

A Fresh Look at the Bible

3rd January 2019

Romans 1-8 The sacrifice of Christ

Reading: Romans 8

Dear Friends

We recall from our talks on the book of the Acts of the Apostles, that the Apostle Paul carried out three missionary journeys, and it was towards the very end of the third missionary journey that he appeared to write this epistle, this letter to the Romans to prepare them for an anticipated fourth journey, which he wanted them to assist him with. However, this letter does not seem to be addressed to one specific ecclesia at Rome, maybe there was more than one, as it was a large and sprawling metropolis, but rather to all the saints, or sanctified, people separated by the call of the gospel within that city. There was at this time as we recall from our study of the book of the Acts a strong backlash from the Jews, who truly resented this Christian phenomena, it was bad enough contending with the Roman paganism, But they saw Christianity as an even greater threat, and we saw how much disruption they caused Paul and his companions as they taught and preached in the cities throughout the Roman provinces. Not only was this disruption on a practical level, but they sought to infiltrate the young Ecclesias with their false doctrine, teaching that only through the law of Moses and keeping the law could they be saved. This is why they had the label of Judaizers. This letter to the Romans is a response to this, and an explanation how the law of the Jews, the law of Moses had been superseded, replaced by something far superior, and we will see what exactly, as we move through the letter. So first Paul presents doctrine relating to salvation, then how the gospel relates to Israel, and then the gospel in regards to conduct. These practical aspects and issues regarding the nation of Israel are more for next week God willing. Paul begins describing himself as a bondservant of Jesus Christ, a slave actually as the Greek word was, he had placed himself voluntarily at the service of the Lord Jesus. This is the example to follow. No half-hearted measures or compromises, he describes himself as one sent, that is an apostle, entirely dedicated to the promotion of the gospel of God. This he states at the very beginning of his letter is based in the Old Testament *promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, 4 and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* Here in this introduction Paul begins immediately stating what the gospel is, and that it was this same gospel that they in Rome, like he Paul, they all were also sanctified, or made saints. They too had signed up as it were to be his slaves. He praises them, congratulates them for their good reputation and witness to those without, it seems they were becoming well known for their resoluteness, and faith, Paul really admired this and told them how much he prayed for them, explaining to them how much he wanted to come and see them, and share with them spiritual encouragement. In fact he never did get to see them in the way he envisaged, although he did end up in Rome, but that was on trial, and in prison, unable to interact and freely speak to the Roman members. However, his wish was mercifully granted because this letter to the Romans has stood the test of time, to be a wonderful dissertation on the gospel which would have greatly cheered them and fortified them against the persecutions they would have suffered. Paul was not afraid to come and see them despite the hazards, the stigma and ridicule the citizens of Rome would heap upon the followers of Christ. It is a lonely life you will lead if you follow the example of Paul. Nothing has really changed since then! So Paul declares in Romans 1; 16 words which form a key passage: 16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for*

the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." Not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. The followers of Christ are made to feel embarrassed, and shunned, and we must resist this, it really doesn't matter, it is the power of God unto salvation. Paul shows his boundless enthusiasm, and the word he uses for power, is where we get our words for dynamo, and dynamite. The gospel will blow the enemy away, do not worry about that, especially the one within. The righteousness of God is revealed says Paul, righteousness belongs to God, it is not man's invention, it is God's essential characteristic, but only appreciated by faith, Paul uses the expression from faith to faith, or out of faith towards faith, , as the Greek would read, explaining a progressively strengthening faith, and now Paul begins his stand against the Judaizers. He says, for it is written the just shall live by faith. It is this statement that he wants to expand and expound to the Roman believers, to give the necessary understanding against the envious Jewish infiltrators, who had already been taught this by the Prophet Habakkuk. For the words the Just shall live by faith are taken from Habakkuk 2:4. They were not Paul's words, but ones with which the Jews should have been familiar. The Prophet witnessed the wickedness and lawlessness of the nation of Israel, and as a nation they would perish, only individuals who showed godly attributes would be spared. And Paul now uses the same argument: No one is special, or has a right to salvation, even people who think that they have the truth, like the Jews did then, 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. He goes on to explain that the proof of creation shows man has no excuse not to reach out to God. Paul explains the condemnation which falls upon all men, because of basic selfishness, that is what sin is all about, worshipping the creature more than the Creator. So God sees man's ingratitude, and just lets him get on with it. It is worth noting the big list of condemnations that Paul presents in the end of chapter, we do not have time to look at them in depth, but would encourage you to check if you practise any of them, but note 1: 32 *who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.* So even if you think you are in the clear, and not guilty of any of them, but enjoy watching others, whether in films, / media/ comedies/ humour and so on then you are just as guilty! Think about it, and the implications. Wow. So Paul says with the self righteous particularly in mind: Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 *But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.* 3 *And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?* 4 *Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?* He shows the stupidity and idiocy of unbelievers, and lays down the cast iron reasoning, all mankind is in it together, some may be ready to point the finger and condemn, but all are guilty before God, all are culpable in some way. God is the ultimate judge. Paul has shown us then the unreasonable nature of man. Ready to accuse others, but excuse self. Now he shows by way of contrast the justice of God. Fair and just rewards: 7 *eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honour, and immortality;* 8 *but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath,* and note the key point in verse 11 *For there is no partiality with God.* He is no respecter of persons, unlike us, who can prefer favourites, and one above another. But God is not like that, and Paul proves it, God does not hold people responsible if there is no law. Transgression is only possible if there is a law. But those without the law, who are ignorant

of God's law will still perish as beasts, because of Adam's mortality inherited by all men. But those Jews who made such a boast of their law, the entitled ones, thought they were so special, promoting and forcing the law on others, yet they themselves would not keep it, but secretly or even openly disobeyed it, and did the opposite, in fact rather than being priests and a holy nation were turned now to being enemies of the truth. Driving people away. They made much of circumcision the outward sign of being Jewish insisting that it was necessary for salvation, but such a claim was hollow and without substance, and their ritualism was meaningless. He explained to the believers, who a true Jew was, in verse 29 of chapter 2: *29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.* So if the Jews were so bad, why did God choose them then, what was the point? What was it that was special about them? Paul explains that God originally entrusted them with the law of God. The rituals they had been given were designed to teach them powerful spiritual lessons. Instead of having to seek out the Truth, like the Gentiles, The Jews had it revealed to them, the difference between right and wrong plainly demonstrated by the law. Paul uses a debating style asking questions, 3:3 Is it God's fault then, that some of them did not believe, despite their privileges? Paul answers God forbid. Or at least that's what the KJV says. The Greek is *me genoito*, there is no word for God included at all, and the phrase simply means, absolutely not, , of course not, may it not be, or perish the thought, all with the same force. Paul uses this phrase about 60 times, and it isn't God forbid, and adding that in to scripture is not very accurate at all. Anyway, what follows is another Key passage: where Paul makes a statement and backs it up with an old Testament passage: Let God be true, but every man a liar, God is sovereign, , his word, His righteousness is final, and he backs it up with David's words from Psalm 51:4 *That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged.* This passage is instructive, because David the king said this from experience, because he murdered and committed adultery, and was now unable to be cleansed by the law, there was no sacrifice available to cover his sins under the law, but God chose to forgive him because David showed the correct mind of humble repentance. He acknowledges that God was right, and he David deserved to die. Thus, he justified God and not himself. Furthermore, Paul goes on in this third chapter to answer his critics who are slandering him, and twisting his teachings, that all are under sin, all are condemned, the law does not make someone right. Knowing to do good, and doing good is all very well, but it is only doing what was originally required anyway. Just keeping the law in itself does not make you good. It doesn't fix the original problem, there is nothing over and above. As Jesus succinctly stated we are all unprofitable servants. 3:23 *All have sinned and come short of the glory of God:* Having thus explained why man is rightly condemned, Jew as well as Gentile, Paul moves on in his exposition of the gospel. What can be done about this condemnation? This next part is the explanation of the term – justification. Verse 24: *being justified freely by His grace*, God's gift, at his discretion, under no obligation, unmerited favour. Grace is not earned, worked for, it is not deserved. It is God's kindness, but how can man be made justified through grace? Paul the Apostle under Divine inspiration continues: *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, redemption, or buying back, the price paid in the person of Jesus Christ. How? Verse 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood... Propitiation is an unusual word, we don't often hear it much today, but in the Greek it is *hilesterion*, and the equivalent word in Hebrew translates as mercy seat! It was the mercy seat where the blood of an animal was offered in a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ where all the sins of the nation could be atoned for and forgiven. This is what the Apostle is referring to, that God will pass over sins that are past, he will forgive the sins we have committed in the past, if we believe, through faith. This is how God demonstrates his righteousness, in his

forbearance and grace. He is the one who is just, and fair. He is the one who justifies, makes right those who believe in Him. In the 4th chapter of Romans Paul explains more of this doctrine of justification, showing it is well and truly rooted in the Old Testament, and he uses the well-known examples of Abraham and David, though Abraham to a greater degree: No Jew could possibly ignore these examples. Verse 1: *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?* Abraham did many great works, and could have used his own works to think himself not such a bad chap, but “pertaining to the flesh” The Jews claimed Abraham as their father, and made a big thing out of it, we have Abraham to our Father, they proudly boasted to Jesus in John 8:39, but as far as Abraham was concerned he found nothing to boast of, because he knew his own weakness. Paul ignored the claims of Judaism which he knew very well indeed, being a Pharisee brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and instead says verse 3 what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. It was not Abrahams works which marked him put to God, but his implicit trust. It was not blind faith, but he was persuaded and fully confident that God could deliver what he had promised. Somehow. Paul selected Abraham as a good example because he was given the promises long before the giving of the Mosaic law, proving that it cannot be the law which justifies. But now he refers to another man who was under the Mosaic law, David, in verse 6 *Even as David also describes the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputes or accounts righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.* Paul chooses David because he also was outside the law in another sense. He committed a sin which had no atoning sacrifice under the law. Adultery and murder for example were punishable by death. Yet he was forgiven – and justified despite this. So the Jews would argue that David was forgiven because he was a Jew, and had flowed the necessary rituals, such as circumcision, and thus a son of the promises. But Paul says such reasoning was nonsense, because Abraham was given the promise that he would be the father of all that believed before the commandment of circumcision, and he taught that in fact Abraham was already circumcised in his mind, because he decided to dedicate his whole life to serving God. So Paul presents the logic. If it is by law you are heirs of the promise, then there is no place for faith, because faith becomes irrelevant, nothing to believe or hope in, nothing to wait for, because we cannot be one of the chosen ones, and moreover, laws always get broken. So what hope is there? No, Paul shows the emptiness of the Jews claims, and shows that Abrahams example is inspiring to all those who likewise believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Faith and grace justifies, not works. There is nothing automatic about it all. Now Paul shows in chapter 5 the great benefits which can be derived from justification by faith. That it gives space for the spiritual man to develop. If justification was by works only, it would render mankind mechanical, ritualised, automated robotic and loveless. But by faith, through grace, it gives people an inner peace knowing a unity with God is possible, and in the realisation that the grace of God has no bounds or limits, it gives rejoicing and hope, that through a process of development of growth, man through understanding and belief appreciates the goodness and mercy of God *And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts* So although our faith will be put to the test as faithful Abrahams, we need not be fearful or afraid of such trials. If the love of God is in our hearts, motivating our thoughts and actions, we can rest confident in or faith waiting patiently in hope of the glory of God. In the next verses Paul explains how God works in the life of a believer to bring about his total justification to obtain reconciliation, or the at-one-ment with God. In this fifth chapter we see the believer manifesting his faith, appreciating the grace

of God, rejoicing and confident in hope of the glory of immortality, and thus bearing up under trials, and patiently enduring them through this one true faith. This hope inspires him, mentally and spiritually strengthening him in the realisation of his status as Son or daughter of God, because he through faith is fully reconciled to his Creator through the sacrificial death of the risen Christ. The key passage in this chapter is in verse 12: *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:* All then, deserve the just deserts, of death. Then Paul uses personification comparing sin to a king, a great tyrant from which there is seemingly no escape. But in everything which this king seems to control his followers, because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, because of the goodness and righteousness of God which knows no bounds, the reign of grace is far more powerful, and defeats the reign of sin every time. Christ fixed the sin of Adam as it were. He repaired the breach. For example: 17 *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)* 19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.* 21 *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness* Paul having then looked so far in this letter at the condemnation of all man, and then at the character of God, and the need for justification, not by works but by faith, he next turns his attention to teaching the doctrine of sanctification. Being justified by faith is all very well, being made right is not a static state. Time and life does not stand still. There is no such thing as unconditional salvation. Trials continue to test and shape us examine our reactions. Faith in Christ cannot be a theory, but it must be a living faith, faith must be revealed in a sanctified life, one which is set apart. He begins this chapter in his by now familiar question and answer style: What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? If it is all about showing the world how great God's grace is, the why not continue being a bad person? Absolutely not! How can this be possible? Paul continues his handy literary device of personification. If we are happy serving sin, as an evil tyrannical king, then expect the consequences, but if instead by way of escape you are rescued and accept salvation by serving the King of righteousness, then to continue justified, and made right you have to continue under the new rules. 16 *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.* So if you continue in sin, you are going back to swerving the old master. The wages of the old master, that is sin, Paul says is death. But the gift of God, not wages note, is eternal life. It is not an exact parallel we can see. The wages of sin is death, because it is a just reward. However, serving God, we do not deserve wages, because we are unworthy of them, instead we receive a gift, through grace. This is made possible Paul explains because believers are separated, they start a new life, though faith, not blind faith mind, but by following as Abraham did the life God has set before them. That is the life of Christ. This begins by baptism, into his death. Being buried. Like Jesus did, putting to death the past life, leaving it behind. There can be no going back. This is a symbol only, because in reality the true believer is actually killing the sinful reactions by copying Jesus reactions. That is how the past life is left behind. So as Jesus was raised from the dead, so the believer also walks in a new way of life. So as Jesus crucified sin, so should the believer, carry their own cross. This being the case it is impossible to carry on sinning that grace can abound. It is a contradiction, the believer now serves King Jesus, and not King sin, so why should he want to serve the old way of life? Is he sanctified or not? Is he really a believer if he wants to continue in sin? No the true way to show how grace abounds, and to reflect the love and mercy of God is most certainly not to continuous in sin, but to continue in the new way of life, abstaining from sin as much as possible, and living in faith as

Abraham. Next Paul uses the example of marriage to teach. We must remember that Paul is answering critics who were slanderously misquoting him, and seeking to undermine the newly formed ecclesias. His teaching is therefore often as a result of their accusations, but nevertheless serve very much as ways to help us understand the salvation that God is holding out to us as Gentiles. He is aware of the Jews who claim that those born under the constitution of Jewish law are bound to keep the law. In some respects that is true, because we have to keep the law of the land until such time as it conflicts with the law of Christ. But those Jews who wished to convert to become followers of Christ, and most certainly those who are Gentiles, are not obliged to keep the law, the old law of Moses, as a new constitution has been established which is far superior. Moreover, Paul explains uses the legal situation of a husband and wife, that a wife is only bound in matrimony to a husband all the time he is alive. As soon as he is dead, she is no longer married, but a single and free to marry someone else. She is free from the law of adultery, because she is no longer under that binding law, because her old husband is dead. (By the way Paul is incidentally expressly teaching here the doctrine of one man, one woman for life) Now says Paul, in easy to understand comparisons, in chapter 7:4 believers become dead to the law, because they have been buried by baptism into the death of Christ, and being risen out of the water are dead to the old law, or constitution of the world, no longer wedded to the laws of sin and death, of hopelessness and boasting of the flesh. That partnership has now finished. Instead believers become married to another, betrothed to Christ, freer, happier, more fulfilling marriage, which will have fruit unto God. Moving on from this analogy Paul anticipates an obvious question. Is the old law useless? Is the law itself sinful? Verse 7: Absolutely not. Paul now connects with the earlier points he made in chapter 3 and 4. The law was useful because it helped define sin. *Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.* The law performed a valuable service in revealing the true nature of the believer's former marriage to the flesh and directs us to the far greater union in Christ. It is not the law which can be blamed. The law, or the commandment as Paul calls it here six times in six verses, that is the whole law, is the limits that God has placed to control the conduct of man. It is the fault of the lusts, desire to throw off any restraint, that rebels against the law that is at fault. It is our very own love of disobedience and lack of self-control that is what we are married to, or what we are servants to, and it is that which kills us, as Paul admits himself 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. He concludes emphatically, that no the law is not useless, it is not sin. That law is wholesome and necessary of course it is: 12 Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Paul then in writing to the Romans shows just how he is one of them, fighting with them all against the tyranny of sin, even though he is in the spirit married, having repudiated the former life of sin, he still finds himself subject to its weaknesses. It a beautiful and delightfully personal section which we can all identify with he explains this struggle within. The battle between two wills. Two powers exist within him. The flesh and the spirit. The flesh still bound by its mortality is subject to bad thoughts, and weak conduct, sin. But the new man is that of the spirit, being the life of Christ, is now also within him. When he wants to do good, which he has learned by the spirit from the Word, he finds it isn't that simple. The fleshly will within distracts him, and throws a spanner in the works, disrupting just like the Judaizers did to the new Ecclesias. Instead he has to fight this impulse, and just as it seems good has the upper hand, he finds himself in captivity again to king sin. This back and forth mental combat is exhausting and so easily he could leave it and abandon the new life, but yet the more powerful pull of the spirit, his conscience, verse 22 *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:* hence the cry with which all believers must be so familiar 24 *O wretched man that I*

am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. Paul shows that though all man is rightly condemned, and all mankind is under the power of King sin, that power has been broken. Not by keeping the law, because then flesh would still boast, and sin would be uncondemned, but instead by justification through grace, and how this is possible, is because the power of king sin has been broken by the singular achievement of Jesus Christ, as he did no sin, and never let it reign in his body, but condemned sin, and justified God, and in so doing was made victorious over sin, and over death. So we too can thank God. It is through Jesus Christ and his sacrifice, that being made right with God is possible. A new law is present, that of the Spirit of life, of love in Christ. If that Spirit is not present, the spirit which Christ showed, that of obedience, subjection, submission, kindness, love, mercy, we all know them, don't we? Well if this Spirit is not in the believer, then he is a fake. Verse 9: *Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* How did Jesus have this Spirit? We all know the Spirit is the ruach, the pneuma, the breath of God, it is His Word. Everything Paul is writing is the Spirit of Christ, it is the Word,. If that word should dwell in us, it is by reading and understanding, and reading again. If we don't read, we can't have the Spirit of Christ, and we are fakes. A struggle is one thing. But ignoring the grace that is held out is quite another. God has shown utter compassion. Paul points out God is a Father, he cares deeply. Through baptism, the believer does more than start a new life. He is not anonymous, he has a new name, the name of Christ. Part of a Divine family. He has been adopted, verse 15, can call God, Abba, or Hebrew equivalent Daddy, a term of endearment, reliance, love dependence, closeness. As part of the family, sons and daughter, children heirs of the same promises of faithful Abraham, joint heirs with Christ. The rules of the family apply, as adopted children, believers are subject to the new house rules, and family get together, and above all to the Head of the house. This is not irksome, a negligible sacrifice, compared with what Christ has done on our behalf, and negligible compared to the bondage we were subject to under King sin, and compared to that life in Christ is glorious liberty, free, free from sin, because faith can be counted to us for righteousness, we are no longer judged merely by our failure of the law, but instead we live in hope of redemption, in the firm conviction that as we have been spiritually released from the effects of sin, we will also in the body, physically be released from death. In this battle. In this hope, in this faith, like David, Like Abraham,. And as Paul has shown us, like Paul, we are not alone in our weakness. The believing Christian can rest assured that God is aware of all our pressures and pain and all our prayers. 26 *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* This is not referring to the Holy Spirit gift of power, but the power of the Word in the life. That of ourselves we cannot find the answer to the difficulties and struggles that assail us, the reading of the Word, strengthens the spiritual man, and creates a holy mind, able to receive the wisdom of the Word in action, and more than this, he that searches the hearts, Christ who knows what is in man, he is our representative, who has gone before (verse 27) he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And furthermore, in another Key passage, Paul declares 28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Paul touches here upon another important doctrine, that of predestination. God who knows all things from the beginning, in his grace has given life to all men, whether they deserve it or not, but knows them that are his, before they are even born, and uses providence to provide them the best possible environment to develop the character befitting to be a son of God. Thus the call of the gospel, the calling, is followed by being justified by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, being made right again. We must

not squander the call of God, or tempt him, no one is too unworthy, everyone is here because of the will of God. Paul has shown us all, that if we believe, show faith that God really does care, let him into our lives. Verse 31: **1 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?** 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Paul has in a logical step by step answered his critics, and slanderers, strengthened the Romans, opened our understanding, shown why we are rightly condemned, how we can be justified. Not through anything we can do, we can never be good enough by our deeds, but by the blood of Jesus Christ, who did no sin, can we be made right, and reconciled, and set apart, sanctified. Once set apart, we remain as faithful believers, and nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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