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

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

**Romans 12:2**

***Fess Up – It’s Really All About YOU, Isn’t It?***

A

s kids, we played a game where you could be “safe” if you touched a certain tree, or stood on Mr. Yarbrough’s porch and shouted, “Home free! Can’t touch me!” If you zipped back to home base fast enough, you could then scramble out into danger again. It’s an exhilarating way to live. Just ask Dan Rather. Or Bill O’Reilly.

Is life only a mad dash away from imminent peril, or toward self-satisfaction? Are there reliable guidelines? For credible answers, we’ve turned to Paul’s letter to Christ’s followers in Rome, about A.D. 57, ten years before he’s beheaded following Nero’s great fire, some twenty-five years after Jesus had returned to heaven.

The world’s primo city bristles with a million slaves. Decadence rules (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Christianity is regarded as a mere flea-flicker sect. Against this backdrop Paul lays out how to be, as Christ told Jewish leader Nicodemus (John 3:3), “born again,” or saved from sin’s eternal damnation.

Someone said the first two verses of Romans ch. 12 are like being “home free. I keep coming back to it for positioning, purpose and principled guidelines.” In chs. 1-11 we’ve examined God’s invitation to all to receive His pardon for sin. In the remainder of Paul’s letter are God’s guidelines for getting the max out of life.

A 104-year-old lady was asked, “What’s the best thing about being 104?” Her answer: “No more peer pressure!”

Ever asked yourself, “What audience am I playing to?” My clients? Bosses? Peers? Family? Who *should* be our “audience of one?”

***Recapping Romans***

In ch. 1 Paul declares that all mankind intuitively knows there is a God. Is it realistic to think that a prodigal protozoa slithered up on a primordial shore and millions of years later awoke with a skull made of twenty-four bones, protecting a three-pound organ encasing more than 60 billion cells? This intricate command and control center hosts our consciousness, thought and creativity, interprets our senses and initiates our body movements.

To deny there’s a Creator requires more faith than to believe He exists. 3,500 years ago God said His name is “I Am.” From the onset of time God’s been telling us, “Hey, it’s Me. I’m here.”

But the Bible reveals that each of us is born hellbent to steer our own ship, to resist acknowledging God as “UdaMan” of our life. Rather than follow God’s way, we opt for a pseudo-savior – like career, fame, science, even family, charities, friends and, yes, religion. Even an “Elimidate” contestant can see where this “me first, God-next” mindset has gotten us. **Let’s read Romans 1:18-25, p.836.**

“But I’m a really good person. God knows that my pluses outweigh my minuses.” **Then let’s shine on Romans 3:10-20, p.838.**

Not one to let us dangle, God graciously, mercifully produced an eternal exit strategy, called “The Gospel.” Quicker than Dr. Phil can blurt out “Get real,” God’s “Good News” puts our personal plight into perspective, intimately links us with God, and gives us total, lasting forgiveness. God does this, no thanks to anything we’ve done, but solely because His Son Jesus took the rap as the sinless Sacrifice for our sin when He was crucified, then rose to life again. **Let’s read Paul’s summary in Romans 3:21-28, p.838.**

Swapping “me-first living” for “God-first living” means you can say:

1. “Now I see that faith in God through Christ, not our best behavior or good deeds, allows God to **pardon me.”** **Let’s check that in Romans 4:4-8, p. 838**
2. “Now I see that faith in God through Christ has brought me **peace with God** because when Jesus was crucified for me, God forgave my sins for good, and made me as right with Him as Christ is! **Let’s read Romans 5:1-11, p.839.**
3. “Now I see that faith in God through Christ has given me such **total forgiveness** that I could actually keep on sinning and *remain* forgiven! But why *would* I?” Paul tells us that, as Christ-followers, sin’s no longer the engine of our lives; God is. We don’t *have* to give in to sin because, no longer sin’s slave, we have the option of living a far superior way. **Let’s go to it in Romans 6:1-7, p.840.**

The perks for living God’s way rock on and on. (1) Once we’re in God’s family, he’ll **never hold our sin against us.** No double jeopardy! (2) Whatever comes into a believer’s life, even if it seems negative, **He’ll eventually turn it into a plus** for us. (3) Nobody can ever split up our oneness with God. **Heaven has no factory recalls.** **Let’s grab Romans 8:1-4, 8:28-39, p.841.**

In chs. 1-8 Paul details how God puts individuals right with Him. In chs.9-11 he takes a side trip to explain that even though now the once-lowly Gentiles are given equal footing to join God’s family of believers, rather than be required to come via Judaism, God is not ignoring His “most favored nation” relationship with Israel. Devout Jews everywhere were – and are – looking for their long-awaited Messiah-Savior-King who will bring home to Israel the scattered Jews, and set up His worldwide throne in Jerusalem.

Christ *already* came to establish His earthly kingdom, but was shot down by His own people, the Jews. Heck, they even pressured Pilate, Rome’s remotely controlled puppet, into *executing* Him. **Let’s read Romans 9:30-33; 11:25-32, p.842.**

Paul agonized for his countrymen to turn from legalistic, spiritual blindness, and follow Jesus. He was even willing to swap his salvation for theirs (Romans 9:2-3). Listen as he contrasts do-it-yourself righteousness with that which God offers us to accept by simple faith. **Listen now to Romans 10:5-13, p.843.**

Only the all-wise, all-powerful, everywhere-present, sinless, timeless, sovereign God could’ve engineered a plan to park humans on the only planet known to support life, then given them freedom to choose to honor Him or not. Then, their having failed miserably in the Garden – and subsequently down through time, we’re given, by His grace, a new way to follow God and live a sin-forgiven life. **Let’s read all about it in Romans 11:25-36, p.844.**

***Is There More After Being The Apprentice?***

Says Paul, now that you know who God is, and how much you need Him, and how much He loves you, and how you can permanently become His son, now what? **Let’s do Romans 12:1-2, p.844.**

Paul’s “therefore” means “So what’s the point?” Here it is: instead of “ordering” believers to act on his counsel, he pleads, begs, beseeches them. On what basis? The fact that, in His mercy, God has not given them what they deserve as sinners.

What action is Paul urging them (and us) to take? Unlike their old religious ritual of offering the blood of animals as a sacrifice for sins, Paul implores them to turn over to God their 110% – body, mind and spirit, not to be *slaughtered* for Him, but to *live* for Him!

Placing ourselves at God’s disposal, in view of all He’s done and will do for us, is our *rational* response. As we dedicate ourselves to Him, He transforms our mind, from the inside out, so that we can actually know His plan for our life. Knowing what *God* says is true of us, now what we ***know*** can always trump how we ***feel!***

Verse 2 of ch. 12 is like coming upon the world’s largest High Definition screen! Zap!! Clarity! Bigger-than-life resolution!

**DISCUSSION: What does Paul mean by being “conformed to the pattern of this world?”**

**How do we go about “renewing our mind?”**

**How would life look to one with a “transformed mind?”**

Emerging from atheism into full-flowered faith in Christ, British professor C.S. Lewis, a colleague of J.R.R. “The Lord of the Rings” Tolkien, began reading his Bible where he discovered his new identity. “Until you have given up yourself to Him, you will not have a real self.” He cited Christ’s words, “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39)” Formerly a loner, Lewis downloaded radically new priorities: #1-loving God, #2-loving others.

Paul says don’t get snookered into the world’s ungodly mold (1 Corinthians 1:20-21). That’ll just pre-empt you from savoring God’s soaring plan for your life. Paul prescribes a spiritual “mind bath,” soaking in God’s Truth. You see, says he, life’s NOT “All About you.” It’s all about **GOD** (John 21:22)! When we put Him first, and define ourselves as He sees us, we find that life is truly **GOOD,** that we **PLEASE** God, and that His plan for us is **PERFECT.**

***Beyond The Fear Factor***

Some fear death. They *should,* if they’ve stiff-armed God’s forgiveness, grabbing the reins of their life. Others fear inviting Christ in; they *shouldn’t.* Jesus died in your place to save you from a fate worse than death, namely endless, after-life torment the Bible calls hell. Ah, but God’s here today offering you a never-ending relationship with him, thanks to Christ’s victory over death. If you haven’t walked through that faith door yet, tell God now, “Father, I’m ready. I’m a sinner. I deserve Your judgment. But I now believe that Your Son died for me, and for that reason alone, You’ve forgiven me. Enter my life now. I need You. Jesus, I’m yours. Please be my “Audience of One.” Thank you. Amen.”

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