

The Righteousness of the Law and Faith

Romans 10:1-13

Romans 10:1-13 - *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” ⁶ But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) ⁷ or, “‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ¹³ For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

Background Notes

The Epistle to the Romans answers the greatest question about salvation: How can a sinner be saved? If God is holy and righteous, how can man, who is unholy and unrighteous, ever hope to make it to heaven? The answer is the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. In the Person of God the Son, God Himself became Man, went to the cross and died for our sins. The penalty for our sins was death, but the Lord Jesus died as our substitute. What is the result? A holy and righteous God can save unholy and unrighteous people *“to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Romans 3:26).

In Romans 9 we have the **divine** side of our salvation. In Romans 9 we saw that our salvation is all of God. In His mercy, God chooses us for salvation, and our salvation is all of God’s grace. We get no credit at all. To even suggest that somehow that we had the moral strength to participate in choosing our salvation takes away from God’s grace. Our salvation is 100% God’s grace -- not 95% God’s grace, not even 99.9% God’s grace. It’s 100% God’s grace.

In Romans 10 we have the **human** side of salvation. God has created us as free moral agents and we are responsible to respond to the gospel, God’s message of grace. If we respond by faith, believe the message and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, we are saved! Romans 10:13 says *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”* It’s as simple as that!

Well now, how do we harmonize Romans 9 (God's sovereignty) and Romans 10 (man's responsibility)? We just did! In Romans 9 we see the divine side of salvation, and Romans 10 we see the human side of salvation.

"Now wait a minute," you may say, "that sounds to me like a contradiction!" Well, it's true, and it's not a contradiction! Here's an illustration. Suppose we're standing before a door labeled "Salvation." Over the top of that door is the invitation: "Whosoever will may enter," so we decide to go through the doorway. After we have passed through we turn back and look, and over the door through which we just passed is written, "You were chosen from the foundation of the world to enter through this doorway."

Do you like that illustration? It may be helpful, but it doesn't exactly explain the entire concept, does it? It's hard for our finite minds to take in -- but that's just the point. Our minds are finite and we can't fathom how the divine side and the human side fit together -- but they do! I'm content to live in the tension of these two wonderful doctrines, and rejoice in God that I know, in the words of Genesis 18:25, that God the Judge of all the earth will do right. And I think we have to leave it there.

Doctrinal Points

1. Righteousness based on the law is utterly impossible.

In verses 1-5 we see that Israel (the Jewish people) had a zeal for God and they wanted to be righteous, but they went about it the wrong way. They thought that they could establish their own righteousness by keeping the Law of Moses. There was only one problem, though -- they **couldn't** keep the Law!

No one can keep the Ten Commandments. Some people **think** they can -- like the rich young ruler who came to our Lord. Remember him? He claimed that he had kept all the commandments. And the Lord gave him one more assignment: to go and sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and come follow Me. And we read that the rich young ruler went away sad, because he had many possessions.

The Lord tested this wealthy young man on the first commandment -- "Thou shall have no other gods before me." The young man claimed that he kept all the Law, but he had failed to keep even the very first commandment!

No one can keep the Law! Righteousness based on the Law is utterly impossible because the Law must be kept perfectly. If you want righteousness based on the Law, you must keep **all** of the Law **all** of the time! In context, that's the meaning of verse 5: "*For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'*" If you break even one small link in a chain, it's broken. Just so would the Law be, as a means of establishing righteousness.

Now that seems obvious to us, doesn't it? But Israel didn't see it -- and many people today don't see it. Many people today think that they can "make it" with God by keeping the Ten Commandments as best they can. They haven't read Romans 10!

Furthermore, Israel failed to see that Christ was the end of the law -- "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*"(v4). Not only was Jesus Christ the only Person who ever kept the Law perfectly, but the Law pointed forward to Christ. Galatians 3:24 says, "*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*" The Law points us to Christ by showing us that we don't measure up to God's standards. It shows us that we need Christ in order to obtain righteousness.

In that way, you see, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." The Law is like a mirror -- it's not a wash cloth. As a mirror can show you that your face is dirty but it can't wash it for you, so the Law shows us that we are sinners, but it can't save us from our sins. Righteousness based on the law is utterly impossible.

2. Righteousness based on faith is readily available.

In verses 6-13, righteousness based on faith is shown to be completely different than righteousness based on the Law. The righteousness of faith is **given** to us -- it is **not earned**.

In verses 6-8, Paul quoted several verses from Deuteronomy 30. In the prophetic context of Deuteronomy 30, Israel of the future is told that the way of life will not be hard to find; it will be readily available. These verses are applied here in Romans 10 to the way of salvation. You don't have to ascend to heaven to find Christ and bring Christ down. Why? He has already come from heaven. And you don't have to go into the grave and find Christ and bring Him up -- He's already been there, and He's been resurrected!

In other words, salvation is readily available. It's as close as your mouth and heart. "*But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart..."*" All you have to do is respond by faith to the message of God's grace. Now how do you respond by faith? You believe, and you say so! Verses 9-10: "*if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" That's is pretty straightforward, isn't it?

Have you confessed Jesus as Lord? Not just believed that Jesus was the greatest moral teacher that ever lived, or the greatest human leader that ever lived, but do you believe that He is LORD? And do you believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead? Do you believe that He's not in a tomb somewhere in Jerusalem -- He's alive and in glory?

“Belief in your heart” and “confession of your mouth” go together. If you pass the test of Romans 10:9-10, then you’re saved. You now have the righteousness of faith. It’s not your own righteousness -- it’s the righteousness of Christ that has been given to you, or imputed to you. God no longer sees your record of sins -- He sees **Christ’s** record of perfection on **your** record book! **This** is the righteousness that is based on faith.

And whoever believes will never be disappointed (v11). And it’s readily available for everyone -- there’s no difference between Jew or Gentile (v12). And it’s not complicated: *“For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”(v13)*. Righteousness based on faith is readily available.

Practical Application

How do you spell “Salvation”?

Do you remember that ad for Roloids years ago, “How do you spell relief?” and then someone would write out “R-o-l-a-i-d-s.” Well, this is a little take-off on that advertisement.

How do you spell salvation? Do you spell it S-a-v-i-o-r? Or, do you spell it L-o-r-d? In other words, in order to be saved, do you have to accept Jesus as Savior, or must you make Him Lord of your life?

How do you spell salvation? This is that question of the “Lordship Salvation” discussion. Must Jesus be “Lord of your life” in order for you to be saved? The answer is Yes -- and No! It’s “yes” in the sense of verse 9 -- you must confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord**. But the answer also is “no,” that one must be **100%** committed in **every area** of one’s life in order to be saved. We would like that approach, and we would like that to be true of every believer, but is there any Christian who has ever made the Lord Jesus “**100% Lord**” in **every** area of life? That would certainly leave me out, and it would even leave the apostle Paul out.

Maybe that answer will be helpful to you when someone asks you, “How do you spell salvation?”