**Series Title:**

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

**Paul's Letter to the ROMANS: Chapter 6**

***Live and Let Die***

I

n 1973 Roger Moore and Jane Seymour made their screen splash in Ian Fleming's "Live and Let Die," with the cliché speedboat chase, banana republic intrigue and the requisite "007" babes. With producers named SALTzman and BROCCOLI, you assumed it'd be tasty, but critics gagged, saying, "Where's the beef!?"

Paul and Linda McCartney's title song is all that survives:

"When you were young, and your heart was an open book,

You used to say 'Live and let live,' you know you did.

But if this ever changing world in which we live in (sic)

Makes you give in and cry, say 'live and let die.'"

March 1775 found 120 colonial leaders -- Washington and Jefferson included -- in Richmond, brainstorming Virginia's response to the Brits' mounting tyranny and oppression in New England. Many wanted to just talk. But 39-year-old Patrick Henry rose to his feet in St. John's Church: "Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace -- but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? … Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!"

Life-and-death is on Paul's mind as he writes to Christ's followers in 1st century Rome where for any who failed to hail Caesar, death was but a Charlton Heston whisker away. Paul here refers not only to rigor mortis, but *spiritual* death (separation from God) and spiritual life (living with God, here and always).

***Romans:***

***"The Christian Constitution"***

Romans is the "How To Know God and How to Live" primer, penned in AD 57-58 by Paul -- primo Christian missionary, Jewish scholar, Roman citizen, and ex-honcho of the world’s cabal against Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 1:15). Written a quarter century after Jesus left earth, to believers in the Empire's capital, both Jews and non-Jews, who'd had no training in their new faith, it spells out their rich spiritual inheritance, and arms them against heresies swirling among Roman villas, public squares, and temples to false gods.

In chs. 1-5 Paul finds all mankind to be carriers of the sin passed down by grandpa Adam. He cites Abraham's faith *in God* which alone put him in right standing with God (Genesis 15:6). He explains that while humanity was hopelessly adrift in sin, God, who's totally just and *must* punish sin, generously erased the debt we individually owed Him for not meeting His entrance requirement of perfection. He did so by sending to earth His only Son, Jesus, to buy our pardon with His life.

When we accept God's forgiveness, God *gives* us the same standing in His sight that Jesus has! Once handcuffed to Adam's dead-end destiny, we instantly step, *by faith*, into a new existence which Paul calls being "in Christ." **Let's ramp up for today's discussion by re-reading Romans 5:16-21 (p. 839).**

Paul was aware that this "grace glut" might make us reckless with our new security as believers whose sins -- past, present and future -- are not only pardoned by God, but put out of His sight forever… like when I was a kid, and my dad worked at a bakery. Mmmmmm, all those pecan pies, sugar doughnuts and peanut butter cookies!

This lavish grace begs the question, "So what do we do? Sin our brains out so that God can ladle on *more* grace?" If this question *doesn't* arise, God's grace hasn't been fully explained! It sounds like too much freedom, like you're 16 again, and your folks jet off for the weekend, forgetting to take the keys to the Porsche! **Let's read Romans 6:1-23 (p. 840).**

***Wanted: Dead and Alive***

***Romans 6:1-11***

Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves *legally*, but many didn't *experience* freedom 'til later. Many Christ-followers know they've been released from their *sin nature*, freed by Jesus' death from that brutal slavemaster, sin. But their life hasn't caught up with their liberty, so they keep *living* like slaves.

Is God's grace a green light to sin more? "Forget it!" says Paul. That would be like continuing to run around on my wife just because she forgave me once! For the believer, sin's *eternal* penalty has been annulled, but we all still suffer its *natural* consequences in this life, and why pay that price by getting hurt and hurting others!

You buy a fixer-upper in shambles. The seller has no more claim to it; it's yours. But the neighbors can't tell the difference. Given some remodeling, it'll begin to reflect the values of its *new* owner.

*Baptism* in this context is not *wet*. The Greek word here refers to dyeing a garment to change its appearance. Paul says the Christian, at Christ's death, became inseparably related to Him, incorporated into what Paul calls "the Body of Christ " (Romans 12:4-5, I Corinthians 12:13). We no longer wear Adam's colors; we're now identifying with Christ as our Conqueror over sin and death.

Right living comes from right thinking. First, Paul wants us to know that, as believers, we're no longer manacled to the *penalty* of sin's death sentence hanging over all of us since Adam. That "old self" ended when Christ, the Perfect Sacrifice, took all our sins on Himself at the cross. And buried them (Ephesians 4:22)! And when Jesus left the tomb, never to die again, we believers rose *with* Him, giving us not just a new *lease* on life, but a new *life* (Colossians 3:9-10).

Since we're not sporting our *heavenly* bodies yet, which is quite obvious looking around this room, we're still under attack by temptation and sin 'til we get to heaven. But Paul wants us to "know" that, as believers, we're not stuck in the "you sin, you're guilty, you die" rut anymore, tied to its eternal consequences.

Contrary to pop theology, we don't gradually become worthy of heaven. Paul says we're unplugged from sin's domination. It's revolutionary for believers to see themselves as God does: perfect and blameless, *IN CHRIST* (Ephesians 1:1-4)! Right thinking means understanding that the Christian is both dead *and* alive.

***Breaking The Code***

Let's unscramble some "Biblespeak" … like dead to sin, alive to God, buried and raised with Christ, old self, new life, body of sin, freed from sin, slaves to sin, and slaves to righteousness.

We'll use the marriage metaphor. Before Liz gave in and married me, I was a bachelor, living free of marriage obligations, free to do as I pleased. Then I said "I do," and everything changed. Almost!

In good faith I gave my love only to Liz. I'm no longer free to live like a single. I have the same urges because I'm still a man. But I'm "alive" to Liz; my single life is "dead and buried," with *her* fork in it!

This analogy eventually collapses because we're speaking in human terms, not in God's supernatural terms. For example, I could be unfaithful to Liz, and if I'm so blessed, she could be gracious enough to forgive me, like nothing had happened. God would. But she might not! Why would I want to hurt either of them?

When believers sin, Jesus doesn't crawl back up to re-sacrifice Himself. "It's *already* forgiven, finished," He said. And the Bible says God remembers our sins no more. He'll *never* divorce us. That's God's brand of GRACE.

***Re-Born Free***

***Romans 6:12-14***

Right living follows right thinking, so Paul recommends that we submit our total selves as weapons, not of sinful destruction but of constructive godliness (Colossians 3:1-5, 1 Corinthians 6:12). In effect, you live with the attitude that you're in a new world (married), not back in your old 'hood (bachelorhood). Your desires are still there, but your loyalty is expressed by your faithfulness.

Paul says KNOW, REALIZE, then LIVE. (1) KNOW that you've been freed from the eternal grip of sin's penalty and power. You don’t have to have lived through the Revolutionary War to "know" that we've been freed from England's control. (2) REALIZE that Christ's victory over sin is your victory. George Washington's defeat of England is ours! And (3) LIVE like a new, God-filled, God-motivated believer. Live like a free American, not like a British subject who owes taxes or allegiance to the Crown.

***You're Now Free To Move About The Universe***

***Romans 6:15-23***

A recovering alcoholic knows servitude is one sip away (John 8:34). We can also be leg-ironed to career, ego, depression, sex, etc. Only God promises true freedom (John 8:33-36).

Paul reiterates his reader's skepticism: "Why not drop all restraints and go on a sin binge?" No way, says he! As Bob Dylan sang, "You gotta serve *some*body" (Joshua 24:14-15, Matthew 6:24). Before putting Christ in charge of your life, you WERE an involuntary slave to sin, *born* that way. But while you were ignoring God, He became your Friend (1 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Sin is a deceitful employer. It kills joy, relationships, hope, everything worthwhile. Life comes down to either *earning* what we *deserve*, or *accepting* what we *don't* deserve. Spiritual death is the earned wage paid to those who refuse to accept God's forgiveness. *But God* … (you gotta love those two words) ... but God wants to give us what we DON'T deserve -- His FREE, unearned gift of unending life with Him -- a whole new sphere of living that can start now!

***How Amazing* IS This Grace Anyway?**

Because God loves us totally, He makes the first move. He doesn't need our help to save us; He does it all; He can't be bought; He's not impressed by our efforts to "earn" salvation.

When we accept God's grace and, by faith, put our confidence in Him to save us, He doesn't put us on probation; He puts us "in Christ!" He doesn't even see our past life; it died on the cross.

He now sees us as being one with His Son! And He'll never veer from that because His grace isn't tied to how we treat Him (Romans 11:29). Our lives change as we increasingly see Him as our Source.

***Payday or CHRISTmas Day?***

Romans 6 tells us (1) it's possible for the believer to be free, yet live like he's enslaved. And (2) it's equally possible for the unbeliever to be enslaved, yet *think* he's free.

Each day our actions reveal our beliefs. They reveal the central focus of our life -- is it us or God? They reveal in whom we place our ultimate trust -- us or God? What are you choosing: the wages of sin that you deserve? Or the gift of God that you don't deserve? Is today payday? or CHRISTmas?

If you've never made that conscious choice, just tell God right now, quietly, "God, I really don't want what I deserve. I'm ready to drop my defenses and all my objections, as sophisticated and solid as I've tried to build them. Using the faith that You give me right now, God, I want to accept your free gift of forgiveness which, if I understand Paul correctly, means that incredibly You adopt me as your child, and You accept me into Your presence the same way that You do Your Son Jesus. Wow, that's mind-boggling, but … thank You, God. By faith, count me in, because of Jesus. Amen."

His Deal

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