousness than, fully knowing, to turn from the holy command delivered to them. <sup>22</sup> What has happened to them accords with the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit." Yes, "The pig washed itself, only to wallow in the mud!"**



The Bible never contemplates the idea of pretenders. It never considers that all one has to do is trust momentarily and then wander away and never trust again but still remain eternally secure. Rather, one must continue to trust and believe.

Paul ends verse 16 by saying “to the Jew especially, but equally to the gentile”. Clearly Paul says the Gospel is God’s Power of Salvation for both Jews and gentiles. This means that the supposed Two Covenant Theology, whereby there are two routes to salvation, is nonsense. The Two Covenant concept is that the Jews are saved by following the Laws of Moses (the Mosaic Covenant) and gentiles are saved by following the New Covenant (the Covenant in Christ). That concept is utterly put to shame right here. The Gospel of Yeshua is for both Jew and gentile; there is no other option. But the other thing that we must see is that in the words “to the Jew especially” reflects a heavenly priority. Jews had, and continue to have, a priority over gentiles when it comes to salvation. The people of Israel are the bearers of the promise contained in the Abrahamic covenant that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Gentiles (the nations) are a recipient of that blessing; but it happens THROUGH Israel.

Please also notice that Israel was also Christ’s priority. He took his message to Jews, not to gentiles. That duty would fall, in time, to his Apostles. In a famous story when Yeshua went to the northern coastal region of Sidon and Tzor, gentile territory, a gentile woman approached him and here was the exchange.

**Matthew 15:21-24 CJB** <sup>21</sup> *Yeshua left that place and went off to the region of Tzor and Tzidon.* <sup>22</sup> *A woman from Kena'an who was living there came to him, pleading, "Sir, have pity on me. Son of David! My daughter is cruelly held under the power of demons!"* <sup>23</sup> *But Yeshua did not say a word to her. Then his talmidim came to him and urged him, "Send her away, because she is following us and keeps pestering us with her crying."* <sup>24</sup> *He said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Isra'el."*

Yet after the woman begged and pleaded, Yeshua relented and healed the woman’s daughter. Immediately Yeshua left and went back to the Galilee. The meaning is obvious. The Jews have priority. But, for gentiles who have faith in Him, Yeshua will save them, too, is asked. How ironic that for 1900 years Christianity has switched up God’s priority and made it “to the Gentiles especially”, but NOT to the Jews.

We’ll continue this next week and deal with a most serious matter that is perhaps the dominant issue of our time.