**Paul's Letter to the Romans**

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

**Romans 13:1-14**

**My Country, My Neighbor, Myself**

I

t’s 1935. You’re a rising phenom in German politics. Der Fuehrer wants you to direct a pogrom to purge the Fatherland of Jews, but you’re a follower of Christ. Will you take the job with a hearty “Heil, yes?”

A few years before being martyred in Rome, and a quarter-century after Christ returned to heaven, Paul writes this letter to that city’s Jesus followers. It’s the definitive “Read Me” re man and God.

It’s early in the repressive reign of cruel Emperor Nero. Go ahead, snub this despot dandy, and you pay dearly. In A.D. 57, seven years later, a mysterious fire levels Rome and its economy. Its crazed ruler is thought to have set it. Historian Tacitus describes a “wag the dog” prequel as Nero unleashes wholesale torturing of Christ’s folks, accusing them of arson.

The public’s already restless, thinking these Jesus types are seditious, intent on capsizing the Empire. Nero hops on this wave, ordering Christians to be murdered, crucified, turned into Coliseum treats for the lions, or wrapped like tamales in animal hides and ignited to become human fireflies.

This is the sinister political scene as Paul writes to believers in the imperial capital city. **For now, let’s put our partisan passions on “pause” as we examine God’s magna carta on the Christian’s relationship to government, reading Romans 13:1-14 (p. 845)**

### The Divine Plight of Kings

### Romans 13:1-7

Governing God’s way brings peace, but crooked juggernauts can fade into just naughts like Tut’s uncommon Egypt, Medo-Persia, Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Rome, the once-mighty British Empire, Third Reich, the USSR. Earth-kings must answer to the Kingmaker.

God wants everyone to submit to their government since He’s given rulers their power and position. Distasteful as it is, even a vile regime is due honor. Claudius, Nero’s predecessor, once ran all Jews out of Rome, so Paul *knew* Jewish Christians would resent this.

Had Israel not risen up against Roman occupation in A.D. 68, Gen. Titus would not have granulated Jerusalem two years later, killing 1.1 million and scattering the rest far and wide, proving God’s point: domination beats annihilation (1 Peter 2:11-21).

“Hold it,” you say, “but Paul didn’t have to live under *this* president!” To treat God’s chosen leaders with contempt or irreverence is to dishonor His designated *ministers* and *servants*. (Oh, how I hate to hear this next line!) When we scathe our leaders, it makes it tough to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

Regimes can be cruel.…

• God put villainous Pharaoh atop Egypt to lock millions of Jews in bondage for four centuries of slavery before Moses freed them.

• God let Babylon’s Nebuchadnezzar, mightiest monarch in history, sack Israel and strong-arm the Jews into exile in 586 B.C.

• God had Cyrus, king of Persia (Iraq), liberate the Jews in 538 B.C.

• Sixty million lives were snuffed out in WW2. Sin exists because God let our first parents choose. (“Eve, Eve, why weren’t you afraid of snakes!”)

Regardless of elections or revolutions, no government exists apart from God’s permissive will, although He definitely doesn’t endorse all they do.

After the coming, seven-year Tribulation, the Bible says Jesus will set up His kingdom on earth for the 1,000-year Millennium. As “King of Kings and Lord of Lords,” He’ll reign from the “New Jerusalem,” leading a perfect government, one to which we’ll gladly submit. ‘Til then, to keep anarchy at bay, God sets up *pro tem* systems with feet of clay whom we’re to obey (Hebrews 13:17).

What would Andy Rooney say? “Ever wonder if God’s playing chess with us? As if we’re His pawns, the world’s armies His knights, the religions His bishops, the media His rooks, and the heads of state His kings and queens?”

When government mandates would cause a believer to sin or compromise our loyalty to God, we must stand with God. Daniel and his three chums were tossed into a fiery furnace for not bowing to a golden idol (Daniel 3:1-30). Baby Moses’ folks spurned Pharaoh’s edict to kill all Jewish infant males (Hebrews 11:23). Peter and John kept talkin’ up Jesus, despite a gag order (Acts 4:16-21). British MP William Wilberforce devoted his life to getting legislation passed in 1833 to abolish slavery in England, paving the way for Lincoln, King and Parks. As Peter told the high priest, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Some chide God for tolerating abusive regimes, critical of His “inhumane” governance. Fact is, God hasn’t been governing since Adam and Eve bit on the Devil’s dare, saying, “Step aside, God; we’ll take it from here.” Since then, God’s mercifully been delaying His final judgment for sin so that all may have a chance to hear and embrace the gospel of His grace.

God’s given those in office the right to tax us to pay for their services. When Jesus was here, He paid taxes (Matthew 17:24-27). In His day Rome’s tax collectors were extortionists, scamming citizens with fat mark-ups for themselves. Asked if taxes were legit, Jesus said without stuttering, “Give Caesar what’s his, and give God what’s His” (Matthew 22:15-22).

**QUESTION: Is lousy government God’s cruel joke? Do believers have recourse? If God’s in control, why vote or watch “Meet the Depressed” and “Deface the Nation?” Can you be a responsible Christ-follower and a good citizen?**

### “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”

### Romans 13:8-10

Love is an action, not a feeling. Loving others, our Lord’s “second greatest commandment,” is a “debt” we can never repay (Leviticus 19:18). God has liberally downloaded His love on us, so it’s a privilege for us to copy-and-paste it on others (1 Corinthians 13). When we love unconditionally, we fulfill God’s laws that He gave Moses on Mt. Sinai (Exodus 20:12-17).

**QUESTION: How can you go out of your way today to love someone, even a schmuck? What would that love look like?**

### “People, Get Ready”

### Romans 13:11-14

Curtis Mayfield wrote and sang this wake-up call:

*People get ready, there's a train a-coming*.

*You don't need no baggage, you just get on board.*

*All you need is faith to hear diesels humming.*

*You don't need no ticket, you just thank the Lord*.

For 2,000 years now Christ’s people have expected Him to come back for them at any moment. When He does, the Bible says it’ll happen “in the twinkling of an eye” -- no time for foxhole conversions (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Paul urges his readers (and us) to anticipate this not-to-be-missed home going. Using Stephen Covey’s metaphor, being ready for Jesus is one of those “big rocks” you put in your jar (your life) first before adding pebbles, sand and water. Essentials first, extras later.

Believers are to “put on Christ,” i.e., to rely on Him to be our Guide and Example. He even “REI’s” us with all the gear we’ll need. **Let’s read Ephesians 6:10-20 (p. 872).**

Check out Paul’s expose’ of how the world is really operating. He says our real adversaries are not people, but that this world’s “bad stuff” is being metastasized by those fallen angels who were expelled from heaven with Lucifer. But their power extends only as far as God gives them rope (Job 1:6-12). These loathsome messengers of Satan start wars, spread disease, famines, natural calamities and the like. But the believer’s fully equipped with God’s armor, necessary if we’re to stand our ground against sin.

The **belt of truth** holds up what we’re wearing (remember, we’ve “put on Christ”). Jesus said, “I *am* the Truth.” Without Truth we got zip, baby. The **breastplate of righteousness** guards our vital organs. Satan wants us to doubt that we’ve really been made 100% right with God after all. Heaven’s **shoes** let us go tell others about the peace they too can have in knowing God. The **shield of faith** deflects deadly darts of temptation, anger, lust, despair, etc. The **helmet of salvation** protects our minds from assaults on our joy, peace and hope. Our only *offensive* weapon, the **sword of the Spirit** (the Word of God), is for close combat with sin. Thanks to God’s Holy Spirit living within every believer, we’re in full pads, prepped for the daily spiritual warfare, fully armed to live a God-directed life.

QUESTION: Give examples of spiritual warfare. Using God’s armor, how do you follow Christ, not our ungodly urges?

OK, roll the highlights film! In this tough-talking chapter God instructs His people to obey government because He put it in place to bring about an ordered society. Submitting to authorities is God-honoring. We’re to pay taxes and love others. And God wants us to be 24/7 aware that Jesus is coming back for His followers at any moment. That’ll focus us on doing what God calls good, and avoiding what He hates, which He calls **sin**.

### “It’s Time To Play

### JESUS JEOPARDY!”

In life’s biggest game God made the first move by sending His Son Jesus to earth to give His life as the totally sufficient sacrifice for our sins. Nothing else would do – not even our all-out, best efforts to be really good guys.

Now the next move is yours. The Bible says you can choose (a) to face God’s JUDGMENT by not taking His free gift of total forgiveness of your sins.

*Hoping* somehow your eternal destiny will find your pluses outweighing your minuses is a fatal miscalculation, as we learned earlier (Romans 4:1-8). God doesn’t grade on a curve -- just “pass/fail.” Paul describes how we go from Fail to Pass: “But then God our Savior showed us his kindness and love. He saved us, not because of the good things *we* did, but because of *his* mercy. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us because of what Jesus Christ our Savior did” (Titus 3:4-6). That’s the Gospel on a plain bun, no condiments.

Or (b) you can choose to fall on God’s MERCY, and not get what you *do* deserve (which is eternal separation from God and ALL that’s good). When you invite Jesus to replace you on the throne of your life, you get the permanent gift of God’s GRACE, something you *don’t* deserve (John 3:36)!

If you’re all over (b) today, before we dash outside back into unreality, just tell God, “God, it’s clear to me that I’m a sinner. I need You in my life. Thank You for forgiving every single sin of mine on the cross. Please come into my life now, and show me how to follow You. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

So what do you think about that?

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