

# HEIR MAIL: PAUL'S LETTER TO ROME

## Ch. 6

**T**iming is everything, someone said. But just when he said it or who said it escapes me at the moment.

Churchill opined, *“To each there comes in their lifetime a special moment when they are tapped on the shoulder and offered the chance to do a very special thing, unique to them and fitted to their talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds them unprepared or unqualified for that which could have been their finest hour.”*

Timing is in God's DNA. *“Everything happens at the time God chooses.”* (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

*“I am God. At the right time I'll make it happen.”* (Isaiah 60:22b)

*“... (God) determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him though He is not far from each of us.”* (Acts 17:26-27)

Where do you fit into God's timing? *“You see, at the right time ... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Romans 5:6-8)

God's ambassador to the Gentile world of the 1st century A.D. was a high-ranking Pharisee named Saul, bent on terrorizing, jailing and killing Jesus' followers, as endorsed by Israel's religious brass. After God changed his heart and name, Paul was met with enthusiasm by some, vitriol by others. Let's hear his story in his own words.

### Let's read Ephesians 3:1-20.

***1-3 This is why I, Paul, am in jail for Christ, having taken up the cause of you outsiders, so-called. I take it that you're familiar with the part I was given in God's plan for including everybody. I got the inside story on this from God Himself, as I just wrote you in brief.***

***4-6 As you read over what I have written to you, 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 have never heard of God and those who have heard of Him all their lives (what I've been calling 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 and welcoming to 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, God handling all the details. When it came to presenting the Message to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities.*

*8-10 And so here I am, preaching and writing about things way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ. My task is to ... make plain what God, who created all this in the first place, has been doing in secret and behind the scenes all along. Through followers of Jesus like yourselves gathered in churches, this extraordinary plan of God is becoming known and talked about even among the angels!*

*11-13 All this is proceeding along lines planned by God and then executed in Christ Jesus. When we trust in Him, we're free to say whatever needs to be said, bold to go wherever we need to go. So don't let my present trouble on your behalf get you down.  
...*

*14-20 My response is to get down on my knees before the Father ... I ask Him to strengthen you by His Spirit ... that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite Him in. And I ask Him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in with all followers of Jesus the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. <sup>20</sup>God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!*

**DISCUSS:** Describe Paul's transformation and unpack his prayer.

Remember the phrase, "So's your old man?" Spiritually, our old man is still hanging around. BUT GOD offers to make us new!

Let's read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21.

*14-15 ... (Jesus) included everyone in His death so that everyone could also be included in His life, a resurrection life ... anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life emerges! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and Him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with Himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what He is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ Himself now: become friends with God; He's already a Friend with you. <sup>21</sup>How, you say? In Christ.*

*God put the wrong on Him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.*

**DISCUSS:** Paul told everyone “what God is doing.” What is He doing?

**For a head start on ch. 6 let’s read Romans 5:1, 18 - 6:14.**

*<sup>5</sup>Our faith in Jesus transfers God’s righteousness to us. He now declares us flawless in His eyes. This means we can now enjoy true and lasting peace with God, all because of what our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One, has done for us. <sup>18-19</sup>Just as one person did it wrong and got us in trouble with sin and death, another Person did it right and got us out of it. But more than just getting us out of trouble, He got us into life! One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one Man said yes to God and put many in the right.*

*<sup>20-21</sup>All that passing laws against sin did was produce more lawbreakers. But sin didn’t and doesn’t have a chance in competition with the aggressive forgiveness we call grace. When it’s sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. All sin can do is threaten us with death, and that’s the end of it. Grace, because God is putting everything together again through the Messiah, invites us into a life that goes on and on and on, world without end.*

*<sup>1-3</sup>So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we’ve left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn’t you realize we packed up and left for good? That’s what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land!*

*<sup>3-5</sup>That’s what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it’s like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it’s like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so we can see where we’re going in our new grace-sovereign country.*

*<sup>6-11</sup>Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer captive to sin’s demands! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ’s sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, He took sin down with Him, but alive He brings God down to us. From now on think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks*

*your mother tongue, and you hang on every word. You are dead to sin and alive to God.*

*12-14 That means you must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives. Don't give it the time of day. Don't even run little errands that are connected with that old way of life. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time. Remember, you've been raised from the dead into God's way of doing things. Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer. You're living in the freedom of God.*

**DISCUSS: Whenever God's endless grace is properly presented, someone will always object, "Then we can just live like hell, right?" So what's your answer?**

Our sinful nature died with Christ when God's sinless Lamb took our sins to the cross and buried them for good! No longer slaves to sin, we rise by faith to new life *in* Christ, forever forgiven – our sins never remembered by God (Hebrews 10:11-18).

In God's eyes the moment we place our trust in Him, we participate *with* Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, and we're "baptized" into "the Body of Christ" (God's worldwide family) -- not *with* water but *by* the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:3-6). Water baptism is a symbol of Christ's having died and buried your sins and raising you to new life.

Your sinful nature *had* to die since sin can't co-habit with Christ in your spirit (Colossians 2:6-10). But your soul (emotions, mind and will) and your body keep struggling with sin because sinning is their habit (Romans 7:14-20). The more time you log with Christ (in your spirit), the more you begin to think and act like Him (Romans 8:29).

God sees the believer as one with His Son. He loves you with no conditions! When we sin, it brings *natural* consequences in this life, but there are none for eternity (Romans 12:1; Galatians 6:7-8).

**DISCUSS: So what are you hearing in this session that's new to you?**

**Let's read Romans 6:15-18.**

*15-18 Since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind? Hardly. ... there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God, and the freedom never quits. All your lives you've let sin tell you what*

*to do. But, thank God, you've started listening to a new Master whose commands set you free to live openly in His freedom!*

**DISCUSS:** Sin no longer owns us; Christ does! With Christ, we're free to live His way. As a believer, what are you free to do?

**Let's read Romans 6:19-23.**

*<sup>19</sup>I'm using this freedom language because it's easy to picture. You can readily recall, can't you, how at one time the more you did just what you felt like doing—not caring about others, not caring about God—the worse your life became and the less freedom you had? And how much different is it now as you live in God's freedom, your lives healed and expansive in holiness. <sup>20-21</sup>As long as you did what you felt like doing, ignoring God, you didn't have to bother with right thinking, right living, right anything for that matter. But do you call that a free life? What did you get out of it? Nothing you're proud of now. Where did it get you? A dead end.*

*<sup>22-23</sup>But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.*

**DISCUSS:** How do you listen to God? How does He communicate with you?

## **Believer's Bill of Rights**

- \* You are no longer a slave to sin, having died to sin when Christ was buried with your sins. (Romans 6:1-2, 6-7)
- \* You've been raised with Christ to new life. You are a new creation "in Christ," united as one with Him (Romans 6:4-5; Galatians 2:20)
- \* Paul employs the *indicative* mood to assert facts, i.e., you are dead to sin (Romans 6:7). And he employs the *subjunctive* mood to express hope that believers will choose to live their newly-created life (Romans 6:12). We live in both worlds, knowing what's true of us while choosing daily to make decisions consistent with our new identity. So "in Christ my life is both a reality AND a possibility."
- \* Baptism is a rite, a ceremony that signified burying the past and a fresh start, sins forgiven. Baptism does not save you, nor is it a requirement to be saved. It declares your decision to follow Jesus.

\* You're known intimately by your Creator! You're not an accident. Your life has purpose. (Ephesians 2:10)

\* From womb to tomb God loves you so much that He sent His only Son to satisfy His just demand that your sin be punished by death. He loves you enough to send someone to point you to Jesus.

\* God knows exactly how many days you'll have on earth.

\* As a new creation in Christ you have a new chooser. Jesus paid with His life for all your bad choices. So how could you ever intentionally sin to test His unlimited grace? It's unthinkable!

\* The Holy Spirit now lives in your spirit as your onboard Comforter, helping you become like Christ (Romans 8:29). He's saying, "Grow up, son! I'll help you."

If you could *do something* to be good enough to be saved, how good would "good enough" be? What does that say about the sufficiency of Christ's crucifixion? Many sincere, religious people, although circumcised, baptized, simonized and anointed, fear that when they die, they won't be good enough. Remember, when Jesus saves you, "It is **finished**." (John 17:3; Ephesians 2:1-10).

### **DISCUSS: Who says we must be good enough for heaven?**

God doesn't *send* anyone to hell. By refusing or ignoring His invitation, we CHOOSE our destiny. Is there a more crucial matter for you to settle? How can you encourage your family and friends to make this choice before the sand in the hourglass runs out? God offers you total forgiveness and eternal life as a GIFT! (Romans 6:23)

Will you *choose* to receive it by faith? If so, tell God, "I resign from running my life and choose to follow You, Jesus. Thank You for forgiving all my sins. I'm all Yours. Amen."

Congrats on your great timing! As a new follower of Christ, with a new identity ("in Christ"), you can see yourself as God sees you:

PERFECT ... FLAWLESS ... BLAMELESS ... IN CHRIST (Ephesians 4:20-24)!

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