

## **The End of the Law For Righteousness**

Romans 10:1-13

There are only two options when it comes to being saved. Option one: Save yourself. Option two: Have God save you. The Jews were trying to save themselves. They were refusing to believe in Jesus Christ to save them. This is ironic for it was Israel whom God had chosen to be saved.

Israel's present unbelief is a dilemma. God's chosen people ought to be believing in their Messiah. In chapter 9 Paul explains their unbelief in terms of God's Sovereign Election: He has mercy upon whom He wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. But in chapter 10, he focuses on the rebellion of the hearts of the Jews themselves.

They are stubbornly refusing to believe. We all know people who have heard the gospel message and continue in unbelief. Many of these have grown up in the Church. And so, Paul's discussion of the unbelieving Jews is very relevant to our own situations.

Read Romans 10:1.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Paul does not speculate as to whether someone is chosen by God or not. He simply prays for them to be saved. He pleads before the One who has the power to grant salvation. Are you pleading with God to save people? When God works to save, He does so in response to the prayers of his people. Use God's sovereignty to give you confidence that God is able to save. But do not think that God's sovereignty removes you from the process.

Pray for God to save those who are unbelieving, especially those who are unbelieving in the visible church. And, as we are praying, we must understand what it is that keeps people from salvation. I know that people all have their own

issues, but every issue can be boiled down to one basic issue. That is our discussion today. Those who are unsaved simply do not understand righteousness.

Read Romans 10:2-13.

<sup>2</sup> I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

There may have been times in Israel's history when the majority of Jews were lethargic in their religious practices. But that was not true during the time of Christ, or even during the time of the early church.

Paul bears witness that the Jews were zealous. And not just zealous in a general sense, but zealous for God. But he then adds that their zeal was "not according to knowledge." We could say, "not according to truth."

We are right to value sincerity and devotion. But these in themselves are not enough to save. We are right to value faith as well. It is the instrument by which we are saved. But it is not technically faith that saves a person. It is the One in whom we place our trust, the object of our faith that saves.

Having no sincerity and no zeal will certainly condemn a person. But sincerity and zeal alone, without truth, will not save a person either.

Paul understood the devotion of his fellow Jews. If you take the time to get to know people of different religions, you will sometimes find that they are people of great sincerity and great devotion. Sometimes you may even be challenged that their devotion exceeds your own.

But do not be fooled into thinking that they must be "saved" because of their sincerity and devotion. Paul makes clear in these verses that "truth" is necessary for salvation. What specific truth is necessary for salvation? It is the truth about righteousness.

<sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

The truth about righteousness is this: Perfect righteousness is required to eternal life. Only Jesus, the Son of God is perfectly righteous. The Jews, even though they had the Scriptures, they still did not understand righteousness. They were ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God. They looked at the commands of God to be righteous. They understood when God told them that if they wanted to enjoy eternal life they must be righteous. But, they missed the portions of Scripture in which God promises to give righteousness to his people. They missed the righteousness that comes by faith, even though it was in plain sight. Their eyes were darkened to the righteousness that comes from God.

So, what is the only other option if you cannot see the righteousness that comes from God? The only other option is to establish your own righteousness. That means to produce your own righteousness. But what do you always have to do if you are going to trust in your own righteousness for salvation?

Two things:

One, you must underestimate God's righteousness.

And two, you must overestimate your own righteousness.

In your mind, you must bring down God's righteousness to a level that is achievable by our own human effort. If true righteousness is beyond you, you will not try to achieve it. You will look for other means of redemption. But if God's righteousness is reduced then you will convince yourself that you might be able to achieve it. Add to this, our propensity to overestimate our own righteousness. We often will admit sins in our hearts. But then we will comfort ourselves that our particular sins are not as bad as those around us. We are better than many. The Rich Young Ruler had thought he had kept all the commandments, when he had blatantly broken the very first one. Remember the Pharisee who looked at the tax collector and thanked God that he was not like other men.

The barrier to faith in Jesus Christ is always a misunderstanding of righteousness. Every other religion has some form of man's achieving of salvation. Only Christianity calls its people to trust not in their own righteousness, but rather in the righteousness that comes from God. Either people are ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, or they refuse to submit to it. In order to

submit to the righteousness that comes from God, you have to abandon in your heart your own righteousness. You cannot hold onto both. You have one or the other.

Beginning in verse 4, Paul makes the case that with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world the true purpose of the Law is made clear.

<sup>4</sup> ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.***

Understanding this verse is the key to understanding the whole passage. It is a verse that is worth your reflection and meditation.

For the end of the law is Christ  
<sup>4</sup> te,loj ga.r no,mou Cristo.j  
for righteousness to all who are believing.  
eivj dikaiosunhn panti. tw/l pisteu,ontia

But what does it mean that he is the “end of the law for righteousness.”

The Greek word for “end” is telos.

There are two basic ways that you can understand this word in the Greek.

1. The termination of (I cannot wait until the end of the semester!)
2. The object of, or the goal of (The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.)

There are several ways that we might understand the termination option.

The Law is very likely the Mosaic Law. With the coming of Jesus, the Mosaic Law has now be terminated, since we are in the age of grace. The Mosaic Law taught salvation by works, and the NT teaches salvation by grace.

Old School Dispensationalists made this thinking popular in the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Not many still cling to this way of thinking, because most people accept that there really has only ever been one way to be saved – faith. The Jews in the OT were

not ever saved by keeping the law. They were saved by faith in the Savior to come, just as we are saved by faith in the Savior who has come.

But there is another way to understand “end” in terms of termination. This more existential, meaning the personal experience of the individual. When a person places their faith in the Christ (the Messiah), they are trusting in the Messiah to grant them righteousness. And in placing their faith in Jesus, they are giving up any hope of making themselves righteous. Law is taken more as the principle of works, or self-justification. This perspective focuses on the last phrase in the verse, “for those who are believing.”

“Christ is the temporal end of the law to establish one’s own righteousness for those who believe. Hence, it is not a R-H statement, it is existential.” Cara

Now, let’s consider “end” in terms of goal, or fulfillment, or maybe even substance.

<sup>4</sup> *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

Insert, “fulfillment” in the place of “end”. Christ fulfills all of the law’s demands. When it comes to true righteousness, Christ has fulfilled the law.

Very close to fulfillment is the idea of substance. When it comes to righteousness, Christ is the perfect expression of righteousness. The Law defines righteousness and Jesus embodies that same righteousness.

Throughout the OT, there is a longing for someone to come who would bring God’s perfect righteousness. Jesus is that someone.

**Colossians 2:17** <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ

The whole OT, including the Mosaic Law, points to Jesus Christ.

**Luke 24:27** <sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Christ is the goal and substance of the Law. Another related way to think of this is that Christ is the purpose of the OT law. The Law was never really designed to justify anyone. Its purpose was to convince us that we have fallen short of true righteousness so that we would look for the righteousness that comes from God. Those who believe in Jesus get this and look to him rather than themselves for righteousness.

I have really only given you the tip of the iceberg when it comes to verse 4. Guy Waters calls it a multilayered onion in which you just keep finding more layers as you peel off the successive outside layers.

In verses 5-11 Paul contrasts the righteousness that is based upon the law and the righteousness that is based upon faith. He begins by saying that Moses did indeed write about the righteousness based upon the law.

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

It is easy to take this verse the wrong way. This is what the Old School Dispensationalists did. Insert the word only, and you will see what I mean. "For Moses ONLY writes about the righteousness that is based on the law." In other words, the Mosaic Law is entirely about works righteousness. The NT, in contrast, is about grace. This sort of thinking works only if you don't know the OT that well. My OT professor constantly taught us that there is plenty of grace in the OT.

Rather than thinking of the OT in terms of law only and the NT in terms of Grace only, we should think that within the context of God graciously saving people, the Mosaic Law does articulate in some places the principle of works righteousness. Paul chooses one such place from the book of Leviticus. He could have chosen others.

**Leviticus 18:5** <sup>5</sup> You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

This verse teaches that the experience “life” is the result of keeping statutes. This sounds very much like what God had told Adam in establishing the covenant of works. If this is all that we had, then we would conclude that Moses only taught works righteousness. But this is not all that we have from Moses, as Paul will show us.

Paul knows that Moses himself also writes about grace because he does not go outside of the Pentateuch (those books that Moses wrote, the first five books of the Bible) to talk about grace and the righteousness that is by faith.

Look at Romans 10:6.

<sup>6</sup> But the righteousness based on faith says,

Paul could have just as easily said, “But Moses also writes about the righteousness that is by faith.” because he quotes Moses to demonstrate the righteousness of faith.

There are only two places in Scripture that have the statement “Do not say in your heart,” Here in Romans 10 and back in Deuteronomy 9. Paul is very likely drawing his hearers to consider that text. Turn with me to the book of Deuteronomy.

"Do not say in your heart,

**Deuteronomy 9:4-6** <sup>4</sup> "Do not say in your heart, after the LORD your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is driving them out before you.

<sup>5</sup> Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their land, but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. <sup>6</sup> "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people.

The book of Deuteronomy is the 2<sup>nd</sup> giving of the Law of God. God had given his law to his people in the books of Exodus and Leviticus. But after wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, God re-confirms his covenant law to his people in the book of Deuteronomy, just before Joshua leads them into the Promised Land. The Promised Land was the Land of Blessing. It was to be the place where God would pour out the Blessing promised to Abraham upon his people.

This blessing is a foreshadow of the blessing of eternal life. Once you understand this, it is a profound statement for God to say to Israel that they are entering the Promised Land – not because of their righteousness. Righteousness is the requirement for entering the Promised Land. And God explicitly tells his people: You are going into the Promised Land – not because you are righteous.

Now, he does not here explain the doctrine of Justification. Instead, there is a focus upon the unrighteousness of the Canaanites who are to be destroyed. Still, for God to declare that his people remain stubborn, even while they are entering the Promised Land, can only mean that they are entering by God's grace, God's mercy. And this is Paul's main point.

Paul combines this initial statement in Deuteronomy 9 with another passage in Deuteronomy 30.

Deuteronomy 30 is placed at the end of God's lengthy promises of blessing and warnings of cursing in Deuteronomy 28. These promises and blessing and warnings of cursing are in the language of keeping the law. They, like Leviticus 18:5 above, speak of the righteousness that is based upon the law.

**Deuteronomy 28:1-2** "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.

**Deuteronomy 28:15** <sup>15</sup> "But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I

command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

But when you combine these statements with what God has already said about Israel, that they are a stubborn people, one wonders how they could ever achieve this blessing.

In chapter 29, God gives another very serious warning to his people. He tells them that even after they are in the Promised Land, that if they do not deal with the stubbornness of their heart, God's jealous wrath will be poured out upon them.

**Deuteronomy 29:18-20** <sup>18</sup> Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, <sup>19</sup> one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. <sup>20</sup> The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.

God is saying to his own covenant people, "I will judge you if your heart is not changed." And then, in the first verses of chapter 30, God basically declares that all of the curses for disobedience will come upon his own people. Many of these curses occurred during the Exile, when the Babylonians conquered Israel in 586 BC.

But then, God also says to his people that when they have experienced these curses, that the promise of redemption is not totally lost.

**Deuteronomy 30:1-5** "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, <sup>2</sup> and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his

voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>3</sup> then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. <sup>4</sup> If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will take you. <sup>5</sup> And the LORD your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

Even though Deuteronomy does use the language that reminds us of the righteousness that is based upon the law – “obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul” – this promise of blessing cannot be based upon our perfect obedience because it is promised to God’s people who are being cursed for sin.

I purposely stopped at verse 5 because I now want you to focus upon verse 6 exclusively. It may very well be one of the most incredible promises in all of the OT. I believe it is the foundation upon which our Ezekiel 36 verses are built.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** <sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Earlier, in Deuteronomy 10, God had commanded his people to circumcise their own hearts.

**Deuteronomy 10:16** <sup>16</sup> Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

But here, in Deuteronomy 30, God, in his mercy and grace, promises to circumcise their hearts, and fix their stubbornness, SO THAT they will love the LORD with all their heart, and “live”.

Life is bestowed on the basis of God’s promise, not on the basis of works.

And this is given in the very book of the Law itself. So, even though Moses does write about the righteousness that is based upon works He also writes about the righteousness that is of faith.

It is in this context that the verses that Paul refers to are stated.

**Deuteronomy 30:11-14** <sup>11</sup> "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' <sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

In the context of Deuteronomy, the point is that the commands of God are not "undoable." God has not asked his people to perform mighty feats of strength. You might compare it to Jesus' words, when he says that his yoke is easy. Submission to Jesus, is not in itself difficult. What makes it difficult is the stubbornness of our own hearts, not the things that Jesus commands us to do.

And so, it is not all that strange that Paul takes these verses in Deuteronomy and applies them directly to Jesus Christ. Instead of the Law being near to the people, Jesus is near to the people.

Turn back to Romans 10 and see what Paul writes there:

Do not say in your heart:

'Who will ascend into heaven?'"

(that is, to bring Christ down)

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 that we proclaim);

Instead of confronting the difficulty of obedience to the Law, Paul confronts the difficulty of believing in Jesus. His fellow Jews may have been stumbling over the stumbling block, but Paul wants them to know that faith in Jesus Christ is simple, and not in itself difficult.

Don't think to yourself that believing in Jesus is undoable. If you think that you must make yourself perfect, think again. If you think that you must make your heart fully obedient, think again. Christ has risen and ascended into the very throne of heaven. He is the righteousness of God for his people. He is able to take you all the way into the inner sanctuary. If you insist on depending upon your own righteousness, you are in essence bringing Christ down. You are not relying upon his righteousness.

And, if you think that all of your past sins are too much for God to forgive, then you are not understanding that when Jesus hung on the cross, he experienced the pains of hell itself. And in your attempt to justify yourself, you digging Christ up from the grave and no longer accepting his perfect sacrifice on your behalf.

The Incarnation, and the Crucifixion, and the Death and Burial of Christ, along with his Resurrection on the Third Day, and his Ascent into Heaven... this is the only righteousness of which God approves.

And this righteousness is received by faith alone.

"The word is near you,  
in your mouth  
and  
in your heart"

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

Yes, Moses may write of works righteousness, the righteousness of the law.  
But he also writes of the righteousness that is based upon faith.  
And this is the righteousness that Paul is proclaiming in his Gospel.

“The law has a two-fold meaning; it sometimes includes the whole of what has been taught by Moses, and sometimes that part only which was peculiar to his ministration, which consisted of precepts, rewards and punishments” Calvin

“In a limited sense, the OT teaches Righteousness by Works option. However, in full and complete sense it teaches Righteousness by Faith.” Cara

And so, the Righteousness of Faith is the only Righteousness by which anyone will ever be saved: Jew or Gentile. And this is exactly what Paul proclaims, beginning in verse 9.

9                   because,  
                      if you  
                              confess with your mouth  
                                  that Jesus is Lord  
                              and  
                              believe in your heart  
                                  that God raised him from the dead,  
                                  you will be saved.

10                   For  
                              with the heart one believes  
                                  and is justified,  
                              and  
                              with the mouth one confesses  
                                  and is saved.

11                   For the Scripture says,  
                              "Everyone who believes in him  
                                  will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;  
      the same Lord is Lord of all,  
          bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

<sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Belief takes place within the heart. It is the movement of the soul to trust in Jesus Christ and his work on your behalf. It is not technically itself a good work. It is turning to God, just as you are, full of rebellion and sin, and accepting that the goodness of Christ (his righteousness) can actually be imputed to your record. And, while you are embracing the righteousness that comes from God in Justification, you are also relying entirely upon God to transform your heart and life, Sanctification.

In faith, we are looking to Lord Jesus to circumcise our hearts – that is to cut off the evil heart, and to implant within a new heart that loves God in sincerity. It is only the resurrected Lord who can accomplish both our Justification and our Sanctification.

From our perspective of battling sin, it seems like Sanctification is the more difficult. But from God's perspective of Righteousness, Justification is the real issue.

God has the power to transform you. But only when Righteousness has been satisfied will he do so. And so, we rely upon the righteousness that is by faith. And we confess it openly to the world. We do not keep it hidden.

We are not all evangelists. We are not all preachers. But we all must confess to the world that we are believing in Jesus Christ alone for our Righteousness.

Christian, the world around you does not understand righteousness. They have brought down the righteousness of God. They have also overestimated their own righteousness. And so, rather than submitting to the provision of God's righteousness, like the Jews of old, they have established their own righteousness. Only, their own righteousness will not be enough.

They may ridicule you. But take courage and proclaim to those whom God has brought into your sphere of influence that message of Jesus Christ – of the righteousness that is by faith. For it is surely true that Jesus will indeed bestow his riches, that he has earned by his righteousness, on all who will call upon him.

Application:

Hold onto the truth about righteousness. Do not let go of the righteousness of Jesus Christ that is received by faith alone. It is the only way that the riches that He has earned will be eternally yours.

There are many verses in the Old and New Testaments that call you to obedience. The pursuit of holiness is a necessary obligation for every Christian. Lethargy or stubbornness towards God's Law places us in danger of God's eternal wrath. That being said, the righteousness that is based upon obedience is a dead end road. You will never be good enough.

Every time you consider the obligation of obedience, you should also remember that true obedience is always the fruit of faith. We are not factories that generate our own righteousness. The only factory of righteousness is Christ. And we always receive righteousness from him, first in justification, but also in sanctification.

There is no righteousness through the law of your obedience. There is only righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you feel your need to be more holy? Look to Jesus, who alone can make you holy.

Have you recently made progress in holiness, made progress in conquering some sin? Be thankful to God's mercy. Don't let this relative holiness become a stumbling block in which you begin trusting in your own righteousness.

May we be a people who only boasts in Jesus Christ – the Righteous One!