

Dear Friends,

When the Holy Spirit directed first century men to write the New Testament, He knew what contemporary believers needed. He also knew what believers in every subsequent age would need, and He included those truths in the text of Scripture. Not only does New Testament Scripture confront and correct errors in believers' minds in that day, but it also corrects our errant ideas. Two examples. Romans 3:5-8 confronts and refutes fatalistic ideas that claim that God causes everything that occurs, including sin. Paul reasons that this idea ignores and contradicts the moral character of God. If God is instrumental or causative in sin, He should be judged, not sit as Judge over sinners. And Romans 10 confronts and refutes the idea that man must be a necessary instrument in causing the new birth. Because God implants faith in the heart in the new birth, rather than faith evolving by human mental activity, the indwelling "righteousness which is of faith" speaks her testimony to a born again person independent of human witnesses or testimony. What man thinks he must take to this person already resides in them.

Paul's gracious and logical reasoning with his critics in Romans serves as a powerful example for our time. He didn't attack his critics in raging anger or hate. He reasoned with them, striving to win them to his faith-way of serving God, not merely feed his ego and win the argument. He faithfully practiced what he preached.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man. (Colossians 4:6 KJV)

Angry words cannot "be always with grace." In fact they are the mirror opposite of grace. Let's strive in the days ahead to impose a strict filter on our words. If the words we consider speaking are not clearly "Grace" words in content and sentiment, refuse to speak them. If they would fail to "Edify" those to whom we speak, (1 Corinthians 14:26; "Let all things be done unto edifying.") refuse to say the words. What a different world we'd experience! Let's do it!

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Ignored and Misunderstood Scriptures (Romans 10:14-17)

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:14-17 KJV 1900)

Throughout the Roman letter, Paul interacts with an unnamed person or persons who hold to a different belief than he. Occasionally he specifically refers to them.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. (Romans 2:1 KJV)

In other settings he simply interacts with their ideas, as in our study passage. He has just reasoned with these people based on the **“righteousness which is of faith speaketh”** in their hearts. He pleads with them to abandon their errant ideas and “Listen” in faith to this faith-speech which resides in them rather than continue in their misguided zeal. In the verses before us he presents what appears to be their objection to the faith-speech he affirmed. He taught that, resident within them, they have the ability to know, understand, and believe the glorious truth of Jesus which would free them from their blind zeal for Moses and the law. They rejected the presence of this **“righteousness which is of faith”** and her message, holding that the only way a person can become aware of this truth is through another person’s testimony to them. They rejected the central core of Paul’s gospel, and Paul reasons with—and prays for—them to be delivered from this errant idea.

This literary style was common in ancient cultures. It is known as “Dialectical” reasoning. The author interacts with his critic, representing the critic’s ideas as accurately and fairly as possible. His objective is not to win the argument, but to win the person, in logical harmony with Paul’s stated **“heart’s desire and prayer to God”** for these people. Further evidence of this literary style appears in Romans 10:18, **“But I say....”** If Paul has been reasoning throughout the chapter, why bother to introduce the thought with **“But I say”**? But, if he has presented his critics’ reasoning and he now wants to offer his counter point to their errant idea, **“But I say”** is necessary to punctuate the dialogue between Paul and his critics.

In the last eighteen months, I’ve observed hostile angry exchanges between people of different views on the virus or on the political chaos of the day. The voices were charged with hot emotions and angry hate for anyone who dared to disagree. There was no tender and passionate **“heart’s desire and prayer to God”** for anyone who disagreed. Only anger and hate. Folks, this attitude is not the way to win a person to your point of view. It almost guarantees the opposite. Such an attitude will convince those who disagree with you that they are not interested in having much of anything to do with you. Look at the fruit of this conduct. It glares at us in every corner of our culture. It is increased division, complicated by no real communication at all. We see it in the culture of our country, but sadly—so sadly—we see the same carnal emotional reactions and consequences in much of the Christian community. Such dialogue fails to measure up to the Biblical requirement for conversation **always seasoned with grace**. (Colossians 4:6) Many folks who claim devotion to the faith leave a looming question in the minds of observers. Is their true religion focused on Jesus and Scripture or on their favored political party or personality or their opinion regarding the virus? And the depth of their emotion answers the question; they have allowed their political ideas or their COVID opinion to become their new faith, their new religion. Christians who are charged by Jesus to live as a pure bright light in a dark world abandon their ability to be that light and take pride in imitating the darkness around them. If Biblical Christianity is to survive in our culture, sincere Christians must face their own abandonment of Biblical faith and seek repentance and forgiveness of the Lord. “But I still hold my faith,” they may say. And I would ask, “How much passion and emotion do you invest in your politics or your ideas about the virus? And how little passion and emotion are you showing for Jesus and for your faith? How much time in a week do you spend talking to people about each of these topics?” I see it. I hear it. And it breaks my heart. These dear people will live to regret what they did, but will it be too late to reignite the authentic flame of their faith, to make **“the kingdom of God and his**

righteousness" first and foremost in their lives? It will definitely be too late for them to be that shining light to those people who only saw their anger and emotions toward other people who disagreed with them. How many such lost opportunities to shine the light of Jesus can we justify?

If we understand Paul's reasoning in this lesson, we'll realize the golden opportunity the Lord gives us to be His light. We err when we think we must out argue, out-emote, or out reason, or quote more Scriptures than the other person to win them. When we try this strategy, we turn them off, not win them. Let's follow Jesus and His way. Our right approach is not to out argue others. **It is to keep ourselves out of the way, not make ourselves the main event.** It is to stay on the sidelines and to so live that Jesus and His light will shine through our lives, through our words, and, yes, by all means through our attitudes and interactions with others.

Paul's critics did not believe in the "**righteousness which is of faith,**" or in her message in the heart. They saw self as the only vehicle by which another person could come to know about God. That is their reasoning. They even quoted some Old Testament Scripture which they thought supported their ideas. Their idea was "Faith comes by hearing," by one believer speaking to the unlearned and convincing them of the truth of the gospel. And they understood the limits of their belief. They knew that all the people of God would never hear, but they were sincerely committed to spread their message as widely as they could.

The distinction between Paul's words and reasoning and his critics' counterargument is punctuated by their questioning "*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed....*" Their view of belief requires a human witness. It refuses to acknowledge the "**righteousness which is of faith**" and her words in the hearts of every born again person.

In refreshing contrast, Paul's message was that the "**righteousness which is of faith**" resides within every born again child of God, implanted by the Holy Spirit directly. And it speaks to every child of grace in whom it resides. The real problem which Paul confronts is not that they haven't heard; rather that they have heard, but their blind zeal and their errant understanding which elevated Moses above Jesus, God in human flesh, blinded them to its meaning. Remember. Paul's objective was not to win an argument with these people. He longed to win them to the glorious truth of "**Jesus and the resurrection.**" (Acts 17:18)

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. This was a dilemma for Paul's critics, as it is for contemporary believers who regard the gospel, the gospel preached by man, as the exclusive way for a person to be born again. Scripture consistently describes the gospel as a divine proclamation, not a divine proposition or offer. It declares the facts of "**Jesus and the resurrection,**" and the manifold implications of that gospel to born again people who presently have the "**righteousness which is of faith**" residing in their hearts and speaking its righteous message to them. For Paul, there was no dilemma, as he will clearly explain in the verses following our study passage. John's teaching that clearly defines the order of new birth **followed by belief** contradicts Paul's critics' belief.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (1 John 5:1 KJV)

Notice John's stated order. The present believer is already born of God, born again. Logically and textually, the new birth must occur prior to belief to harmonize with John's teaching. Jesus affirmed the same sequence in John 5:24.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is **passed** from death unto life.* (John 5:24 KJV)

According to Jesus' words, the person who hears Jesus' word and believes on the Father who sent Jesus "**hath everlasting life.**" He already possesses it, so his belief cannot be a cause or instrument in his becoming born again. It is rather an evidence that he has been born again.

By building on this truth, Paul urges his critics to listen to the voice of faith that presently resides in them, believe in Jesus more than they believe in Moses, and find the joy and liberty of the gospel.

God's order in the natural world is simple. Life occurs followed by action. He practices similar order in His spiritual operations of salvation. He bestows eternal, spiritual life on a person. Once that person lives, has been born again, he/she can then believe in God, in Jesus, His Son, and grow in understanding and in the practice of godliness in his/her life. The New Testament role for the gospel relates to this second aspect of spiritual life, after being born again, our coming to believe and learning the habits of godliness and of a fruitful faith. (2 Peter 1:5-9)

Because of the errors surfaced and rejected in Acts 15 and Galatians, it appears that many Jewish believers in Jesus were confused regarding Moses and the law. They did believe in Jesus, but they wanted to retain their "Jewish-ness" and require that any Gentile believer must become a Jew before becoming an accepted Christian. In this process, they believed that Moses and the law was a necessary step to becoming a "Real Christian." No, "***This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.***" (Matthew 17:5b) Jesus is the answer, first and last, to authentic New Testament faith. We do not need Moses as a stepping stone to reach Him. The indwelling "***righteousness which is of faith***" fills that role. Jesus is "***the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.***"

Elder Joe Holder