

## 10A 2023

What does it mean when Paul says to the people of Rome that we can be free from the law of sin and death?

He explains that those who need the law are “living according to the flesh” whereas the law is already fulfilled in those who walk “according to the Spirit.”

That just makes it more confusing for us because Paul’s distinction between Spirit and flesh does not fit with our popular understanding of the human being, which I would argue is deeply influenced by Freud.

Whether we realize it or not, when we talk about the subconscious and the ego, when we discuss desire and its suppression, we are invoking Freud’s understanding of the mind, and the way we tell the story determines the outcome, so let’s look at Freud.

Freud divided the mind into the id, the ego, and the superego.

The id refers to unconscious drives.

It is the pleasure seeking part of us, which in Freud is mainly sex.

The ego, on the other hand, is our conscious self, made up of thoughts, memories, and perceptions.

Lastly, the superego seeks to direct or even coerce the id into socially acceptable behavior.

When we think, “It’s so hot, I want to take all my clothes off,” the id steps in and says  
no.

In Freud’s theory of the mind, a kind of Victorian morality is assumed.

Our mind is described as being locked in a permanent struggle against itself.

It must strive to keep itself in check based on approved social mores.

Our id, in other words, would drive us to do things deemed shameful by our society if  
only our superego allowed it, so our ego feels threatened by part of ourselves,  
which results in guilt and shame.

Guilt and shame thus are baked in, especially when it comes to sexual issues, yet this is  
the model we tend to assume, dare I say, unconsciously?

It is the model that informs our daily discourse, our thoughts about ourselves.

I do not think when we get to the gates of heaven, God is going to say to us, “You were a  
compassionate and generous person, but remember that sexual thing you did when  
you were 25? Yeah. You can’t come in here.”

Now when we lie or cheat to get sex, that is a different issue.

Notice also that, for Freud, all of this occurs in our own skull, so to speak.

Our only connection to the minds of others for Freud is through observation.

Carl Jung told a different story, but his views did not sink into the popular  
consciousness.

For Jung, there are also three parts—an ego, a personal unconscious, and a collective unconscious.

The ego is our *conscious* selves.

The personal unconscious is that of which we are *unaware*, and can include individual memories of which we are not conscious.

Finally, the *collective* unconscious holds our memories as a species.

It contains knowledge with which we are born.

Love at first sight is a result of the collective unconscious at work.

For Jung, the unconscious is not just things repressed out of fear and shame, as it is in Freud—the results of a struggle between two parts of ourselves—but can be simply memories that have slipped from consciousness (but later might be recalled) and things that we share as a species of which we are not consciously aware.

Rather than a struggle against itself, Jung sees the goal of our mind to be to recognize and affirm itself both in its individuality and also as part of something larger.

Then there is the Christian view of the mind, which is closer to Jung.

Rather than say that there is a repository of something in us like Jung's collective unconscious, we might say instead that our consciousness is actually *connected*, to some extent.

We get a glimpse of that connection, for example, when we sense what someone else is thinking.

A Christian understanding of the mind might say, therefore, that there is an ego, which is our conscious selves composed of thoughts and perceptions, conscious needs, desires, and memories.

There is also our unconscious self, composed of needs, desires, and memories that we have repressed or forgotten and of things that were there all along, but have not yet been brought to the light of awareness.

And finally there is the Great Consciousness, of which we are all a part.

We are, after all, made out of God.

This helps us to understand Paul's terms.

The *flesh* is the more independent aspect of the self.

The ego can either focus primarily on the independent self to the exclusion of the bigger connection, or on the Great Consciousness (Paul's *Spirit*), in which we all share and from which we all spring.

When we turn our ego more exclusively towards the independent self, we are ignoring that aspect of ourselves that is part of the Great Consciousness, shared by all.

At such times, we become selfish, greedy, lazy, proud, etc.

If we focused only on the Spirit, on the other hand, we would not survive.

We need food, clothing, shelter, and beauty.

We need both sides, in other words, to bring about wholeness.

I would say that Paul is a little harsh on the things of the flesh.

You will notice that, unlike Freud's view of the mind, there is no innate conflict.

There is no constant battle or Victorian standoff.

Nothing in us is inherently evil.

It just depends upon how we apply it.

Guilt and shame arise only when we ignore part of reality, when we refuse to notice

what is before us and attend exclusively to our more independent self.

Shaming drives us inward, in other words, away from the Great Consciousness, and

allows others to manipulate us.

We need to free ourselves from these repressed aspects of ourselves that result from

others' shaming us about our innate aspects (aggression, anger, sexuality, etc.) that

are fine as long as they are guided by an awareness of how we fit into the Great

Consciousness in which we all share.

(Someone has made us think, in other words, that the Great Consciousness categorically

disapproves of these things in an attempt to manipulate us, and this is not a true

representation of the Great Consciousness.)

I can go my own way, as it were, and ignore how I affect you, or I can be aware that we are all ultimately a part of one thing and all affect one another.

My thoughts affect your thoughts.

My desires affect your desires, and vice versa.

The more I blind myself to the Great Consciousness and focus solely on the most independent aspect of me (as we are led to do by those who would control us), the more I act out of greed, pride, etc. and I need the law to teach me the errors of my ways.

The more I allow myself to be aware of the Great Consciousness of which we are all a part, what Paul calls the Spirit, on the other hand, the less we need the law.

As Paul says, “To set the mind on the flesh is death,” because it cuts us off from the very source of everything, “but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace,” because it brings us into harmony with the whole.

We undermine ourselves when we carry Freud’s model in our heads.

We imagine that God is outside of us telling us that we are bad, particularly in terms of sex, thus causing us to feel guilt and shame, which prevents us from loving ourselves, and this, in turn, prevents us from loving our neighbors.

Those people who seek perfection in themselves and desire it in others are unaware that we are incomplete by our very nature, a part of something larger.

The spark plug needs the piston needs the camshaft, etc.

None of us can do it all, and it is beautiful when it works in harmony.

Those people who are blind to this have cut themselves off from the source of life  
(which is why Paul speaks of death) and seek to replace it with power, escapes,  
wealth, and anything else that makes them feel superior or further encourages  
their blindness to the Great Consciousness.

With the Christian understanding, life is no longer about being better than, but about  
*being a part of.*

It is not about being good enough for God, but about feeling secure enough to  
participate.

No longer are we to feel shame because of who we are.

There is no part of us that is inherently evil.

Evil comes from blindness alone.

We commit evil when we think that we are utterly independent.

Psychopaths, for example, are those who have only a tenuous sense of that connection.

There are ways for them to contribute, as well, and eventually, maybe in the next life,  
they will continue to develop that awareness of the Great Consciousness.

We can see what a profound sin it is to make someone feel that he or she is not a part of  
the rest of us, to exclude someone for not being good enough.

Being good is just a matter of being a part of.

Now it should make more sense when Paul says that we can be free from the law of sin and death.

Those who need the law, Paul explains, are “living according to the flesh.”

The law is already fulfilled, on the other hand, in those who walk according to the Spirit.

I hope this will help you free yourselves from Freud and from any guilt or shame that might have been engendered by the story as he told it and by those who would control you.

I hope, in other words, that it will help to free you to be, just as you are, *a part of* and to discover even more about who that is.