

October 25, 2026

BELIEVE: ROMANS 9:30–10:3, 9-17

Introductory Activity

Tell the story of Jim “Wrong Way” Marshall: In a 1964 NFL game between the Minnesota Vikings and the San Francisco 49ers, Jim Marshall made a life-defining play. The NFL deemed it the #56 play in its top 100. It happened in the fourth quarter at Kezar Stadium in San Francisco. The 49ers’ quarterback threw a short pass to Billy Kilmer, who fumbled the ball when he was subsequently. Vikings’ defensive lineman Jim Marshall scooped up the ball and ran toward the end zone. Unfortunately, he was running the wrong direction. He had things backwards and did not realize it. As he ran down the field, unhindered by any of the 49ers, he heard the crowd’s roar. He interpreted that roar as cheering for his deft abilities. His teammates were also chasing him along the sidelines, “cheering” him along. It was only after he tossed the ball out of bounds from inside the 49ers’ end zone, successfully scoring a safety for the 49ers, that he realized his mistake. The news was delivered to him by 49er Bruce Bosley, with a simple “Thanks, Buddy.”

Summarize and Transition: Marshall, who died in 2025, went on to play and succeed in that game and many more to come. The infamous play was always treated lightheartedly by the player and those around him. However, getting things backward and running the wrong direction is not always a lighthearted affair. Today we are going to study portions of Romans 9 and 10. In this passage, Paul is going to reveal that the Jews “were doing everything exactly backward” (Romans 10:2, MSG) in their zeal for righteousness. We will also see that Paul was prayerfully pursuing his countrymen as they ran in the wrong direction. Then he will urge fellow believers, and us, to run hard with the message of Christ and take it in the right direction towards those who need to hear it.

1. RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH (ROM. 9:30-33)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 9:30-33.

Explain: In the preceding verses of chapter 9, Paul outlined the sovereign choice of God to select Israel as His people to bring forth His plans. In verses 30-33, Paul introduces human will as a co-equal component of salvation. The concept of God’s sovereignty that requires human responsibility to choose Christ’s salvation is difficult to understand. As the ETB LG says, “For centuries, explaining the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility has proven to be more difficult than accepting it by faith.” (ETB LG, 88) Though rich and important, this concept is one that should be studied in a setting that allows for such deep conversation. That place is not a Sunday morning small group where we hope to teach for life transformation lived out next week. So, while not dumbing down the passage, let’s take the passages presented in the ETB curriculum and see what we can apply to our coming week. The main point of this passage, titled by the curriculum as “Righteousness Through Faith,” is “**All people need to understand that true righteousness comes through faith, not by works.**” (ETB LG, 89) We can see this in the pursuits of two groups of people: **The Believing Gentile and The Unbelieving Jew.**

The Believing Gentile

In the believing Gentile, we see **A Paradoxical Path to Salvation** (vv. 30-32a). The path is paradoxical from the human perspective. In verse 30, Paul says the “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

righteousness.” You might say they were chasing after the wrong treasure but found the treasury of God in Christ. To use Paul’s language, the treasure they pursued was “not...righteousness.” If one is pursuing “not...righteousness,” he or she is pursuing the opposite of righteousness, that is unrighteousness. So, while they sought the wrong thing, they *found* righteousness. How did they find it? Through faith! They were doing all the wrong things but found the prize anyway. The righteousness they obtained was not one built on works. That is where the paradox comes in. It is human nature to believe that if we are going to achieve something, obtain something, be something, we must try hard, pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, or go hard or go home. That might work in economics, but it does not work in God’s economy. God’s path to the riches of glory is paradoxical. And it made no sense to the unbelieving Jew that Paul speaks about.

The Unbelieving Jew

In the unbelieving Jew, we see **A Paradoxical Response to the Savior**. For centuries, Jews had been running after the “prize” of righteousness, but running the wrong way. Or as Michael Martin puts it, “Israel sought the right goal but did so in the wrong way.” (ETBC, 83) Paul says they were “pursuing the law of righteousness,” but righteousness is not achieved by the law. And really that is what the law was pointing to all along. In Galatians 3:24, Paul tells us this.

Read Galatians 3:24 (The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith.)

The word translated “guardian” (CSB, ESV, NIV) is translated as “schoolmaster” in the King James.¹ Phillips says the law was “a strict governess,” and Dunn says that law was “a stern baby-sitter.”² The Law as a “guardian,” “schoolmaster,” “governess,” and “baby-sitter” functioned to bring Israel to Christ. It does so by revealing one’s sin and stripping him or her down to the core before a holy God. “As A. Schlatter once put it the law was ‘the silent preparation for the revelation of faith.’”³ However, instead of welcoming the Savior promised by the Law through faith, Israel paradoxically stumbled over the treasure God placed in their path towards righteousness. Justification by faith in Christ was a stumbling block for Israel. “It stood in the way of their own popular religious philosophy of works and... They stumble[d] over the offer because it deprives them of any proprietary involvement in their own salvation. It is pride that brings people down.” (NAC, 206) They were practicing a try-hard-pull-ourselves-up-by-our-bootstraps-go-hard-or-go-home kind of righteousness. In God’s economy, that does not work. Righteousness comes by faith.

Discuss: How do we see works-based religion in our world today?

Of course, we see this in religions or belief systems that literally say you must do certain things, perform certain actions, or participate in certain rituals to please God or “the gods.” We also see works-based religion in those who say that a Christian can lose their salvation if they do enough bad things. We see it in the good churchgoer who thinks if he gives enough to the building project or “blesses” the preacher with a good ole’ Baptist handshake often enough, then God will reward him with salvation. We see it in the old man near death who says I just hope I did enough good to get to heaven. That is not salvation by faith; that is a hope in some form of cosmic karma. All of this is built on pride. It is the same kind of pride Mounce’s quote above ascribes to the unbelieving Jew. Yet Paul says faith-based righteousness will not put someone to shame, shame being the opposite of pride. Note that. Works-based faith is the product of pride, leading to the self-exultation of the worker, while faith-based righteousness is the product of trust resulting in the exaltation of a gracious God.

¹ παιδαγωγός (*paidagōgos*), οὐ (*ou*), ὁ (*ho*): n.masc.; ≡ Str 3807; TDNT 5.596—LN 36.5 **guardian**, custodian, supervisor (1Co 4:15; Gal 3:24, 25+) James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997)

² Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 266.

³ *Ibid.*, 267.

The one who places their trust in Christ through faith for salvation will not be embarrassed in the end, nor will he be disappointed.

Summarize Transition: Throughout the metanarrative of Scripture, God consistently acts in a way that seems paradoxical to humans. He chooses the younger son; or he chooses the small nation of Israel, or He comes to earth to serve as a sacrifice for sinful mankind. The concluding verses of Romans 9 yet again reveal the seemingly paradoxical nature of God's work. The Gentiles who sought unrighteousness found righteousness through faith. The Jews who sought righteousness through good works failed to discover the treasure of Christ's forgiveness leading to salvation. Both were running the wrong way. The Gentile through faith was saved by God's grace. The Jew stumbled over the free gift and freedom of grace. As Westerners in the 21st century, we don't deal with the dichotomous distinction of Jew and Gentile. Instead, we have other factors like race, economic station, education, or politics. In relation to salvation, there is no distinction in person. There is only distinction in the direction we are running, the goals we seek, and the trust we place in Christ. **"All people need to understand that true righteousness comes through faith not by works."** (ETB LG, 91) In the next passage, Paul is going to continue his discussion of the unbelieving Jew and examine their misguided zeal.

2. MISGUIDED ZEAL (ROM. 10:1-3)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 10:1-3

Explain: It can often seem like Paul is down or negative toward the Jews as a whole. Paul does not feel animosity or hatred toward his own people. Instead, Paul has a great love for them, and his negative comments are directed at their failings. It might be similar to how we speak of a wayward child. We love them, but we critique their actions. Paul's words in Romans 10:1-3 are examples of both love and critique. In verse 1, we are privy to his **Magnificent Zeal for the Lost**.

After critiquing their failure to receive the gospel message in chapter 9, Paul immediately follows up with the statement of his "heart's desire" to see them saved. He does not have malevolent feelings toward the Jews. Instead, this language reveals that he is "motivated by a benevolent spirit." (ETB LG, 92) Moreover, it is not just a desire to see them saved. It is his prayer that they come to faith in Christ. "Prayer is one of God's means of accomplishing His purposes, so Paul prayed for Israel." (ETB LG, 92) If we read the book of Acts, we will see that Paul's desire and his prayer were lived out in his evangelistic actions. But we should stop here and note that all three work together. Paul had a desire. That desire led him to pray *and* act.

Discuss: How can your group more effectively pray for the lost?

One of the first steps in praying consistently and effectively for the lost is to keep them before you. As an individual and a group, we should have a list of people who need salvation and those who need to connect with God's Word and God's people. If we do not consistently remind ourselves of the need, we are prone to forget them in our prayers. Dr. Ryken quotes C. S. Lewis in his article "C. S. Lewis the Evangelist,"

I have two lists of names in my prayers, those for whose conversion I pray and those for whose conversion I give thanks. The little trickle of transferences from List A to List B is a great comfort. (Exalting, 174)

One reason Paul was so concerned that his Jewish brethren move from List A to List B was that he could "testify" about their spiritual shortcomings. Let us not forget that Paul was once lost as a (Jewish) goose. "He understood their state of mind more than most: 'an unenlightened zeal for God' was exactly what he himself had before he met the risen Christ." (TNTC, 189) This is a second step in developing an active prayer life for the lost. We should never forget that from which we were saved. Often, as sanctified believers who now live in a holy bubble, we forget the plight of the lost. Instead of looking up in prayer to God for their souls, we look

down on them for their deeds. Merida reminds us, “The proper heart attitude is heartbrokenness, not an air of superiority.” (Exalting, 173) In verses 2 and 3, Paul outlines the failure of the unbelieving Jew, but he does so while noting that he too was once like them. As we quickly look at **Misguided Zeal for God**, let us also note that Paul’s critique applies not just to the unbelieving Jew of whom he writes but, to some extent, all unbelievers.

First, he says, “they have zeal for God.” Here we can see that all humanity has a **Desire for the Divine** (v. 2a). Since their return from captivity, the Jews have been zealous for the ways of God. However, that desire was corrupted and became a devotion to the letter of the law, not the spirit (Spirit?) of the law. They had lost God in their commitment to His Law. Our world today is filled with people seeking the divine. They seek the divine in pilgrimages to the East, hiking the Camino de Santiago, spending time in Nature (as opposed to Creation), or looking inward. Many say they are spiritual but not religious. Humanity has a desire for something bigger than itself.

Second, Paul notes that their zeal is tainted because it is “not according to knowledge.” Their desire, like the seekers of spirituality today, is marred by an **Incessant Ignorance** (vv. 2b-3a). The Jews were not ignorant of the Law, but they were ignorant of the heart and purpose of the Law. Likewise, people today are ignorant of the God-given purpose behind their desire for the divine. In his memoir, Augustine of Hippo wrote, “Man, who are a little piece of your creation, desires to praise you...because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”⁴ Later in the 18th century, Blaise Pascal wrote of filling the endemic emptiness experienced as part of the human condition. He says that our attempts to fill this emptiness “are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and unchanging object, that is to say, only God Himself.”⁵ To use modern language, we might say that we have a God-shaped hole in our heart. Augustine and Pascal both express the incessant ignorance of the unbeliever seeking spirituality or the divine. They know they need *something*; they just do not know what it is, and they are going to restless search to fill that hole until they find rest in God.

Third, Paul says that in their ignorance the unbelieving Jew had “attempted to establish their own righteousness; they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.” In effect, their ignorant zeal had led to a **Stubborn Stalemate** between their pride and their good. The “good” that humanity needs is salvation in Christ by grace through faith, and ignorance of the truth is keeping men and women from that. Martin writes, “While the word ignorant can describe someone lacking knowledge, it can also refer to a person who disregards or willfully ignores some truth... [Paul] implies that they chose to ignore or disregarded the truth revealed in the gospel.” (ETBC, 85) The Jews had the Law that pointed them to Christ. Paul tells us in Romans 1:18 and following that the Gentiles have enough knowledge through creation, history, and human nature to seek the True spirituality in Christ (we call this General Revelation). Yet the stubbornness of the unbelieving Jew in Paul’s day and the modern, enlightened, and educated unbeliever today prevents them from placing their faith in Christ. It is a stalemate between pride and the ultimate good.

Discuss: Knowing that those around us are searching for something of which they are stubbornly ignorant, how should believers respond today?

Summarize and Transition: The believer should respond like Paul. Paul personally knew of the searching, stubborn ignorance of which he spoke. We too should remember that we have been raised from the pit of

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.1.1, p. 3.

⁵ Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. W. F. Trotter (Christian Classics Ethereal Library: Grand Rapids, nd), Section VII Fragment 425, p. 80. Accessed online <https://ccel.org/ccel/p/pascal/pensees/cache/pensees.pdf> October 16, 2026.

sinfulness. Paul responded by praying with the great desire of his heart for those who needed to find Christ. Paul also went to the nations. The ETB Leader Guide reminds us that “Believers can follow Paul’s example by praying for the salvation of lost people.” However, Merida goes further and challenges us, “To be an evangelist like Paul, we need to learn to pray for the salvation of others.” (Exalting, 174) In the next passage, Paul is going to explain how a person can find salvation in Christ. We can learn from him the essential elements of sharing with others.

3. SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL (ROM. 10:9-13)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 10:9-13.

Explain: In verses 4-8, Paul continues to argue for righteousness found in faith, not the keeping of the law. He concludes verse 8 with the statement, “This is the message of faith that we proclaim.” Our passage picks up with that message. It is a message in two parts. First, we see the **Exclusivity of the Gospel**. This is a topic we have talked about before, but it is worth repeating. Salvation is found exclusively in the work of Christ. In verse 9, he writes that a person must confess and believe. In verse 10, he says that one must believe and confess. Paul is *not* saying that belief results in one effect and confession another. However, “the order believing-confession is the order of both logic and experience.” (TNTC, 192) Unless they are being duplicitous or lacking a true understanding of the gospel, a person will not confess Christ without first believing in their heart. (cf. NAC ,209 and ETBC, 860) But what does the person believe and confess? “Christ is Lord.”

Discuss: What is one confessing when they proclaim Christ to be Lord?

Explain: “At the time of Paul’s writing, one can find inscriptions, papyri, and ostraca attesting that ‘Nero is Lord,’ even the grandiose claim that ‘Nero, the Lord of the entire world.’ [sic.]” (Bird, Romans, 359 in Exalting, 177) For those under the rule of the Roman emperor, to confess Christ as Lord was treasonous. To declare Christ as Lord publicly is a declaration of **Total Commitment to the Truth** despite cultural opposition. It is also a confession of the belief of the heart. Not only is Christ Lord, but He is also the resurrected Lord. A belief in the resurrection of Christ is a belief in the need for His resurrection. Thus, the confession is one of **Theological Conviction**. While Paul does not state it in these two verses, to declare Christ as the risen Lord is to acknowledge personal sinfulness, Christ’s sinlessness, His atoning death on the cross, and His defeat of sin and death at the resurrection. We can also understand the confession of Jesus as Lord to be a confession of **Total Compliance to God**. The word that Paul uses for Lord is transliterated as *kyrios* that generally means master. However, the word can go much deeper. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Paul would have used, the word was used to translate words used for God, including *’ādôn* (Lord) and *yhwh* (Yahweh). Moreover, the NT, written in Greek, uses the word *kyrios* when citing OT passages about God.⁶ Why all of this information about translation? Because when a person confesses Jesus as Lord, he is submitting to the leadership of the Sovereign God of the universe. The blessings of the gospel are exclusively given to those who confess Jesus as Lord in this manner. However, verses 11-13 reveal the **Universality of the Gospel**.

Verse 12 reminds us of the universality of sin. Paul uses the phrase, “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.” We saw this same language in Romans 3:22 and 23. There he writes, “²² The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, *since there is no distinction.* ²³ *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” (emphasis added) There, the lack of distinction has an ominous feel. Everyone is sinful and destined for judgment. Here, though, the universality of sin is balanced by the universality of opportunity.

⁶ Jonathan Lo, “Deity,” in Lexham *Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al., Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

“Everyone who believes” and “everyone who calls” will experience salvation. Salvation is not based on *anything* other than one’s faith in Christ.

Summarize and Transition: Let’s briefly summarize what we have learned so far: (1) Faith comes through faith, not works. (2) Everyone has a desire for God but does not realize the object of their desire. (3) Salvation through Jesus is available for everyone regardless of background. This has implications for the believer, but first we need to acknowledge the importance of these points for the unbeliever. The ETB LG sums up the reality that “Any person who has not yet believed and confessed Jesus can do so and be saved.” (Teacher, you might want to take a moment to remind your group that anyone with questions about salvation can speak with you or a pastor.) But what does all of this mean for the believer? That is where Paul goes next.

4. GO TELL (ROM. 10:14-17)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 10:14-17.

Explain: This is one of the most poetic calls to evangelism and mission work in the Bible. But due to time limitations, let’s see what we can learn through a list of bullet points.

- **The Necessity of Believing (v. 14a):** Salvation is found only in faith-filled belief expressed in confession.
- **The Necessity of Hearing (v. 14b):** It is necessary for those seeking the divine (10:2a) or those pursuing unrighteousness (9:30) to actually hear the gospel message.
- **The Necessity of Preaching (v. 14c):** While someone can pick up a Gideon Bible in a hotel room and read and respond to the gospel message, Paul here emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel. The preacher here is not an officer of the church, but anyone who proclaims the gospel even over a cup of coffee or standing beside a trackhoe.
- **The Necessity of Going and Sending (v. 15a):** While God is the primary sender of believers, the local body of believers is the commissioning body (see Matt. 28:18-20 and Acts 13:2-3). Believers are commissioned each week when they leave corporate worship. Missionaries are commissioned by the local congregation to go to the nations. The church should be intentional in both sending believers into their neighborhoods and calling out the called for the sake of the nations.
- **The Beauty of Going (v. 15b):** Paul’s quote from Isaiah is from a part of the prophet’s message in which the messenger is proclaiming the end-time rule of God over the nations (Isaiah 52:7). When we proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, we are proclaiming His Lordship over all. It is a beautiful message, and the bringer of a beautiful message is always welcome regardless of the dirt and grime on his feet.
- **The Horrors of Rejecting (v. 16):** Again, Paul quotes Isaiah (53:1). Isaiah 53 is a prophecy concerning Jesus’s death and burial. It reminds us of the horrors of rejecting Christ’s work on the cross. It also reminds us that a person’s rejection of the gospel does not negate its Truth nor our obligation to share.
- **The Power of the Message (v. 17):** Faith comes after hearing the message, and the message is about Christ. Only the gospel message of Christ can save a person and change their life. The gospel of a good church, the gospel of good works, nor the gospel of a better life can save a person. It’s good to invite people to church. It is good to do good things for and with people. It is good to help people discover the better life available through right living, but none of those things by themselves can break the power of sin and save a person from judgement.

Summarize and Transition: Stott observes that “the essence of Paul’s argument is seen if we put his six verbs in the opposite order: Christ sends heralds; heralds preach; people hear; hearers believe; believers call; and those who call are saved.” (Stott, *Romans*, 286 in NAC, 211) Let us be a people who go; preach so that people

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hear, understand, and believe; call people to salvation; and see them experience God's salvation. "Believers must tell others the gospel message and send missionaries throughout the entire world." (ETB LG, 97)

CONCLUDE

In this lesson, we are reminded that "everyone who confesses and believes in Jesus will be saved." (ETB LG, 87) Some people are going the wrong way in life. They are either chasing after unrighteousness or chasing after salvation through good works. Neither approach leads to eternity with Christ. It is through faith alone that one can receive the gift of eternal life. Today there might be a few ways we can respond to Paul's message.

How do we respond?

1. You might need to stop chasing salvation and simply rest in the confession that Jesus is Lord. If you need to come to faith in Christ, today is the day.
2. If you are a believer, you are surrounded by those who do not yet know Christ. Spend time this week praying for them.
3. Ask the Lord to provide you with the opportunity and wisdom to share your faith with others this week.

Let us be people with beautiful feet this week as we take the marvelous message of Christ's defeat of sin and death leading to salvation and life in Him.