**Series Title:**

**"OUR DILEMMA: GOD'S SOLUTION"**

**Paul's Letter to the ROMANS: Chapter 5**

***Peace At (Not Just) Any Price***

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he artist formerly known as Cat Stevens was born Steven Demetre Georgiou in 1948 to a Cypriot dad and Swedish mom in Soho in London's cheeky West End. Raised Greek Orthodox, in Catholic schools, Cat scored his first hit at 18, and contracted TB at 19, at 23 wrote and sang his chart-busting "Peace Train."

Now a Muslim, Yusuf Islam believes 9-11 has delayed that train's arrival for thirty years. His lyrics in 1971 capture both his dreams and doubts about global serenity:

"Oh I've been smiling lately, dreaming about the world as one

And I believe it could be, some day it's going to come

Now I've been crying lately, thinking about the world as it is

Why must we go on hating, why can't we live in bliss

Cause out on the edge of darkness, there rides a peace train

Oh peace train take this country, come take me home again"

Are mankind's peace hopes as bankrupt as Amtrak? In 57-58 A.D. Paul addresses that in his letter to Christ's followers in Rome.

***Saul/Paul, God's "Man For All Reasons"***

Of the New Testament's twenty-seven books, thirteen are letters from Paul, born in ancient Turkey to Jewish parents who were Roman citizens under Caesar. This tentmaker received a Greek education and studied under Gamaliel, the premier teacher of the Pharisees -- ideal preparation for his being Christ's first world ambassador.

Saul, as he was first known, rose to the pinnacle of Palestine's legal profession. After Christ's crucifixion and return to heaven, he set out on a holy war to eliminate Jesus' ardent devotees.

Hell-bent for Syria to wreak more terror, he was pulled over supernaturally by the risen Christ (Acts 9), and transformed into God's unlikely voice for this new "gospel" he lays out in Romans.

***Sizing Up Romans chs. 1-4***

Romans answers the big question, "How can man get right with God? (John 3:4). Paul's point is that gaining a "right standing" with God is a gift, not a reward, and it's not for sale (Romans 1:16-17). He insists we can't know the worth of this gift 'til we know that without it, we're all toast (Romans 3:21-24).

Just as there's only one God, Paul says God's provided but one way for all men to join His eternal family -- and that's by faith, not by our moral, religious or civic accomplishments. The Law given to Moses for Israel proved us unable to meet God's perfection standard. Like our spiritual ancestor Abraham, we all come to peace with God simply by trusting in Christ's sacrifice for our sins.

It's not "*cheap* grace." It comes with a platinum price tag because God surrendered the One most precious to Him, to leave the splendor of heaven, be born in a stable, be rejected by even the religious leaders of that day, and finally to die the cruelest possible death ….. in OUR place. God's gift to us cost Him plenty. Only Jesus' sinless sacrifice could pick up the check (John 1:10-12).

Faith alone has no value. Its worth is in its object. It wasn't just that he *had* faith that saved Abraham, but that *God* was the *object* of his faith (Genesis 15:6).

Setting the stage for ch. 5, maybe the Bible's high water mark, Paul relates the story of Abraham who, still childless at 75, "believed" God when He promised him a son. Twenty-five years later 90-year-old Sarah birthed Isaac. **Let's read Romans 4:18-25 (page 839).**

Now let's boot up Paul's invincible optimism, as he turns from salvation-through-faith-alone, to the perks of being tight with Christ. **Let's read Romans 5:1-21 (still on page 839).**

***The Peace Dividend***

***Romans 5:1-5***

Do you see much genuine joy in the world today? How about your own JQ (Joy Quotient)? We're not talkin' feel-good "positive thinking" yuks. We're talkin' bone-deep peace with the only One to Whom we're ultimately accountable -- the one, true PeaceMaker.

Highlighting some of the bennies of following Christ, Paul checks out the believer's *past* ("we have been justified"), *present* ("we have peace … we have gained access … we now stand") and *future* ("we shall be saved"). Peace, grace and hope -- quite the trifecta.

Perk #1 of being right with God, sez Paul, is peace *with* God. Thanks to the cross, He no longer holds our sin against us because when He sees us, He *sees* Christ, *not* our sins! Almighty God is *at peace* with us (Romans 8:1). To be cool with the Creator is a good thing.

But let's not confuse peace *with* God with the peace *of* God (Philippians 4:7). The former makes the latter possible, and the latter can only be had by having the former. It goes like this -- Before I came to Christ, my sin put me at odds with God. But He loves even His enemies and offers me the remedy of His forgiveness through Christ's death on the cross. God's act of forgiving us erases our past, present and future sins from His books once for all. And that's no blue-sky IPO hype.

When I fully embrace that, by faith, I'm no longer God's enemy, but His forgiven friend, at peace *with* God. Possessing that, I can now deal with daily life by enjoying …….. the peace *of* God.

The moment we trust Him, God *justifies* us and "declares" us to be *righteous*, "right with Him" (i.e., having the same standing His Son has), never to change His mind about us (Romans 4:8)! Sin-free is where He's set the bar for joining His family, and since only His Son is perfect, and since He loves us so much, He withdraws our guilt from our "account" and credits us with Christ's guiltlessness. We can bank on it, put our faith in it.

Perk #2 is "access" into God's grace -- an intro into all the goodies of being His adopted son (Ephesians 1:3-6). It's like Supercuts -- no appointments, no waiting. And God has no voice mail. He answers.

Perk #3 is being able to rejoice, even in bummers, knowing that the *worst* that can happen is that we'll spend eternity with God (Romans 8:17). Navigating dire straits with God creates the steadiness to hang in, plus a fire-tested reliability which forges unshakable hope in the God who *always* keeps His promises (2 Corinthians 4:8-12, 17-18, 6:4-10, 12:10). Stability, reliability, hope -- okay, it's not an NBA contract, but it's not a bad package either.

Believers can be glad three ways: (a) in the hope that God's shaping us to be more like His Son, and that we'll one day be in His presence (His "glory"), (b) in suffering and (c) in God Himself. Reality is our *position* in Christ, not what we *feel* like on life's roller-coaster.

***Timing Is Everything***

***Romans 5:6-8***

For a law-abiding, honest guy, few would be willing to die. But for a noble, generous, "good" soul, some might. Jesus told a wealthy, young exec, "No one is good, except God" (Luke 18:18-19). Jesus' point? "Good" is not something we become by our efforts. Only God is good; so only He can *declare* us *good*.

Jesus voluntarily became a man, albeit remaining sinless -- try THAT while walking past Victoria's Secret!! (Philippians. 2:5-11) He didn't wait for us to "clean up" our lives. No, He pro-actively took our place, paying the full penalty for our sin. God proved His love for us, at the cross, even *before* He set us right with Him, while we were morally impotent to earn it (Galatians 4:4).

***Crocodile Hunter Optimism***

***Romans 5:9-11***

Since God loved us so much when we were still His *enemies*, Paul says, "Picture how much MORE He'll care for us now that we're His *friends*!" After all, His Son gave His very life for us (Leviticus 17:11, John 5:24, 1 Thessalonians 1:10).

Remember hard times when all your props were gone? Michelangelo explained, "As the chips fall, the image emerges." We can rejoice when we focus not on the chips, but on the emerging, Christlike image that God's sculpting. And that gives us untamed optimism.

***Death by Birth; Life by Death….Huh?***

***Romans 5:12-19***

"1-Adam-12, we have a killer on the loose, and his name is SIN!"

Humans die physically and spiritually not because of their individual sins, but thanks to Adam's *original* sin. Thus even the most moral person is destined to spend eternity separated from God simply because he/she was infected at birth with Adam's sin.

You're camping by a rushing rill up in the Cascades. You scoop up a cool drink, unaware that upstream some yo-yo has polluted it. Just as you didn't choose your parents, you didn't choose to be polluted upstream by Grandpa Adam, head of the "Adam's Family."

In physics the "Butterfly Effect” explains the *chaos* theory of “Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions” which says that upstream acts effect everything downstream.

In fractal geometry, patterns in larger natural objects (e.g., dirt, rocks, sand, etc.) are seen repeated in ever smaller scale as you drill down into smaller fragments. The fractal fingerprint of a boulder remains identical in its tiny grains of sand. The implication is inescapable, as with HIV: once it's in the blood, it taints all it touches, even far downstream.

Adam and Christ are mankind's two *federal* heads, i.e., their actions affect all of us. Adam's sin resulted in death that ends in a Christless eternity (Romans 3:23). But from the moment Adam sinned, God announced His plan to bring all men ("the many") back into harmony with Him forever, just as His original plan for Adam had been. "The many," as the rabbis saw it, means "all" since "all" contains "many individuals" (Isaiah 53:11-12, Mark 10:45).

The cross cancels our death penalty for sin, AND gives us life in and through Christ forever (John 1:4). If you need a heart transplant, but can't afford to pay to be on the candidate list, you're *ipso facto* on the "Death List." But show me the money, and you move to the "Life List." Christ made that payment for each of us, taking our sin on Himself. **Let's read perhaps the most stupendous thing ever said, something Paul wrote that affects all humanity: 2 Corinthians 5:21 (page 860).**

Paul's repetition of how one act by Adam and one by Christ affects all humans may seem overly redundant, but remember:

1. His readers had almost no info about their new faith.
2. His readers had much religious "unlearning" to do!
3. As they faced persecution and death because of their faith in Christ, Paul wanted them to take comfort in knowing that our sins -- and the Law's demands on us -- were both nailed to Christ's cross, and neither looms over us any more.

Paul reminds us that the Law was not given to Adam or to Jesus; it was given to Moses and the Jews as a straightedge, teaching them the futility of man's best efforts to meet God's standards on his own. Christ didn't come to model for us a life to be emulated; He came to *give* His life for us so that we could have a brand *new* life.

***Grace vs Sin? No Contest***

***Romans 5:20-21***

"The Law was added," meaning it was a temporary tool designed to demonstrate the holiness of God (Galatians 3:19). The Law didn't come to make us righteous. Nope, it just let us recognize sin.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found, was blind, but now I see." Those lines were written by John Newton who, 'til age 7, was raised by a godly mother, then orphaned on the streets of London. He lied about his age to join the Royal Navy, deserted and fled to Africa, living with an abusive Portuguese family. He escaped, was picked up by a passing ship, got drunk, fell into the ocean and was harpooned by the captain! Chained down in the hole, he surrendered his life to Christ and became a pastor and hymnwriter who gave us:

"Through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. 'Twas grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will bring me home."

***All Aboard The Peace Train***

Only the blameless Son of God is an acceptable sacrifice for your sin and mine. Your faith that Christ took your place on the cross will credit your account with right standing before God. God's check's been made out in your name. All He needs to close the books on your status with Him is the signature of your faith.

If you've never done so before, tell Him now, "God, what You're telling me is coming into focus. As I understand it, You no longer hold Adam's sin, or my sins, against me, thanks to Jesus' sitting in for me on the cross. Thank You for that. I believe it, I really do. So right now I'm endorsing Your check, the one that totally covers my sin debt, and puts me right with You. Whatever's ahead, I want to face it with You. Because of Jesus, and on the authority of what Your Book says, I'm all Yours. Amen."

His Deal

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