

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 15, Chapters 6 and 7

We are going to spend considerable time today defining terms and words that have become common in our Christian-era vocabularies; but we either don't actually have a definite understanding of those words and terms in our minds, or we take them differently than how they are actually meant.

So before we conclude Romans 6 and get started on chapter 7 I want to begin by taking another shot at explaining why Paul must be understood so very unlike he traditionally has been, and why this is no easy task. Why do I harp on this so much? Because like it or not, what Paul says in the New Testament forms the core of most Christian doctrine. Whether it should or not is another matter.

Bible translators are forever in a bind; they are well aware that at times what they are attempting to translate from the Biblical Hebrew or Greek to English is probably a Jewish idiom or expression that is from an ancient era 2000 to 3000 years ago. Even if it is fairly clear to them that the phrase under translation seems to be an idiom or an expression they don't necessarily know for certain what it meant to the writer or to the people of his day. And if the meaning of the expression isn't entirely clear to them, then the dilemma is: do they go ahead and transliterate the Hebrew or Greek word for word (resulting in a passage that is likely to mean something to a 21<sup>st</sup> century English speaker that it could not have meant to the writer), or do they translate it dynamically? A dynamic translation means to interpret and write down NOT what the words literally say, but rather what those words mean to communicate (at least in the opinion of the translator).

Let me give you some well known English examples of idioms and expressions from American culture to help to illustrate my point about dynamic translation. "Don't cry over spilt milk". "Don't let the cat out of the bag". "Let the chips fall where they may". "Don't count your chickens before they hatch". "Every cloud has a silver lining". "Kill two birds with one stone". I could go on and on with these because idioms and expressions are simply part of our daily conversations. Idioms and expressions are designed to be memorable and to communicate something that is uniquely connected to one's particular culture. They work; and it is infrequent that if I should use these idioms when conversing with another American that the other person would not instantly understand my meaning. In fact, in but a few words those idioms sometimes convey something very specific that it might otherwise take a paragraph or two to define.

But something very different happens when an American talks to a non-American using those same idioms. In fact it usually doesn't even help if the American can speak the foreign language of his or her conversation partner, because if those American idioms and expressions are translated to the foreign language word for word, disregarding culture, the foreign person still doesn't get it. Or worse, he accepts what is said as meaning exactly what it

sounds like it says. I remember some years ago in Brazil talking to a business associate and telling him “a deal is a deal”. He looked at me with an odd expression and said: ‘Well of course it is. And a cat is a cat, and car is a car.’ He kind of wondered if I thought he was stupid, or because I said something that is so blatantly obvious to any thinking person that perhaps he was being insulted. It actually took about a 5 minute conversation for me to explain and nuance the American expression “a deal is a deal” in Brazilian cultural terms that finally made sense to him.

This is what we are dealing with when we are interpreting Paul, and at times when interpreting other writers of the Bible books. Paul is not an American or a European and doesn’t think like one or talk like one. The Old Testament can be challenging to interpret but it gets even murkier in some ways when we are dealing with the Greek New Testament. Why? Because by this point in history Jewish Tradition, **Halakhah**, had become fully integrated into Jewish society so many Jewish religious beliefs, expressed using certain unique terms and expressions, were nearly universally accepted within Jewish culture and taken for granted. And as what happens in many languages, abbreviations, idioms and expressions are developed as a kind of short hand to express the essence of these various beliefs. For instance: a popular Christian religious expression is “once saved always saved”. It is short hand for a long and complex assertion about the nature and workings of redemption. But it only has meaning to a Christian who holds to a similar belief system and who lives in the same culture. Outside of that, those words are either misunderstood or they hold no discernable meaning at all.

Paul brings us a unique set of translation and interpretation difficulties. As a highly educated Pharisee and Rabbi he not only thought and explained religious matters in terms standard to his Jewish culture but he also thought and explained things in terms of how he was taught at the Academy of Gamaliel, at which he was a star pupil. There is a unique structure and protocol that Rabbis use to state or debate religious principles and regulations of Judaism that we can identify within Paul’s statements provided we know what to look for. I’ve already pointed out some of these and showed you that what Paul seems to be saying according to our 21<sup>st</sup> century way of using the English language within Western culture (and especially within the 21<sup>st</sup> century Church, which holds certain doctrinal viewpoints that aren’t quite as universal as we might assume), doesn’t always jibe with what he meant within his 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish culture that had Judaism at its center. Rather Paul is using words and expressions that were everyday, common, and well understood in Jewish society but can mean something else entirely to our ears. Our job (difficult as it may be) is to discover what he meant to communicate to his contemporaries; not what it SOUNDS like it means to us 2000 years later in an entirely different cultural setting. For example: I speak regularly to you about the good inclination and the evil inclination. These are not standard Western Church terms. But they are standard Jewish terms from the Old and New Testament era, and the concept of humans being born with good and evil inclinations is perfectly valid, biblically speaking, even if Christianity uses different terms to express a similar theological concept. Paul of course uses the Jewish concepts behind those very Jewish terms and idioms to express himself in his letters that form so much of our New Testament (what else would he use?). But if we don’t recognize that fact, and if we can’t explore what it meant from his Jewish point of view of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., then it is all but guaranteed that we will derive some very strange doctrines from those words, or we will find Paul making conflicting statements, or seeming to disagree

with either the Torah or (at times) with Christ.

I tell you this because especially passages in Romans chapters 6 and 7 get misunderstood because many Bible commentators, and nearly all Pastors and Bible Teachers, do not recognize the Jewish cultural expressions that Paul is using for what they are. Let me give you some examples of this issue using rather standard foreign expressions from our era, which when directly translated to English certainly have a meaning, but the sum of the words do not actually mean what it sounds to our ears like it means. In German there is an expression that literally says: "You have tomatoes on your eyes." Now we can certainly understand those words and go look in a mirror to see if we really do have tomatoes resting on our eyes. But in German idiom this has nothing to do with tomatoes. It means: "You are not seeing what everyone else obviously sees".

Another example comes from Sweden. The expression is: "There is no cow on the ice". And of course while those words certainly do have meaning in English, in reality this idiom has nothing to do with cows or ice. Rather it means: "There's nothing to worry about". Thank the Lord those two idioms aren't Hebrew expressions found in the New Testament; otherwise tomatoes, cows and ice would undoubtedly hold prominent places in our Christian doctrines and Church services.

Let's continue with our study of the Book of Romans and I'll continue to point out when we are dealing with apparent Jewish cultural expressions and what they seem to have meant at that time. What those words meant then is what they need to mean to us now or we have missed the point.

### **RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 6:12 – end**

I want to review something important with you. In Romans we have heard Paul speak about three distinct kinds of divine law. I pause to do this because precious few Bible commentators acknowledge that there are three and insist there is but one use and meaning for the word "law". There is the kind of divine law like Paul says that Adam received; a direct commandment, one on one, from the Lord that is really meant only for that person. Then there is another kind of divine law that all human beings are born with. We innately know these laws and all humans are required to obey them; this is the Natural Law. Finally there is the third kind of divine law that was given to the Israelites on Mt. Sinai: the Law of Moses. Paul has gone to great lengths to explain that no matter which of the three kinds of divine law a person might violate, it is sin and therefore that person becomes a sinner. And since the Law of Moses didn't even come to mankind until after the Israelites had left Egypt, then only two kinds of divine law had existed up until then: a direct command, one on one, from God, and the Natural Law. Thus all human beings regardless of race, nationality or ethnicity, and at all times in history, have been subject to one kind of divine law or the other; and so all human beings could (and did) sin. What is the consequence of sin? God's wrath, and ultimately, eternal death. That, and what to do about it, has been the focus of the Book of Romans.

But it is equally important that we understand that apart from divine law Paul also weaves another kind of law into his dissertation that goes unnoticed to the untrained eye: Jewish Law.

**Halakhah.** Tradition. Manmade law as opposed to divine law. We have to watch for this. So as Bible Believers our challenge is that when Paul speaks of “law”, which of the three kinds of divine law and one kind of manmade law he is speaking of? The major difficulty in identifying which is which is because in all cases Paul only uses one Greek word for all four kinds of law: **nomos**. And when we translate **nomos** to English, it is always “law”. So a Bible student has their work cut out for them when reading Paul’s letters, and especially so the Book of Romans.

Although we discussed verse 14 last time, we’ll briefly follow up on it since it is a perfect example of Jewish idiom that meant one thing to Jews then, but communicates something different to Christians today. It says this: **“For sin will not have authority over you; because you are not under law but under grace”**. I quoted the eminent Bible commentator C.E.B. Cranfield who points out that even though it might sound so, this does not imply that the Law of Moses is dead to Christians. Rather we must instead understand what “under Law” and “under grace” mean. But before that, what is meant by ‘sin will not have authority over you’? We have learned that those living under the dominion of sin are therefore living under the authority of death since sin and death are fused together as one. And who are those living under the dominion of sin? All who come from Adam. Us. Everybody. Thus what is being contrasted by Paul are the consequences of what happens to a sinner according to the Law of Moses, versus what happens to a sinner who, by God’s grace, has been righteoused. The consequences of sinning (which is God’s wrath upon the sinner) has been the topic since mid-way through Romans chapter 1. And Paul has been preaching that by means of a sinner trusting in the faithful works of Messiah Yeshua that sinner can be protected from God’s wrath, which is due to him. Thus the consequences of sinning under law is God’s wrath (death), but the consequences for committing the same sins under the gracious act of God righteousing the sinner (grace), is the **avoidance** of God’s wrath.

Then in verse 15 we again encounter Jewish idiom. In this case it is Jewish idiom used especially by Rabbis. In the standard rabbinic way that a matter of Scripture interpretation and a resultant ruling about it is created, Paul puts words in his straw man’s mouth. And the words are in response to Paul seemingly implying that if we are free from law, then we must also be free from sinning. So the straw man says: then “Let’s go on sinning because we are not under law but under grace”. In the standard rabbinic expression of strongly disagreeing with a proposed theological ruling, Paul responds, “Heaven Forbid!” Then starting in verse 16 he goes on to explain why the straw man’s idea that under grace it is OK to continue sinning is not correct.

To make his case Paul again resorts to using the fundamental doctrine of Judaism called The Two Masters. Please take note: while the concept of a person not serving two masters can be found existing in the broadest sense in the Torah (such as the commandment in Exodus to serve no other gods but the God of Israel), it is not explicitly stated in the Bible until we read it in the New Testament. **Luke 16:13 CJB** <sup>13</sup> **No servant can be slave to two masters, for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can’t be a slave to both God and money.** So why don’t we hear this doctrine of the Two Masters before the New Testament? Was it an innovation of Christ who essentially created and spoke the doctrine of Two Masters as a kind of new “Christian” doctrine? No. This was a long established doctrine of Judaism; Yeshua was merely using something familiar.

Remember: Judaism was the result of the Babylonian exile. So Paul knew of this Jewish doctrine of the Two Masters since his childhood. Therefore he uses the doctrine of Two Masters to make his point because the Jewish Believers in Rome would have instantly picked up on it and accepted its validity.

And Paul says that if you obey your inner instinct to sin, then you are a slave to it. And since the Jews connected sinning to our evil inclination, then they saw the evil inclination as one Master and the good inclination as a second Master. Paul reminds his readers that you can't be slaves to both. Once we were slaves to the master of sin, now we are slaves to the master of righteousness (God).

He does something kind of interesting in verse 19: he apologizes for using the choice of words that he did. Why? Because in the Diaspora, and especially so in the capital of the Roman Empire, Rome, being a slave was a low and degrading thing. So using the metaphor of slavery to express a Believer's devotion to obeying God was to use something disgusting and thus inappropriate in Roman culture. So while Paul understood that sensitivity he used it, as he often does, for impact to gain the attention of his readers. But the point Paul is making here is that after being released from slavery to the Master to sin it doesn't mean that a Believer has no obligations to his new master, the Master of righteousness: God. And I'm afraid that it is often mistakenly thought among many Evangelical Christians that the type of freedom and liberty they gain in salvation is the freedom and liberty from obedience to God or from any obligation to Him whatsoever. Paul makes it clear that our new found freedom is only from our obligation to sin, because we had allowed our evil inclinations to be our Masters.

I also want to point out in verse 19 how he speaks about how in the past those to whom he's writing his letter used to use their bodies for impurity and lawlessness, which, says Paul, only led to more lawlessness. What does Paul mean by lawlessness? Is he implying they were criminals? When the Bible speaks of lawlessness, it is speaking only of one thing: divine laws. Law breaking in the Bible means to break God's divine laws; not laws made by human governments. In fact Yeshua was so aware of this reality and this understanding among Jews that He made it a point to teach that worshippers of God were indeed to obey their human governments. However in other statements it is also made clear that this only applied to government laws that were in moral agreement with God's laws. Thus if the human government deified their leader, worshippers of God of course weren't being instructed to, as good citizens, commit idolatry and worship the government leader. And it was the same concerning all matters of morality. However when it comes to non-moral matters like conscription into the military, taxes, contract law and the like, then indeed God's worshippers are to abide by their local governmental laws.

Thus a very good and appropriate substitute for the term lawlessness as used in Holy Scripture that reveals how it was meant in Paul's day would be Torahlessness. In fact Torahlessness carries with it a far more accurate sense of what Paul means than lawlessness, which sounds to our modern ears like the actions of a criminal.

Paul ends this section of his letter to the Romans by stating his final conclusion, which is actually (in Jewish culture) a **Halakhic** ruling. After debating against his straw man, now, for

several chapters, verse 23 brings this particular flow of thought to a close with a religious instruction that all who worship Yeshua as Lord and Savior are to follow. A ruling that is the very basis of Christianity.

**Romans 6:23 CJB** <sup>23</sup> *For what one earns from sin is death; but eternal life is what one receives as a free gift from God, in union with the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord.*

Let's move on to Romans chapter 7.

### READ ROMANS CHAPTER 7 all

This chapter, if it had a title, should probably be: True Liberty is Freedom from the Condemnation of the Law.

I spent quite a bit of time at the beginning of our lesson today explaining that the key to understanding the New Testament, and especially Paul, is to spot his Jewish idioms and expressions. The opening verses of Romans 7 afford us just such an opportunity.

Paul offers this “odd” opening to chapter 7 saying that his “brothers” ought to already know most of what he’s telling them. Paul’s brothers are the Jewish Believers of Rome because he says that he is speaking in regard to those who know and understand Torah (at least that’s what the CJB says). Most English versions will not use the word Torah, but will say either “law” or “the Law”. So in those versions, Paul is speaking of those who already ought to know law. We discussed in an earlier lessons that by adding the definite article “the” before the word “law”, we turn it into “The Law”. “The Law” in Jewish thought means the Law of Moses. The problem is that in this verse the definite article is not actually there. Bible translators have added the word “the” in order to make it appear that Paul is speaking of the Law of Moses. But the Greek NT manuscripts don’t have it that way.

I’ve already explained that the Greek word for law is **nomos**, and that Paul uses the term **nomos** to refer to several different kinds of law and not only The Law of Moses. So our challenge is to identify which kind of law he is speaking about at any given time since in Romans the term “law” is used constantly. The general consensus of Bible translators is that Paul is indeed speaking about the Law of Moses in verses 1 – 3, when he uses the analogy of a woman being married to her husband, but then the husband dies so according to law she is free to be remarried to another man. And this freedom is because since the husband died he is no longer under law, and so the widow is set free. Virtually every Bible commentary I could find agreed that what Paul was quoting was a commandment from the Torah (the Law of Moses) about the circumstances under which a widow could remarry. And, these Bible commentators are wrong.

How do I know they are wrong? Because there is no Torah law that deals with a widow being able to remarry; in fact it is forbidden. The closest thing there is in the Law of Moses to a widow legitimately remarrying after her husband’s death is the law of Levirate marriage, whereby a man dies but his wife has produced him no sons. The man’s brother is required to marry the widow and produce a male child with her. The reason is so the deceased husband’s

bloodlines will continue, because the son produced by the widow and the brother are considered as belonging to the deceased husband. Clearly this is not at all what Paul has in mind and the Law of Moses has no other laws in this regard to a widow remarrying. Rather, in verses 1 -3 Paul is citing a general law of Jewish society that when a Jewish woman is widowed, she may remarry and it is not adultery. The important issue for us, however, is where this law comes from because it clearly does NOT come from the Law of Moses. Rather, it is a Tradition. Jewish Law. Paul is not referring to Scripture; he is referring to **Halakhah**.

In the Mishnah we read this: ***A woman is acquired in marriage in three ways and acquires her freedom in two. She acquires her freedom by divorce or by her husband's death. As for divorce, it is well, since it is written "then he shall write her a bill of divorcement"; but whence do we know that she is freed by her husband's death? It is logic; he (the husband) bound her; hence he frees her....thus death is compared to divorce: just as divorce completely frees her, so does death completely free her.***

The Torah carries the death penalty for a woman who remarries because it is viewed as adultery; so a ruling of **Halakhah** (a Tradition) was created within Judaism that says a widow who remarries is not guilty of adultery. Therefore we know that in Romans 7:1 – 3 we have an example of when Paul uses the term **nomos** to mean law in the sense of **Halakhah**, Jewish Law. And clearly Paul gives much authority to this ruling of the Rabbis and accepts it as legitimate. However I don't think Paul has a clear, conscious line of demarcation between the Law of Moses and Jewish Law; most of the time he sees Jewish Law as but an expanded interpretation of the Law of Moses, so it is nearly one in the same. This is because that is exactly how Jewish society viewed it. When he speaks of The Law of Moses from a historical, technical sense that is one thing. But when he speaks about law from a Jewish social/cultural sense, The Law of Moses and Jewish Law are so closely inter-related that most times he sees them as unified.

So when in verse 1 he says that his brothers already understand "law", he means they understand Jewish Law; **Halakhah**: the Jewish law code of Jewish culture. It doesn't mean that they have been formally trained in the Law of Moses as the priests were. We must remember that in the Jewish Diaspora especially, the only real contact that Jews had with their religious authorities took place at the Synagogue where the Pharisees ruled. And the Pharisees were the authors and enforcers NOT of the Law of Moses but of **Halakhah**. It was **Halakhah** that ruled Judaism and the Synagogue; not the Law of Moses.

I hope this is beginning to hit home with you as I realize that you have been learning almost an entire new vocabulary and I'm sure it has been quite a challenge.

It starts to get more complex with verse 4. Paul, using the illustration and analogy of verses 1 -3 about the widow remarrying, says that Believers in Yeshua have been made dead to the Torah (The Law). But here Paul switches and he means the Law of Moses and not Jewish Law. How do I know that? Because the definite article "the" is indeed present in the Greek. So Paul is indeed saying "The Law", which indicates The Law of Moses. Remember: he's not trying to apply the ruling of **Halakah** of verses 1 -3 to verse 4; he's only using it as an illustration of how to think about a Believer dying to The Law. In the case of the widow, it was

her husband that died. Using that illustration, in the case of verse 4 it is the Believer in Yeshua that died to The Law of Moses.

Here's the thing; regardless of what this means, precisely, the important point is that it is the Believer who died; The Law didn't die. However because Christians have had it drilled into our heads for 19 centuries that The Law has died, we unconsciously read that meaning into the passage. Please look carefully at this verse and notice: who or what died? The person or the Law? Is there any implication that The Law has died? None.

So what can it mean for a Believer to die to the Law? What in the world is Paul getting at? We can take his assertion to mean one of two things: 1) Believers no longer have any obligation to follow The Law of Moses, and therefore for us any violation of The Law of Moses is not sin for us. Or 2), Believers no longer are affected by some particular aspect of The Law of Moses. The Institutional Church says that option 1 is correct: we have no obligation to follow God's laws as found in The Law of Moses and if we do something that the Law of Moses prohibits, it is not sin for us as Believers. The problem is, not only does Christ in Matthew 5 say the opposite, so does the Apostle John. <sup>CJB</sup> **1 John 3:4** *Everyone who keeps sinning is violating Torah- indeed, sin is violation of Torah.*

Option 2 is the correct one. In fact, it is the fairly obvious choice. There is some aspect of the Torah Law that Believers are no longer under and Paul has been speaking of that aspect throughout Romans. The focus of his letter has been God's wrath for sinners and how we can avoid it. The issue has been the condemnation (death penalty) that comes with sinning. And Paul has said that the Torah, The Law of Moses, details God's law so that what is sin and what is not sin becomes crystal clear. But it also details the penalty for sin. The next chapter of Romans, Romans 8, begins this way: <sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 8:1** *Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua.* There it is; just as Paul summed things up at the end of chapter 6 with: *For what one earns from sin is death; but eternal life is what one receives as a free gift from God, in union with the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord. (Rom 6:23 CJB)*, now he sums up chapter 7 of Romans with the first verse of chapter 8: *Therefore, there is no longer any condemnation awaiting those who are in union with the Messiah Yeshua.*

The aspect of the Torah that Believers are dead to is the **condemnation** that comes from disobeying its many laws; we're not dead to The Law itself. Salvation has not freed us from obedience to The Law; rather, Salvation has freed us from the death penalty that The Law requires for disobedience to The Law. Where have we heard this before?

**Matthew 5:17-19 CJB** <sup>17</sup> *"Don't think that I have come to abolish the Torah or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete.*

<sup>18</sup> *Yes indeed! I tell you that until heaven and earth pass away, not so much as a yud or a stroke will pass from the Torah- not until everything that must happen has happened.*

<sup>19</sup> *So whoever disobeys the least of these mitzvot and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But whoever obeys them and so teaches will*

### ***be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven.***

So according to Christ and according to Paul The Law of Moses remains in effect for Believers, but through God's grace we are saved from the condemnation of what happens when we break any of those laws (we sin). So since that is the case then what happens to Believers who refuse to obey the Law of Moses? Christ says that whether we obey or don't, we are still members of the Kingdom of Heaven; that is, we remain saved (although in other passages Paul makes it clear that this is true only to a point). However the Kingdom of Heaven is a real Kingdom; it will have a real King (Yeshua), it will have real rules and laws, and it will have real citizens whose status will be arranged in a real hierarchy (the Church often refers to this Heavenly hierarchy as jewels placed in our crowns). Yeshua says that those Believers who strive to obey The Law of Moses will be given the greatest status in the Kingdom of Heaven. But those Believers who say they see no need to obey the Law of Moses will be given the least status in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So if your goal is to make it into God's Kingdom by the skin of your teeth (not a very wise goal), then simply determine that The Law is not for you. But if your goal is to please God on this earth, and to obey His Law to the fullest extent of your ability and circumstances (a good goal), then a far greater experience and status in the Kingdom awaits you. I have utterly no idea of the tangible differences between the two statuses. But I did once hear a person describe it this way: if when you go to Heaven and you get into the line where they're handing out transportation, which you would rather have: a Mercedes or a skate board?

We'll continue in Romans chapter 7 next time.