

The Gospel According to Rocky Balboa: Are You Strong Enough to Get Back Up?

The Bible is filled with many verses that become very familiar to believers in Messiah. These verses can become our go-to verses whenever we have a need, be it spiritual or physical. Unfortunately, many of these verses are quoted completely out of the context in which they were first written. One of these familiar verses is found in Romans 8:1 (TLV), where Paul writes: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah *Yeshua*."

This verse is often quoted by teachers who are telling those they are teaching that once a person becomes a believer in *Yeshua*, condemnation should no longer be a part of their life. They will often even condemn those who feel condemnation because they feel condemned.

The problem with this interpretation of this verse is that in order to make it mean that no believer should ever encounter feelings of condemnation, one has to do two things. First, forget that the verse begins with the word "therefore," and second, forget that Romans 8 is longer than one verse.

Let's begin with the first problem: the word "therefore." I once heard a teacher say, "Whenever we see the word 'therefore,' we must find out what it is there for." The word "therefore" is used to connect previous information in the text to a statement that is now being made. In other words, it is impossible to understand what Paul is trying to relate in Chapter 8 verse 1, unless you first read what he wrote in Chapter 7. So, let's look back to the last few verses of Romans 7 to acquire the context and see if it changes our understanding of Romans 8:1.

“For I delight in the *Torah* of God with respect to the inner man, but I see a different law in my body parts, battling against the law of my mind and bringing me into bondage under the law of sin which is in my body parts. Miserable man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—it is through Messiah *Yeshua* our Lord! So then, with my mind I myself serve the *Torah* of God; but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin” (Rom. 7:22-25).

These powerful words written by Paul describe the battle he fights as a believer in *Yeshua*. His inner man delights in the *Torah* of G-D, while at the same time, his mind and flesh are under bondage to the law of sin. In other words, Paul was fighting back then the same battle we fight today: the battle between the inner man, also known as the Spirit and the mind and body. Today, we would say this battle is between G-D’s Spirit, which dwells within us, and our sinful desires. Or we might say the battle between our old man and our new man.

It is after Paul describes this battle that he cries out, “Miserable man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (v. 24) a question that Paul answers by saying “Thanks be to God—it is through Messiah *Yeshua* our Lord!” (v. 25).

It is because Paul understood that his fight against his flesh was a battle he would continue to fight every day of his life, but because of his faith in *Yeshua* and the power of the infilling of the Holy Spirit, he would ultimately win the battle.

Paul’s words were not intended as a cop-out of lazy faith, which removes all responsibility from the believer to fight the good fight and finish their course. Not at all! Paul wrote the words to assure believers that as long as they continued in their faith fighting the battle between their human desires and the desires of their new man, they should never allow the enemy to condemn them for their failures and defeats because, while they might at times lose battles, they would, through

Messiah Yeshua, win their war.

Paul's words are really a pep talk between a veteran warrior and those he is preparing for battle. They remind me a lot of the words Rocky Balboa gives to his son in the movie "Rocky 6." The truth is when I first heard Rocky's short speech to his son, I wondered if the writer of the movie had Paul's word from Romans in mind when he wrote the script. Below are the words from Rocky's pep talk.

"Let me tell you something you already know. The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are. It will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how."

Rocky was telling his son the same thing that Paul was telling the Roman believers, and even you and I today. You and I are in a fight every day, and as long as we continue to fight and continue to get back up every time we are knocked down, we have no need to ever feel condemned as long as we keep moving forward. That's why Yeshua spoke the words we read in Matthew 24:13: "But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

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