

# HEIR MAIL: Paul's Letter to Rome

## Ch. 1

**T**he Mediterranean sun rises to greet the first century as the curtain goes up on the Roman Empire. First-nighters decked out in their togas naively applaud bad actors like Julius Caesar, Nero and Augustus Caesar. Hordes of extras include barbaric tribes, scholars, wealthy traders, farmers and 60 million slaves!

“In headline news Brutus and Cassius knock off Julius Caesar. Antony and Cleopatra, double suicide. Caligula assassinated. Nero murders mom, sets Rome ablaze using Christians as torches, kicks wife to death, takes his life, his successor Galba is murdered. Now let's check traffic and weather ...”

Using his Hebrew name, Saul, a Roman citizen on Jerusalem's high court, terrorizes the first Christians. After a supernatural makeover, Paul, his Gentile name, becomes a Roman candle, dispelling darkness with Gospel light (Acts 9). It's 30 years after a Nazarene carpenter was hung for claiming to be God's Son. From A.D. 47-57 Paul, God's envoy to Gentiles, tours ancient Asia, announcing that performance-driven religion has been replaced by Jesus' sacrificial death as payment-in-full for the world's sins!

This letter has been called “probably the most powerful human document ever penned.” It was written to (1) Jews who accepted Jesus but continued living under Moses' laws and to (2) Gentiles who had worshipped idols.

**38** (Addressing a synagogue in today's Turkey, Paul pleads,) “**I want you to know, my very dear friends, that it is on account of this resurrected Jesus that the forgiveness of your sins can be promised. 39 He accomplishes, in those who believe, everything that the Law of Moses could never make good on. But everyone who believes in this raised-up Jesus is declared good and right and whole before God. (Acts 13:38-39)**

Rome's first Christians were probably Jews who'd been in Jerusalem, accepted Christ there, were hunted down by legalists and fled to Rome. Gentiles joined Jewish converts there and were pressured to mingle works-oriented religion with Paul's by-faith-only Gospel.

**11** (Paul explains the origin of his mission.) “**... this great Message I delivered to you is not mere human optimism. 12 I didn't receive it through the traditions, and I wasn't taught it in some school. I got it straight from God, received the Message directly from Jesus Christ.**”

(Galatians 1:11-12)

Fast forward to today. It's late...Seattle drizzle slows you to a crawl. You reach for Arrowsmith to keep you awake. Out of nowhere an SUV is coming at you! The next thing you remember, white uniforms are ringing your hospital bed. You have questions.

"Who am I? Where was I going? Who can answer me? Will those answers be truthful? Can I put my trust in them to tell me the truth? "How can I be sure? Can God speak to me? Does He know who I am?"

Let's overhear David, one of God's troubadours, with a solo for his Maestro.

"<sup>1-6</sup> GOD, investigate my life ...  
I'm an open book to You;  
... You know what I'm thinking.  
You know when I leave and when I get back;  
I'm never out of Your sight.  
You know everything I'm going to say  
before I start the first sentence. ...  
<sup>13-16</sup> You formed me in my mother's womb. ...  
Like an open book, You watched me grow from conception to  
birth;  
all the stages of my life were spread out before You,  
The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one  
day.'  
<sup>17-22</sup> Your thoughts of me ... I couldn't even begin to count  
them..."  
(Psalm 139:1-18)

Our Maker has told us who He is, who you are and how you can relate. There's only one way, He says. It's by believing that the Son of God took our death sentence and served it for us on the cross (John 14:6). Time after time Paul risks his life to deliver that message in hostile environments. His letter to Rome documents what God wants you to know about the Trinity, the Gospel, sin, heaven hell, His promises and His great love for you.

**Let's read Paul's magna carta ("great charter of freedoms") -- Romans 1:1-32 (MSG).**

" 1 I, Paul, am a devoted slave of Jesus Christ on assignment, authorized as an apostle to proclaim God's words and acts. I write this letter to all the believers in Rome, God's friends.

"<sup>2-7</sup> The sacred writings contain preliminary reports by the prophets on God's Son. His descent from David roots Him in history; His unique identity as Son of God was shown by the Spirit when Jesus was raised from the dead, setting Him apart as the Messiah, our Master. Through Him we received both the generous gift of His life and the urgent task of passing it on to others who receive it by entering into

obedient trust in Jesus. You are who you are through this gift and call of Jesus Christ! And I greet you now with all the generosity of God our Father and our Master Jesus, the Messiah.

"8-12 I thank God through Jesus for every one of you. That's first. People everywhere keep telling me about your lives of faith, and every time I hear them, I thank Him. And God, whom I so love to worship and serve by spreading the good news of His Son—the Message!—knows that every time I think of you in my prayers, which is practically all the time, I ask Him to clear the way for me to come and see you. The longer this waiting goes on, the deeper the ache. I so want to be there to deliver God's gift in person and watch you grow stronger right before my eyes! But don't think I'm not expecting to get something out of this, too! You have as much to give me as I do to you.

"13-15 Please don't misinterpret my failure to visit you, friends. You have no idea how many times I've made plans for Rome. I've been determined to get some personal enjoyment out of God's work among you, as I have in so many other non-Jewish towns and communities. But something has always come up and prevented it. Everyone I meet — it matters little whether they're mannered or rude, smart or simple — deepens my sense of interdependence and obligation. And that's why I can't wait to get to you in Rome, preaching this wonderful good news of God.

"16-17 It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts Him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: 'The person in right standing before God by trusting Him really lives.'

"18-23 But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of His divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they

didn't treat Him like God, refusing to worship Him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in His hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

24-25 So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes!

26-27 Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.

28-32 Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose. And then all hell broke loose: rampant evil, grabbing and grasping, vicious backstabbing. They made life hell on earth with their envy, wanton killing, bickering, and cheating. Look at them: mean-spirited, venomous, fork-tongued God-bashers. Bullies, swaggerers, insufferable windbags! They keep inventing new ways of wrecking lives. They ditch their parents when they get in the way.

Stupid, slimy, cruel, cold-blooded. And it's not as if they don't know better. They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!

DISCUSS: Anything here look familiar? How do we respond?

### *His Dealer's Choice* *Romans 1:1-7*

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words and acts. I write this letter to all the believers in Rome, God's friends.

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As "Christ's bond-servant" (voluntary) Paul was devoted to his Master, Jesus, whose deity was proven by His miracles, by His Father's voice from heaven at His baptism and by His resurrection. To emphasize His grace, God chose His bitterest human enemy, Saul, to announce Christ's liberating news to Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19; Romans 11:13) .

**BEFORE** Christ's crucifixion, animals sacrificed to God allowed sins to be forgiven but not paid for until the cross. **AFTER** the cross, **God permanently forgave all sins** (Romans 3:25). The only sin that sends anyone to hell is refusing God's offer. That's the "gospel of the grace of God" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Grace gives us the opportunity to choose, and God won't override your will.

**DISCUSS: Why isn't being good good enough for God?**

### ***"When in Rome, Don't"*** ***Romans 1:8-15***

"8-10 I thank God through Jesus for every one of you. People everywhere keep telling me about your lives of faith, and every time I hear them, I thank him. And God, whom I so love to worship and serve by spreading the good news of His Son—the Message!—knows that every time I think of you in my prayers, which is practically all the time, I ask Him to clear the way for me to come and see you. "

Historian Tacitus writes, "Into Rome flow all things vile and abominable!" Paul was telling the denizens of this immoral cesspool that God loves and welcomes sinners! His deal is His offer to transfer all our sins to His only Son and give you the very same standing that His Son has with Him (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

DISCUSS: What about the Gospel is misunderstood?

*Trust is a Must*  
*Romans 1:16-17*

"16-17 It's news I'm most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! God's way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: "The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives."

Paul's seminal discovery is mankind's continental divide: "Those who live in right standing before God do so by faith, not by human effort." (Habakkuk 2:4; Galatians 3:11)

DISCUSS: In what ways do we try to earn God's favor?

*Now Showing at Sinnerama!*  
*Romans 1:18-32*

"18-32 But God's angry displeasure erupts as acts of human mistrust and wrongdoing and lying accumulate, as people try to put a shroud over truth. But the basic reality of God is plain enough. ... By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse. ... People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat Him like God, refusing to worship Him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in His hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand."

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Paul builds an airtight case for our need for God (Genesis 3:17-19; Psalm 90:9-11). Sexual immorality vainly seeks intimacy with someone other than God (Leviticus 18:22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). That done, God lifts all restraints, turning us over to our sins, letting us call bad good and good bad (Judges 17:6). Ignoring God is a slippery slope, leading to a civilization's collapse.

The flip side of the Good News is the bad: ALL of us are born as sinners in God's eyes and deserve being separated from Him forever. (John 3:36; Romans 3:23, 6:23). But because God loves us so outrageously, He had His cherished Son die in our place. God pardoned all sin. We can't *earn* forgiveness; it comes only by *faith*. Here's Paul's classic statement over which many Christ-followers trip. Watch this closely.

8-10 Saving is all (God's) idea, and all His work. All we do is trust Him enough to let Him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! ... we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join Him in the work He does, the good work e has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Since Adam, God has broadcast His existence using Creation as Exhibit A, giving each person time to see the orderly, intelligent work of our Master Designer/Creator (Psalm 8:3-4; 19:1-4). God is not hiding from us; He desires that all of us know Him (2 Peter 3:9). An ancient Old Testament voice advises, "**Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near.**" (Isaiah 55:6)

**DISCUSS:** Compare "the God we want" with "the God who is."

## ***“Give Me Jesus”***

If you haven't closed the deal with God yet, please do so during this song which I hope will be your prayer right now. Say something like: “God, I'm a sinner. By faith I believe Jesus paid for all my sins on the cross, in my place. I'm all Yours. Thank You. Amen.”

**In the morning when I rise  
In the morning when I rise  
In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.**

**Give me Jesus,  
Give me Jesus,  
You can have all this world  
But give me Jesus.**

**And when I am alone  
Oh and when I am alone  
When I am alone, give me Jesus.**

**Give me Jesus,  
Give me Jesus,  
You can have all this world  
But give me Jesus.**

**And when I come to die  
Oh and when I come to die  
And when I come to die, give me Jesus.**

**Give me Jesus,  
Give me Jesus,  
You can have all this world,  
You can have all this world,  
You can have all this world,  
But give me Jesus.**

“Give me Jesus” by Fernando Ortega :11/4:12/  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v\\_3c1tLhUgM&list=RDv\\_3c1tLhUgM&start\\_radio=](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_3c1tLhUgM&list=RDv_3c1tLhUgM&start_radio=1)

## **As a follower of Christ, 2021 will be 21-derful because you are ...**

- 1.... forever forgiven and at peace with God (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 1:4; Jude 24-25)
- 2.... a co-heir with Jesus Christ who is your life (Galatians 4:1-7; Philippians 1:21)
- 3.... crucified, raised and seated with Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20)
- 4.... a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- 5.... a member of the Body of Christ (Colossians 1:24)
- 6.... holy, set apart by God as an ambassador of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20)
- 7.... the Holy Spirit's earthly home (Romans 8:9-11)
- 8.... never to be separated from God's love (Romans 8:25; 1 Peter 1:4-5)
- 9.... being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 12:1)
- 10... named in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27)
- 11... free from keeping the Mosaic Law in order to be right with God (Galatians 5:2-4)
- 12... saved by God's grace and not by anything you have done (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- 13... joyful in hope (Romans 12:12)
- 14... giving God thanks in everything (I Thessalonians 5:18)
- 15... not worrying about anything (Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Peter 5:7)
- 16... growing in the knowledge of the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2; Proverbs 28:26)
- 17... learning how God thinks (Philippians 2:5)
- 18... hearing God's voice (Isaiah 6:8; Hebrews 3:7)
- 19... a citizen of earth and heaven (Ephesians 2:18-22; Philippians 3:20)
- 20... have the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control
- 21... assured of being forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

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