

- 2) Having addressed from the scriptures the matter of righteousness based on law, Paul turned to the *righteousness based on faith* in relation to God's revealed word (10:6-8). The fact that the larger context (10:5-13) finds him drawing from the Old Testament carries significance beyond mere necessity. It is true that Paul had no New Testament at his disposal, but there is also a contextual importance to his citations. For his intention was to show that Israel's unbelief was the result of willful disregard for God's revealed righteousness fueled by their insistence upon establishing their own. By drawing from Israel's scriptures – specifically passages in which God was addressing the nation through Moses – Paul was demonstrating to his readers that the problem had never been a lack of disclosure on God's part. From the point of its constitution as His covenant nation, God had called Israel to find its righteousness in Him through faith (ref. 10:16-21).

In these three verses Paul began by *personifying* the principle of righteousness based on faith. That is, he presents it here as a rational entity speaking directly of what it is and how it is to be understood: “*But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus...*” (10:6a). The reason for adopting this method of presentation is that it highlights Paul's contextual emphasis, namely that Israel could not rationalize its lack of faith by claiming that God had not revealed it to them. The righteousness of faith had indeed made itself known by “speaking” to them from the very beginning. For even Moses, the mediator of the Law, had proclaimed to God's people that their righteousness was to be found in Yahweh through faith.

Having personified this righteousness, Paul proceeded to represent its address to Israel from two angles: what it *forbids* (10:6b-7) and what it *insists upon* (10:8). Together these references are drawn from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. This passage is part of a larger context that itself must be understood within the scope of the whole of Deuteronomy. For in this book Moses was making his final exhortation to Israel, and the passage at hand is a crucial part of that message.

- Israel had now completed her forty years of wandering and was camped on the plains of Moab, poised to cross the Jordan and begin her ordained conquest of the land promised to Abraham (1:1-6).
- For his part, Moses was about to die, having been denied the right to enter the land because of his conduct at Meribah. His death would not come because of the infirmity of old age, but as a matter of preparation. According to Yahweh's determination, Israel could not enter Canaan until Moses had died (cf. Numbers 20:1-13; Deuteronomy 34:1-8).
- As a whole, Deuteronomy constitutes Moses' final words to Israel, and his exhortation consists of three broad thematic sections. In the first section he exhorted the sons of Israel to remember what God had done for them and what He intended in bringing them to this point (1:1-4:43). In the next one he called them to understand and apply themselves to what God required of them as they took possession of the land of promise (5:1-26:19).

Finally, in the last section Moses set before Israel what God would yet do in fulfillment of His oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (27:1-33:29).

Paul was drawing from the last section of Moses' address to Israel, and this recognition is important to his meaning. For in this part of his exhortation Moses was looking to Israel's *future*, and as such his message was one of both condemnation and hope. In chapters 27-28 Moses set before Israel future blessings and curses that would come upon them, as determined by the nation's faithfulness to the covenant God had made with them. In the next two chapters (29-30), Moses went on to warn the people to be diligent to keep the covenant lest the declared curses fall upon them and they become like Sodom and Gomorrah (29:1-28). Nevertheless, in chapter 30 Moses indicated that Israel would not heed his warning; when they entered the land they would fail in their responsibility and forsake Yahweh (30:1, cf. also 31:14-30). The future would indeed bring upon them the curses of desolation and banishment. *But it was this impending condemnation that provided the context for God's proclamation of hope.* The sons of Israel would turn away from the covenant and bring misery and destruction down upon their heads, but the day was coming when Yahweh would remedy their plight (ref. 30:4-6). And yet this renewal and restoration were not to be in a vacuum; God would do His work, *but He would do it in connection with Israel's repentance* (30:1-3, 9-10). When Israel returned to Him in their hearts, Yahweh would restore them to Himself. This is the contextual framework for Paul's citations, and it provides the vital foundation for understanding his meaning.

- a) The first declaration of the righteousness based on faith constitutes a *prohibition* (10:6b-7), and it is framed around two parallel statements drawn from Deuteronomy 30:12-13. As indicated above, these are part of a larger context that spans chapters 29-30. Having set in front of the sons of Israel their covenant responsibility and the blessing and curses attached to it, Moses concluded by reminding them that God's instruction to them was not obscure or out of their reach. It was not in heaven or beyond the sea, that someone should have to go and retrieve it and present it to them; quite the opposite, the word was "very near them, in their mouth and in their heart, that they might observe it" (ref. again 30:11-14).

At first glance it appears that Paul was taking illegitimate liberty with this passage, using it in a way utterly foreign to its own context. For Moses made these statements in reference to God's covenant commandment to Israel; Paul was associating them with the principle of righteousness by faith. As well, he altered the sense of the passage by referring it to Jesus Himself. And finally, he even changed its wording (cf. 30:13 with Romans 10:7). Douglas Moo comments: "*How can Paul take a passage that is about the law of God and find in it the voice of righteousness by faith? And how, in his explanatory comments, can he claim that what the text is talking about is not the commandment but Christ?*"

These obvious difficulties have led many to conclude that Paul was simply making a loose association. He recognized that Moses' words had a different sense, but as they applied to Israel and her obligation to believe and obey God, He could use them here in a somewhat similar way. But in reality, his intention went beyond merely a general association of broad ideas; his use of Moses' words in this context reflects a profound insight into the Deuteronomic instruction and its salvation-historical significance.

As noted, in this section of his exhortation Moses proclaimed to the sons of Israel their present and future choice as they stood poised to enter Canaan. The nation could choose *life* or *death*, the former resulting from faithfulness to the covenant, the latter from disobedience to it (30:15-20). The choice was theirs, and yet the future was already fixed – not because of divine necessity but because of stubborn human hearts (ref. again 31:14-29). Therefore, Moses' challenge to obedience was accompanied by the two-pronged promise of impending judgment and desolation and ultimate renewal and restoration. These themes comprised the singular *commandment* Moses set before Israel (cf. 30:10 and 30:11), and the *word* that was near them. And most importantly, both of these key elements of God's promissory word to Israel – condemnation/desolation and renewal/restoration – were later realized in the history of the nation.

- From the point of Israel's conquest of Canaan the nation's legacy had consisted of a series of divine judgments culminating finally in the desolation of the land and the banishment of Israel and Judah into captivity. Though a remnant of Judah later returned and rebuilt Jerusalem and her temple, the covenant nation of Israel continued under divine judgment: the northern tribes remained in dispersion; the Davidic throne was not restored; and Judah's own recovery was as a vassal state under Gentile authority.
- But now, just as promised, Yahweh had effected renewal and recovery. In the giving of His Son He had brought the remedy for Israel's disobedience and estrangement. Life, prosperity, and blessing had come, but Israel's reception of them – as Moses had declared long before – depended upon the nation's repentance.

Paul understood that God's promise to Israel of divine remedy had been realized in the Lord Jesus and His saving work, but he also understood that Israel's continued condemnation was the result of her refusal to turn from her stubborn, self-willed insistence upon self-righteousness and lay hold of God's own righteousness through faith in His Son.

How, then, should Paul's compound prohibition (10:6b-7) be understood in the light of the Deuteronomic context from which he drew? Two things must be considered in answering this question.

The first consideration is Paul's own commentary on the passages he cited (vv. 10:6b, 7b, 8b). Three times in verses 10:6-8 Paul repeated the pattern of citing a statement from the Deuteronomy context, and then providing his own explanation of the meaning he intended. In each instance his citation is followed by the phrase, "*that is,*" by which he introduced his commentary. Given the nature of this commentary, it provides the clearest indication of how he was viewing and using this Old Testament context. And the heart of Paul's explanation has already been suggested, namely that he interpreted Deuteronomy 30:11-13 in terms of Christ Himself. It is this centrality of Christ in Paul's argument that is the reason for his alteration of the Deuteronomy text (cf. again 30:13 and 10:7).

The second thing to be considered is how Paul's commentary fits with the contextual and salvation historical significance of Deuteronomy 29-30 (and more broadly, the whole of the book of Deuteronomy). As noted, Paul employs 30:12-14 in a Christological way. This is in contrast to Moses, who was speaking in terms of God's word to Israel. But the transference from *word* to *Christ* is not so far fetched as it may appear. One obvious connection is that Christ is the fulfillment of God's word, even as it finds one particular expression in His covenant with Israel (John 1:1-14; Revelation 19:6-13; cf. also Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:8-9, 59:20-21; etc.).

But Paul's transference was grounded in more than this. For Moses' exhortation to the sons of Israel was directed toward the truth that, through the Law, God had revealed His righteousness to them, and had thereby shown them how they were to find life and blessing in relation to it. But now, in the context of fulfillment, God has revealed His righteousness in the One who is Himself God's "covenant to the peoples" (ref. again Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:8-9). Christ has come as God's consummate word, not only to Israel, but to all mankind. And just as ancient Israel could not excuse her covenant disobedience, either by claiming ignorance or by indicting God for a lack of disclosure, so neither could the Israel of Paul's generation excuse its lack of obedience to God's revelation in the Son of the covenant. Thus Paul's interaction with this Deuteronomy context:

- Christ had been openly manifested in the flesh, so that it was preposterous to claim that someone should have to "ascend into heaven" in order to "bring Him down" to the world of men.
- So also, Jesus had displayed His triumph over death in His resurrection by appearing to hundreds of people before His ascension (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). No one needed to "descend into the abyss" in order to "bring Christ up from the dead." This crucial point of fulfillment as it implicates God's promissory "word" to Israel explains Paul's change of expression from the *sea* in Deuteronomy 30:13 to the *abyss* in 10:7.

*“His purpose for making such a change was to facilitate his christological application. As he could use the fact of the incarnation to suggest the foolishness of ‘going into heaven’ to bring Christ down, so now he can use the fact of the resurrection to deny any need to ‘go down to the abyss’ to bring Christ up from ‘the realm of the dead.’” (Moo)*

Paul’s point is this: Faith does not permit a person to seek to make Christ present by bringing him down from heaven or by raising him from the grave. The reason is obvious – Christ has already been brought down and raised up, and faith stands in the conviction of His death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and everlasting rule over a new creation.

- b) By its very nature, faith will not allow the “faithlessness” expressed by the petitions of 10:6-7. On the contrary, what faith *does* say is: *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”* (10:8a). As before, Paul’s meaning is discerned by considering first his own commentary on this statement, and then applying that commentary to the historical and salvation-historical contexts of Deuteronomy 30:14. With respect to the former matter, Paul interpreted the *word* of the Deuteronomy passage in terms of the apostolic *word of faith*. This word is the message of the gospel that calls all men to exercise faith in Jesus Christ. Here, as in the previous two citations, Paul’s interpretation is wholly Christological.

The historical context for verse 30:14 within the scope of Moses’ exhortation has already been addressed. God was setting in front of Israel her obligation to covenant faithfulness, along with the blessings and curses that would attend her particular response. Building upon that exhortation, God’s “word” further included the declaration of Israel’s assured disobedience and judgment, but was crowned with His promise that He would one day overcome the calamity of their faithlessness and self-will; He would bring recovery and restoration according to His oath to Abraham. *And yet, Israel’s participation in this renewal demanded their sincere return to Yahweh with all their hearts and souls* (30:1-10).

This was God’s word to the sons of Israel. It was a word that called for the obedience of faith, and such faith was not an unreasonable demand. For Yahweh’s word of warning and promise was not obscure or out of reach; it was neither foreign nor elusive. Israel knew her God, and had seen His veracity, faithfulness, and loving care over a period of forty years. His word was *near* them, in their mouths and hearts. *But how much more is this true in the context of fulfillment?* The day of God’s manifest righteousness has come. He promised renewal and recovery, and His word has been fulfilled in the Word made flesh – the Word who dwelt among men so that they beheld His glory (John 1:1-18). The nearness of God’s word is no longer defined by the mediation and proclamation of Moses; it is now the nearness of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.