

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 19, Chapter 8 cont. 2

Last week in Romans chapter 8 we concluded by discussing the status of Believers before God during our lifetimes. We also discussed that Yeshua (as recorded in Matthew 5) explained how He will determine our status in the future during His reign over the Millennial Kingdom. That is, what will be our position in the Kingdom of Heaven, on earth, once it has been fully realized and what are the criteria for determining that status? Christ defined it in terms of our assignment to one of two basic groups that He labeled as the greatest and the least. If one strove to obey The Law of Moses and taught others to do so, you would be made part of the group called “the greatest”. If one determined not to obey the Law of Moses and taught others that The Law is irrelevant to them, then you would be assigned to the group called “the least”. But since that is for the future, after Christ returns, what determines your status before God in the here and now? I’m not speaking of saved versus not-saved but rather of our status before God as Believers. And while this is not nearly as cut and dried as Yeshua explained it regarding future times, it is clear that as a worshipper of Yeshua we can harbor one of two possible attitudes, and therefore have one of two possible relationships before God during our lifetimes: one in which we are seen as a servant, or the other in which we are seen as a son. Each of these are a good status; but, just as with Yeshua’s definition of status in His Millennial Kingdom in Matthew 5, so we see a hierarchy of a lesser and a greater status for Believers in the here and now.

In the world of the 1st century A.D., and especially within Judaism, there was a distinct understanding of the inherent advantages of a son over a servant. A servant was essentially a slave, and a slave usually obeyed out of fear of his master. On the other hand a son was family; he loved his father, his father loved him, so the son wanted to please his father and obeyed out of love and gratitude. However biblically and within Judaism, there was a class of people called servants of God and another class called sons of God. Both a servant of God and a son of God were of high and preferred status. Nonetheless a servant of God was a lower status than a son of God thus the attendant privileges were different. The pattern for the difference between the two classes was established, and can be demonstrated, with the pattern of the Levites.

The Levites were set apart from the other tribes of Israel at Mt. Sinai to be servants for God; they were God’s designated priests. And interestingly we find out that there could be no land inheritance for Levite Priests (for God’s servants). In fact, from Mt. Sinai onward they were not to be considered as part of Israel in the sense of having the same advantages and rights that all the other tribes of Jacob held; the most important advantage the Levites lost in the bargain was the right of inheritance.

^{CJB} Deuteronomy 18:1 *The cohanim, who are L'vi'im, and indeed the whole tribe of Levi, is not to have a share or an inheritance with Isra'el. Instead, their support will come from the food offered by fire to ADONAI and from whatever else becomes his. ² They will*

have no inheritance with their brothers, because ADONAI is their inheritance....

Thus the servants of God, the Levite Priests, would receive only a spiritual inheritance and not an earthly inheritance. However in Israelite culture, among all tribes other than Levi, the sons of a father had inheritance rights, with the firstborn receiving an extra allotment. So following the pattern, sons of God will receive both heavenly AND earthly benefits because they are legal heirs. Servants have no legal rights to land and property and so will get primarily heavenly benefits. If **you** had a choice, which would you rather be, before God? A servant or a son? Interestingly Paul explains that the advent of Yeshua has given us all a choice. Romans 8:14 says: ^{CJB} **Romans 8:14 All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons.** So since all Believers are given God's Holy Spirit upon their trust in Yeshua, why then aren't we all given the status as God's sons? First I want to say that essentially, from a spiritual perspective, son status is available for the taking. But as Believers we have to trust God that we actually **are** sons and respond accordingly. Otherwise if we do not apprehend our position as sons then we will be seen as servants due to our lack of faith. The key words in this verse are "led by". We must be **led** by God's Spirit; not just HAVE God's Spirit.

Paul has spent the last few paragraphs explaining the frustrating conundrum that Believers face: we live with both God's Spirit and the spirit of an evil inclination living side-by-side within us, so we find ourselves constantly pulled in opposite directions. That is, at times we disobey God and sin even though we know better; even though God's Spirit is dwelling within us and we have The Law written on our hearts. Thus as Believers we have the challenge of more or less retraining ourselves. We must learn to be led by God's Spirit rather than to be led by the spirit of our evil inclination; the spirit of our former Master. Such a thing is an ongoing process that requires determination and perseverance. Thus just as it is obvious that any clear thinking Believer ought to strive to be greatest rather than least in the Kingdom of Heaven (even though either way we will be members of the Kingdom of Heaven in good standing), we also ought to strive to be sons of God rather than servants of God (even though both are good things, and both indicate that we are redeemed).

The irony is that we ought **not** to strive for the higher statuses ("son" and "greatest") purely because it benefits us. Rather the benefit should come as a natural outcome of wanting to please God by obeying Him. Seeking a greater status is the wrong motive for obedience. Frankly, we rather taint the outcome if our main purpose for striving to obey God is what we get for ourselves in return. Such a wrong attitude is at the heart of what propels the Prosperity Doctrine of our day.

Thus, concludes Paul, since because of Christ there is no condemnation (no death sentence) for those who trust Messiah Yeshua, then we should set fear on the shelf; we should not take on the attitude of a servant who obeys his Master out of fear. Rather we should take on the attitude of a son who obeys his Master out of love.

Let's re-read a portion of Romans chapter 8.

RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 8:18 – end

Paul speaks of the “sufferings” they were enduring. Does he mean to indicate some sort of tribulation (hard times, persecution)? Perhaps; but the context of the dialogue more seems to be about suffering with the dilemma of having God’s spirit within us and yet retaining remnants of our old nature that pull at us and frustrate us as we strive to behave and think as God wants us to; but we fail. And he probably also means “suffering” in the sense of personal identity with our suffering servant Yeshua in that we are willing to take on the hurt and pain of others in order to show mercy and tell them of God’s love for them. As of the time of Paul’s writing of the Letter to the Romans, which is some years before his journey to Rome as a prisoner, there was no organized persecution of Jews going on in the Roman Empire. Yes, in some cases there was bigotry against Jews (as there always has been and always will be against various races and ethnic groups). However the Roman Empire operated on the premise of religious tolerance and cultural diversity (to a point) and in fact it is recorded that the Jews were given special dispensation by the Roman government because some elements of their religion were quite demanding. The evidence is that neither the traditional Jews nor the gentile and Jewish followers of Christ were being systematically persecuted at this time as they soon would be under Nero. So we probably shouldn’t think of Paul’s reference to “suffering” as any kind of dangerous tribulation beyond some non-Believing Jews giving Paul and other Believing Jews a hard time occasionally.

There are a couple of things we must always keep in mind as we read any letter from Paul. First: while Paul believed in an End Times that involved the return of Christ, he didn’t see it as something in the far future. Rather, he thought it was imminent; virtually something that could, and likely would, happen within his lifetime. This is why he had such a great urgency to evangelize, and why in Romans chapter 9 we’ll see him express a willingness to forsake his own salvation in exchange for bringing Israel in general to salvation (this, of course, is an expression of his passion; not something that was possible in reality). The second thing is that Paul’s understanding of what glory means (as it pertains to the future of Believers in the world to come) is grounded upon the notion of endurance of sufferings and persecution as proof of faithfulness to Yeshua. This notion is very much the same perspective that the Essenes held (the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls) and it is expressed in terms they used to refer to themselves. Terms like “poor in spirit”, “paupers of grace”, and “desperate of justification” (among others). These were common terms found in the Dead Sea Scrolls to express the Essenes’ determination that suffering was the lot of those who sought righteousness as they waited for their deliverance from the sons of darkness. With the translation and release of the Dead Sea Scrolls it is clearer than ever that there was great agreement and interaction between the Essenes and Yeshua, and no doubt Paul was keenly aware of their views, some of which integrated well with the beliefs of the Pharisees.

What interests me most about this verse is the statement that we will eventually be heirs to a glory that will be revealed in the future. That is, the reward for our perseverance of our current state of spiritual conundrum that comes because of our firm trust in Yeshua will be revealed at a later time in the future (in the world to come; the *olam ha-ba*). And the reality is that to this day we really don’t know what our heavenly future looks like (although there is no end of speculation from the pulpit and from books). We must simply have faith that the general characterization of our future with Christ will be as wonderful as promised and greater than anything that is even possible on this earth as it stands today.

Verse 19 is a bit difficult to deal with because Paul speaks of “the creation” as a living entity of some sort. I think what is really happening is that he is speaking of “the creation” in grammar terms that we call personification. That is, things that are not human are spoken of as though they had human characteristics. So when Paul speaks of “the creation” it is my opinion that he is referring to everything in existence that is **not** human: plants, animals, rocks, the oceans, the stars in the sky, and so on. And that all of these things that God created are frustrated because humans have ruined everything. And they know that a restoration is coming, and they’re growing wearing waiting for it. Again; these terms like frustrated and waiting are not meant to be taken literally; these words of emotion applied to non-human things are personification. The creation also seems to know that God’s work towards the redemption of His creation is predicated upon the revelation of the sons of God: Believers. The appearance of Believers is the signal to the creation that restoration has begun. So folks, even though you may never have thought of yourselves in this way, you yourselves, as Believers, are a sign that God is in active process of restoring His creation to its original perfection and even greater.

Why is the creation in such an anxious state? Because as Paul says in verse 21, it is decaying; its condition worsens, and decays more, hour by hour. This decaying was not supposed to have happened to the creation; it is a result of Adam’s arrogance and sin. And further, says Paul, the same freedom from death that God’s children (another synonym for sons of God or for Believers) have now attained, will also happen for the creation in general at the appropriate time. In other words, when the creation is redeemed, it will stop decaying and be saved from death.

Suffering birth pains is mentioned as describing the condition of the creation. The illustration of birth pains was a common one in Judaism; it was usually used to describe the sufferings of the creation as it awaited the beginning of the Messianic Age (the rule of Messiah) and what was loosely called the entrance into the world to come. So Paul is not inventing anything new; the term birth pain he uses was not only common, it was meant in Judaism precisely in the same context he means it in this passage. It is an End Times expression.

Verse 23, then, says a mouthful. First, it is said that we “have” the firstfruits of the Spirit. A Jewish Believer would have well understood the reference; likely few gentile Believers would have. First let me comment that the words are NOT that we ARE the firstfruits of the Spirit but rather that we HAVE the firstfruits of the Spirit. Let’s consider this statement from the Jewish cultural perspective. Even the Diaspora Jews were well aware of **Bikkurim**, the Festival of Firstfruits, and also of **Shavuot**, which although known as The Feast of Weeks was actually a 2nd Firstfruits festival (**Bikkurim** concerned the barley harvest, **Shavuot** the wheat harvest that came some weeks later). In both cases, the firstfruits is the sign that the harvest is ripening and soon it will be time for the reaping. As used here, firstfruits is a metaphor that is simply another way of saying that Believers, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, are the sign or pledge that harvesting time is at hand. In Judaism, firstfruits and harvesting are symbolic of redemption.

But in verse 23 Paul also expands on his assertion of Believers being sons of God. He says that since we have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we are waiting to be made sons of God; and then he defines the phrase “being made sons of God” as having our entire

bodies redeemed and set free. This goes back to what we discussed earlier; becoming a son of God is more a process than an event. In fact redemption is a process and little about it is an all-at-once event. It is similar to the concept of the Kingdom of God. Yeshua said that with the coming of John the Baptist, the Kingdom of God has arrived on earth; it is here, now. And yet, it is in no way fully manifested; it is in its infancy. The Kingdom of God then, and even today, is but a fraction of what it will eventually become. So even though we can be called sons of God today, as Believers we have a long way to go before all the privileges and honors and manifestations of what it means to be sons of God are fully realized. We are currently experiencing but the tip of the tip of the iceberg.

In verse 24, Paul explains that it is the hope of this full completeness of becoming sons of God that we wait for with such great expectation. And that it is our salvation that gives us reason for this hope. But he ends this verse by having us remember that as of now our hope remains a faith-based hope. Yet, from philosophical viewpoint, we can't call what we hope for "hope" once it comes to full realization. So we should rejoice in our hope, just as we will rejoice when it is no longer a hope but reality.

It has always been interesting to me that some parts of Christianity want to paint a rosy picture of what life becomes when we finally believe. The idea more or less being that once we come to faith, our troubles are over. And if we do have trouble, it is because we just don't have enough faith, yet. In other words: struggles, failures, and woes in our life indicate a Believer of little faith. None of these matches with what Scripture tells us; and the brutally frank Paul is regularly warning Believers (and Seekers) that coming to faith in Christ brings with it obligations, duties, and suffering.....not utopia. Thus our waiting for our hope to be fully realized will need much perseverance. And because we are still not perfected....and especially our fleshly bodies are not perfected.....we are full of weaknesses that can make persevering all the harder. But Paul says that the Holy Spirit of God is fully aware of this and is here to help.

I bring this up because it is among my pet peeves that some Christian leaders think that God and the Christian life must be presented to their congregation as super appealing; as a sort of divine welfare system that not only fixes all our problems but fulfills all our dreams. My peeve is that not only is that not true, but especially when immature, new Believers buy into this lie, and the harshness of life comes along to dash this false hope, they fall away from the faith, either blaming God or renouncing Christ altogether. So let me be clear: our hope is not in daily happiness. It is not in getting the job we want, the perfect spouse we seek, not even in finally getting that 70 inch 4K flat screen Smart TV with surround sound. Our true hope is more future than present. Our salvation has secured our eternal future; not our temporal present. Oh, without doubt, life is so very much better in the present with God than without. We can go to Him in prayer, He will offer us comfort, and give us peace in impossible circumstances. He is a God who will heal, protect us in many instances, and give us guidance and wisdom when we choose to listen to Him. In fact, Paul says that often we won't know how to pray, so God will even help us with that. The Holy Spirit living in us knows our needs and sufferings and longings and will pray for us in the way proper worship and prayer, in God's will, ought to happen.

As you think about what I've said, what God has promised, and your current circumstances I

ask you to face a stark reality: we are redeemed, but we live in an unredeemed universe. And there are times when we can feel overwhelmed by not just what comes our way, personally, but by what we see happening all around us. We can become full of fears, foreboding, and get depressed and anxious. Our faith doesn't insulate us from the growing darkness of the world; in fact it makes us all the more aware of it. The wickedness and deprivation so prevalent all around us, which used to go unnoticed by us, suddenly becomes alive in vivid color and all too apparent. It also becomes apparent that there is little we can do about most of it. Yeshua's advice is don't worry and fret; turn to God in prayer. So I submit to you that part of the God-ordained process of our becoming perfected in Him is when we have our eyes opened to how God actually sees this fallen world, and how it pains us because it pains Him; and so we learn how to be more dependent upon God, and that means to pray effectively and earnestly.

The concept that begins in verse 27 flows into verse 28: it is the concept of intercession. That is, the Holy Spirit intercedes....He plays an active role as He sees fit.....in the lives of Believers even including helping us to pray. Paul begins verse 28 with "we know"; it is meant in the sense of taking something for granted as common knowledge. Without doubt he is expressing some kind of traditional declaration that was well known among Jews. In fact, whereas Christianity has adopted this verse as among the most memorized and quoted, noting correctly that this is the beginning of Paul speaking of the concept of election, the reality is that Paul is speaking more about the election of Israel as God's chosen people than about the election of gentiles to form a new group of people called Christians. It is not that it can't apply to Christians; but we must realize that God's election of Israel and His ongoing faithfulness to Israel has been an underlying theme of the Letter to the Romans up to this point.

When Paul says that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God, he means "good" in the sense of favor. And when he speaks of those who love God, while it certainly can apply to Believers, it more aptly applies in this context to Israel. Again; throughout Romans an underlying message has been that God created a set apart people called by His name, then God gave this set-apart people His covenants and since doing so has not rejected them and replace them with somebody else. God has remained faithful to His chosen people despite their unfaithfulness to Him. Paul continues that the Lord has an irresistible, unstoppable purpose for His people; and while this is referring to Israel in the main, it certainly on another level can include gentile Believers in Yeshua. The next several words about knowing these people in advance and determining in advance who they would be and who would be conformed to Yeshua, bring us into the controversial topic of predestination. The idea that Calvin holds about predestination is that before any of us were born God not only foreknew but chose those who would trust His Son for salvation. And those whom God decided would become sons of God, he called to be righteous at the right time. In other words, all has been predetermined about our lives before we were born. We didn't choose salvation; the Savior chose us. Free will in this sense, then, is very limited. I don't want to get off track on the issue of predestination; because like with the Doctrine of the Trinity, there is not only one doctrine of Predestination, there are a few with differences of among them. Just know for now that it is this passage that influenced Calvin's doctrine of Predestination the most.

I want us to pause and reorient ourselves. It is close to universally agreed among Bible scholars that Romans chapters 7 and 8 are fully linked (I completely agree with them....it is

obvious). They are very nearly a single unit and if we want the best sense of it we should mentally erase the chapter and verse markers and read chapters 7 and 8 as the whole that it was originally written and so intended. Chopping it up with chapter and verse markers (that never existed until a 1000 years after the NT was written) obscure its unity. So, let's remember back to the opening words that started this long unified section, spoken by Paul in verse 1 of chapter 7: ^{CJB} **Romans 7:1 *Surely you know, brothers- for I am speaking to those who understand Torah- that the Torah has authority over a person only so long as he lives?***

Or as in the KJV:

^{KJV} **Romans 7:1 *Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?***

Who does Paul say he is directly speaking to? Those who, in this context, he calls his brothers. How does he define his brothers in this case? He says it is those who understand the Torah; those understand the Law. Clearly he says he is speaking to his Jewish brethren and so throughout chapters 7 and 8 he continues to tie what he is saying back to this verse by regularly calling those he is addressing his brothers. He is addressing primarily the Jewish Believers because since chapter 1 he has been defending God's election (His choosing) of Israel to be His set-apart people, and the Gospel itself is proof of this because the Gospel is how God is rescuing His people from the hole of sin and death they have dug for themselves. The inclusion of gentiles as additional recipients of the Gospel (especially by Paul) has caused some Jews to ask why God is bringing gentiles into the fold. And in turn, some gentiles have wondered if God accepting them means that He is turning His back on His ancient people and choosing a new people. It was complicated and confusing and so Paul has been walking a delicate line. But my point is this: the election of God's people (those from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), and defending their continuing election, has been an important theme of Romans; one that gentile Christian Bible students and teachers seem to overlook. And it is in that continuing context of Paul primarily addressing Jews that we should read chapter 8 and especially so the difficult words beginning at verse 28.

Thus in verse 31, after saying all these things, Paul then asks in typical rabbinical fashion: "What then are we to say?" This introduces us to the standard format whereby a Halakhic ruling (a Jewish religious ruling) is about to be made. And Rabbi Paul's ruling is this: if God is for us, who can be against us? The question, then, is: who is "us"? Who is it that God is for? Where in any of Paul's narrative has there been some overriding concern that people in general are against Believers (Jew or gentile) and so Paul is trying to convince them that God is for them, so don't worry about what "people" are saying or doing to you? In fact, whatever opposition there has been (although we've not found any in the Book of Romans) has been from Jews, not gentiles, and it has been against Paul specifically as an instigator of trouble. So as to what we just discussed, "us" is Paul and his Jewish brethren as he stated to start chapter 7. Here is what Paul is arguing for: it is self-evident that if God is for His chosen people ("us") then God has not and will not reject His people. In fact, as we'll see in Romans chapters 9-11, Paul will vigorously defend Israel on God's behalf because of the accusation that since Israel has rejected their Messiah, then God has decided to reject Israel. And by the way before we get to those chapters: it is **not** that there is any historical or biblical evidence

that some wide scale or even meaningful protest from gentile Believers that Jews should not be regarded as God's people because most of Israel rejected their Messiah has surfaced yet. Rather it is that Paul anticipates that due to the controversial nature of gentile inclusion in partaking of Israel's covenants that it is an accusation that is bound to come up so he is going to deflect it right now. As Paul will argue, Israel's election as God's chosen people (His elect) has not been, will not, and will never be revoked by God. And no power, no principality, and no human king have the authority or ability to do so. But guess what: the Bishop of the Church of Rome in the 4th century decided that he could declare that the Church has replaced Israel, and a large portion of Christianity to this day has declared that God revoked Israel's election and has replaced it with the gentile Church.

Here's the thing: although Paul is speaking directly to Israel, at the same time these same principles apply to all Believers. Redeemed Israel and Believers (Jew and gentile) essentially belong to the same group (spiritually speaking), have been delivered by the same Messiah, are under the same covenants, and are the fulfillment of the same prophecies. And Paul is going to go to some lengths to speak on this complex matter in chapters 9 – 11. It is complex enough that it is difficult for the many denominations of Believers to come to an agreement on the subject. I maintain that it is a lack of understanding of 1st century Judaism and Jewish culture that is the culprit. We're going to work to sort that out over the next several weeks.

Verse 32 seems to be Paul widening his scope back to including gentile Believers by saying: ^{CJB} **Romans 8:32 He who did not spare even his own Son, but gave him up on behalf of us all- is it possible that, having given us his Son, he would not give us everything else too?** By saying "us all", the indication is that he is no longer speaking mainly to his Jewish brothers and he makes it clear, therefore, by saying "us all" that regardless of racial or ethnic heritage, God giving up His only Son shows that His love extends to everyone and not just to Jews. Thus, reckons Paul, if God is willing to do all that, He's not going to suddenly throw in the towel and reverse course. He's not going to send His Son to the cross and then turn around and punish (meaning condemn) those who His Son died to save!

So the meaning of the statement of verse 35 that asks us who will separate us from the love of Christ; and then is followed with a list of hypothetical circumstances that theoretically could be the cause of separating Believers from Messiah's love.....trouble, hardship, persecution, hunger, poverty, danger and war.....is that while all these listed circumstances could certainly happen to a Believer, neither the Messiah nor The Father will pull back their love and cause the separation. Paul then quotes Scripture to support his doctrine. **"For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we are considered sheep to be slaughtered"**. This passage is from Psalm 44:23 and it is about Israel being persecuted by her enemies and exiled to the nations, yet remaining faithful to God's covenant under the harshest of circumstances. Thus the Psalm writer is appealing to God to come and deliver His people from their tribulation. This is to back up what he has just said about trouble, hardship, war, etc., of itself **not** being able to separate God from His chosen people. And since Believers have been included as among God's elect, then this is to say that hardships and persecutions are nothing new for those who love God and that we can not only withstand it when it happens, we should expect it TO happen. Paul does not own a pair of rose colored glasses.

Thus to end this long line of thought that begins with Romans 7:1 and concludes with Romans 8:39, Paul says that nothing dead or alive, not God's own loyal spiritual beings like Angels, nothing that currently exists nor will ever exist by any means, no type of wicked spiritual force or power that refuses to take their direction from God, and nothing that God will create by means of His own will, will be able to snatch us away from God's love, shown through His Messiah.

Paul is fully convinced that neither God nor any other thing whatsoever can stand between us and Him. But notice that all of these things that theoretically could, but won't be able, to separate us from God's love are external to us and out of our control. Also notice that never is there an implication that as Believers we have lost all freedom of our thoughts, our bodies, and our choices; that once saved we somehow are blocked by God from walking away from His love at our own choosing. In fact, in a dire warning some passages earlier, Paul says this: ***Romans 8:12-13 CJB*** ¹² ***So then, brothers, we don't owe a thing to our old nature that would require us to live according to our old nature.*** ¹³ ***For if you live according to your old nature, you will certainly die; but if, by the Spirit, you keep putting to death the practices of the body, you will live.***

We'll take up Romans chapter 9 next time.