

HEIR MAIL: PAUL'S LETTER TO ROME

Ch. 3:1-8

For 1,500 years both Jews and Gentiles had to approach God through Judaism, a religious system whose 613 laws were impossible to obey, creating a prevailing fear of failure.

Chosen by God to curate His truths, Jews were to be examples of how to honor and serve Him, but, alas, they were only human.

Privilege: Your Platform

It's *circa* A.D. 58 as Paul writes to Gentile and Jewish followers of Christ in Rome. He risked all to advance what the risen Christ had commissioned him to preach. It blurred the line of separation that had given Israelites an edge in relating to God. Paul explains:

*“²⁵ I give all my praises and glory to the One who has more than enough power to make you strong and keep you steadfast through the promises found in **my gospel**; that is, the proclamation of Jesus, the Anointed One. This wonderful news includes the unveiling of the **mystery** kept **secret** from the dawn of creation until now. ²⁶ This **mystery** is understood through prophecies of the Scripture and by decree of the eternal God. And it is now heard openly by all nations ...”* (Romans 16:25-26) To believers in ancient Turkey Paul wrote:

“² ... you're familiar with the part I was given in God's plan for including everybody. I got the inside story from God Himself ...

*⁴⁻⁶ ... you'll be able to see for yourselves into the **mystery** of Christ. None of our ancestors understood this. Only in our time has it been made clear by God's Spirit through His holy apostles and prophets of **this new order**. The **mystery** is that people who'd never heard of God and those who have heard of Him all their lives (both outsiders and insiders) stand on the same ground before God. They get the same offer, same help, same promises in Christ Jesus. The Message is accessible, welcoming everyone across the board.*

*⁷⁻⁸ This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise ... When it came to presenting the **Message** to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any available Christians. ...*

*⁸⁻¹⁰ ... I am, preaching and writing about the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. My task is to bring out in the open and make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in **secret** ... Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among angels! (Ephesians 3:2-10)*

Theologian Paul M. Sadler illuminates the religious reset in play 2,000 years ago as old-time religion was being replaced by the new:

“With the nation Israel derailed due to their rejection of her Messiah, God has temporarily left her on a remote siding. ... Today God is operating non-stop service to the Rapture on the Grace Xpress. Once the members of the Body of Christ reach their heavenly destination, Israel and the prophetic freight will again be permitted to return to the mainline.”

DISCUSS: What questions does this raise or answer for you?

Let's read Romans 3:1-8.

1-2 So what difference does it make who's a Jew and who isn't, who's been trained in God's ways and who hasn't? As it turns out, it makes a lot of difference—but not the difference so many have assumed.

2-6 First, there's the matter of being put in charge of writing down and caring for God's revelation, these Holy Scriptures. So, what if, in the course of doing that, some of those Jews abandoned their post? God didn't abandon them. Do you think their faithlessness cancels out His faithfulness? Not on your life! Depend on it: God keeps His word even when the whole world is lying through its teeth:

'Your words stand fast and true; rejection doesn't faze you.'

But if our wrongdoing only underlines and confirms God's right doing, shouldn't we be commended for helping out? Since our lies don't even make a dent in His truth, isn't it wrong of God to back us to the wall and hold us to our word? ... The answer to such questions is No, a most emphatic No! How else would things ever get straightened out if God didn't do the straightening?

7-8 It's simply perverse to say, 'If my lies serve to show off God's truth all the more gloriously, why blame me? I'm doing God a favor.' Some people are actually trying to put such words in our mouths, claiming that we go around saying, 'The more evil we do, the more good God does, so let's just do it!' That's pure slander, as I'm sure you'll agree.”

DISCUSS: Where are you on your journey from legalism to grace?



WANTED: ONE SINCERE SEEKER

Two thousand years earlier God informed Abraham that His progeny would produce One who would rule the earth forever. Until then the Almighty assigned them to shepherd His message, the Torah (the first five books of the Bible). God also defined the precise boundaries of “the promised land” which He gave them for eternity. (Genesis 17:8; Joshua 1:1-6) These blessings lured the Jews into pride and doubt. David articulates this (Psalm 14:1-3):

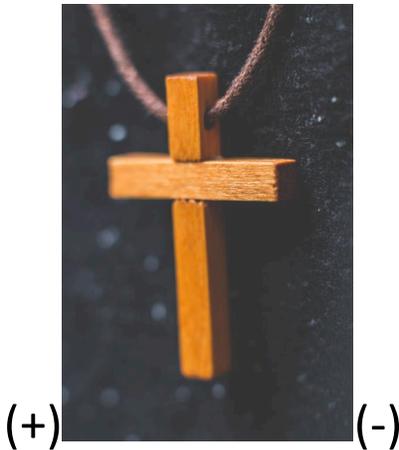
“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

DISCUSS: But what about all the really nice, generous unbelievers!?

How are you living the Christian life? On the left side of the cross place a + sign. It represents activities and self-talk that we add to Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for us. It inflates your **PRIDE**.

On the right side place a minus (-). It conveys the gloom of being unworthy of God’s love and self-talk that cripples you with **GUILT**.

The solution? Stop focusing on yourself. Zoom in on the huge sacrifice Jesus made when He subbed for you on Calvary.



Note confession's **contrasting** roles as voiced by (1) John who with Peter and James served the new Jewish converts to Christ in Jerusalem, then by (2) Paul whom the risen Christ assigned to take his new gospel to the Gentiles:

*"If we **confess our sins**, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

*"If you **confess that Jesus is Lord** and believe God raised Him from death, you will be saved. By our faith we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved."* (Romans 10:9,10)

Note the sharp distinction between Christ's words on forgiveness **before** the cross and his statement through Paul **after** the cross:

*"And when you pray, make sure you **forgive others so that your Father in heaven will also forgive you**. But if you withhold forgiveness from others, your Father withholds forgiveness from you."* (Matthew 6:14-15)

*"**Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.**"* (Ephesians 4:32)

My friend Gary Bannister gets to the point: "Your slide into legalism starts when you **focus on yourself** instead of **focusing on God.**"

The New You

"This means that our knowledge of men can no longer be based on their outward lives (indeed, even though we knew Christ as a man we do not know Him like that any longer). For if a man is in Christ, he becomes a new person altogether—the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. All this is God's doing for He has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ; and He has made us agents of the reconciliation. God was in Christ personally reconciling the world to Himself—not counting their sins

against them—and has commissioned us with the message of reconciliation. We are now Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were appealing direct to you through us. As His personal representatives we say, “Make your peace with God.” For God caused Christ, who Himself knew nothing of sin, actually to be sin for our sakes, so that in Christ we might be made good with the goodness of God.”

(2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

DISCUSS: What’s the difference between religion and being “in Christ?”

This journey from Legalism to Grace requires much unlearning. When we see how completely forgiven we are, and the gruesome sacrifice Christ made for us, we’re truly saddened by our sin. So we sin less, not more. What’s more, we see everyone, even the vilest among us, as completely forgiven by God! They simply need us to let God love them through us. They don’t need to get a sin shower and clean up first. Just believe, then fervently thank God for their new life, one in which their sin and guilt are gone! God remembers it no more; why should we?

*“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one **whose sin the Lord will never count against them.**”* (Romans 4 4:7-8) Here’s another translation:

*“Fortunate are those whose crimes are carted off, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate. Fortunate the person against whom **the Lord does not keep score.**”*

When believers come before the Judgment Seat of Christ, this "bema" seat is an awards ceremony where God honors what *He's done through* us, and graciously destroys our self-serving attempts to be "spiritual" (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).

DISCUSS: What are your goals in light of God’s grace?



Some are obsessed with reporting their sins to other Christians. **“Repent, repent!”** is their mantra. **BUT NOW** – after the cross -- with all sin forgiven, thanks to Christ’s

crucifixion, the risen Jesus arms Paul with **a new gospel** -- the **secret**, the **mystery** and **my gospel**.

The emphasis now is on God's having put all of our sins on Christ, on becoming like Him. An exact dupe of the relationship the Father and Son enjoy was credited to everyone's account, awaiting us to accept by faith this amazing gift. Our Age of Grace mantra is:

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in everything for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Author Graham Cooke says God is not stalking us born-again, piling up warrants to process at our next hearing (aka confession). We've all sinned ... and we'll sin again. But the risen Christ flashed Paul a paradigm flip: God is not keeping track of your sins. He had Paul announce that where sin abounds, there's more than enough of His grace to deal with it. He remembers our sin no more. There's no condemnation when the believer sins. God never changes His mind about you, says Graham:

"God loves you just as much on your worst day as He does on your best day ... "

"You don't become a new person by changing your behavior; you discover who you are in Christ, and your behavior changes accordingly."

"When the Father looks at you, He sees nothing wrong. He's not obsessed by sin; He's not like us. He's consumed by life!"

"God doesn't want to talk to you about sin. He's not "dealing with" our sin. He's establishing our righteousness.

"Attack anything that makes you feel unworthy, inadequate, hopeless, powerless and useless. That's the enemy. don't get distracted by what you are not. Walk in God's perception of who you are because yours is not good enough."

"Do not look for evil. Look for the goodness of God all around you. As you look for signs of His Presence, many more opportunities will occur for you to bless people and share God's true nature."

"Grace is the empowering presence of God that enables you to become the person God sees when he looks at you. He sees you complete in Christ. He doesn't see anything wrong with you. He sees Jesus in you!"

Sarah Young of *Jesus Calling* extracts this from Paul's "**mystery**:"

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. ... Thinking that you should live an error-free life is symptomatic of pride. Your failures can be a source of blessing ... failure highlights your dependence on Me. I’m able to bring beauty out of your mistakes. Trust Me ...”

**DISCUSS: “God always focuses on your new nature because He killed your old one.”
How does that change how you view yourself and sin?**

DISCUSS: Describe anything we covered today that’s new to you.

Is Heaven Your Final Home? Really?

Religion says, "If you try hard, you may be able to wiggle into heaven." **BUT** God's forgiveness is a GIFT, not a reward! (Romans 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-10) When God declares you right with Him, you can take it to the bank ... and to the grave! The Bible is clear. (1 Timothy 1:15-16) We must ask Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. If there were another way, the cross would’ve been unnecessary. (John 1:12, 14:6) Your sin is not the issue. God has already dealt with it. It’s your choice: will you accept God's forgiveness?

Simply tell God, "Father, I’m humbled that Your Son took my place to serve the death penalty for my sin. I gratefully receive Your pardon, and trust You, Jesus, to be my Lord and Savior. Amen."

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His Deal

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