
“That They May Be Saved”

ROMANS 10:1-4

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AT A GLANCE

To those who continue to seek to establish their own righteousness, may I invite you to cease? May I invite you to rest in Christ? May I invite you to take up the yoke of Christ whose burden is easy and yoke is light, because He has finished the work of righteousness for you. May I invite you to humble yourself before the Lord, to lean no longer upon your own virtue, your own sense of goodness, and trust wholeheartedly in His? You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free.

INTRODUCTION

I don't know if you watched the Super Bowl or not but there was a commercial about Jesus washing feet that aired during the game. I've been skeptical of this organization for some time now, but I was disappointed in their ad and even more so in their website. You'd think with a Super Bowl commercial about Jesus there would be a great opportunity to give people the gospel, to tell them what Christ did for them. Unfortunately, that is not what you find on their website. They give the world a version of Jesus, a Jesus who "gets us." He does get us, but He does much more. He saves us. He redeems us. He transforms us.

One of the reasons I believe the commercial is dangerous is that it fails to present the true picture of our sin. There's not even a mention of sin on the website. Rather, what the commercial portrays is essentially no different than what the Israelites of Paul's day were guilty of, seeking to establish their own righteousness. What we see in the commercial is the virtue of accepting people just as they are and the equivocation of that to Jesus washing the disciples' feet in the upper room. Jesus washed His disciples' feet, including Peter, who would deny Him, and Judas, who would betray Him. Yet, Jesus did not simply love Peter as he was. He loved Peter as he was, and He changed Him through His Spirit. Had Judas not killed himself, perhaps he, too, could have repented.

The problem as I see it is this is just another virtue-signal campaign. It's just another badge of honor to wear on our chest to show how virtuous we are. No one is actually going to go wash someone's feet. It's a talking point. It's a gimmick. It's a vain attempt to establish our own righteousness (the goal of all virtue-signaling.) Paul confronts exactly this in today's passage. Let's read!

ROMANS 10:1-4

¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

THAT THEY MAY BE SAVED

Verse 1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. We are reminded that Paul neither hated his kinsmen according to the flesh, ethnic Israelites, nor did he gloat in his salvation over against their destruction. He did not become bitter toward people who wronged him, but instead earnestly prayed for their salvation. It's one thing to generally want our enemies to be saved and it's quite another to genuinely pray to that end, as Jesus told us to do.

SINCERITY DIVORCED FROM SAVING KNOWLEDGE

Verse 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. By his own admission, Paul was a zealous man. He told the Philippian church that he once zealously persecuted the church. He was sincere in his convictions. But something was lacking from his zeal: **knowledge**.

There is a knowledge that puffs up and a knowledge that builds up Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:1. The knowledge that puffs up is a fleshly knowledge. It's a law-based, a works-based knowledge. It's knowing the right and wrong. But there is a different kind of knowledge, *epignosis*, which comes from a saving relationship to God.

Paul prayed for the Ephesians, *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened..." Ephesians 1:17-18*

True knowledge comes when we know the Truth. Jesus said, *"I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me."* John 14:6 Knowledge that brings us to God comes by knowing Christ Jesus and it is received by faith, not by intellect. There are lots of bible scholars in the world who know nothing of the Truth. They, like Paul's kinsmen, have a zeal for God, but **not according to knowledge**. They are sincere; even if sincerely wrong. It's a false zeal. The knowledge Paul referred to is true knowledge of God and how to relate to Him.

SEEKING TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul expounds upon what he means by zeal without knowledge in **verse 3. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.**

They knew what Moses said, *"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?" Exodus 15:11* Yet remarkably, they found a way to lower the righteousness of God and elevate their own until the two should meet. They thought they could attain the righteousness of God because they were ignorant of the standard. They imagined they could follow a few laws, perform a few rituals, abstain from some vices, and make amends with a few sacrifices and call it a day.

They were ignorant of the fact that God's righteousness is a perfect righteousness. This is why Jesus said, *"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment!" Matthew 5:21-22* Jesus applied the same with adultery and lust in your heart. The Jews were comfortable enough with not doing the thing prohibited, but having pure hearts and holy hands was foreign to them. They were ignorant of it.

I doubt Paul meant they were ignorant in the sense that they simply did not know better. Most likely, like so many people who grow up in the church today, they heard of the perfect righteousness of God, but they hated it. A perfectly righteous God demands perfect righteousness from us and I can't

be perfectly righteous. So, let me bring Him down a few levels and let me elevate what I can achieve. In other words, let me make God in my own image and let me establish my own righteousness.

Everyone loves a good reason to boast. We love to feel good about ourselves and, frankly, the gospel makes us feel bad. That is, as long as we're committed to establishing our own righteousness. As long as we're committed to standing on our own merit, the Gospel is offensive. It tells us we have no merit to stand on. We have no grounds for boasting in ourselves. It tells us we are sinners and we need a Savior.

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith..." Romans 3:21-25

ALL HAVE SINNED

The self-righteous stumble over that part that says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift." If that's true it means I'm not really a good person. If that's true it means my sense of virtue is baseless and prideful. If that's true, it means I come before God as a beggar; and that hurts the ego.

Robert Mounce reminds us, "The only thing God requires of people is that they not persist in trying to earn what they can only receive as a totally free gift. The problem is that pride stands in the way of receiving God's gift. Deeply ingrained in people's hostility to divine grace is a proud and stubborn self-reliance that would rather suffer loss than be deprived of an occasion for boasting."

END OF THE LAW

Instead of seeking to establish their own righteousness by works of obedience, they should have recognized their wicked hearts and sought the righteousness of Christ. **Verse 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

Is Paul saying Christ is the end of the Law, as in the goal of it? Or is Christ the end of the Law as in the fulfillment? Christ being the point of the Law resonates because "through the Law comes knowledge of sin." Daniel Doriani explains, "The law labels human sin and its punishment. This drives us to see our guilt and to long for Jesus, the Savior, who removes sin's guilt, punishment, and burden." In other words, knowledge of sin ought to drive people to their knees in repentance, seeking mercy, just as the fictional tax collector in Jesus' parable. The Law of God should have us all saying, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner."

At the same time, Christ is the fulfillment of the Law because He lived a perfect life, satisfied the perfect Law, and was put forward as the final and perfect propitiation, a substitutionary sacrifice for our sin.

For these reasons, I don't believe it's either/or. I believe it's both/and. Jesus is both the goal of the Law and the fulfillment. He did for us what we know we could never do for ourselves. This is why the righteousness of God is given to **everyone who believes in Him.**

Everyone who comes to an end of themselves, recognizes their inability to attain the righteousness of God, and sees in Christ their all-sufficient Savior, is given the righteousness of God by grace as a gift. As it is written, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

Not, “so that by working for Him, by determining to be a better version of our ourselves,” but “in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” How do we attain the righteousness of God? We admit we are unrighteous, and we embrace Christ as Lord and Savior.

I'd like to spend the rest of our time on a few points of application.

ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

I shared this last Wednesday in our study of Philippians that people love our badges of honor. We love something that says to us and to the rest of the world we're more virtuous than you. We cling to things that cause us to look good, and we ignore things that cause us to look bad. There is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined, a “germ hostile to the church.” It is zeal without knowledge.

The church is a great place for folks to do all sorts of good things. We offer classes and service opportunities, we encourage acts of sacrificial love, we create space for people to practice virtue. And we want people to be filled with zeal. Christians ought to be the most zealous people in the world. We ought to be the most virtuous, the most sacrificial, the most loving, the most given to study of the Word of God. Yet divorced from the kind of knowledge Paul speaks of in verse 2, an enlightening, saving, spiritual knowledge of God and His righteousness, all this works against the gospel message we proclaim.

None of those things I mentioned are wrong. In fact, they are all commanded of Christians. But this is a classic case of root vs. fruit, or of the cart and horse. Do I do this thing because I seek to honor the Lord because I am eternally grateful for His work on the cross? Does this virtue arise from the work of the Holy Spirit inside me, convicting me, transforming me? Am I hungry for the Word of God because I want to know Him more and I want to walk more closely with Him?

Or is this thing I do an attempt to prove my virtue? Do I study the Word of God because I want to know more than someone else? This is a heart issue and heart issues are never easy. They require us to humble ourselves before the Lord and say with David, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there be any grievous way in me.*” *Psalm 139:23, 24* If the zealous Jews of Jesus day put Him on the cross because He exposed their heart motives, perhaps we ought to be taking a much harder look at our hearts to ensure our zeal is not without knowledge. Do I have Jesus or do I have religion?

MISSIONAL ZEAL

Do you truly desire in your heart that those who are far from God would be saved? Do you intercede for them? What about when those people have hurt you? Or when those people would like to hurt you? How about for people who are so totally entrenched in wickedness that you can't possibly envision them ever being saved?

It is not for us to discern who is elect and who is not. It's not for us to make the judgment of who gets the gospel. Notice that right smack in the middle of Paul defending election, he speaks of how he desires these people's salvation and prays for it. It's antithetical to scripture to take the posture of fatalism or apathy.

Fatalism says, “Well, they don't seem too interested in the gospel, they're living like a demon, they're making awful choices, they must not be elect. Why bother sharing the gospel with them?” Slay that mentality! Kill it! Take it out behind the barn and put it to death. God alone knows who is elect. It is not for us to know. Our responsibility is to do just as Paul did – desire, pray, and go. Desire the salvation of all people everywhere. Earnestly pray for their salvation. And go to them with the gospel as the Lord leads and creates opportunity. That's our job. Preach it, teach it, and tell it to whoever will you can. Leave the results to God.

Another way to err is to become apathetic. Apathy say, “Well, God is sovereign and therefore He’s going to be the one doing the work. I’ll just wait for Him to bring the harvest to me.” For Paul it was not enough to rest on God’s sovereignty in election to save people. His doctrine of election, of God’s sovereignty, did not reduce his appreciation for human responsibility. He did not sit back on his laurels and hope that the harvest would simply be brought in. No, he understood the imperative of Jesus, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers.” Paul was no lazy theologian. He was not content with the so-called “holy huddle” and neither should we be.

The Lord has invited us to participate with Him in the most important work in the world, taking the Gospel across the street and around the world. That’s what you’ll see on the main wall in the Fireside Room. That’s our vision. That’s where we’re headed. It’s what drives us as a church. In His sovereignty, God has established that no person can be saved unless they respond in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And no one can respond to the gospel unless someone tells them the gospel.

THE SACRED TASK, OUR DELIGHTFUL DUTY

The gospel is a message of salvation from sin based entirely upon the righteousness of Christ imputed to you by faith. You and I have the sacred task, the delightful duty, of being His messengers, ambassadors, missionaries, taking the gospel across the street and around the world. To people who hate us. To people who mock us. To people who despise us, reject us, would hurt us, and even kill us. For as Paul says, *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake...”* *Philippians 1:29* Is it your desire that the unbelieving world would be saved even if it means you suffer for the sake of Christ?

I want you to think of it like this, when unbelievers are saved, they become your brother or sister in Christ. There are still people in the world who will become your brothers and sisters, who will spend eternity with you in Heaven, rejoicing over this great salvation we share in Christ. There are members of the heavenly choir made up of members of every nation, every tribe and tongue who have yet to hear the gospel and believe it. Some of them will believe the gospel because YOU told it to them. Do you desire and pray that they, the unbelieving world, may be saved?

Finally, to those who continue to seek to establish their own righteousness, may I invite you to cease? May I invite you to rest in Christ? May I invite you to take up the yoke of Christ whose burden is easy and yoke is light, because He has finished the work of righteousness for you. May I invite you to humble yourself before the Lord, to lean no longer upon your own virtue, your own sense of goodness, and trust wholeheartedly in His?

We live in a world enamored with virtue-signaling. There’s nothing new under the sun. People have always hated a God who would tell them their way of living was wrong. They’ve always despised a God who would tell them they don’t measure up; that their efforts weren’t enough. That vein of pride runs deep into our hearts. Ask the Lord to search yours and to pluck it out so that you can know what it means to live in freedom. You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free.

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