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

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

**Chapter 9**

***Oh No, God’s Using 4-Letter Words Again***

“A

re we there yet?” Have you ever driven kids from Seattle to Disneyland? By Tacoma, this question’s old hat.

Well, we’re halfway through Paul’s classic letter to Christ’s followers in ancient Rome. His theme is “God’s righteousness,” and this ex- supreme court justice develops it into an airtight brief. In chs. 1-3 we see God’s wrath toward sin. Man is born a sinner, lost, totally depraved, and without excuse. (Having fun so far? Glad you came?)

Cheer up; chs. 3 and 4 say that despite our unworthiness, God has provided a way for us to stand forgiven before Him -- not via religion, but through a one-to-one connection with His Son, Jesus. This is driven by God’s generosity and our faith, not our efforts.

Ch. 5 says placing our hope in Christ gives us peace with God, and, as a bonus, Jesus’ own sinlessness is credited to our account!

Chs. 6-8 explain that following Christ involves trusting Him daily to help us deal with human temptations as God shapes our character into that of His Son. God lets believers know that (a) He’ll never again hold our sins against us; (b) whatever happens to us is for our ultimate good in His “shaping” process; and (c) no one, nothing, not even we ourselves can separate us from God’s love.

***We’re On A Grace Roll, So Why This Bagel?***

In chs. 9-11 Paul whistles a time-out from extolling God’s amazing grace to give us an overview of how God deals with the Jewish people past, present and future. As a nation, God has temporarily set aside His “chosen people” to offer His forgiveness, righteousness and spiritual adoption to the Gentile (non-Jewish) nations as well.

In ch. 9, addressing God’s sovereignty, we look at man as God sees him. In ch. 10, whose theme is God’s justice, we’re with mankind, looking up at God. Ch. 11, about God’s faithfulness, finds us between God and man, realizing that God’s sovereignty and man’s free will are two sides of the same coin. Only God knows why…since His ways are unfathomable.

Romans 9 has been called “the most disrupting chapter in the Bible.” After delving into it, some ask, “Why doesn’t God play ‘fair?’ Why isn’t He more tolerant?” **So grab your pith helmet (for this “epithle”), and let’s rumble thru Romans 9:1-33 (p. 842).**

***Jews Rock!***

***Romans 9:1-5***

“Why do so few Jews follow Christ?” Paul, a Hebrew by birth and schooling, and a descendant of Jacob’s youngest son, Benjamin, is devastated because the majority of his fellow Jews aren’t following Jesus, their promised Messiah. He’s even willing to forfeit his seat in heaven if his kinsmen would place their trust in Christ.

God certainly gave the Jews a huge head start:

1. At His discretion, not based on their erratic behavior, God chose Israel to be His “first-born” of all the peoples He’d created (Exodus 4:22, Deuteronomy 7:6, Isaiah 66:22).
2. God revealed to Israel His “glory” (His presence). He led them out of slavery in Egypt, through the Arabian wilds for forty years, appearing as a cloud by day and a plume of fire at night. He also “met with” the Jews in the tabernacle where Moses’ stone tablets were kept. No other nation got this special God-treatment.
3. God made verbal contracts with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David and other Jewish patriarchs (Genesis 15, 22; 2 Samuel 7:13; Jeremiah 31:31, Ezekiel 36:24-27).

1. On Mt. Sinai God gave Moses His laws for the Jewish people.
2. God set up rituals, feasts and other ways for Jews to honor Him as previews of the salvation Messiah would one day bring.
3. God promised His coming kingdom only to the Jews. Until Paul unwrapped the “mystery” of the Gospel, **ALL** people (Jews and non-Jews) had to worship God in “the Jewish way.” But now God has, for the time being, set aside the nation of Israel to invite **ALL** people to receive Him, not through religious rites, personal merit or human intermediaries, but by simply *believing* in Him!
4. God literally spoke to Israel through “the fathers” --- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When you and I entrust our lives to God through Christ, even we Gentiles become offspring of Abraham who was the first to receive God’s promise, i.e., that He’d bless **ALL** people through Abraham’s seed (namely, Jesus).
5. God stepped out of eternity onto earth not as a Martian or a Canadian, but as a Jew (Matthew 1:1, Hebrews 2:16).

### Are We “ALL” God’s Chillun’?

***Romans 9:6-9***

Being a Jew doesn’t *ipso facto* make you God’s child. It seems that He exercises His sovereign prerogative to choose who He wants to adopt. We don’t gripe about giving voters the right to elect. But we don’t want to cede that right to the One who has yet to make His first mistake? We just want God to be our heavenly bellhop.

How can we choose or reject God if He holds all the aces? It’s like this: we’re subject to gravity here, but not up in space. Likewise, God’s ways are higher than ours. He says in ch. 9, “Here’s how I work; get over it.” He wants all the credit.

Nonetheless, even though God has the chooser hammer, Paul says, “**EVERYONE** who calls on the name of the Lordwill be saved” (Romans 10:13, 1 Corinthians 1:2). It seems both “God’s sovereignty” and “man’s responsibility” are true.

***Love/Hate Relationships***

***Romans 9:10-13***

Now those 4-letter words God used: “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” The Greek word Paul used for “hate” means “to detest, to persecute, to love less.” Throughout the Bible, references to Jacob and Esau mean the nations of Israel and Edom, rather than the individual brothers who founded them (Malachi 1:1-5).

God chose Jacob, Abraham’s grandson, to be in the line of faithful Jews which 1,750 years later would produce Jesus. God even renamed Jacob as “Israel,” pledging to give Palestine to the Jews.

God’s sovereignty means He’s Creator and Ruler over all protons, people, planets, galaxies, everything! He’s His own counsel, relying on no one or nothing else to sustain or define Him. This stupefies some, maddens many, totally turns off others.

***So You Want Justice, Do You?***

***Romans 9:14 –18***

God’s grace is big news in chs. 1-8. Now we’re intro’d to His mercy (i.e., the withholding of His wrath, which all sinners deserve). Until we get our arms around His mercy, we’ll never appreciate His grace (His undeserved kindness to us) (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

When it comes to deciding for or against God, Paul says we’re impotent; only God in His mercy can take the initiative to forgive, embrace and save us from everlasting destruction and torment.

As for Pharaoh, God saw that his heart was already “hardened” (literally, “heavy,” weighed down”) (Exodus 7:13-14). He simply left that Egyptian ruler’s heart in its natural state, weighed down by its own sin, just as our hearts are before we invite Christ to take over.

***He Took 100 Pounds of Clay***

***Romans 9:19-21***

In 1961 Gene McDaniels rocked into *BILLBOARD’s* #3 spot singing:

He took a hundred pounds of clay

And then He said, "Hey, listen."

"I'm gonna fix this-a world today"

"Because I know what's missin.' "

Now can'tcha just see Him a-walkin' 'round and 'round

Pickin' the clay uppa off the ground?

Doin' just what He should do

To make a livin' dream like you.

How do you like being compared to mindless mud on God’s wheel? Or could it be we’re more like our creative God’s work of art?

But wait, if I’m not one of “God’s elect,” just a fistful of wet dirt deprived of His mercy, then I’m powerless to choose, right? Then how’n’heck can God hold me culpable for my sin?

What we have is a two-sided coin that’s always buffaloed believers and skeptics alike. On one side is God’s sovereignty where He says, “I’m dealin’ the cards; live with it.” On the other is God’s loving, gracious heart: “God our Savior wants **ALL** men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-5). Peter echoed that: “(The Lord) does not want **ANYONE** to perish, so He’s giving more time for **EVERYONE** to repent.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Hey, if God hadn’t “elected” **SOME** to be saved, **NOBODY** would be, since Paul wrote, “**NOBODY** seeks after God” (Romans 3:10-11). God’s not responsible for sin, nor is He obliged to save **ANYONE**.

We are not God’s judge. He’s not subject to our Customer Satisfaction Index. He embodies rightness and Truth, and He’ll ALWAYS do what’s right, whether we get it, or like it. It’s impossible to isolate one side of this coin from the other. We lack the mental wattage, and the right, to do so.

***People, Get Ready***

***Romans 9:22-26***

Due to Adam’s sin, all of us are born sinners, destined to spend our afterlife as objects (“vessels”) of God’s wrath, unlike those who believe Christ and become objects of God’s mercy. Paul’s Greek word for *wrath* means “justifiable punishment.” “Destruction” doesn’t mean *cessation of being*; it is “ruin” or “loss” in never-ending, Divine anger and “flaming fire,” exiled from God, making 9/11 look like a love-in (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This final withdrawal of God’s patience shows His hatred for sin, the sins Jesus took on Himself when He was crucified in our place (Ezekiel 33:11).

With Paul’s unveiling of the mystery of the Gospel, God swings wide His doors of forgiveness, giving **ALL** who trust Him for salvation the privilege of becoming His “son.” Until now no Gentile nation had been called “God’s people.” Just the Jews.

***Stumbling Into Eternity***

***Romans 9:27-33***

A 1998 census estimate set the world’s Jewish population somewhere north of 13,000,000. God says only a “remnant” of them will follow Jesus as their Messiah (Isaiah 10:20-22).

*Religion*, with no personal *relationship* with Christ, Paul cites, is fatal. Religious Jews had relied on their own goodness to some day attain God’s green light into heaven. They could never be sure; they could only hope and strive harder. Sadly, they overlooked their need to trust God, as Abraham did. When their Messiah came to the very hamlet the prophets had predicted, under precisely prophesied circumstances, most Jews spurned His “Follow me.” And their religious pride angrily led to His crucifixion.

Instead of making Jesus their Cornerstone, they tripped over Him. If they’d only believe that, because of the cross, God no longer holds their sins against them, that He’s MADE PEACE with **ALL** men (2 Corinthians 5:18-21)! Now He’s waiting for each of us to receive this Good News by faith. But He won’t wait forever.

So we dare not get hung up on either of these two extremes:

1. God has stacked the deck, and if He hasn’t “chosen” me, what’s the use? Or….
2. It’s totally up to me to follow God. I’m in charge of my own destiny. I rise or fall on my own.

Paul bottom-lines it this way: “**EVERYONE** who calls on the name of the Lord WILL be saved.”

***What’ll Ya Have: Justice Or Mercy?***

If you’ve never officially settled your eternal account with God, He’s set up all the arrangements for you to arrive at this point, and He wants you to pray a prayer like this right now:

“God, You’re right; I’m a sinner. I do need a Savior. And I do NOT want Your justice; I want Your mercy. Thank You for paying my sin debt on the cross, for wiping my slate clean. Please enter my life now and show me how to *really* live for You. Because of Jesus, I can ask You to do this for me. Amen.”

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www.HisDeal.org

george@HisDeal.org

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