

HEIR MAIL: PAUL'S LETTER TO ROME

Ch. 3:9-31

Today we explore a framework for understanding God's inspired, true and changeless Word. The Bible's two major sections are hinged by the birth of God's Son. In the Old Testament the Creator literally speaks the universe into existence, then creates humans to populate this originally perfect paradise.

When our first parents disobey God's lone prohibition, sin enters the world in the form of Satan who, as the angel Lucifer, had been banned from heaven, along with a third of the angels. Because of His great love for humanity, God has a plan to overcome Satan and all evil, restoring peace and purity to His creation. Otherwise, all mankind would be Robinson Crusoe'd, stranded by the sin that infects each of us, bound for hell as punishment.

The theme of the O.T. is that God will provide Someone to destroy Satan's power. To demonstrate the standard we must all meet to enter God's presence, God gives Moses ten commandments. To illustrate what it would look like to live by these "laws," He selects Abram to father a vast people group, the Jews, who would produce the Savior/Messiah.

That's where the O.T. ends and 400 years of non-recorded silence begins before the N.T. picks up this story's thread. For the preceding 2,000 years God employed a complicated, religious system of symbols, feasts, sacrifices, teachers, mediators, kings, judges, prophets and the temple. Time after time, despite His generous care, even giving them a land of their own as a lasting refuge, the Jews disrespected God. Each year a rabbi would enter the holiest part of the temple and offer an unblemished animal sacrifice to *cover* the sins of the past year. But they would not be permanently *forgiven* until their Messiah came to earth.

That Savior is born immaculately to a teenaged virgin. Thirty years later He launches a teaching/healing ministry throughout this New Jersey-sized country – today's Israel. To silence this Galilean carpenter who claims to be the Son of the living God, the mob has Him crucified. But this story doesn't end there. No way, this is where it gets dicey.

DISCUSS: Why did God give the Ten Commandments?

It's said that **"Text without context is pretext."** In other words, a verse read without thought to the surrounding verses can be misconstrued. That would be like reading someone else's mail, or relying on a promise not made to you.

This is the context in the Middle East in about 33 A.D. as Judaism's rabbinical infrastructure wobbles when its faithful reject their Messiah, and a surprising voice appears to announce God's new gospel, for the first time welcoming non-Jews. On an epic scale this is God's changing of the guard, a paradigm shift of galactic proportions, a pause in God's kingdom program during this current age of Grace.

Now there's no need for a temple -- Whaaaaaaa!?! -- since God's Holy Spirit would reside in each believer. No need for a priest between the worshippers and Jehovah God. No expectation to obey all of their religious laws because they found that to be impossible. The only One who could live in perfect harmony with them -- their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth -- now shares with all who follow Him His perfect relationship with God the Father.

DISCUSS: How did this affect the Jews?

To explain this earth-shaking transition, Jesus needed to go "God/mano-to-mano with one He could trust who could relate to various cultures and traditions of that day. So He interrupted the legalistic life of that era's most religious Jew who was leading a hit squad targeting Christ's first followers. A brilliant casting choice! The chief of sinners would become God's pattern for saints, self-identified as "the least deserving of all God's people."

Saul was both a Jew and a Gentile, a Roman citizen and sat on the highest court! Now as Paul, his Roman name, he is summoned by the risen Christ to a sit-down in Heaven #3. *So radical* was this sea change in God's dealing with men, *it was necessary for Paul to hear truths from Jesus in person* that were so unutterable that he was unable to repeat them all upon his return to earth.

DISCUSS: What must it have been like to be whisked into heaven to meet the risen Lord face to face, and be told such chin-dropping truths?

Suddenly, Peter, James and John, having lived all their lives under the law, and traveled for three years with Christ as their personal rabbi., what do they do now with all of their Jewish rites and rituals?

On the other hand Paul was taken to the third heaven to learn a mammoth secret which had never been foretold by God or His prophets. That secret, or mystery, is that through Christ's death and resurrection, He had paid in full the debt for everyone's sins – past, present and future! So, following the law to earn salvation had to give way to being saved by accepting by faith what Christ's death had accomplished once and for all.

DISCUSS: How could you believe some guy who said he'd been to heaven and told you that spiritually, this was a brand new ballgame?

Paul has a dilemma on his hands because he was taught by the most prestigious rabbi in the land all of Judaism's writings in "the law and the prophets." He now has the daunting task of facing fellow Jews with his new assignment given him by Jesus.

Let's read Romans 3:1-31:

3¹⁻² So what difference does it make who's a Jew and who isn't, who has 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. Scripture says the same:

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? These questions come up. 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.

⁹⁻²⁰ So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others? Not really. Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it:

There's nobody living right, not even one,
nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for God.
They've all taken the wrong turn;
they've all wandered down blind alleys.
No one's living right;
I can't find a single one.
Their throats are gaping graves,
their tongues slick as mudslides.
Every word they speak is tinged with poison.
They open their mouths and pollute the air.
They race for the honor of sinner-of-the-year,
litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,
Don't know the first thing about living with others.
They never give God the time of day.

This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about others but to us to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place! And it's clear enough, isn't it, that we're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else? Our

involvement with God's revelation doesn't put us right with God. What it does is force us to face our complicity in everyone else's sin.

²¹⁻²⁴ But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in Him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity He put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where He always wanted us to be. And He did it by means of Jesus Christ.

²⁵⁻²⁶ God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in Him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins He had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's now—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in His rightness.

²⁷⁻²⁸ So where does that leave our proud Jewish insider claims and counterclaims? Canceled? Yes, canceled. What we've learned is this: God does not respond to what we do; we respond to what God does. We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting Him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade.

²⁹⁻³⁰ And where does that leave our proud Jewish claim of having a corner on God? Also canceled. God is the God of outsider non-Jews as well as insider Jews. How could it be otherwise since there is only one God? God sets right all who welcome His action and enter into it, both those who follow our religious system and those who have never heard of our religion.

³¹ But by shifting our focus from what we do to what God does, don't we cancel out all our careful keeping of the rules and ways God commanded? Not at all. What happens, in fact, is that by putting that entire way of life in its proper place, we confirm it.

Romans 3 is Cliff Notes for the Bible.
Romans 3:23-24 is the Universe's continental divide.

Notice the similarities and differences in Peter's and Paul's messages.

- Under Peter's gospel you had to forgive others if you wanted God to forgive you (Matthew 6:12,14,15) **** ** BUT the grace gospel which Jesus had Paul convey to us says we forgive others **because** God has already forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32)
- Peter concentrated on the kingdom on earth (Matthew 5:5) *** ** BUT Paul's focus was the kingdom of heaven (Acts 26:19).
- Peter and his Jewish converts were waiting for Christ's **prophesied** "second coming" (Isaiah 59:20) *** ** BUT Paul unveiled the Rapture, an event held **secret** until he disclosed this return of Christ to take all believers to heaven to live with Him forever.
- Peter taught that circumcision was a must for salvation *** ** BUT not according to Paul (Galatians 5:1-6).
- Peter's gospel held that you must confess your sins to be saved 1 John 1:9) *** ** BUT Paul **never** mentioned confessing sins either for salvation or just peace of mind. Why? Jesus has already taken them to His grave where He left them! They're history! God says He will remember them no more, so why keep regurgitating our screw-ups?
- Peter's invitation to be saved, as was John the Baptist's and Jesus' (**before** the cross was also the message of: "**Repent and be baptized.**" *** ** BUT (**after** the cross) Paul's salvation invitation was simply "**Believe** on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved ... and your house." (Acts 16:31)

- Peter spoke of being baptized **with** the Holy Spirit, being **filled** with the Holy Spirit and **receiving** the Holy Spirit (Acts 1 and 2) *** *** **BUT** Paul's converts were baptized **by** the Holy Spirit into Jesus Christ.

- Jesus told His disciples that if they prayed in His name, they would receive **whatsoever** they asked (Matthew 18:19) *** *** **BUT** Paul prayed for healing three times without success (2 Corinthians 12:7-1). His counsel was to bring our requests to God in prayer which would result in our being guarded by God's inexplicable peace (Philippians 4:6-7).

The Book of Acts covers a tumultuous transition as God plays celestial chess, moving Israel out of "check" and sliding the Body of Christ into the upper hand through which He is now dealing with mankind and nations.

"I have been commissioned to preach the wonderful news of the glory of the exalted God. ... ¹⁵ I can testify that the Word is true and deserves to be received by all, for Jesus Christ came into the world to bring sinners back to life—even me, the worst sinner of all! ¹⁶ Yet I was captured by grace, so that Jesus Christ could display through me the outpouring of His Spirit^l as a pattern to be seen for all those who would believe in him for eternal life." (I Timothy 1:11,15,16)

"He canceled out every legal violation we had on our record and the old arrest warrant that stood to indict us. He erased it all—our sins, our stained soul—He deleted it all and they cannot be retrieved! Everything we once were in Adam has been placed onto His cross and nailed permanently there as a public display of cancellation." (1 Colossians 2:14)

In a N.T. post-It Jude, Jesus' half-brother, warns about false teachers who distort the Scripture:

"I have been some who have sneaked in among you unnoticed. They are depraved people whose judgment was prophesied in Scripture long ago. They have perverted the message of God's grace into a license to commit immoralities and turn against our only absolute Master, our Lord Jesus Christ...."

"But you, my delightfully loved friends, remember the prophecies of the apostles of our Lord Jesus, the Anointed. They taught you, "In the last day there will

always be mockers, motivated by their own ungodly desires.” They cause divisions and are followers of their own natural instincts, devoid of the life of the Spirit.”

Short on verbiage but our dude Jude writes a mean benediction

“Now, to the One with enough power to prevent you from stumbling into sin and bring you faultless before His glorious presence to stand before Him with ecstatic delight, to the only God our Savior, through our Lord Jesus Christ, be endless glory and majesty, great power and authority—from before He created time, now, and throughout all the ages of eternity. Amen!”

DISCUSS: Like the ancient Hebrews, you and I have been entrusted with the very words of God. What should we do with them on our watch?

Fed the night before by the young, miracle-working Carpenter from nearby Nazareth who multiplied a handful of fish and bread, a throng thousands strong hung with Him in northern Palestine. Awed by His powers, some of them asked, “How can we do amazing works like you do?” Brushing past their selfish question, the Son of God replied, *“The work of God for you is to believe in the One whom He has sent to you.”*

Have you experienced the miracle of being loved and forgiven by God of all your sin? It occurs when you believe, when you put your faith in what Christ accomplished for you by serving your death sentence on the cross. Invest a moment of silence now, and -- in your own words -- receive His gift. “Loving God, thank You for pursuing us. Long before we even knew Your name, You had us in your sites. You’re so patient with us. Our hope is in You. Amen.”

His Deal
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