

The Simple Gospel

Romans 10:1-13

Though I always did well in school, I also realize my own limitations, my weaknesses. I have a way with numbers, and so math came easily to me. Algebra and trigonometry were my favorite subjects, and my mind could think through those sorts of problems easily and naturally. But when it comes to matters of philosophy, and even theology, I'm not quite so easily at home. I'm simple and I'm straightforward, and I don't apologize for that, but quickly realize when I'm in the presence of others more intellectually astute. In terms of theology, I'm quick to see the consistencies needed for a strong and healthy systematic theology, and quick to see inconsistencies, but I am also often easily overwhelmed in deeper matters of theological thought reasoning.

Some of that is to acknowledge my own weaknesses, my own human limitations, which keeps me both honest and humble. But some of that is, I believe, also to acknowledge my strengths. Because, although there is often great benefit in deeper biblical thought and philosophy, there is also great benefit in being simple and straightforward when it comes to the gospel.

Sometimes we make it too complicated. Too confusing. And that is where I have always found this chapter in Romans to be so helpful. It is very simple. That's the idea of,

v.6. "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above) 7 or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."

In other words, we don't have to go searching the outer reaches of the universe to understand the gospel. We don't have to go somewhere to find Jesus. We don't need to learn

something deep and mysterious, especially some sort of higher knowledge or intellectual accomplishment, in order to know Jesus. You don't need to go to college, or to seminary. You don't need to know Greek or Hebrew. You don't need to be advanced in terms of human IQ. You don't even have to be very old, or very intellectually sophisticated. A little child can understand Jesus. A rather young child can have true faith, true understanding of salvation in the Jesus of the gospel. Because it is a simple gospel. And that is our focus this morning.

For nine chapters Paul has been explaining the gospel, in many ways with many significant points. He answers many questions and objections that might be raised, and explains many deep and profound matters that we would not be able to understand apart from the apostle's words given by inspiration of the holy spirit. And yet, as we come to chapter 10, he simplifies the whole matter in a most profound way. "What does it say?", he asks in verse 8. What does the gospel say? What is "the word of faith which we preach"? What is the gospel? Here it is, plain and simple, as direct and straightforward as you will ever read or hear.

v.9

So, you don't have to be a Jew. You don't have to submit yourself to Jewish ceremonial laws. And actually, to be saved, you don't have to obey any laws. The keeping of the law, your obedience to the law, is not the ground upon which you are saved. And that is the whole point of the error his fellow Jews were so prone to have. So Paul makes it clear to them, and to the Gentiles. To everyone, to the whole world, all the nations of the world. You have to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord! And then you have to believe that he did exactly what the Bible said he did. You have to "believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead."

Confess with your mouth, and believe in your heart. Confess Jesus with your mouth. And believe in Jesus in your heart. And you will be saved. That is the gospel I preach to you, to all of you.

Now, remember how Paul has come to this point in chapter 10. His immediate focus is the unbelief of his fellow Jews, their unwillingness to believe in Jesus. Remember how chapter 9 began,

Rom. 9:1 “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, 4 who are Israelites.”

Thus chapter 10 begins,
v.1

And then he identifies their problem, the stumbling block which he mentions in chapter 9 verse 32. The Jews were looking for the restoration of their relationship with God on the basis of their own works, their own law-keeping. They were seeking to be righteous before God on the basis of the law. And that was the stumbling block.

Rom. 9:31 “...but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. 33 As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

Paul identifies the danger. He’s not difficult to understand at this point. It is,

I. THE DANGER OF ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.

They had zeal, an eagerness to obey the law. They had external evidence of a zealous attempt to be faithful to God. But alas, we read,
v.2

What was the knowledge they were lacking? What was their root error? What was the stumbling block. Those questions are easy to answer. They were seeking to be righteous before God in and of themselves. They were seeking their own righteousness, seeking for that to be sufficient to be accepted and acceptable to God.

v.3

This problem, this failure, is not limited to the Jews. The danger can be more broadly defined simply as,

A. A zeal for your own righteousness.

A zeal to pursue your own foundation for righteousness before God, based on the law. In other words, a works based righteousness. A performance based acceptance before God. You perform well enough and God will accept you as righteous.

I should note in that regard, you can stimulate a lot of zeal in that process! If you have to work for it yourself, you may well be motivated to work hard. But you are always left with that unanswerable question, “How hard is hard enough?” How good is good enough? And that is where the lack of knowledge is made evident. The whole process is wrong. The whole process demonstrates a lack of knowledge. Paul even calls it a rebellion of sorts,

v.3 “[They] have not submitted to the righteousness of God.”

So there is zeal. There is energy expended and effort made to keeping the law. And they are trying to do enough. And as Paul

puts it, they are “ignorant of God’s righteousness.” Ignorant of the fact that we cannot achieve sufficient righteousness ourselves. You cannot be good enough, if it is your own righteousness with which you seek stand before God.

Paul understood that in such a personal way. It is the basis of his own personal testimony, which he writes to the Philippians. Speaking of himself as a Christian, he writes,

Phil. 3:3 “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, 4 though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

Then he goes on explain what he learned about true righteousness that is sufficient to stand before God.

Phil. 3:7 “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

Paul well understood the danger of a zeal for his own righteousness, and it also an ignorance with regard to the work of Christ itself, for Paul says that,

v.4

So there is,

B. The need to understand the work of Christ.

To understand what verse 4 means, that Christ is the end of the law. That’s surely one of those verses you can’t take out of context, and use as an excuse to sin. You can’t violate God’s law and then claim that you have a right to do so because of verse 4, because Jesus is the end of the law. No, the point of that verse is stated plainly,

v.4 “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Christ is the end, the ending or cessation of the law as the basis upon which you are made righteous before God. The law is not to be used, cannot be used, as that foundation. Performance with respect to the law cannot be the basis upon which you can stand before God righteous. And everyone who believes in Jesus understands that!

v.4 “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

That brings Paul to a more specific definition of,

II. TWO TYPES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

He begins with the,

A. Righteousness of the law.

This is what we’ve been talking about, the righteousness based upon the law. The righteousness defined by the law. The righteousness the refers to the performance of obedience to the law.

v.5

The idea of this frequently quoted verse is that those who pursue the righteousness of the law are under the curse of that law that obligates them to perfect obedience, without provision for redemption. The idea is that if you pursue the righteousness of the law you will be obliged to complete, perfect and perpetual obedience. And that is the curse. If you do these things, pursuing righteousness through the law, you must keep all the law, every bit of it.

Paul would explain that curse this way to the Galatians.

Gal. 3:10 “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”).”

There is an alternative, another type of righteousness. The,

B. Righteousness of faith.

We’ve been studying that these past several chapters in Romans, and this is the main point of this whole section. This is what the unbelieving Jews missed. This is what so many people miss today. It remains a stumbling block, that we are righteous, that we are justified, not by what we ourselves do but by faith.

v.6-7

The point is that there is no secret, no secret formula. There is no unsolvable mystery that is impossible to figure out. Rather, the gospel is simple. It is straightforward. Easy to understand. And it is close at hand.

v.8

The reason it is close at hand is because God has revealed it. God has made it known. And we don’t have to go to heaven to find the answer because God has come down to earth. First, through his prophets of the Old Testament, where this quote comes from. And then, in the flesh, in the human flesh of his own son, the Lord Jesus, who became man and dwelt among us.

The word of God that reveals the righteousness of faith is “the word of faith which we preach.” It is the gospel. And here it is. It is near you today as well, for I am preaching it to you this morning. There is nothing unclear at all in,

III. THE WAY OF SALVATION.

This is what I preach. This is what I proclaim to you today, just as plainly and clearly as Paul did in Romans 10.

v.9

Let’s look just a bit closer at those two things, those two characteristic elements of true, saving faith. Beginning with,

A. Confession of personal faith in Jesus.

It is, first of all, a confession of the mouth, words spoken and declared. It is a willingness to acknowledge sincerely the Lord Jesus, that Jesus is Lord. And that is meaningful. Lord means master, ruler. It is the declaration of recognizing the authority that is over you, that Jesus is the ruler of your life, the king who reigns in your own heart.

This is how we put it as for membership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, our fourth membership vow, “Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord.” Not just savior, not just fire insurance to protect you from hell, but an

acknowledgment that Jesus is the ruler of your life and the master of your heart. And so our membership vow continues, “and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?” That’s what it means to say that Jesus is Lord. It is not a good work you perform, but it is a promise that you make.

And you make that promise, that covenant commitment, as a profession of your mouth, what we typically call a public profession of faith. It is what we require of every church member who is invited to partake of the Lord’s Supper, a public profession of faith, of personal faith in Jesus. And that’s what you must have to be saved.

It doesn’t give the exact form here, does it? Some people have a specific time and place when that was first done. That is my testimony. Others can’t identify the original experience of such a confession of faith, because it was part of their heart and life from before their memory. But in the present, in truth and reality, this must be true in order to identify every true Christian, do you, will you, confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord!

Verse 10 repeats this idea, “with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” And the focus upon Jesus is again emphasized in,
v.11

Then there is the content of faith, what you believe about Jesus. And Paul is able to cut right to the chase, to get right to the heart of the matter with regard to what you believe. He focuses upon the resurrection, choosing that event and that doctrine because it is the very climax and centerpiece of Christ’s work. I would say that the reference to the resurrection then

represents the fullness of Jesus’ work as mediator—his conception, his birth, his life, his death, and, after the resurrection, his resurrection. Thus what is necessary for salvation is a,

B. Profession of faith with regard to the person and work of Jesus.

Again, with a focus upon the resurrection in order to plainly understood, Paul writes,
v.9

He then gives a word of explanation in verse 10, of the importance of what we believe.
v.10

So the belief, the profession of faith with regard to Jesus, is not a doctrinal statement, per se. It not just a formula. It is a sincerely held belief in Jesus himself. And it comes from the heart, not merely an intellectual declaration. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness.”

You confess with your mouth, proclaiming your loyalty and submission to Jesus, and you believe in your heart that which God has revealed about his life, death and resurrection, Paul says you will be saved. You believe it in your heart, and you profess it with your lips. That’s true, saving faith, by which there is salvation. Thus we read from the words of Paul,

IV. A SIMPLE INVITATION.

This isn’t a theological lecture or a discourse. This is an invitation of the gospel. And Paul makes clear, it is for everyone.

A. There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile.

v.12

All who call upon him will be saved. All who call upon HIM will be saved. Jewishness no longer matters. And the absence of external Jewish tradition is not a barrier. For the reality is that,

B. The gospel is an invitation to all people.

v.13

Note, please, that the same writer who gives this invitation also teaches election, God's purpose of election in salvation. He teaches about predestination and God's eternal counsel. And the point is that we don't know that secret will of God, we don't know who the elect might be or whom God, in the counsel of his will, has chosen for salvation. So we don't concern ourselves with that. Instead, we proclaim the gospel with the freedom that Paul has, to proclaim to everyone the truth that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

It is a universal invitation. It is a free offer of the gospel, freely given to all men. We need not be constrained in our evangelism by the reality of God's eternal decree of election. Paul had no constraint. For this is the gospel as it is declared by invitation to all men,

v.11-13

Beloved, hear those words today. To those of you who believe, then let your faith be strengthened and encouraged, that you might never fall into the dangerous temptation of thinking that your righteousness is of the law. And renew that faith, day by day, week by week even as we worship together.

And if you don't yet believe, especially if that gospel is unclear in your own mind, then please hear it clearly. Listen to the simple gospel. And respond with true faith. I would say that to our children as well, you who are listening to me, especially you

younger children, listen to me. This is what God says to you, to everyone,

v.9 "...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."