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HOW TO BE SAVED

Romans 10:5-10

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Romans Lesson 64

How to be Saved Romans 10:5-10

My subject is, "How to be saved." When I was first trained in how to share my faith (over 45 years ago now!), I was instructed not to use words like "saved" or "salvation," because to most people, they were meaningless religious jargon. Rather, I was told that I should focus on how Jesus can give us abundant life here and now. Tell people how Christ can give peace, joy, freedom from guilt, harmonious relationships, and other present blessings.

While the gospel does bring many wonderful present blessings, its main message is about being eternally saved or lost. In Romans 10, Paul uses *salvation* or *saved* in verses 1, 9, 10, and 13. The concept of salvation or being right before God permeates the entire chapter. Paul is still hammering home the same message that he has been preaching throughout the entire letter (1:16-17), that the only way to be right with God is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not by good works. You may ask, "Why does Paul keep repeating this?" The answer is, "Because we're all so prone to try to get saved by our own good works." We need this message hammered into our works-oriented brains!

Before we work through the text, let me emphasize the practical value of these verses: At this moment either you are *saved* or you are *lost*. There is no in between category. If you are saved, it means that if you died today, you would spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. If you are lost and died today, you would spend eternity in the torment of hell. Those are the only options.

As I've said many times, *saved* is a radical word. If life seems to be going okay, then you don't sense that you need to be saved. If you think that you're a basically good person and that your goodness will get you into heaven when you die, then you won't feel a need to be saved. If you think that Jesus came to give us a few tips on how to have a happy life, then you don't realize your true condition before God. You need to be saved because you're perishing!

When that cruise ship was sailing smoothly through the Mediterranean Sea last week, if you had rushed into the dining room and yelled, "Get into the life boats now," the passengers would have thought that you were crazy. They didn't need to be saved, thank you. You would only be interrupting their dinner. But a few minutes later when the ship hit the rock and began listing as it took on water, everyone's attention was focused on being saved from a watery grave. The truth is, your boat is going to hit the rock called "death," and so you need to be ready for that inevitable moment. Life may be going smoothly at the moment, but if you're not right before God, then you need to be saved.

The angel told Joseph (Matt. 1:21), "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Jesus said (Luke 19:10), "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost." He said (Luke 5:32), "I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." He was not implying that some are righteous enough that they don't need salvation. Rather, some mistakenly think that they are righteous enough to get into heaven by their own works. But the truth is, we all have sinned and deserve God's judgment (Rom. 3:23). Thus we all need Jesus to save us from that judgment. So here again Paul says,

To be saved, you must recognize that you cannot
save yourself and you must truly believe in Jesus
as the risen Savior and Lord.

In Romans 10, Paul is still dealing with the question that dominates chapters 9-11, "If the Jews are God's chosen people, why are most of them rejecting Christ?" In chapter 9, Paul pointed out that it never was God's purpose to save all the Jews. Rather, His purpose was to save a remnant according to His gracious choice. The emphasis is clearly on God's sovereignty in salvation.

But if God is sovereign, then are unbelievers not responsible for missing out on salvation? From 9:30 through chapter 10, Paul argues that the Gentiles attained the righteousness that comes by faith, while most of the Jews were lost because they sought to establish their own righteousness by works. They didn't trust in Christ, who is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (10:4). Their sinful pride kept them from salvation.

In Romans 10:5-10, Paul contrasts the righteousness based on the law (10:5) with the righteousness that comes through faith (10:6-10). To be saved by keeping the law, you must keep it perfectly. But to be saved by faith, you trust in what God has done in sending His Son to die for your sins and raising Him from the dead. Salvation is not by keeping the law, but by faith in Christ.

1. To be saved, you must recognize that you cannot save yourself by keeping God's law (10:5).

Romans 10:5: "For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness." "For" shows that Paul is explaining 10:4. He refers to Leviticus 18:5, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the Lord." In that verse, "live" does not refer to eternal life, but to enjoying God's blessings in the Promised Land (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], pp. 647-648).

But for Paul, *life* is equivalent to justification, or righteous standing before God. In Galatians 3:11-12, Paul also cites Leviticus 18:5 to contrast the attempt to approach God by keeping the law with the way of faith: "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.'" Then in 3:21-22, he adds, "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe."

Paul is making the same point in Romans 10:5: if you want to gain eternal life by keeping the law, you must obey it perfectly. As Paul has just stated, the Jews were trying to establish their own righteousness by works of the law (9:32; 10:3). Paul himself had tried that route. In Philippians 3:5-6, he lays out his Jewish pedigree: "Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."

But at his conversion, Paul counted all of these credits as loss for the sake of Christ. He goes on (Phil. 3:9) to explain the contrast (the same one that he is drawing in Romans 10:5-10): [that I] “may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Paul made the same point in Romans 2:12-13: “For all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.” (See, also, James 2:10.)

Even though Scripture is so abundantly clear, this is the main reason that people do not trust to Christ for salvation: they think that they can save themselves by being good or by keeping God’s law. The truth is, we’ve all repeatedly broken God’s law, both outwardly and on the heart level. We’ve all failed to love God with all of our hearts; we’ve failed to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. So, as Paul explains (Rom. 3:19-20), “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” To be saved, you first must recognize that you cannot save yourself by keeping God’s law. Rather, that law condemns you.

2. To be saved, you must recognize that Christ has done for you what you could never do for yourself (10:6-8).

Romans 10:6-8: “But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down), or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).’ But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching.”

These are difficult verses and I won’t pretend that I completely understand them, even after reading and re-reading numerous commentaries! But I’ll try to explain them as best as I can. The opening “but” shows that Paul is contrasting the righteousness based on the law (10:5) with the righteousness based on faith. He

first cites from Deuteronomy 8:17 & 9:4 ("Do not say in your heart") and then rather loosely from Deuteronomy 30:12-14, adding his own explanatory comments to link these verses to Christ. His main point is that God has always offered salvation by faith apart from human effort, even under the law.

The problem is that Deuteronomy 30:12-14 seems to say that keeping the law is within the reach of every person. But Paul cites them for an opposite meaning, that salvation has nothing to do with human effort, but rather that God has provided everything so that all we must do is to believe in Christ. How do we explain this?

First, in the Deuteronomy 8:17 & 9:4 references, Moses warns Israel that when they take possession of the land of Canaan, they must not think that they have earned it because of their own righteousness. This clues us in that God's blessings come to us by grace, not by our efforts. Then Paul adds the reference from Deuteronomy 30:12-14, "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."

"It" refers to the commandment of the law being near, but Paul replaces the commandment with Christ being near. Is he arbitrarily changing the meaning of that text to make it say something completely different? No! In Deuteronomy 30:6, Moses promised, "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live." That is essentially the same as the new covenant promises that later came through Ezekiel (36:25-27) and Jeremiah (31:31-34). These promises point to God's forgiving our sins and imparting new life to us by His grace alone. It is only when God changes our hearts that we are then able to obey God's commandments.

But even those who have received the new birth do not obey perfectly. So why does Paul replace the commandment (in Deut. 30) with Christ? Answer: Because, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (10:4). Jesus did what no one else could ever do: He perfectly fulfilled God's holy law. By

His death, He satisfied the penalty of the law that we deserved. So when you believe in Christ, God imputes Christ's righteousness to your account and views you as if you perfectly fulfilled the law.

The two questions that Paul cites from Deuteronomy 30 had become proverbial expressions for doing what is impossible (Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 383). Thus Paul is saying that just as an Israelite did not need to go into heaven to bring down God's commandments, so we do not need to do the impossible by going to heaven to bring Christ down to where we live. God did that in the incarnation. Christ came to bear the curse of the law on our behalf (Gal. 3:13).

Paul changes the second question, which in Deuteronomy is, "Who will cross the sea?" into, "Who will descend into the abyss?" The sea and the abyss were somewhat interchangeable concepts in the Old Testament and in Judaism (Moo, p. 655). Paul refers to the abyss to facilitate his application to Christ's death (Moo, p. 656). There is no need to go into the abyss to bring Christ up from the dead, because God has already done that.

So Paul's point is that human effort is not necessary to procure God's righteousness. God has done it all: He sent Christ. Christ died for our sins. God raised Him from the dead. All that we must do is to believe in this word that Paul was preaching. The fact that this word "is near you" (10:8) means that you don't have to go through some difficult or impossible process (ascend into heaven; descend into the abyss) to find Christ and be saved. Rather, you can believe in Him at this moment and be saved.

Don't get lost in the difficulties of verses 6-8 and miss the application, which is: When you die and stand before God, either you will argue that you should get into heaven because you were a good person; or, with the hymn writer, you will say, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." God in Christ did for you what you never could have done for yourself. Abandon your efforts and trust in Christ! Paul goes on to explain the content of this word of faith that he was preaching, which we must believe:

3. To be saved, you must truly believe in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord and Savior (10:9-10).

Romans 10:9-10: "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." In verse 9, Paul follows the order of Deuteronomy 30 (cited in verse 8), "in your mouth and in your heart." In verse 10, he explains verse 9 ("for") in the logical order: First we believe in the heart and then that heart belief finds outward expression in confession with our mouths and with our lives.

- A. True faith is a matter of your heart relying on specific content regarding Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord and Savior.

Paul uses "faith" or "believe(s)" in 9:30, 32, 33; 10:4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14 (2x), 16, & 17. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Romans: Saving Faith* [Zondervan], p. 90) argues that in 10:9-10 Paul is giving us a definition of saving faith, showing us both its content and its character.

There are not two requirements here for salvation, namely, believing and confessing. Rather, the repeated emphasis on faith shows that faith is the only requirement. As Paul told the Philippian jailer in response to his question, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:31), "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Outward confession of Christ is the inevitable outcome or character of genuine saving faith.

True saving faith is a matter of the heart, or inner person. It is not just a matter of intellectual assent, although we must believe the facts of the gospel as God has revealed them in His Word. These facts include that we have sinned and thus stand guilty before God. He sent Jesus, His eternal Son, to take on human flesh and die as our substitute on the cross. God raised Jesus bodily from the dead, thus showing that He accepted Jesus' death as a satisfactory offering. Since "Lord" is used hundreds of times in the Old Testament to refer to God, confessing Jesus as Lord means believing that He is the Sovereign God. You must understand and believe this content of the gospel in order to be saved.

As an aside, sometimes when I talk to people about their need for salvation, it becomes evident that they don't have a clue about who Jesus is. To press such people to make a decision to trust in

Christ would be premature, in that they wouldn't know who they were trusting in. So I encourage such people to read the Gospel of John and ask God to show them who Jesus is and why He came. Otherwise, they would be believing in a Jesus of their own imagination. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses believe in a false, made-up "Jesus," but such faith does not save. Saving faith is based on the truth about Jesus as revealed in God's Word.

But saving faith is also a heart response to these facts. When you believe that the sinless Son of God bore God's full wrath for your sins on the cross, it affects your heart. Just as you would be moved with gratitude if someone risked his life to save your life, so you are moved even more deeply to believe that Jesus died for you.

And faith includes committing your eternal destiny totally to Christ's death on your behalf, not to any works of righteousness that you have done. Committing yourself to Christ includes repentance (turning from your sins), and submitting to Jesus as Lord of your life. If you don't submit to and follow Christ as Lord, it shows that you really don't believe in Him as He is revealed in the Bible. It would be like saying that you believe in a prescribed medicine, but you never take it. Thus Paul adds...

B. True faith confesses openly that Jesus is the risen Lord and Savior.

Faith is the root; confession is the fruit. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, but if our faith is genuine, it will always bear the fruit of salvation (Eph. 2:8-10). The demons believe in Jesus, but their faith is not saving faith because it does not result in repentance and good works (James 2:14-26).

One of the first ways that a new believer should confess Christ is by being baptized. In our culture, baptism isn't usually a costly commitment, but in many cultures that are hostile to Christ, to be baptized will result at best in being disowned by your family, or at worst by being murdered by them. We should take baptism seriously! After baptism, we go on confessing Christ by living in a manner pleasing to Him, by growing in love and obedience to Him, by trusting Him through our trials, and by telling others about His wonderful salvation as we have opportunity (1 Pet. 3:15).

Of course, all of us have failed numerous times to confess Christ, both through our sins and by not speaking out for Him when we should have. Thankfully, we have the example of Peter, who failed miserably and yet who later preached Christ boldly. The issue is *not perfection*, but *direction*. If our faith in Christ as Lord and Savior is genuine, the direction of our lives will be that of confessing Him before others. The outcome of such faith and confession of Christ on earth will be hearing Jesus confess us before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

Conclusion

Don't make the fatal mistake of thinking that because you're a pretty good person, you don't need to be saved. Jesus didn't give up the glory of heaven and suffer the agonies of the cross so that you could have your best life now. He didn't die primarily so that you can have a happy family or succeed in business. He died to save you from your sins. He will save you if you recognize that you can't save yourself and you truly believe in Him as your risen Lord and Savior.

Application Questions

1. How can we help a person who senses no need for salvation to see that "his ship is going to sink"?
2. Someone says, "I believe in a loving God who wouldn't judge any good, sincere person." How would you respond?
3. Why is the belief that people are basically good and that their good deeds will save them so offensively wrong before God?
4. Some evangelicals argue that you can believe in Jesus as your Savior and still go to heaven, even if you do not submit to Him as Lord. What verses (other than our text) refute this?

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