

# Gospel for All

Romans 9:30-10:21

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There are lots of things we may desire strongly in life, but not all of those things come to pass. When I was young, like many young boys, I aspired to be a professional ball player. Depending on the season, I dreamed that one day I'd be the guy making the winning shot, catching the winning touchdown, or driving in the winning run. It became obvious to me fairly quickly that these dreams were never going to come to pass. I learned that it wasn't enough to just want to be a superstar athlete—you also needed to possess skill and coordination. As much as I wanted it, I knew it wasn't going to happen.

When I went to college, I went with the dream of becoming a medical doctor, hoping to one day become a surgeon. I loved my coursework and was prepared to make that dream a reality when it became apparent that the Lord was leading me to change course and go into ministry instead. That was a much harder dream to let go of. Four years after I graduated and my friends all had the title of Dr. and I was still just Rick, it was a difficult pill to swallow. (To be clear, I'm glad for the choice I made though!)

Paul, in our passage today wrestles with the difficult reality that as much as he would like all Jewish people to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ, many were going to miss it. To Paul's credit, he did not entirely write off his Jewish brethren (we'll look more at why next week), but he also saw that God's plan was much bigger than just the Jews.

We're going to cover a lot of ground today as we look at the end of Romans chapter 9 and the entirety of Romans 10, but what we'll see in these verses is Paul's clear explanation of what the gospel is and isn't, and why we need to share the message with everyone we can.

## The Failure of the Jews

Paul begins by reiterating his heart for the Jewish people, but explains where they've gone wrong.

<sup>30</sup> What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God's standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. <sup>31</sup> But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. <sup>32</sup> Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. <sup>33</sup> God warned them of this in the Scriptures when he said, "I am placing a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble, a rock that makes them fall. But anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."

Dear brothers and sisters, the longing of my heart and my prayer to God is for the people of Israel to be saved. <sup>2</sup> I know what enthusiasm they have for God, but it is misdirected zeal. <sup>3</sup> For they don't understand God's way of making people right with himself. Refusing to accept God's way, they cling to their own way of

getting right with God by trying to keep the law. <sup>4</sup> For Christ has already accomplished the purpose for which the law was given. As a result, all who believe in him are made right with God. (Romans 9:30-10:4, NLT)

Paul deals with the paradox that many Jews, who were trying so hard to be made right with God, would end up failing to do so, while many Gentiles, who were not trying to do so would end up right with Him. Paul's explanation for this was simple—the Gentiles were made right by their faith, while the Jews were trying to earn salvation by keeping the law.

As we've gone through Romans, we have talked a great deal about the fact that no matter how hard we try, we cannot erase our sin by doing good things. The notion of a cosmic balance scale, where our sins are placed on one side and our good deeds are on the other simply doesn't correspond to reality. Every one of us is hopelessly sinful, and we cannot erase those sins from our account. What we need is a Savior who can pay the penalty we have incurred.

Paul said the Jews were missing the point, trying to look to the law as a means of getting right with God. If you recall earlier in Romans, Paul said that the purpose of the law was to show us our need for a savior, not to serve as a means of becoming righteous in our own strength. Paul said the Jewish people were zealous, but their zeal was misdirected.

And the Jews of Paul's day were very zealous! During the time of the monarchy in Israel's history, the people often worshiped other gods. As a result, God allowed the nation of Israel to be conquered by Assyria, and then by Babylon. Eventually, they were allowed to return to their homeland. The people learned their lesson, and when new forces came to invade them, they stood resolute that they would not turn aside from the Lord, being willing even to die rather than turn aside. This same zeal consumed Paul before he had trusted in Christ. He was so zealous for the Jewish faith that he was willing to kill those Christians who he viewed as a threat to it. The Lord showed Paul how badly mistaken he was. This goes to show us that zeal alone cannot save us.

There are many today who claim that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere. The problem, of course, is that you can be sincerely wrong! Just because you believe something sincerely does not make it true. Unless the object of your belief is true, it is powerless to save.

Paul quoted an Old Testament prophecy that predicted this would happen. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a stone in Jerusalem that makes people stumble and a rock that makes them fall. The Apostle Peter quoted this same prophecy and connected it with a clear prophecy about the Messiah. Their point was that many people stumble over the gospel message. They are unwilling to believe it and instead of being saved by the Rock of Ages, they are crushed by it instead.

What causes people to stumble over the gospel message? I think there are a few things.

**First, is that it requires humility on our part.** Step one of the gospel is to admit that you have a problem you cannot solve. In many respects, it is like a person coming to grips with an addiction. Why do so many persist in addictive behaviors? Because they believe they've got it under control. Until they admit their problem and their inability to manage it on their own, they will never be free. In the same way, we cannot be saved until we admit that we can't fix our problem and must rely on Christ to do what we can't. That is not an easy pill to swallow.

**Second, is that it requires us to surrender control.** Many people refuse to trust in Jesus because they know that if they do, they will have to make changes in their lives. Most people are ok with the idea of God forgiving us, but not with submitting to Him. If they have to do things God's way, they're not interested (even though His way's better!)

**Finally, it seems too good to be true.** Sometimes people begin to grasp the message of the gospel and even manage to get past the first two objections, but then they believe the lie that it all sounds too good to be true. They believe they have messed up too badly, or that God could never forgive them. Sometimes people can't let go of the notion that they have to earn salvation. Grace simply doesn't compute for many people. The gospel is a wonderful gift, but it takes trust to receive it.

Paul's point was that many Jewish people would miss out on the gospel blessings because they were too proud to recognize their need to change course. The same thing happens to many in Christian nations today. We have the information in front of us, but we stumble over the gospel message instead of being transformed by it. Paul laments this reality, even as he recognizes its truth.

## Salvation By Faith

Next, Paul turns his attention to what is required for salvation.

<sup>5</sup> For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. <sup>6</sup> But faith's way of getting right with God says, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will go up to heaven?' (to bring Christ down to earth). <sup>7</sup> And don't say, 'Who will go down to the place of the dead?' (to bring Christ back to life again)." <sup>8</sup> In fact, it says, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart."

And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: <sup>9</sup> If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. <sup>11</sup> As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." <sup>12</sup> Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:5-13, NLT)

Paul says that we are saved not based on our adherence to the law, but on our faith in Jesus. Some have taken this to mean that the Old Testament is no longer relevant. That is a terrible error. Paul's basis for everything he is saying is the Old Testament scriptures! But Paul also reminds us that the law given to the Jewish people is no longer binding on Christians today. Instead, we are to trust in Christ and submit to Him as we live our lives. The law still serves as a guide, but not a guide for how to be saved. Instead, it gives us a glimpse into God's design for how we are to live.

This leads to Paul's famous declaration about how to be saved. He says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then you will be saved.

These are exceedingly important words, so we should look at them carefully. At first glance, it seems like Paul is saying that we are saved by what we do. He lists two things that a person must do to be saved: confess that Jesus is Lord, and believe God raised Him from the dead. But just last week we saw that people are saved because God chooses to save them. How do we reconcile these two statements? We start by believing that Paul wasn't contradicting himself. He knew what he said just a few verses before. Then I think we see that Paul is describing two sides of the same coin—maybe just looking at it from different points of view. On one side, we see from a human perspective (we must make a choice), while on the other, we see from God's perspective (God chose us before the creation of the world).

God initiates and is responsible for our salvation. Without God's intervention in our hearts, we would continue to live in rebellion against Him. No one believes unless God first works in their hearts. On the other hand, we are responsible to respond to His call on our lives. A Christian is someone who trusts in Christ and believes the truth about Him. The question is how does that happen? Is it something we do, or something God does in us? I think it is correct to say that both things are true. When God changes our hearts, our desires change. As a result, we decide to believe in the truth, and as a result, we live differently. So, it is correct to say that we must make a real decision to trust Jesus, but it is also true to say that everyone who chooses Christ does so because God has chosen them from before the creation of the world. The important point to grasp is this: we bear responsibility for our choice to either trust in Christ or reject Him. But at the same time, those who do believe recognize that they are not better than anyone else—because they are recipients of God's grace, which led them to faith.

Paul's important point here is that *everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. This means Jews and Gentiles alike, people from all walks of life and backgrounds stand on level ground. There is only one way of salvation, but it is available to all.

This statement addresses a question people often ask when we talk about God choosing people to be saved. How do I know if I am chosen? The answer isn't that

complicated. If you call upon the name of the Lord to save you, if you have genuine faith in Christ, then God has chosen you! If He hadn't, you wouldn't make that choice at all.

## **How Do We Get There?**

This leads Paul to talk about how people can come to a place of believing in Christ at all, and gives us some important instruction as Christians.

<sup>14</sup> But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? <sup>15</sup> And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

<sup>16</sup> But not everyone welcomes the Good News, for Isaiah the prophet said, "Lord, who has believed our message?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ. (Romans 10:14-17, NLT)

The temptation that sometimes comes from the knowledge that God is the One who ultimately draws people to faith in Christ is to conclude that what we do doesn't matter. If God is ultimately in control, why do we need to bother telling people about the gospel?

Paul answers that question here. The reason is that God uses human beings as the conduit through which He changes people's hearts. God chooses to use the preaching of sinful human beings to share the message of hope and forgiveness with the world. He could accomplish all of this without us, but He gives us the opportunity to be part of the process of bringing people to faith.

This is a reminder to us that we need to share the gospel message with others. Paul says that faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes from the Good News about Christ. It doesn't come from trying to get people to change their behavior. It doesn't come from trying to convince people to vote for a specific political position. It doesn't even come by arguing for the existence of God or the truth of the scriptures. People are saved by hearing the gospel message.

There is a famous saying that is (falsely) attributed to St. Francis of Assisi. "Preach the gospel always. Use words if necessary." The idea of this is that the way we live should present Christ to the world. And there is an element of truth in this statement. Many say that they are evangelizing with their lives, so they don't need to use words. This is usually a cop-out—a way to excuse our unwillingness to share our faith. And it flies in the face of what Paul says. Paul reminds us that we need to share the message of the gospel with others. People cannot believe the message until they have heard it. So, we have a responsibility to share it with them.

## **What of Israel?**

Romans 10 ends in much the same way that Romans 9 did. It points to the fact that this whole state of affairs was predicted throughout the Old Testament. God had repeatedly said He would cause Gentiles to come to faith and that He would do so through the

Jewish people. He repeatedly spoke of how the Jewish people had frequently rebelled against Him and had remained hardened in their hearts. None of this should have been a surprise to anyone. That didn't make the reality of it any less painful for Paul.

But as we'll see next week, Paul was not completely hopeless. He knows the story isn't over yet. He rejoiced in God's salvation of the Gentiles, even as he continued to pray for the Jews to respond in faith.

## Conclusion

So what are we to take from this passage? We've covered a lot of ground, so let's put together some practical applications.

**First, make sure your faith is anchored to Christ.** It is easy for people to get sidetracked in life, even in the church. Sometimes we get the idea that we need to be serving more in the church, or giving more to the church, or doing a better job at following God's commands. These are all good things, and things Christians should be doing. But sometimes we get things out of order. We imagine that if we do enough of these religious things, then we'll be right with God. That isn't true. Zeal and sincerity are not enough. Make sure your hope is anchored to true faith in Jesus. Remember that we are saved by what He has done, not by what we do. If you grasp these truths and are trying to honor Him, the other things will follow.

**Second, tell others about the gospel!** This seems simple, but many people feel ill-equipped to do so. Here's my advice: practice! Think about how you would present the gospel message in one minute. Talk about sin, our need for a savior, and what Jesus has done. Here's how I might say it: God created everything, and He designed us to be in relationship with Him. But we broke God's laws, which broke our relationship with Him. Doing good things can't undo the bad things we've done. But the good news is that Jesus died to pay the penalty we deserved and to fix what we broke. Everyone who trusts in and follows Him will have that relationship restored and will live with Jesus both now and forevermore! Once you've got the basics down, expand on it a bit. And then start talking to others. The more you do it, the more comfortable you'll feel. It's ok to not have all the answers. Our job isn't to answer every question people ask; it is to faithfully and lovingly proclaim the truth of the gospel. God will take it from there.

**Third, don't let your pride keep you from growing in faith.** The Jewish people believed they had things all figured out. As a result, they were unwilling to learn and unwilling to change. Their pride kept them from the blessings of God. We can do the same thing. The gospel message is clear and unchanging, but God may work to change things in your life. He may take you in a different direction. He may teach you something that causes you to rethink much of what you've believed, He may challenge you to make changes you aren't sure you're ready for. The gospel requires humility—not just at the beginning, but at each step along the way. Be open to where the Lord leads you and follow Him, recognizing that He knows what's best, and He's always got more to teach us.

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