

Romans: The Good News of God

Christ Is the End of the Law

Romans 10:1-4

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Scripture

Let's read Romans 10:1-4:

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

Introduction

The vital question, with which the Apostle Paul deals, is no doubt, "How is a person saved? And, how does my salvation relate to the salvation of the Jews and the salvation of the Gentiles?"

One thinks of the theme verses of the letter, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" (Romans 1:16-17).

Today, however, people are not very interested in such a question, which in itself, of course, may be symptomatic of a deeper problem in human nature. What people are interested in is, "How can I be happy?"

One commentator, named Luthi, says:

Whatever aspect this "happiness" may assume for each individual person, the question of happiness rules our thoughts and holds passionate sway over our imagination. This is understandable: God certainly does not blame us for liking to be happy. What father does not want his children happy? This is particularly

true of our Father in Heaven: if anyone wishes us to be happy, then it is He. But God alone knows what is good or harmful for the human race, and He knows that all our happiness is as fragile as a soap bubble. But however much it may please Him when His children make soap bubbles and enjoy themselves a little and are happy, it pleases Him much more when His children are saved. How will the world be saved? This is His passionate concern; this is why the way to salvation is and remains the burning theme of the Letter to the Romans.

Last Saturday and Sunday the young people of our church spent a happy weekend on the shores of Lake Biel (Bienne). During it, one of the party who plays the guitar sang us a song about a man who leaves his home by the North Sea, and makes his fortune in foreign lands. But in spite of his happiness, he is homesick. In his mind's eye he can see the open sea and the yellow bloom flowering on its shore, and he seems to hear the cry of the sea gulls. The song is interesting for the insight shown in the words: "I have found happiness, but still I long for home."

Fortunate the man for whom happiness is not sufficient! Fortunate the man who knows the great nostalgia, the longing for more than just pleasure, for as the German philosopher Nietzsche says, all pleasure lacks eternity.

Luthi is right. Paul speaks to those into whose lives "God has breathed his great nostalgia," and who now wish more than anything else to be at home with him. In this great nostalgia is found, not only happiness, but also that eternal joy that alone satisfies.

Lesson

In Romans 9 Paul stressed the divine side of our salvation, laying great emphasis on the sovereignty of God in saving and hardening. That side of the divine program should have its stress, and the apostle gives it here. Paul and Jesus are the great preachers of the sovereignty of God in our salvation (cf. John 6, etc.).

But divine sovereignty should always be balanced by human responsibility. We are required by God to respond to the message

of grace. Our human responsibility is plainly set forth in the Word (cf. Acts 16:31). And that is the emphasis of Paul in Romans 10.

We rejoice in both doctrines, divine sovereignty in grace, and human responsibility to submit to the Word of grace. With that comment we turn to the exposition of the letter to the Romans.

I. Paul's Eagerness for Israel's Salvation (10:1-2)

First, I want you to notice Paul's eagerness for Israel's salvation.

Paul declares his eagerness for Israel's salvation in verse 1: **"Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."** It is a beautiful expression of the apostle's concern for his own flesh and blood. And it is a pattern that ought to be true of us, too.

The Psalmist says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem! 'May they be secure who love you!'" (Psalm 122:6). Is that your concern? If you are in tune with the apostles and with our Lord, I am sure it would be.

Louis T. Talbot, in one of his works, tells the story of a person who once said to him, "Do you expect me to love the Jews? Why, they are terrible people."

He replied, "Yes, they are terrible. In fact, they are nearly as bad as the Gentiles!"

And then he pointed to the way the Gentiles were acting the world over, fighting among themselves in tumults and wars and, in addition, persecuting the Jews all the while. And he added that, even if the Jews *were* worse than the Gentiles, what of it? We should still pray for them and their salvation.

Then Paul explains his eagerness for Israel's salvation. He says in verse 2: **"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."**

In Romans 9:1-5 the apostle spoke of his great heaviness of heart over Israel's lost condition. He pondered their great privileges, such as "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of

the law, the worship, and the promises” (9:4). In addition, they were descendants of the patriarchs, and from them—the greatest privilege of all—is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised (9:5).

And yet, in spite of these privileges, only a remnant of Israel was saved. The great mass of the nation had turned from God in unbelief and, with the Gentiles, had crucified their Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle’s consideration of their condition in Romans 9 is from the *objective* side of things, that is, from the side of their privileges and their failure to measure up to them.

In Romans 10 Paul looks at things more definitely from the *subjective* side. He speaks of his great desire that they be saved, because **they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.**

The **zeal** of the Jews in the New Testament times was noted by Jesus, who said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matthew 23:15).

He also said that the time would come, after his departure, when the apostles would meet with Jews who would put them out of the synagogues and, further, would think that whoever killed them would be doing God a service (cf. John 16:2).

In our day we tend to think that anyone zealous in spiritual things is surely acceptable to God. How many of us have heard people say, “It doesn’t really matter what a person believes, as long as we sincerely believe it. If we do the best we can, then God surely will accept us. He is not a religious bigot, is he? Aren’t all things relative in spiritual matters?”

Sincerity, however, is no substitute for truth. The person who sincerely believes in the solvency of an insolvent bank and puts his money into their hands for safekeeping is soon disillusioned. He learns that sincerity is no substitute for solvency.

In spiritual things there is truth and there is error. The Scriptures set forth the truth. That which is not in accord with the in-

spired Word of Truth is wrong. That which is according to the inspired writings is from God and, therefore, true and reliable.

As R. C. H. Lenski, the well-known Lutheran commentator, has put it, “Take poison ardently; the ardor will as little prevent the deadly effect of the poison as the lack of ardor would.”

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Community Church in California once said, “Last week, my wife Kay and I had an appointment in Pasadena and had to take separate cars. She was in the white van, and I was in the blue Olds. As we were going, we got in a little traffic jam, and I lost her. I saw what I thought was her white van, and went all the way to Downey before I realized I was following the wrong van. I got there half an hour late.”

And then he adds, “You can be sincere, but you can be sincerely wrong. The fact is that it takes more than sincerity to make it in life. It takes truth.”

Similarly in spiritual things, sincerity in the acceptance of false doctrine will not save us. We are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ alone. And that is why it is so important that we know it and preach it accurately (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

If ever a man could be saved by **zeal**, it would be Paul. Listen to his words in Philippians 3:4-9:

⁴though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

It is easy to see that the apostle, a zealous man, regarded **zeal** in a wrong cause as worse than worthless. It was “rubbish” for him. The important thing in spiritual things is *truth*, not sincerity (cf. Acts 22:3).

Donald Grey Barnhouse, the great Presbyterian preacher of Tenth Presbyterian Church in the last century, put it this way:

You drive your car over the George Washington Bridge with perfect faith that it will hold you, and you arrive safely on the other side.

With just as good faith you may drive onto some wooden bridge over a country stream, but if the boards are decayed you will be let down into the stream. It is not your sincerity or your faith that keeps you safe. It was the object of your faith that made the difference. If you place all the faith in the world in a religious system, you will be lost. But the smallest amount of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ assures your salvation (Acts 3:16).

II. The Error of the Israelites (10:3)

Second, I want you to notice the error of the Israelites. Paul says in verse 3: **“For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.”**

Paul explains what the error of the Israelites was, but he does it negatively. He tells the Romans how *not* to be saved in his review of Israel’s failure. The mistake of the Israelites lay in seeking to establish their own righteousness by good works before God and in failing to receive as a free gift the righteousness of God.

They did not realize that they were sinners and could not earn a righteous standing before God. In this they were ignorant of God’s righteousness. The Israelites, like a wrecked auto by the sign of a steep curve in the road ahead, were a warning to all that salvation is impossible to religious, zealous people who think that they do not need a Redeemer, but can stand by their own good works. The Israelites are a living illustration that people will come to grief

over Jesus Christ, if they fail to see why he had to come (cf. Galatians 2:21).

They loved their legal righteousness and set about establishing their own righteousness out of pride and arrogance. We think of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector told by Jesus in Luke 18:9-14. The Pharisee, “standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’”

The arrogance is obvious. In the 21st century, however, we do not pray as the proud Pharisee. We know better than to take such a position. So we pray, “God, I thank you that I am not as the Pharisee.” And we do not see our pride.

Jesus made it clear who was accepted before God. He said of the tax collector, who stood afar off from the altar and, afraid and ashamed even to look up toward heaven, beat upon his breast in confession, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” Then Jesus said, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Friends, sinners cry out for mercy, the product of the propitiating sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The righteousness of God, to which the nation Israel by and large did not submit itself, was the imputed righteousness that flows out of the penal, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

R. A. Torrey, the famous evangelist and preacher of the early part of the 20th century, told the story of a young man who came to him for counsel about going into the ministry:

When he came to me, Torrey began, I said, “You want to go into the ministry. Are you a Christian?”

“Why, of course, I am. I was brought up a Christian, and I am not going back on the training of my parents.”

“Have you been born again?”

“What?”

“Jesus says, ‘Except a man be born again, he cannot see the

kingdom of God.”

“Well,” he said, “I have never heard of that before.”

“Did you know that you *have* committed the greatest sin a man can commit?”

“No, I not know that.”

“What do you think the greatest sin is?”

“Murder.”

“You are greatly mistaken. Let us see what God says.”

I turned to Matthew 22:37-38, and read: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.”

“Which commandment is it?” I asked.

“The first and greatest.”

“Have you kept it? Have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind? Have you put God first in everything—in business, in pleasure, in social life, in politics?”

“No, sir, I have not.”

“What have you done then?”

“I have broken this commandment.”

“Which commandment is it?”

“The first and greatest.”

“What have you done then?”

The young man said, “I have broken the first and greatest of God’s commandments. I have committed the greatest sin a man can commit. But I never saw it before.”

Our responsibility, from the first breath as human beings we draw to the last, is to give to our Creator complete and full obedience of heart and soul and mind. We are to love him with our whole heart and soul and mind perfectly.

If I were to give each one of you two minutes in this service to stand on your feet and proclaim your perfection, I am sure that you would not dare to rise. For you and I know that we have broken the first and greatest commandment.

We need, therefore, a Redeemer who will pay the ransom price for our souls, and we need him desperately.

Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, the great Princeton theolo-

gian, has written of a somewhat flippant religious critic, contemplating with admiration the religion of ancient Israel, who said in acknowledgement of what he found there, “an honest God is the noblest work of man.” Warfield said:

There is a profound truth lurking in the remark. Only it appears that the work was too noble for man; and probably man has never compassed it. A benevolent God, yes: men have framed a benevolent God for themselves. But a thoroughly honest God, perhaps never. That has been left from the revelation of God himself to us. And this is the really distinguishing characteristic of the God of revelation: He is thoroughly honest, a thoroughly conscientious God—a God who deals honestly with himself and us, who deals conscientiously with himself and us. And a thoroughly conscientious God, we may be sure, is not a God who can deal with sinners as if they were not sinners. In this fact lies, perhaps the deepest ground of the necessity of an expiatory atonement.

How true that is! Our God is an honest God, and he cannot deal with us as if we were not sinners. He must punish sin. He will deal with us honestly and righteously and if Jesus Christ had not offered the atoning sacrifice and paid in full the penalty of the people of God, we would be lost forever.

But thank God! He has dealt with us honestly in Christ, and we now may stand in our substitute and have the forgiveness of sins, and that righteously. He has paid our debt and set us free, imputing to us a righteousness that fully satisfies our honest God (cf. Romans 3:21-26).

III. The End of the Law (10:4)

And then, notice what Paul says about the “end of the law” in verse 4: **“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”**

The expression, **“Christ is the end of the law”** is a notoriously difficult one, because the word **“end”** may be used in sev-

eral different senses. However, most commentators take “**end**” to mean “termination,” or “fulfillment,” or “culmination.” So, we could say that Christ is the culmination or fulfillment of the law. Righteousness is only available in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, notice the universality of the offer of salvation in Romans 10:4. Paul says, “**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**”

Charles Spurgeon once said:

It is marvelous how fine the wire may be that will carry the electric flash. We may want a cable to carry a message across the sea, but that is for the protection of the wire, the wire which actually carries the message is a slender thing. If thy faith be of the mustard seed kind, if it be only such as tremblingly touches the Savior’s garment’s hem, if thou canst only say, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief,” if it be but the faith of sinking Peter, or weeping Mary, yet if it be faith in Christ, he will be the end of the law for righteousness to thee as well as to the chief of the apostles.

And the individuality of the salvation is also set forth, for the word “**everyone**” is singular. The offer of salvation is to each of us individually. My hope is that we will not, like the Israelites of old, rely on our righteousness to make us acceptable to God. But rather, that we would rely on the righteousness of Christ, as the old hymn says:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in Thee:
let the water and the blood,
from thy riven side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure,
cleanse me from its guilt and pow’r.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortland's *A Passion for God*:

O Lord God, we acknowledge that zeal for you, precisely because it feels so right, can deceive, concealing our actual need for you at a level of our being deeper than our own fervor can reach. O Lord, let us know the reality of ourselves and the fullness of Christ. Let us be stripped of our self-righteousness so that we may be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Let us be wounded, that we may be healed. Let us be shamed, that we may be glorified in Christ, our all-sufficient Savior. Whatever we must lose, let us gain Christ and be found complete in him alone.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.