**Paul's Letter to the Romans:**

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

**Chapter 8**

***God's "Get Out of Jail Free" Card***

M

artin Sheen starred in the 1998 non-starter, "A Letter from Death Row." In its "write your own review" section on movies.com, there were zero entries for this "suspense thriller" about an innocent con on death row whose letters enthrall a screenwriter, but apparently *not* many moviegoers.

That same google.com search turned up this "Letter To A Death Row Inmate" described as "written to a person on death row by the father of the man whom the person on death row had killed."

"You're probably surprised that I, of all people, am writing a letter to you, but I ask you to read it in its entirety and consider its request seriously. As the father of the man whom you took part in murdering, I have something important to say to you. I forgive you. With all my heart, I forgive you. I realize it may be hard for you to believe, but I really do.

"At your trial, when you confessed to your part in the events that cost my son his life and asked for my forgiveness, I immediately granted you that forgiving love from my heart.

"I can only hope you believe me and will accept my forgiveness. But this is not all. I want to make you an offer. I want you to become my adopted child. You see, my son who died was my only child, and I now want to share my life with you and leave my riches to you.

"This may not make sense to you or anyone else, but I believe you're worth the offer. I've arranged matters so that if you'll receive my offer of forgiveness, not only will you be pardoned for your crime, but you also will be set free from your imprisonment, and your sentence of death will be dismissed. At that point, you'll become my adopted child and heir to all my riches.

"I realize this is a risky offer for me to make to you -- you might be

tempted to reject my offer completely -- but I make it to you without

reservation. Also, I realize it may seem foolish to make such an offer to one who cost my son his life, but I have a great love and an unchangeable forgiveness in my heart for you.

"Finally, you may be concerned that once you accept my offer, you may do something to cause you to be denied your rights as an heir to my wealth. Nothing could be further from the truth. If I can forgive you for your part in my son's death, I can forgive you for anything. I know you never will be perfect, but you don't have to be perfect to receive my offer.

"Besides, I believe that once you've accepted my offer and begin to experience the riches that'll come to you from me, that your primary (though not always) response will be gratitude and loyalty. Some would call me foolish for my offer to you, but I wish for you to call me your father. Love, God"

The letter captures the life-changing facts Paul's been laying out in his historic letter to Christ's followers in first century Rome.

***Romans chs. 1-7 Instant Replay***

In chs. 1-3 we see that, thanks to the original sin of Adam and Eve, all of us have been born as sinners who need a Savior from the eternal consequences of our sin. After we turn to God in faith, accepting His forgiveness purchased for us by Christ's death on the cross, ch. 5 spells out the perks of being set right with God, of being put at peace with Him! Chs. 6 and 7 cover the ongoing war believers have with their old sin nature, and the key to gaining victory over it by relying on Christ's win over sin and death. **Let's do a quick reprise by reading Romans 7:18-25 (p. 840).**

Let's say you're Tom Hanks, alone on a tropical atoll, and could have only one chapter of the Bible wash ashore in a bottle, which would it be? My pick - Romans 8. Above all others, this chapter has turned the lights on for me. If you could come to just one Nordy's, today's is the one most pregnant with God's life-liberating roadmap that resolves the angst we all have about sin and death.

**Lacking the thundering tympani it deserves as it builds to a cymbal-shattering climax, nonetheless let's read Romans 8:1-39 a capella.**

***Trust Facts, Not Feelings***

***Romans 8:1-4***

Here's what's *true* of every Christ follower, regardless of his/her *feelings*. In ch. 7 the believer is freaked because he can't *consistently* do right, or keep from doing wrong. So he reads the wrong roadmap, assuming his sin has cut him off from God, that there'll be "hell to pay," perhaps the loss of his salvation!

But Paul trashes this notion since those in Christ are forever secure, saying, "Since you're now *in Christ*, nobody can put you in a bad light before God because He's swapped your hell-bent life for a new, Holy Spirit-directed one (Titus 3:5, 1 John 5:12). You no longer *have to* sin, and are no longer doomed to spend eternity isolated from God!" This swap is better than ***E****(ternity)****-bay****,* baby!

God's no Grandpa Grouch, waiting for us to screw up. Our destiny's not dependent on *being* or *doing* good. Only God can save us, and only He can reproduce Christ's character in us (Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24)! Here's a jolt -- it's up to God, not the believer, to present us blameless to His Father (Jude 24-25)!

Christ's followers may not always *feel* forgiven, but God says they *are*. What's more, from where He sits, they're *perfect*! That's our *position "in Christ,"* but not always our *experience*. Why live in constant, low-life guilt when God has made us right with Him!

Man couldn't meet God's standard of perfection in the Law given to Moses. So, to get into relationship with us, God had to make it possible for us to be perfect -- that is, perfect in HIS eyes! By sacrificing His Son Jesus Christ on the cross, God gives us what we could never earn -- that gift of perfect standing before Him, freeing us from our tail-chasing "*sindrome*."

***God Don't Run No Waffle House***

***Romans 8:5-11***

Paul says whoever hasn't yet turned over the keys of his life to Christ is, *ipso facto*, dominated by his sinful impulses. He's hostile toward God, maybe not like a mad bomber, but is certainly rejecting the Savior. In that state, no matter how moral or charitable, he's powerless to please God because he's regarding Christ's sacrifice as irrelevant (Romans 3:10-11). But the believer has his mind set on doing things God's way, giving him peace to handle his new life in a manner that gives God all the credit.

Here's a gut-check. Paul says if God's Spirit (the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead!) is living in you, you *belong* to Him, based on your faith that Christ's death forever paid the penalty for your sins. But, warns Paul, if you haven't yet invited God's Spirit to live in you, you don't belong to Christ. There's no "I *think* I’m a Christian;" or "I *hope* I am." Paul says you're in or out. No waffling.

***Make Room For Daddy***

***Romans 8:12-17***

Because the believer's been liberated from his date with eternal punishment, he's no longer obligated to be controlled by his sin nature. He can now, powered by the Holy Spirit, say NO to sin. He can defy the gravity-tug of sin by choosing throughout the day to do what pleases God (Romans 12:1-2).

Every morning, instead of faking it by "*looking* spiritual" all day, God's man can say, "Lord, today I'm at your disposal. Take my appointments, thoughts, words, selfishness all my junk, and lead me by Your Spirit to do and be what will bring You joy today."

The choice is ours each moment to live not in failure, but in the victory Christ purchased for us on the cross. From deep within, His Spirit confirms to believers that we belong to God, and can call Him "Abba." In Aramaic that's what Palestinian babies say: "Daddy." We can be fearlessly intimate with, and unintimidated by God.

What a great Dad! He makes us His *heirs*, even *co-heirs* with His Son Jesus! Are we valuable to Him or what! Imagine Jesus' privileges! God says we're in for the same cut, just because He *wants* to!

***Too Pooped To Pray***

***Romans 8:18-27***

"*Glory*" refers to when Jesus comes to take His kids "to glory" to be with Him always -- when He takes our earthsuits in trade for new, indestructible bods that'll never die, in which we'll live forever with Christ (Philippians 3:20-21)! (Personally, I've ordered a 34 waist!)

Life on earth is *groaning* -- illness, setbacks, busted relationships and, for some, persecution, even martyrdom. But Christ's followers look ahead to His return and the glories to come. Even the animate and inanimate objects of creation are waiting on tiptoes, as Joni Mitchell wrote in '69: "We are stardust, we are golden, and we've got to get ourselves back to the Garden" (Revelation 21:1-8).

Pain is a universal, graphic, temporary reminder of the fallout of Adam and Eve's sin and of Christ's sufferings for us (Philippians 2:5-8). It urges us to let God be *our* God, to receive His peace, unrattled by hostile situations in our path. God's kids' suffering will forever cease when we see Christ face-to-face, and that breeds hope and patience (2 Corinthians 5:1-4; John 16:33).

When we're too frazzled to even pray, God's Holy Spirit *in* us groans with us, and prays to the Father *for* us! God the Father loves and provides for us; God the Son gave His life to save us; and God the Holy Spirit even prays for us to the Father 24/7/365!

***Is Life Just A Cabaret, Old Chum?***

***Romans 8:28-30***

Why do some folks have such awful crosses to bear? It's not fair! We wrestle with letting God be in charge because by nature (1) we're selfish; (2) afraid and (3) proud.

We focus on the *immediate*; God sees the endgame. We view life as the inside of an embroidered sweater -- a gaggle of knots, colors and threads. But God, on the flip side, sees the big picture. Life is lived in the windshield … but understood in the rear view mirror.

Our knowledge is *limited*; God's is *infinite*. We don't know what God has in store for us, only the ultimate outcome which He's revealed plainly in the Bible: either we spend eternity with Him in heaven, or suffer His eternal wrath in a flaming pit the Bible calls hell (John 3:36). "And no, Regis, other than Jesus, there are no other lifelines."

William Ernest Henley boasted, "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul!" By contrast, believers can have unshakable confidence that our "Daddy" is *causing* ALL our circumstances to eventually pan out for our *benefit*, per *His* will for us (Jeremiah 18:1-6; Proverbs 20:24; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Romans 11:33).

God leaves nothing to chance in a believer's life, using ALL of its contents to shape us so that we begin taking on Christlike characteristics (Genesis 50:20)". How good is *that*!

As God, He's never said "Oops." He knew us personally before Creation. He knew Adam and Eve would screw up. He knew He'd offer His Son to take the punishment for our sin. He knew that if we accept His forgiveness, He'd adopt us as His kids, and remake us to carry the very traits of Christ so that when we arrive in His presence, we'll be perfect in His sight, a stature we could never earn or deserve on our own! **Let's read Psalm 139:1-18 (p. 467).**

***Who's On Your Side?***

***Romans 8:31-39***

It's natural for us to get a hyper-inflated view of ourselves. "Man is the measure of all things," contends humanism, elevating the human spirit over the supremacy of God. Humanism has even crept into religion, overemphasizing what *we* do *for* God --- at the expense of what *God has* done, *is* doing and *will* do *for* us.

Paul says nothing we can do is good enough to earn God's approval (Romans 3:10-18). That's why He's done it *all for* us, so that now, symbolized by Christ as His "sheep," we are Super-conquerors with Him on our side (John 10:14-15). Who but the Creator could turn a mere sheep into the most powerful creature on the planet!

The God who deployed His Son to earth to die for our sins, that same God will keep, defend, protect and provide for those who place their faith in Him through Christ. No enemy within or without, even death or hell, can ultimately defeat us -- or split up God and His kids -- because no matter who's against us … GOD IS ***FOR*** US!

***Why Wait?***

Have you plugged into the "Romans 8 Life" where there's no finger-pointing or final torment awaiting you? --- where God moves in with you and assures you that your eternal reservations with Him are secure? -- where you have His iron-clad guarantee that all that happens to you will, sooner or later, be a plus for you?

If not, why wait? Tell Him now….."God, I really need You. By faith I'm believing that Your Son Jesus paid the penalty for all my sins by taking my place on the cross. Thank You for totally forgiving me. Please enter my life now and help me live Your way. Amen."

His Deal

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