**READING PAUL’S MAIL TO THE ROMANS: PART 2**

**Chapters 8-16**

Welcome back aboard our circumnavigation of the entire Bible. Like early explorers who ventured into uncharted seas, we’re likely to encounter conditions when:

• we’re “socked in” and wonder why we ventured out here “in the deep”

• or we’re lulled into a glassy-eyed stupor and wonder how we’ll stay awake for the next hour

• or we’re rocked by storms of doubt, guilt or a queasy feeling that something’s not right

• or we’re actually enjoying the voyage, curious about the ports of call and, above all, our final destination

Just as ancient mariners used the stars to stay on course, we’ll need a trusty, seaworthy sextant.

The Bible is divided into Old and New Testaments -- 66 books. The OT’s 39 and the NT’s 27 were written by some 35 people. With resumés ranging from shepherd to king, each man passionately believed in God, despite his own personal sins. Each drew his inspiration and input from God so that today, millennia later, you and I can actually know what’s on God’s mind.

The OT was written over a period of 1,000 years and contains history, laws, poetry, philosophy and prophecy. The NT took about 50 years to write its pages of history, doctrine and prophecy.

With all its diversity, it has one consistent theme: God created and loves sinful man, and has provided an uncomplicated, yet uncompromising door through which we may receive God’s full forgiveness and be assured of living with Him forever after death.

The OT is the source book of Judaism, and the entire Bible is the operating manual for those who follow Jesus Christ.

By studying the Bible we can discover who God is, who we are and why we’re here. This is the global positioning system needed to make sense of our past, present and future. It leads us to True North. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to my Father except through me.” And “You will know the Truth, and the Truth will liberate you.”

**New Testament**

The first four books of the Bible’s “back nine” are known by their authors’ names: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These contemporaries of Christ each documented Jesus’ life on earth with a slightly different twist.

Matthew was a tax collector, not the H.R. Block kind. He was a shakedown artist who conned as much as he could out of his taxpayer-victim, then wired some to Rome and kept the rest. From slimeball to full-time student of Christ, Matthew wrote his book about “Christ the **King**.”

Mark was born into money and later traveled with Paul, the first Christian missionary. He wrote about “Christ the **Servant**.”

Luke, the NT’s only Gentile author, was a physician who wrote of “Christ the **Son of Man**.:

John left commercial fishing to become Christ’s closest protege’, writing about “ Christ the **Son of God**.”

These four “gospels” cover the 33 years Christ lived on earth, with details about His family tree, birth, life, teachings, miracles, death, resurrection and return to heaven.

For an encore, Luke writes Acts, an upclose view of how Christ’s followers rallied together after His death and resurrection, founding what we know today as the Christian faith.

**Saul? Paul? Who *is* this guy anyway?**

Today we wrap up the book of Romans, the next book after Acts. It’s written by Paul whose title is “apostle,” Greek for “messenger.” To be an apostle, you had to jump through four hoops:

• You had to have personally seen Jesus walking around after His resurrection.

• You had to have been appointed to the office of apostle by Christ Himself.

• Infallibly inspired by God, your speaking and writing had to be error-free.

• And you had to, through God’s power, perform miracles.

Thus, the Apostles Alumni Club can meet in a Yugo.

Paul was born, about the same time as Jesus, into a Hebrew family in Tarsus in Cilicia, a Roman territory in today’s Turkey. Being Jewish *and* a Roman citizen afforded him privileges and access throughout the Roman Empire.

He took his formal rabbinical training in Jerusalem from the celebrated teacher Gamaliel. Saul studied both Greek and Jewish culture and tradition.

Although he swung his pen like Jr. does a bat, apparently he was a bit scrawny. But to have survived long distance, primitive travel, he must’ve been tough.

Saul had a dramatic conversion (Acts 9) from militant Judaism en route to Damascus, Syria where he intended to continue beating up Christians. He later refers to himself as “the chief of sinners” -- an admission absent from today’s political lexicon.

On the Damascus road Saul suddenly realizes his sworn enemy is really the Son of God. Having heard Stephen’s bold speech (Acts 7) before the Jewish high council, just before Stephen was stoned as the first Christian martyr, Saul now knows Jesus truly is the Messiah whom Jewish prophets had predicted for centuries.

This Messiah had been rejected by His own people, executed like a thug; yet He returned from the grave, a fact documented by historians and more than 500 eyewitnesses.

That validates for Saul that Christ had indeed died for the sins of the world, literally purchasing God’s forgiveness, as a sacrifice, for all of us. Sin had once and for all been erased from our personal charts. All that remained was for each of us to simply *believe* that, to commit our lives to God who wants us to be in His forever family.

God changed Saul’s name to Paul and gave him the mission of taking this “Good News” (the gospel) to the Gentile world of his day.

Someone said turning to Christ is like attending a play. When you enter the theater, you come intentionally, not under duress. Perhaps you’re slightly familiar with the plot, playwright, cast and reviews.

During the play you’re intensely following the story lines, trying to grasp the message of the script. Obviously, you didn’t come to sleep through the entire evening and have someone summarize the play for you as you leave the theater.

Then why do some people “sleep” through life, opting to procrastinate -- or choosing not to bother -- when it comes to figuring out who the Author of life is, how we’re supposed to respond to Him, and what the meaning of our existence is.

If it’s a choice between trusting our own smarts and pluck to get us into heaven -- *or* trusting the God who made us......

• What have you got to lose by *not* turning your life over to Christ?

• Is there any reason you shouldn’t do it today?

• If so, then what more does God need to do to convince you to accept His free gift of forgiveness?

Paul’s letter to the Christians in Rome has been called one of the most profound, most enlightening books in all literature. More than any other, it deals with big stuff -- who God is, our sin, how the two of us can get together, and how a person lives this out in a practical way. Not exactly the Jerry Springer Show.

The Bible sees history as cubicled into religious eras. Most followers of Christ believe the “era of grace” has been in effect from shortly after Christ returned to heaven ( “the ascension”) until the moment when Christ returns to take His followers with Him to heaven ( “the rapture”). Paul, it’s said, is God’s chief voice for this age of grace.

Paul believes God created a perfect world, placing our first-parents Adam and Eve in it to live a sinless life. God’s only caveat to this naked pair was “Don’t eat fruit from this one tree.” Why He placed any “off limits” tripwires in the Garden of Eden, we don’t know. Make a note of it, and we’ll ask Him later.

In Genesis we see that Eve took Satan’s bait, ate the tainted fruit and convinced her Bart Simpson to eat it too. That act has been called “original sin.”

At this point death entered the world. Instantly, people began to die instead of face the prospect of living forever in human form. Pain in childbirth was introduced, creating several scenes for “ER.” That 4-letter word “work” popped up. Prior to SIN, Adam and Eve led the Club Med life of lottery winners.

Over the next 4,000 years God introduces ways to offer man temporary forgiveness of sin -- things like blood sacrifices. God gives Moses the Ten Commandments to demonstrate that it’s impossible to meet His lofty standards. In fact, apart from *being* God yourself, or some other supernatural deal, a person can’t measure up to God’s definition of perfection. Since God doesn’t associate with sin, humans could never gain back the level of fellowship God had enjoyed with Adam and Eve B.S. (before sin). That is, until God, like Ford, had a better idea.

“What if,” He mused, “I dispatched my only Son to leave heaven for a few years and be transplanted to earth. Since this was pre- “Touched By An Angel,” God was forced to do it the old-fashioned way, i.e., a virgin birth!

Along comes Jesus, born into a carpenter’s home in the Palestinian village of Nazareth, on the main road between Egypt and Asia. It was a seedy, rude, immoral, culturally-deprived town -- similar to the way “Almost Live” speaks of Renton.

Jesus grows up obscurely, learning His earth-dad’s trade, playing with his siblings, studying with the rabbis at the temple. (Now *there’s* a picture, i.e., the Son of God, a member of the Trinity, enrolled in Sabbath classes. Who’s gonna flunk *Him*!?)

At 30 this poor man’s Bob Vila comes “out,” begins turning water into wine, healing people, raising the dead, walking on water, teaching the crowds who followed Him (and who *wouldn’t* follow an act like this!). His message is simple: “Whoever believes in Me, though he may physically die, he shall live forever. Do you believe this?” When He says this to His friend Martha, she comes up with the right answer: “Yes, Lord, I believe You are the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God.” (John 11:25-27)

Many Jews who heard Jesus teach began following Him. Others regarded Him as Public Enemy #1. Jesus is hauled through several courts, without the benefit of William Ginsberg -- and He’s reluctantly sentenced to be crucified by Pilate, the Roman puppet.

On that cross, nails hammered through His hands and feet, Jesus, the One all the Jewish prophets had anticipated for centuries, paid a debt none of us could ever pay so that you and I could be forgiven by God.

This “good news” inspires Paul to hit the road to tell the then-known world that through repentance and faith alone in Christ, Gentiles as well as Jews could enter into a personal relationship with God, guilt-free, anxiety-free, knowing for sure that their eternal home is heaven -- *not* a place the Bible calls hell.

**Romans 8-16**

The first three chapters of Romans paint the bleak picture that every single person is born as a sinner, unable to please God. The next five chapters are conversely a giant upper, describing God’s free gift of eternal life, something we receive individually by placing our faith in Him, not by striving to please Him with our good works.

**Let’s read chapter 8** which we hustled through last time without having time to discuss it.

In chapters 9-11 Paul tackles the deep subject of the sovereignty of God, the fact that *He’s God and we aren’t* -- a large, horse-sized pill for some to swallow. In chapters 1-8 Paul addresses Jews and Gentiles as individuals. Now he deals with them as nations.

**Let’s take a crack at chapter 10** as Paul interfaces God’s all-powerfulness with the moral freedom and responsibility of man. Somehow, from God’s perch, there’s no double-speak here. If it’s too befuddling, jot it down, and we’ll ask God later.

In chapters 12-16 Paul describes in Home Depot terms, how a person lives in right relation to God, to self and to others.

If we’re tracking with Paul this far, then the most logical, most intelligent, meaningful, spiritual thing you and I can do is to give ourselves to God, and to live for Him. Nothing else is more fulfilling or more sense out of life’s insanities.

**Let’s roll into chapter 12.**

Paul’s readers lived in the imperial city of Rome. Since he wrote this in A.D. 57 or 58, Nero was on the throne. Paul wrote to them about their dual citizenship -- as “citizens of heaven” and of Rome. Paul then turned to how his audience was to treat to their fellow man.

**Let’s do chapter 13.**

As soaring as any prose you’ll find, chapter 15 could serve as the conclusion of this landmark letter. But Paul, the player’s coach, concludes with 16 and some very personal email to individuals in Rome.

**Let’s rock on to chapter 15.**

Romans, a monumental piece of literature, yet a personal letter bearing a potent message for every person.

Paul announces (Romans 3:10-12) that ....

"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

**But God**, who proclaimed every man a sinner, destined to spend eternity apart from Him, came up with a better idea. He’d send His son to die as a sacrifice for our sins, erasing its eternal penalty forever, giving us His righteousness -- to both Jews and Gentiles alike -- in order that we can know Him personally in this life -- and enter into sinless presence after we die.

And we do that by simply believing the gospel, by faith. That’s the message of Romans. And that’s the key to understand the central message of the entire Bible.

His Deal

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