**HEIR MAIL: PAUL’S LETTER TO ROME**

 **Ch. 7**

D

an Stone settles in at the pulpit where he pastored 20 years ago. Today is the church’s 200th anniversary, and he’s been asked to deliver “the sermon of his life.” He opens fire!

**“When I was your pastor, I only gave you 50% of the gospel. I’ve come today to give you the other 50%!”** Stone rocks! (By the way, so does his book, ***THE REST OF THE GOSPEL: WHEN THE PARTIAL GOSPEL HAS WORN YOU OUT.***

Many churches preach that Jesus died for our sins. Thank God for this life-saving Gospel, but is this all Jesus meant when He promised an “**abundant life**” to His followers? (John 10:10) After you’ve been “born again,” how can we cash this “abundance” check?Frances Schaeffer asks, **“How should we then live?”** Stone echoes, “How can I live this abundant life?”

**Admit it … you can’t**.

**But JESUS** can and will!

And that’s the rest of the Gospel!

Paul’s letter to Christ’s folks in 1st century Rome unpacks a **new way of getting right with God**. It has shaped western civilization more than any other document. We’re about to skim the first six chapters. (Our notes are on [www.HisDeal.org](http://www.HisDeal.org) at “Romans” or “Meetings”)

**Let’s read Romans 1:17.**

**17***This* gospel unveils … **a perfect righteousness given to us when we believe**, **moving us from *receiving* life through faith to the power of *living* by faith** …”

**Let’s read Romans 3:20-24.**

20 … The law exposes sin. 21–22BUT NOW … **all who believe in Him (are declared right with God)**… 23for **all have sinned and need God.** 24… **Jesus has liberated us from the guilt, punishment and power of sin!**

**DISCUSS: What does “right with God” mean?**

**Let’s read Romans 4:5,8.**

**5… no one earns God’s righteousness. … 8**The Lord says, **“I’ll never hold your sins against you!”**

**DISCUSS: What happens to a believer’s sins?**

**Let’s read Romans 5:1-2**

1 **God now declares us flawless in His eyes.** … 2**Our faith guarantees us … a perfect relationship with God**.

**Let’s read Romans 6:1-2, 11, 14.**

**1Do we persist in sin so that God’s kindness and grace will increase? 2What a terrible thought! We have died to sin once for all … 11… Since you are now joined with Him, view yourselves as dead and unresponsive to sin’s appeal while living daily for God’s pleasure in union with Jesus … 14**For sin shall no longer be your master because **you are not under the law but under grace**.”

In the event you vote for living under the Law, you’re likely thinking: “If I do the right things, I’ll go to heaven.” But what are ***those things***?” How well do I have to perform them?” Or “If I blow it badly enough – how much is ‘enough’ -- will God stop loving me? Will I lose my salvation?”

**Most believers are trying to become something they already *are*! God has perfected us from His point of view; we’re a finished product.** Graham Cooke says it best: **“Grace is God’s empowering presence within you that enables you to become the person God sees when He looks at you.”**

God forgave all our sins when Christ died and rose again. To keep seeking His forgiveness is either (1) an uninformed insult to Jesus or (2) a rude request for Him to go back on the cross. Spiritual growth occurs as we let our old man remains slain while our new man thrives in the risen Christ. Knowing that life’s battles are His, not ours, we can rest in Him.

Maybe you were reared under Galatianism where law and grace were fused into one irreconcilable system. Could we ever please all the shifting expectations! Our only recourse was to try harder and harder … and keep failing. Like that pathetic rodent on the wheel, we were slaves of *kaizen*, the Japanese business philosophy that demands *continuous improvement*. “If only I could be good enough for God to accept me the way I am …”

Let’s read Romans 7:1-6.

***71-3You shouldn’t have any trouble understanding this, friends, for you know all the ins and outs of the law—how it works and how its power touches only the living. For instance, a wife is legally tied to her husband while he lives, but if he dies, she’s free. If she lives with another man while her husband is living, she’s obviously an adulteress. But if he dies, she is quite free to marry another man in good conscience, with no one’s disapproval.***

***4-6So, my friends, this is something like what has taken place with you. When Christ died, He took that entire, rule-dominated way of life down with Him and left it in the tomb, leaving you free to “marry” a resurrection life and bear “offspring” of faith for God. For as long as we lived that old way of life, doing whatever we felt we could get away with, sin was calling most of the shots as the old law code hemmed us in. And this made us more rebellious. In the end all we had to show for it was miscarriages and stillbirths. But now that we’re no longer shackled to that domineering mate of sin, out from under those oppressive regulations and fine print, we’re free to live a new life in the freedom of God.***

**DISCUSS: Is “freedom of God” an oxymoron? Please explain.**

“Legal marriage” ends when a spouse dies. Add a spouse when you have a “live” one, and you’ll be arrested, or you’ll win courtside seats for the Utah Jazz. The Law served its purpose = it defined sin.

 When Paul unwrapped “the mystery,” the rabbinical laws, rituals, sacrifices, diets etc. were **replaced by faith alone**. Jews *and* Gentiles can now be “right” with God permanently. (Galatians 2:20-21; Colossians 1:24-29)

Standing with my bride before two ministers – yes, two! – Liz and I exchanged our vows. We left our outdated “covenant of courtship” at the altar and began life together under our new “covenant of commitment.” We said, “I do.” But I do *what*? That’s the rest of “the marriage gospel.” That’s the mature, Christlike freedom given to you to enjoy, loosed from the legirons of legalism!?

**Have you said “I do” to God’s offer of forgiveness?**

**Let’s read Romans 7:7-23.**

***7I can hear you say, “If the law code was as bad as all that, it’s no better than sin itself.” Not true. The law code had a perfectly legitimate function. Without its clear guidelines for right and wrong, moral behavior would be mostly guesswork. Apart from the succinct, surgical command, “You shall not covet,” I could have dressed covetousness up to look like a virtue and ruined my life with it.***

***8-12Don’t you remember how it was? I do. The law code started out as an excellent piece of work. What happened, though, was that sin found a way to pervert the command into a temptation, making a piece of “forbidden fruit” out of it. The law code, instead of guiding me, was used to seduce me. Without all the paraphernalia of the law code, sin looked dull and lifeless. I went along without paying much attention to it. But once sin got its hands on the law code and decked itself out in all that finery, I was fooled and fell for it. The very command that was to guide me into life was cleverly used to trip me up, throwing me headlong. So sin was plenty alive, and I was stone dead. But the law code itself is God’s good and common sense, sane and holy counsel.***

***13I can already hear your next question: “Does that mean I can’t even trust what is good [the law]? Is good just as dangerous as evil?” No again! Sin simply did what sin is so famous for doing, i.e., using the good as a cover to tempt me to do what would finally destroy me. By hiding within God’s good commandment, sin did far more mischief than it could ever have accomplished on its own.***

***14-16I can anticipate your response: “I know God’s commands are spiritual, but I’m not. Isn’t this also your experience?” Yes. I’m full of myself—after all, I’ve spent a long time in sin’s prison. What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can’t be trusted to figure out what’s best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God’s command is necessary.***

***17-20But I need something more! I know the law but can’t keep it … if the power of* sin in me *keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I need help! I can WILL it but can’t DO it. I decide to do good, but I don’t really do it; I decide not to do bad, but I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don’t result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time.***

***21-23It happens so regularly it’s predictable. I decide to do good, and sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God’s commands, but not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and when I least expect it, they take charge.***

**DISCUSS: Explain Paul’s references to “all of me” and “parts of me.”**

I don’t do what I s*hould* do, and I do what I should *not* do. This “friendly fire” is not from me, “the real me.” It’s the sin that lingers like a crouching tiger in my mind, emotions, will and body. I used to think that’s a cop-out. You *want* to do the right thing. but there’s no ammo in your chamber before you’re saved. Yet, honestly, it reoccurs once we’ve been saved. However, we’re not helpless now. We have all the ordnance of heaven’s armory. God has come to my rescue, making me the victor, not the victim. We lock’n’load and declare victory in Jesus’ name! **The Holy Spirit *IS* my DYNAMITE POWER to say “NO” to sin and “YES” to God!**

“All of us who are mature,” says Paul, “should take such a view of things. And **if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.”**(Philippians 3:12-15)

**DISCUSS: When did you first realize that you needed a Savior?**

**Let’s read Romans 7:24-8:4.**

***24I’ve tried everything; nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question? 25The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.***

***8 1-2With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has cleared the air, freeing you from a lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.***

***3-4God went for the jugular when He sent His own Son. He didn’t deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In His Son, Jesus, He personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of it. And now what the law code asked for -- but we couldn’t deliver -- is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us.***

**DISCUSS: More effort is not abundant life. Describe your efforts.**

**Freedom Redefined**

**“12It’s true that our freedom allows us to do anything, but that doesn’t mean that everything we do is good for us.** I’m free to do as I choose, but I choose to never be enslaved to anything. 19… God, the Holy Spirit, lives in you. 20You were God’s expensive purchase, paid for with tears of blood, so use your bodyto bring glory to God.” (1 Corinthians 6:12,19-20)

**DISCUSS: Describe Paul’s concept of freedom.**

OK, how do we experience “the rest of the Gospel?” As Stone puts it, **“Salvation is a necessary beginning, but there’s much more!”** Being forgiven doesn’t explain how to live the Christian life.

When you’re “born again” (that’s Jesus’ term), God’s Spirit comes to live in your spirit. He won’t inhabit your soul, mind, emotions, will and body because they’re now under construction, becoming a mirror image of God’s Son. (Romans 8:29) Oh, we try to *look* perfect, but because the Holy Spirit now resides in our spirit, we’re already perfect in God’s eyes! Sadly, most believers are unaware of this part of “the rest of the Gospel.” Had you ever heard this until now?

At my life’s lowest point our late friend, Gib Martin, asked me, “What’s your definition of a “*mature* Christian?” Paul’s answer: “Jesus Christ *is* my life!” (Philippians 1:21) Gib taught me that “… **your *true* life** is hidden with God in Christ. … who you *really* are will be revealed **with Him in His glory!“** (Colossians 3:3)

These “rest of the Gospel” distinctives, as told exclusively to Paul by the risen Christ, belong to you if you’ve placed your trust in Christ : (2 Corinthians 12:2-7)

1. **Jesus lives His life *for*, *in*, *through* and *as* you.** (Galatians 2:20; Romans 11:29,36 )
2. You are **right** with God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
3. You are **holy** (set apart for God’s purpose). (Colossians 3:12)
4. You are **complete** in Christ – your spirit is reborn, making you “a new creation in Christ, your sins are forgiven, you’re free from legalism’s foolishness. (Colossians 2:10; Romans 10:4)
5. You are **forgiven**, **blameless**. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 1:22; Romans 5:1; Jude 24-25)
6. You are **loved** permanently. God will never terminate or take back what He gives you. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Romans 8:38-39, 11:29)
7. All are **equally welcome** to join “the Church, the Body of Christ.” We’re not talking denominations; this term implies every Christ-follower in every nation. (Ephesians 2:13-19)
8. You have **no worries** since everything comes *from,* happens *through* and *ends* up in God. (Romans 8:28; Philippians 4:6-7)
9. You have **no fear** because Christ is your love, power and sound mind. “Fear not” – or words to that effect – are in the Bible 365 times. Why that *specific* number, do you suppose?)
10. You are **God’s adopted son**, **God’s heir** and **Christ’s co-heir**. (Ephesians 1:4-6; Romans 8:17)
11. At the “Rapture” Jesus returns in the *clouds* (not to *earth* as He will to end sin’s rule at Armageddon) to take both the dead and the living believers with Him to heaven. Paul says, we are not “children of wrath.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-57; I Thessalonians 4:13-18)

God is not obsessed with your sin. He placed it on Christ, judged it and forgave us at the cross. You’re now free to **say “no” to sin** and **“yes” to Christ in you.** **You are who God says you are!**

SPOILER ALERT!! Jesus took your sins – past, present, future – to His tomb and left them there, forgiven forever. We’ll always bear the *natural* consequences of our *sin habit* while we’re on earth. God never “condemns” a believer for sinning because you’re in Christ, and Christ is in you, and God’s never angry at His Son. (Romans 8:1) You’re as right with Him as Jesus is! This is **the new you**. It’s **who you are**, so live like it!

**"DIY Christianity”**

The solution is to let God’s Spirit transform how we think (12:1-2). Hang out with Him. Let His Spirit control your mind, emotions and will. Religion gives your soul the pretense of attaining godliness by doing, not being. But “Christ in you” and you “in Christ” – is who you really are. Religion wears you out by shaming you into doing stuff -- repetitious, faux-holy drills. **But God** makes you right with Himself as a free gift when we put our trust in Him (Ephesians 2:8-9). All others *choose* **eternal separation from God.** (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15)

**DISCUSS: Why do so many of us think God is out to get us?**

The Passion translation’s editors sum up how God sees your identity:

**“I am the one who defines you. I long for you to understand who you are and how I see you. Your identity is not established on anyone’s opinion of you. It is rooted in My truth. I see within you the capacity for greatness—the true importance and dignity that comes from heaven. You are a vessel of My glory. You are beautiful, brave, loved, fearless, My treasure, wanted. Absolutely nothing can separate you from My love.”**

**The “Holy But”**

Dan Stone coins a classic phrase: “the Holy But.” We can ignore what people say before they say *but* because what they truly believe comes after *but*. Like …. “Sam is a nice guy. We’re lucky to have him as a pastor BUT …..” Or “I know God loves me BUT …..”

The Holy But bridges the communication chasm, sorting feelings from faith, as in a police lineup. Here’s how it works. (1) your statement about a situation, (2 the Holy But. (3) God’s truth. Let’s tee it up on Psalm 13.

(1) “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death.” (2) “**BUT** I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

What changed? Not David’s dilemma. Certainly not God! The **Holy But** changed David! The “But Bridge” takes you from situation to solution, panic to peace, lost to loved. It’s a key to entering “**abundant life**.”

##### **‘”Choose Today!”**

##### Your **sin is not the issue**. God dealt with sin on Calvary. Your choice is the issue. The Bible is clear. Joshua, Moses’ mentee, challenged the millions he led into the Promised Land, saying, **“Today is your day to choose. Speaking for my family and me, we choose the Lord!**

##### O**pen your life to Christ**, thank Him for dying for you, by faith **invite Him to be your Savior**. If there were another way, the cross would’ve been unnecessary. No one else can save you. Only Jesus. The Bible says **whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.** We’ll take 30 seconds now and let you have that conversation with God. He’s listening. (30 seconds)

Now you can rest ….in the rest of the Gospel.

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His Deal

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