

### THE BOOK OF ROMANS

#### Lesson 30, Chapter 12 continued

The final part of last week's lesson regarded gifts of specific aptitudes and abilities given to each Believer by God; these are better known in Christian circles as spiritual gifts. They were: prophecy, serving, teaching, counseling, giving, leading, and doing acts of mercy. No priority or preeminence seems to have been assigned to these by Paul. They had to be presented in some order or another and he says nothing about the first gift listed (prophecy) being greater than any of the following gifts, nor that the last gift listed (doing acts of mercy) is the least of them. If one gift was indeed greater or better than the others, then Paul's entire metaphorical soliloquy about parts of the body all being different yet needed for their own purposes, and his other thoughts about the equality between Jews and gentiles would be contradictory. So it seems to me that the spiritual gifts all have approximately equal value and importance in God's Kingdom so that no one should boast about which one they might have received. There is a hint of a hierarchy of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28, but I think Paul is simply numbering them and not listing them in a numerical pecking order. Beyond that, the lists from 1 Corinthians and Romans don't match.

Paul having spoken, now, about different gifting given to different people according to the Lord's will, what follows next beginning in verse 9 are the Apostle's instructions that apply universally to all Believers. Before we read this section of Romans chapter 12 I want to remind you that to the Jewish Rabbi Paul establishing these instructions for Believers must be looked at from the Jewish cultural perspective. That is, within the Jewish world these kinds of religious rulings are called **Halakhah** and within any community of Jewish people these rulings were the norm for establishing behavior and doctrine. What makes them unique in Romans 12 is that this was **Messianic Halakhah**; that is, religious rulings for followers of Yeshua. However lest we think that Paul's rulings were different from what was already being practiced in Jewish society, these rulings bear a striking resemblance to the manner, terminology, and in many cases the theology used by the Essenes in establishing the community rules for their Dead Sea sect of Judaism. So let's read starting in verse 9.

#### RE-READ ROMANS CHAPTER 12:9 – end

Paul's first general instructions concern love and hate. We're going to spend a few minutes with the subject of love and hate because it can sometimes be hard in this modern world (including within Christianity) to define these two terms due to what they have come to mean in the West as opposed to what they meant 2000 years ago in a Jewish Middle Eastern context. What ought to matter to us is what love and hate means from God's perspective. First and foremost love means a wholehearted acceptance and hate means a complete rejection. Thus as it relates to our relationship with God, to love Him is to fully accept Him and to hate Him is to firmly reject Him. To love what is good is to fully accept and internalize what is good. To hate what is good is to purposely and knowingly reject what is good. Second, love is complete devotion to a person, an ideal, a god or perhaps a way of life. Hate is a complete disregard and

aversion towards a person, an ideal, a god, or a way of life. But third, as biblically defined, love and hate intrinsically involve actions: outward behavior. And this may be the largest departure from how those two terms are thought of today whereby love and hate are seen as mostly products of emotion. While love and hate can certainly involve our emotions, biblically speaking love and hate are not the **names** of two of our emotions nor are love and hate primarily about emotion.

Because the Bible makes it clear that love and hate both emanate from the heart, then because of the modern **romantic** sense of the heart being the seat of our emotions (especially of love) then the knee-jerk reaction of Christians and secular people alike to the terms love and hate is to think of them as super-intense emotions. So for modern people to love is to “like” someone or something to an extreme level and to hate is to “dislike” someone or something to an equally extreme level. However as we’ve discussed innumerable times, when the Bible uses the term “heart” it means it as the seat of our will and our intellect; not of our emotions. In that era the kidneys, liver, and even stomach were seen as the inner sources of human emotions. To summarize: in Bible times the heart was NOT seen as the seat of our emotions, but rather as the seat of our intellect. Yes; back then it was assumed that the human heart organ was where our mental processes, our thinking, took place. They knew nothing of the brain as part of the thinking process. So the better way to perceive what the Bible means by “heart” (**lev** in Hebrew, **kardia** in Greek) is to substitute the word “mind”.

God tells us that it is our minds that give birth to love and hate, but He also tells us that our actions (our outward behaviors) are used to express love and hate. Thus when in Romans 12:9 Paul speaks about not letting our love be a mere outward show (not letting love be only insincere actions) instead of our behavior expressing our true inward mind, it is meant to connect nicely with what he has been teaching in previous chapters of Romans about following the Law of Moses in inward spirit and not only in an outward, mechanical following of religious instructions. I think it would be fair to say that Paul is telling Believers not to be hypocritical or phony.

Building upon what I explained about biblical love and hate ALWAYS involving action, Paul says to recoil from what is evil and instead to cling to what is good. Once again while certainly the instruction to recoil from the one and to cling to the other begins with our minds making a decision (and for Believers this decision should be based upon what the Lord has taught and commanded us) recoiling and clinging also characterizes our outward behaviors. So let me give you an example of this in our time; I’ll use something that can be most challenging to deal with. The matter of homosexuality is approached in a straightforward manner in both the Old and New Testaments and it is listed as among the worst sins possible; thus it is biblically immoral and even called abhorrent by God. Therefore what is to be the Christian reaction to this lifestyle that God calls evil? Paul says we are to recoil from evil. So what does that mean; are we merely to intellectually reject it and leave it at that? No. Does it mean being outwardly nasty and even abusive to the person who has embraced the sin of homosexuality? No; that violates the principle of loving your neighbor. Does that mean we should be accepting, excusing, and tolerant of the lifestyle of the person who has embraced homosexuality in a show of our love? No to that as well. To recoil means to reject any particular evil for ourselves; first mentally and then behaviorally. But it also means to never compromise and accept any

evil as merely reasonable personal choice for others. Unfortunately in some cases it can mean having as little to do as possible with the unrepentant person who has fully embraced that sin and its accompanying lifestyle.

Therefore we must not recoil in our conscience from something but at the same time cling to it in our behavior. Nor should we cling in our conscience to something but outwardly recoil against it. To try to do so reveals that we are self-deceived or it is the epitome of hypocrisy. That may not be a politically correct viewpoint today, but biblically that is how it is.

So what does it mean, biblically speaking, to cling to good? In our time, just as it meant in Paul's day, it means to constantly behave in a righteous manner that conforms to God's Torah: the Law of Moses. It is the Torah that sets down the standard of good for the entire world; so the good it mandates should be especially embraced by followers of Yeshua. We don't have the time to get into the deep discussion of exactly how to bring across the intent (the spirit) of each of the 613 laws to modern times.....some are much more difficult to do than others. But rather I mean to generalize (just as Paul is doing) to say that our outward behaviors need to stay closely tied to the biblical definitions of good that we mentally agree with, even if our friends or authorities think we are being too prudish, inflexible, or intellectually backward for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a fine thing to mentally agree with God's definitions of good and that these principles should be obeyed; it is another to act it out especially around others who don't walk with the Lord or don't take their faith as seriously as do you.

I'll give you another rather touchy example for our time to mull over; eating and diet. The Torah has clearly set aside certain edible items as for God's followers, and other edible items that are to be shunned by His followers. The permitted items are to be the sole food sources for Believers; the prohibited items are not to be considered food at all (even though technically they might be perfectly edible and perhaps even tasty and desirable). The list of prohibited and permissible items is not something that neither is difficult to bring across time and culture nor is difficult to follow. All of the edible items listed in Leviticus are generally available in nearly every culture of the world (certainly they are in the West). Therefore we must first mentally put ourselves subject to God's commandments regarding food and diet, and then we must put that decision into action. However if we are **not** convinced in our conscience about eating biblically Kosher (even though all Believers should be), then to eat Kosher anyway because our friends do so or so we can fit in with a certain religious group so that we can look good, means that we're doing it for the wrong reasons; we're neither clinging nor recoiling, we're being hypocritical. Spiritually speaking, we are trying to love and hate the same thing at the same time; the Bible calls this being double-minded. Let's move on from love and hate to Paul's next ruling.

Verse 10 is essentially Paul making a ruling based on his midrash (his interpretation) of the meaning of Leviticus 19:18.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Leviticus 19:18 *Don't take vengeance on or bear a grudge against any of your people; rather, love your neighbor as yourself; I am ADONAI.*** It's important to notice that this religious ruling that Paul makes for Believers to love your neighbor as yourself and to show honor to others is not a new Christian innovation; Paul is merely stating a fundamental

principle within mainstream Judaism of his day. The *Pirkei Avot*, which in English means Chapters of the Fathers, is a compilation of Hebrew ethical and moral teachings passed down to the Rabbis. In *Pirkei Avot* 2.10 we read this:

***R. Eliezer said: Let the honor of your friend be as dear to you as your own.....Who is he that is honored? He who honors his fellow man, as it is said: For them that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.***

What we just heard is basically a rabbinic way of pronouncing the Golden Rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Another ethical teaching Paul introduces to the Believers at Rome follows in verse 11: <sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 12:11 *Don't be lazy when hard work is needed, but serve the Lord with spiritual fervor.*** Clearly this verse is less about not being lazy at our jobs, and more about how zealously we serve in the Kingdom of God. And the idea is for Believers to not shun getting our hands dirty doing Kingdom work but to be eager participants. That is, don't leave everything to the other guy and especially the hard things or even the little things that may go largely unseen by others of the community. Even more we are to do whatever our task might be with the fire of the Holy Spirit burning in us as our motivation and as our guide.

Paul gives us this instruction in verse 12: <sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 12:12 *Rejoice in your hope, be patient in your troubles, and continue steadfastly in prayer.*** Yeshua made these two statements that no doubt Paul had in mind when he wrote those words. <sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 10:22 *Everyone will hate you because of me, but whoever holds out till the end will be preserved from harm.*** Christ also said: **John 15:18-19 CJB<sup>18</sup> *"If the world hates you, understand that it hated me first. <sup>19</sup> If you belonged to the world, the world would have loved its own. But because you do not belong to the world- on the contrary, I have picked you out of the world- therefore the world hates you.*** So Paul is telling Believers that we need to rejoice in hope....but a hope of what? Whenever Paul speaks of hope it is nearly always hope for resurrection from the dead. Believers receive this hope of personal resurrection because of our trust in Yeshua and His resurrection; so then it follows that we will be afflicted with hatred from the world because of the world's staunch hatred of Him. This source of hate from the world will come from two sources: individuals or governments. Paul uses the term "troubles" to describe this hateful opposition Believers will face. What is our solution? What should we do about this? Nobody wants to be hated for their faith; their hope. Should we protest in the streets? Should we try to overthrow our government and install a Christian one? Paul says our solution is to be steadfast in prayer so that we can rejoice in our hope at the same time we are patient in our troubles with the world. Let me be quick to comment as regards troubles aimed at Believers. In Paul's time there was no such thing as Democracy; there were only autocratic governments. So citizens had no choice about who ruled over them or what laws were enacted to control them. But in modern times, especially in the West, we have government leaders who, for the most part, are chosen by the people. So the context Paul is operating under is that all government actions against Believers are dictatorial, and therefore the dynamic is that Believers should not lead society in rebellion but rather instead should pray. This would apply somewhat differently when we live in a Democracy where there are legal and peaceful means to change government leaders and

policies.

Thus Paul's point is prayer instead of retaliation; pray instead of retaliating against individuals or rebelling against governments. Why pray instead of retaliate or rebel? Listen to this excerpt from the Testament of Benjamin. The Testament of Benjamin is taken from a Jewish work composed in the mid 100's A.D., and is part of a larger work called the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. I want to quote this because it helps to demonstrate the mindset of the traditional Jewish community in general during and following Paul's time. I want to keep highlighting that most of what Paul issues as **Halakhah**, a series of religious rulings for Believers, is little more than rephrasing what was already taught and practiced within mainstream Judaism in his day.....but of course within the context of the Gospel of Christ.

***“If anyone wantonly attacks a pious man, he repents since the pious shows mercy to the one who abused him, and maintains his silence. And if anyone betrays a righteous man, the righteous man prays. Even though for a brief time he may be humbled, later he will appear far more illustrious, as happened with Joseph my brother....”***

So here members of Jewish communities are being urged to pray for those who are oppressing them instead of retaliating against them; even going so far as to do good to their enemies. Remember: this work I'm quoting from is NOT a work of Believing Jews, but rather of non-Believing Jews. And yet look how close this comes to things that Christ said: <sup>CJB</sup>  
**Matthew 5:44 *But I tell you, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!***

After dealing with the spiritual side of tribulation against us from the world, in verse 13 Paul turns to the humanitarian side. For Jews, attending to the practical needs of those who form their community was itself seen as a biblical measure of righteousness. Paul demonstrated this in the Book of Acts when he went from synagogue to synagogue in the Diaspora collecting money to take with him to donate to the needy Believers in Jerusalem. And while we must never think that the only people Believers should help are a) other Believers, and b) those of our own community, it is the Believers of our community that are the top priority. Why is that? Because the world takes care of its own and Believers are no longer part of the world. The world does, and always will, far outnumber us demographically and outstrip us in resources. In Bible times the precise definition and boundaries of one's own community weren't exactly the same as they are today because social systems have changed and evolved. But notice that Paul demonstrated that regardless of which local Believers' community we might belong to we must always consider the Holy Land (Israel) as part of our community.....and especially the Messianic Jews living in the Holy Land who have need.

Yeshua said this: <sup>CJB</sup> **Luke 6:27 *Nevertheless, to you who are listening, what I say is this: "Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.....*** So in verse 14 Paul essentially reiterates this fundamental commandment that Christ gave to His disciples. While I'm not a fan of many of Calvin's doctrines, he does provide some sharp insight on parts of the New Testament and here I'd like to quote him because I think it precisely captures Paul's purpose in saying what he did.

***“Although there is hardly anyone who has made such advance in the law of the Lord***

***that he fulfills this precept (love your enemies), no one can boast that he is the child of God, or glory in the name of a Christian, who has not (at least) partially undertaken this course, and does not struggle daily to resist his (personal) will to do the opposite.”***

This is followed in verse 15 where Paul speaks of rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. This is Paul's way of saying that the true measure of caring and compassion for our fellow man (regardless of whom that may be) is to join in empathizing with that person's experiences in whatever way they might occur. Is this a new Christian edict? Once again, this is a fundamental principle within Jewish society in Paul's day. In Ecclesiastes 3 we read this:

***“A man should not rejoice when among people who weep or weep when among those who rejoice. He should not stay awake among people who sleep or sleep among those who are awake. He should not be standing when all others are sitting or sit when all others are standing. This is the general rule: A man should not deviate from the custom of his companions or from society.....”***

Another way of thinking about Paul's regulation is that we should respect, and give a fair hearing, to the views of others within the community to which we belong. Why? Because only then will we have any ground upon which we can create the kind of relationship whereupon we can lead them to the Lord. I've said to many well-meaning Believers who want to go to Israel with the grand vision that they are going to bring Jews to Christ: leave your Christian tracts at home and begin by creating an honest relationship of friendship and mutual respect. This will take time, perhaps years, and it must be sincere and without agenda or you will quickly be found out and all opportunity to speak about Yeshua will vanish. A 10-day Israel tour will not provide sufficient time to create that relationship. And it will almost certainly require you being as open to learning from them, and bending to their society and customs, as what you hope to show to them. And this is precisely what verse 16 tells us.

From there Paul moves on to yet another traditional Jewish maxim: don't repay evil with evil. In other words don't seek revenge for a wrong done to you because this violates the principle of loving your neighbor as yourself. Among the most pious of Jews, including the Essenes, the reason behind this regulation is that perhaps a merciful person who has been dealt an evil blow by someone will be able to lead the offender to behaving more righteously. Let's revisit the Testament of Benjamin. In chapter 4 we read this:

***“See then, my children, what is the goal of the good man. Be imitators of him in his goodness, because of his compassion, in order that you may wear crowns of glory. For a good man does not have a blind eye, but is merciful to all, even though they may be sinners. And even if persons plot against him for evil ends, by doing good this man conquers evil, being watched over by God. He loves those who wrong him as he loves his own life. If anyone glorifies him, he holds no envy.....If your mind is set towards good, even evil men will be at peace with you....”***

This sounds like something Yeshua himself could have said. Again I want to draw you back to a major point in this week's lesson: the principles Paul introduces in his letters that the

average Believer thinks are being newly formed by Paul's words and thus belong exclusively to Christianity and Messianic Judaism were neither new nor revolutionary as so much of the Christian world assumes. In fact we see a pattern emerge: Paul is essentially but reminding the Jews of the Diaspora (in this case Believing Jews in the city of Rome) of these long held bedrock principles of Judaism at the same moment he is introducing these same principles to new gentile Believers who, as former pagans, are likely hearing them for the first time. Truly, Christianity has a Hebrew heritage.

Next in verse 18 is one of Paul's more famous sayings, especially embraced by pacifists. <sup>CJB</sup> **Romans 12:18 *If possible, and to the extent that it depends on you, live in peace with all people.*** Let's begin by talking about what this verse does NOT say. It does NOT say that we are obligated to be at peace with all people. It also does NOT say that even though a person refuses to be at peace with you, as a Believer you must be at peace with them. And neither does it say that peace is entirely our responsibility. Rather there are two significant caveats surrounding the instruction to live in peace with all people. The first is "if it is possible", and the second is "to the extent that it depends on you". So as a Believer my desire ought to be for peace with all people and I should do every reasonable thing within my sphere of control to make that happen. I should try to see the other person's viewpoint; and I should not take retaliatory action merely because I've been offended or shamed. But this does not mean that if a person is holding a knife to my wife's throat that Paul has said that I must stay peaceful and allow that criminal to proceed without interference. It does not mean that when an aggressor nation threatens or attacks us that we don't defend ourselves and if we go to war that we should not play to win. Rather provided there is a way to make peace with another party who also seeks peace, without compromising our moral principles and our relationship with God, and without passively allowing ourselves to be taken over by a criminal or a tyrant, we are obligated to make every effort to effect peace to the point that our efforts are firmly rejected.

However, as says verse 19, that also means that even when we have been wronged in some way we should not seek revenge for the sake of revenge. This of course plays to the Jewish principle, and one that Christ reiterated, that we are to love our enemies with the hope that they will repent and turn to the God of Israel. And we can be assured that at some point, either in this life or the next one, God will exact a price for that wrongdoer's attack upon us. In fact God prefers that we leave such a matter of justice to Him. But do not misunderstand: criminal justice on earth administered by human governments is expected by God and that is one of the reasons He created nations and installed governments. Paul's statement more concerns unjust actions against us that, for any number of reasons, go unpunished.

We need to be aware of just how difficult of an injunction this was for Believers, Jew or gentile, in Paul's era. Avenging a family member or yourself was not only common practice it was assumed. In fact, because most of the world operated in a shame/honor society to some degree, to be wronged not only produced harm it also produced shame. And the only way to get rid of this shame was to get your honor back. And usually the only way to get your honor back was some sort of revenge upon the one who shamed you, which often involved killing them. So that you understand this better I'll expand just a bit more. Whether among Jewish society or Roman society there were strict civil laws and there were police forces, court

systems and systems of punishment. So murder, theft, and mayhem usually did not go unpunished. However certain crimes also produced shame upon the victim (rape for instance), and at other times non-criminal acts (like a male being slapped on the face as an insult) also produced shame. Thus the criminal acts could be handled by the criminal justice system, whether Jewish or Roman. However the criminal justice system had no capacity to solve an issue of loss of honor due to an insult; this, by custom, was left in the hands of the one who was shamed. Both Judaism and the Roman government actually established civil laws that tried to stamp out this practice of vengeance to restore honor; but honor killings were still common. In fact, in one of Jesus of Nazareth's most famous quotes we find Him teaching about what a victim of insult ought to do or not do about losing their honor.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Matthew 5:39** *But I tell you not to stand up against someone who does you wrong. On the contrary, if someone hits you on the right cheek, let him hit you on the left cheek too!*

This badly misunderstood verse has nothing to do with criminal activity. It is not a call to not defend yourself when being attacked, nor is it a call to allow a criminal to harm you and you refuse to prosecute. God's justice requires that we are to always administer justice according to divine regulations. Being struck on the cheek might be cause for assault and battery in the Western world, but it was not so (and still is not so) in the Middle Eastern world. Rather slapping someone on his face was a cultural act of shaming that person; it was very serious (although judicial authorities would have no involvement because no crime was involved). A slap on the face would almost certainly result in the person who got slapped seeking revenge on the one who slapped him, and the one who did the slapping would have expected it. Thus a blood feud could erupt that entangled the entire family and could go on for decades. The goal of the one whose cheek was slapped was to regain his lost honor and this was done at any cost up to and including murdering the offender. So Yeshua's only point was to tell those whose honor was taken from them by such a thing as having your face slapped was to NOT seek revenge. Instead, allow the offender to strike the other cheek as well because this issue of shame and honor was based strictly on manmade cultural customs and had no actual basis in God's moral or ethical laws. However the retaliation of the one who had his cheek slapped would nearly always involve his committing a criminal act that would violate God's laws in hopes of regaining his honor. Yeshua says that among those who follow Him, that should not occur.

Paul quotes first Deuteronomy 32:35 and then follows that up with Proverbs 25 verses 21 and 22; notice that the term "your enemy" is used. While we think of our enemy mostly in terms of war that is not how it was always thought of in ancient times. Your enemy was often a person you hated or who hated you for some breach of cultural protocol or some offense that had been committed. This only sometimes involved criminality; more often than not it involved an insult within the cultural shame/honor system of that society. This is why the final few words that read "You will heap fiery coals of shame upon his head" must be taken within the Jewish context; this is about shame and not criminal justice. Thus in the case of all that Paul has been addressing to close out this chapter, Paul has not been talking not so much about criminal activity but rather the cultural problem of shame and honor and how to restore lost honor. Paul's solution is to allow God to make the determination about what kind of revenge (if any)

ought to be exacted upon a person who caused you to lose your honor in the eyes of your peers.

And finally Paul sums up essentially the entire chapter by saying that we are not to be conquered by evil but rather we should conquer evil with good. The bottom line to this is that the best way to bring people into a relationship with Yeshua is through love, mutual respect, and to determine never to exact revenge from someone who has offended you. To be conquered by evil means for us to give in to our evil inclinations; this will result in our burning desire for revenge. Rather God's way to conquer both our evil inclination and doing evil in response to someone who has wronged us, is instead to respond with good. And whatever just punishment that ought to happen, but didn't for whatever reason, God will mete out according to His wrath....or perhaps, just as He has done for countless millions of us, with His mercy.

We'll begin Romans chapter 13 next time.