**Paul's Letter to the Romans**

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

**Romans 12:3-21**

**Living Beyond“Therefore”**

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## e’re rifling through Paul’s mail to Christ’s folks in Rome, circa AD 57, three years into Nero’s reign. This letter is perhaps the keystone of the Bible, thus of all literature.

First century Rome was the early beta version of western civilization. The Eternal City’s seven hills glistened with commerce, villas of the aristocracy, staggering wealth and wretched poverty.

Slaves comprised up to a third of the population as “non-persons,” many without even a name. Corruption ran wild (1 Corinthians 6:9-20). One of four newborns died before turning 1; half before age 11. Penniless parents left babies for passersby to take home.

Since the Roman Empire’s founding in 31 BC, its rulers were regarded as gods. Cynicism and Stoicism prevailed. Into this decadence came radical news that God had provided a once-for-all cure for man’s sinful state because a Jewish carpenter had reframed forever how God and humanity will relate.

### Romans, In The Rear View Mirror

In chapters 1-11 Paul downloads that God’s made it possible for all people everywhere since Day One B.C. to know about Him, leaving all off us with no excuse (Romans 1:18-20). Whether by doing good works or trying to be religious, it’s futile to strive to earn God’s acceptance, or to get our sin-ticket written off (Romans 3:20-21). The Bible says we can only be set “right” by placing our faith in God’s Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 3:28). Doing so clears the air between us and God, now and always (Romans 5:1, 8:1).

### That’s Nice, But Now What?

### Romans 12:1-2

## Now Paul moves from doctrine to doing. Let’s read Romans 12:1-21 (p. 844.)

When Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God responded by extending His mercy to Gentiles who ‘til then had to convert to Judaism and follow its strict code of sacrifices, prohibitions and endless traditions – with no way to have their sins permanently deleted (Romans 11:30-31). God tapped Paul to announce that to be forgiven, anyone had only to, by faith, cast their lot with Christ.

This was a sea change from God living in a building, to living in every believer (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), and from man’s getting to God via a middleman (rabbi) to going direct, as we do today.

Under God’s new program, unveiled by Paul, since Christ gave His life as the one-time-only sacrifice for our sins, our logical response is to wear a “Reserved for God” sign, placing us at His disposal. God wants us to hop into the offering plate (Romans 6:13, Ephesians 5:1-2). Can we ever outgive God? One song goes, “I’ll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross.”

DISCUSSION: What are some things that can divert us from living the life to which Jesus calls us? How can we resist taking their bait?

God wants to rewire us to think and act differently, setting our minds “free to fly about the country.” We begin to beef up on who He says we are, not letting other forces squeeze us into their mold (2 Corinthians 10:5; Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:9-10).

That deadly Me-first Virus, released by that “snake” in the Garden, infects every person (1 Corinthians 7:31, Ephesians 2:1-3). This scam promotes anything but God as our solution. It screens us from Truth, and builds religious sandcastles to give us false hope that, like with frequent flyer miles, we can *earn* God’s “unmerited favor!”

What we *believe* drives what we *do*. So, our mind’s reformatted operating system can now empower us to repurpose everything we do into an act of worship to God (Colossians 3:23-24).

***What’s My Line?***

***Romans 12:3-8***

When we consider how much God loves us, that to wipe out our sins, He had His only Son take our place on that Roman cross, it’s a stretch for us to be pompous. All our talents, skills and spiritual gifts are supplied freely by God. It just makes sense for us to use them to be a God-reflector and to serve others.

DISCUSSION: Briefly review those seven spiritual gifts in verses 6-8. Jot down what you believe are two gifts God has blessed you with. Unacceptable answers include (a) the gift of tailgating, (b) deserving an NBA salary and (c) having Catherine Zeta-Jones as your personal bodyguard.

***Walks, Talks Like A Duck***

***Romans 12:9-13***

Non-hypocritical, unconditional love is piped in only from God. When you see it in action in someone’s life, and it walks like God, and talks like God, you know it’s from Him. His love hates evil and, like a close-knit family, it embraces good (Philippians 2:1-3).

A transformed mind opens heart and home to others’ needs, especially those of fellow believers (Galatians 6:10). Many perceive the #1 mission of Christ’s followers is to relieve the world of all suffering, creating heaven on earth.

An army protects its own first if it’s to help the helpless. And the Bible urges believers to fortify each other so they can then take spiritual and physical sustenance to millions who are without Christ.

DISCUSSION: Describe how your life would look if you had and exhibited this sort of love, joy, hope and generosity.

***Life Is Not A Pacers-Pistons Game***

***Romans 12:14-21***

Will Rogers said, “I never met a man I didn’t like.” Either Will lived in a lighthouse, or he never met your \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)! Who *is* your enemy? A former spouse, coach, boss, partner, friend?

Here God is speaking to individuals, not to nations. His counsel is to not follow your natural instinct. We’re to bless (speak well of) our adversaries, to *thank* those who criticize us (1 Peter 2:23, 1 Corinthians 4:12). If your foe’s an unbeliever, he has no Holy Spirit to guide him, no hope, no peace with God. How can you get hacked off at a guy toting all that baggage? Actually, some of the best lessons we’ll ever learn are taught by our enemies.

We’re to walk humbly in others’ shoes, shined or not, whether they’re high 5-ing or weeping (1 Corinthians 12:26, Philippians 2:4).

What a relief to leave revenge to God, letting Him balance the books (Deuteronomy 32:35, Hebrews 10:30). Who needs that stress! “Heap coals of fire” on an enemy’s head may refer to an Egyptian custom that shows a repentant spirit. It was also an idiom meaning to shame your foe with unexpected, undeserved kindness. So, go ahead, send a mushy Valentine to Simon Cowell.

When you let evil get the best of you, you become its victim. Replacing our own willpower with God-power, we can smother evil with love (Peter 2:19-21). This is what Jesus meant by calling His followers the “salt of the earth” and “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13-16). He’s challenging and enabling us to “Be different” so others can see God at work in an earth suit. But this turbo-living is a non-starter if Jesus is not in your life to help you live on the other side of “Therefore.”

***God’s Game of 21:***

***Stacked For You To Win***

This chapter’s 21, high-impact verses plot God’s preferred route for our lives. They are NOT rules, just a picture of potentials.

12:1 Keep giving God your body; the rest of you will follow.

12:2 Let God give you a makeover from the inside out.

12:3 See yourself as God sees you.

12:4 Live out what God’s called and equipped you to do.

12:5 Believers are parts of a body whose head is Christ.

12:6-8 Use your God-given gifts.

12:9 Run toward good and away from evil.

12:10 Genuinely love and respect each other.

12:11 Throw yourself into life with God as your Driving Force.

12:12 Praying reminds us of our hope and need to be patient.

12:13 Be generous to God’s family.

12:14 Speak well of those who try to hurt you.

12:15 Laugh and cry with others.

12:16 Humbly refuse to play favorites.

12:17 Don’t strike back; take the high road.

12:18 Be a peacemaker.

12:19 Revenge is off the table; God’s keeping score.

12:20-21 Doing wrong is never right; doing right is never wrong.

**DISCUSSION: How would our workplaces and homes change if we actually lived like this? How do we start?**

Our motivation to live “transformed” comes from knowing that God treats us like this! Jesus proved it. And believers have the Engine, God’s Holy Spirit, to get movin’. **Let’s gas up in Galatians 5:13-18, 22-26 (p. 868).**

***He’ll Leave The Light On For You***

Once you say “yes” to God, He makes you “a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). No longer will you be doomed to never-ending destruction in what the Bible calls “the lake of fire” because God will have adopted you as His very own son, making you a co-heir with Christ to all of heaven’s assets! And He’ll send His Holy Spirit to reside in you, to be your Comforter and Mentor. He’ll take *all* your sins -- past, present and future -- and bury them, *never* holding them against you again. *Ever*.

Jesus said, "Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life (John 8:12)." He invites you to let Him spotlight your path right on into eternity (John 3:1-21). If you’ve never taken that step of faith, just whisper to God, “God, I know something now of how much You love me. I’m a sinner, desperately in need of Your Son Jesus to be my Savior. So, here’s my heart, soul, mind and body. Please come live in me. I’m all Yours, as much as I know how to be. Thank You and (everybody said) ‘Amen.’”

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