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

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

**Chapter 10**

***Will or Grace:***

***Another Laughing Matter For Andy Rooney?***

*60*

 *Minutes’* crackly curmudgeon, Andy Rooney, tells Imus In The Morning, “Why should I see ‘The Passion Of The Christ’ and pay nine dollars just for a few laughs?” Try saying that about Mohammed in Mecca, Anderoo! Only in America where almighty God takes it in the shorts, thanks to free speech and our moral poverty. But Andy’s not the only guy who can stir the pot. Paul, history’s first missionary, is an all-pro at that.

Here’s a quick fly-over of the bombs he dropped on us in A.D. 57 in chs. 1-9 of his literary classic written to Christ’s followers in Rome. He says that none of us – Jews or Gentiles – is born suitable to be in God’s presence (1:18-3:20). But because God loves us and wants to live with and *in* us, He makes it possible, through the death of His Son Jesus, for us to live at peace with Him and receive His righteousness at no cost to you and me. This reverses the curse that sin slapped on us all (3:21-5:21). What’s more, despite our continuing to wrestle with sin here on earth, we can tap into God’s righteousness to help us live godly lives, as He reshapes us to bear Jesus’ own characteristics (6:1-8:39)!

In ch. 9 we butt heads with perhaps the Bible’s most hotly debated chapter -- hotter than a Martha Stewart Sing Sing soufflé. Paul, himself a Jew, takes on Israel, arguably the most religious nation on earth. In spite of their religious fervor, all but a few of the Jewish people are very far from God, as we’ll soon see.

Ch. 9 defines God’s overarching right to choose as He pleases, a notion that nukes our narcissistic “World According To Me,” pricking our presuppositions about our status in the universe. But if God’s Word is reality, we must let it speak for itself.

Paul says absolutely none of us would ever get around to trusting in Christ as our Lord, or even seeking God, if He hadn’t pursued us first. God alerts us to our need of a Savior, puts a hunger in our heart to set things straight with Him, opens our spiritually-blind eyes to see that His Son died in our place as payment for ALL our sins, and gives us enough faith to transfer control of our lives to Him. All credit goes to God’s Grace; and none to our Will.

***Road To Righteousness: Doing or Believing?***

Every coin has two sides, so ch. 10 flips from God’s total control over to man’s responsibility and moral freedom. Since we’re talking about our sin, and how to get right with God, we tend to engage in “who me?” buck passing, a hand-me-down from our first forefather and foremother. **Let’s get back to the Garden and read Genesis 3:1-13 (p. 2).**

Knowing the genesis of our dilemma, let’s now get God’s solution, which pops in stark contrast to our measly attempts to *earn* God’s okay. **Let’s read Romans 10:1-21 (p. 843).**

### All Zeal, But No Deal

***Romans 10:1-4***

Heavy of heart, Paul hasn’t given up on his countrymen who have not yet connected the dots between their self-righteousness and accepting Jesus. Alas, they’re striving passionately to earn salvation (by observing holy feasts, the Sabbath et al), a futile exercise that breeds either pride or depression. This works-driven religion, Jesus says with His best Dr. Phil candor, produces false doctrine, “hypocrites, snakes and blind guides.” So make sure your teachers are following God’s script, not theirs (Matthew 23:1-39).

The Jews failed to see that their Old Testament (the Torah) actually taught salvation by *faith*, not by human effort (Genesis 15:6). Their "stumbling stone" was Jesus who was not the Messiah they were expecting. Some folks ignore life’s end game, fallaciously assuming that come Judgment Day God will write off their sins because hopefully their good deeds will outweigh them (Romans 3:21-22).

Paul once bought into that. Before coming to Christ, for the sake of his beloved Judaism, he terrorized those Jewish “traitors” who welcomed Jesus as their Messiah (1 Timothy 1:15-16). But most Jews were and are clueless re the one fact all people MUST know: that being forgiven and set right with God is a free gift from God’s grace; and that the Law God gave to Moses was meant only to show us our sin and our utter helplessness to please God *without* His gift.

Being a good guy, even a churchgoer *seems* adequate, right?? King Solomon cautions: “There's a way of life which looks right to a man; but look again -- its end is the way of death -- it leads straight to hell” (Proverbs 14:12).

Paul says, “Christ is the *end* of the Law.” If he means Christ fulfilled all of its requirements *for* us by living a sinless life, then, hey, why go to the cross (Deuteronomy 21:23, Galatians 3:13)? But no, Christ did not fulfill the law for us; He *died* for us (1 Corinthians 15:3)! When a Jew (or anyone trying to earn his way to heaven) places his trust in Christ, that’s “the *end* of the Law” for him since now his right standing before God has come by a “new and living way” (Hebrews 10:20, Romans 6:14).

Is God the “Chooser-in-Chief” (ch. 9), or are we (ch. 10)? Are these opposing views? Paul puts them back-to-back, indicating both are true. (If we could figure out how that’s possible, we could become the fourth member of The Trinity.) But it really makes sense. As Ray Stedman puts it, “God must call us before we can possibly move toward Him; yet, if we do not respond, we’re to blame for not knowing Him and for continuing in our lost, fallen condition.”

***All That To Say This***

***Romans 10:5-10***

For a stretch of 1,500 years – from Moses to Christ’s first coming - God put Israel under the Law, knowing they could not fully obey it, knowing that only their *faith* in God (the sort of faith Abraham had) would give them God’s own righteousness and eternal life with Him (Leviticus 18:5).

Those who live by faith don’t need Christ to return from heaven or the grave to give them more proof. God has already come to us, in Bethlehem (Deuteronomy 30:6, 11-14). But that’s apparently not enough for everybody, as Paul wrote to Corinth’s believers:

*“Since the world in all its fancy wisdom never had a clue when it came to knowing God, God in his wisdom took delight in using what the world considered dumb -- preaching, of all things! - to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation. While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom, we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified. Jews treat this like an anti-miracle -- and Greeks pass it off as absurd. But to us who are personally called by God himself -- both Jews and Greeks -- Christ is God's ultimate miracle and wisdom all wrapped up in one. Human wisdom is so tinny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:21-25a, p. 848).

“The word of faith,” i.e., the Gospel as told by Paul, was a topic the Jews talked about (it was “in your mouth”), and that universal hunger for being one with God was “in your heart” (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). So all they need do was just admit (“confess”) to Jesus that He is Lord, and believe that God had raised Him from the dead, and they’d be, as Jesus said, “born again,” “saved” (Philippians 2:9-11).

As Thomas Hooker, an English Puritan who came to America in the 1630’s, said: “If a man has faith within, it will break forth at the mouth.” Authentic trust in Christ can’t be muzzled.

***Come One, Come All***

***Romans 10:11-15***

Before the cross the route to God was thru the temple, adhering to Moses’ Law (the Torah), to feasts, sacrifices, dietary regs, ordinances (even, ouch, circumcision!) and oral traditions (the Talmud).

But after Paul’s conversion, the playing field was leveled. God’s invitation is now to “anyone,” “all” and “everyone” to come to God through faith in Christ. Trying to meet all the Law’s demands dooms you to eventual disappointment and shame (1 John 4:16-17).

800 years B.C. the Old Testament prophet Joel announced, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). Mentioning it here is the first time in Romans that Paul lays out God’s solution to man’s dilemma. ‘til now he’s documented sin’s presence, power and potential. Now … God’s promise!

“Whosoever” is *all* of us, not just a handpicked elite (John 3:16). God keeps it simple: He saves us—we don’t save ourselves. And He saves *anyone*, but *only* when we turn to Him in *faith*.

350 years B.C. Aristotle, Greece’s famed philosopher, tutored 13-year-old Alexander the (about to be) Great. This Greek thinker taught that righteousness comes from external, frequent actions. But had Ari consulted Moses’ writings, he’d have found that “Abraham *believed* God, and God *credited* it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3, 20-25).

God isn't asking us to *do* anything – just to *believe* what Christ has already done. We who know Christ have the thrill of telling others not another manmade philosophy, but the life-transforming news that frees us to be who we’re created to be (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

***Hard Of Hearing***

***Romans 10:16-21***

Paul says Israel can’t cop a plea; they *had* heard God loud’n’clear -- through prophets and miracles (called “special revelation”), and through the silent witness of nature and of their own hearts (“general revelation”). Nary a soul ever lives unaware of God’s existence. In every culture, no matter how uncivilized, people know “Someone” bigger than they are sends the rain and rotates day with night. Creation announces that God is! **Let’s read what King David, who’d been raised as a shepherd boy under Palestine’s starry skies, wrote in Psalm 19:1-4a, p. 408).**

1,600 years before it happened, the great Jewish liberator Moses predicted that non-Jews, unschooled in rabbinical ways, would be sought out and embraced by God, not of their own choosing or merit. This, he promised, would arouse jealousy and anger in the Jewish heart, but to little avail in wooing them to Jesus.

Even today God is still the ever-patient Seeker. You and I, the seekees. He reveals Himself to us through creation, through people, circumstances and events, primarily through His loveletter to us, the Bible. But some say, “No thanks, God, I’ll rely on my own righteousness. What happened on the cross is irrelevant.”

Worse yet, “I don’t deserve God’s forgiveness. Let me clean up my act first.” That’s like going to the neighbors’ to eat and saying, “OK, how much do we owe you for dinner?” What an insult. God picked up the tab to forever eliminate our sin debt; it cost Him His Son.

***The Romans 10 Take-Out***

Recapping this chapter’s key points, we find that ….

• Religious zeal without Jesus, the “*Real* Deal,” is no deal.

• We can’t score enough points with God to earn His favor. Our sole hope is to put all our faith chips on red, i.e., the blood that Christ spilled for you and me.

• Our new life in Christ should not be the best-kept secret in town, on the job, or at home. God’s able to give saving faith to those who hear the Gospel from us, no matter how ineptly we tell it. God’s free gift of salvation is the best product we could ever represent.

It's built into our genes to try to be good enough to impress others -- and God! But, warns the Bible, we're all sinners, equally doomed to spend our afterlife forever in a really intense place where it won’t be CD’s that are burning. But the Gospel gives us a choice: Christ came, died and was raised to save you and me. To be saved, God says, "Receive My gracious gift by faith alone, plus nothing!"

Personally, I could never face life’s highs and lows if my spiritual house were not built on Christ the Rock, instead of on the shifting sand of my flaky attempts to be good.

Jesus told of the taxman who prayed this one-sentence prayer that changed his life forever. Why not pray it with me: “’O God, have mercy on me, for I’m a sinner.’ I’m calling on you now in faith because You’ve promised to save me. So I’m taking that to the bank as we speak. Thank You, Jesus, for Your indescribable gift. Amen.”

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