

Romans 10:1-13 • When Man Loves the Rules More than the Ruler

Introduction

Can you imagine yourself as a child, living with your parents, but never acknowledging their role in your life or even that they're daily providing clothing, shelter, food, even presents and gifts? Further, because of their generosity in spite of your attitude, they continue to provide everything for you even though you begin to not even acknowledge their presence, much less that all you have is provided by them. You act as if they don't even exist if though the very things you have are proof enough of their existence. You live devoted to and taking care of all that's given you without ever acknowledging the love and persons of those actually providing them. That gets close to what happens with people that live legalistic lives—they begin to love and worship the rules rather than the Ruler.

¹Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

[Read v.1]

Point: This is the key to what follows. The discussion here is salvation and why "some" people obtain and some don't. Not ALL Jews reject Jesus, just as not all Gentiles accept Him. But there are some basic behaviors all of which are corrected in the same manner—through Christ.

²For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

[Read v.2]

Q: What is the good characteristic and what is the bad? Why doesn't it all even out to the good?

A: On the plus side there is zeal—a word which in the Greek has the same root as "jealousy". You can't have this kind of warmth of feeling that borders on jealousy without having some kind of personal regard, even affection for the object of one's zeal. But the minus side in this case is that zeal is not aligned with knowledge—which isn't just about "awareness", but "recognition", "understanding", to know in depth the source, to know and acknowledge the entire truth of something.

Application: Have we ever substituted enthusiasm for the truth? Is it simply enough to be "on fire" for God? How does this apply to us personally? Do we allow our feelings to substitute for studying God's Word? Does God's Word ever take precedence over feelings?

³For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

[Read v.3-4]

Q: How could they not know God's righteousness? Isn't that what the Old Testament Law was all about?

A: It's following the rules rather than the Ruler. Without "knowing"—recognizing God as the greater goal behind the Law, having no understanding of what the Law was trying to achieve in building a bridge to the Law Giver—their vision never focused beyond the text of the Law.

Q: What was the result of their misapplication of the Law?

- "...seeking to establish their own..." They placed themselves higher than God.
- "...they did not subject themselves..." It was actually rebellion, using the things of God to break away from God.
- In essence, they've made themselves ruler in God's place, but still trying to use His rules.

Application: How am I using the "things" of God—doctrine, theology, music, worship, tithes, prayer, fasting, celebrations, church services, etc., etc.? Have I become devoted to something to the exclusion of God's intention that these things build a relationship with Him, not replace Him?

⁵For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. ^{6a}But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows:

⁶But 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), ⁷or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." ⁸But 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,

[Read v.5-6a]

Q: Having defined the problem, how does Paul segue to contrasting it with the solution?

A: The problem is subscribing to the doctrine that God's righteousness is based on the Law when in fact it is based on faith. (Remember the example of Abraham, hundreds of years before the Law was even given, "Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." --Genesis 15:6) Paul is going to explain how to obtain it by faith as opposed to keeping the Law.

[Read v.6-8]

Q: What is the meaning of "Who will ascend into heaven"?

A: A very loose translation might be, "Obtaining God's righteousness by faith is not out of reach—it's an attainable goal." Some might post an excuse that goes something like, "It's too lofty a goal, completely unattainable. Who can possibly visit heaven itself in order to bring it down here to within my reach?"

Q: What is the meaning of "Who will descend into the abyss"?

A: It's the opposite excuse. Both of these excuses are rooted in the wrong belief that heavenly things are unattainable because they reside in heavenly places that can't be reached by this earthly location. But this is a good example of how David's Psalms are "journals" or "commentaries" on the correct meaning and application of the Pentateuch (Law):

*"Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from Your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, You are there;
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea,
Even there Your hand will lead me,
And Your right hand will lay hold of me."
—Psalm 139:7-10*

Q: What is the common denominator of these 2 excuses? What do they have in common?

A: The person is insisting that it has to come to **them**, exactly where **they're** at; they are refusing to make any kind of effort to seek God on **His** terms but insist it comes on their own.

Q: What is the significance of stating that "the word is near you"? How does this relate to the line of reasoning laid out by Paul here and throughout Romans leading to here?

A: Those that base righteousness on the Law believe the "word" is way out there— "...who will ascend...who will descend..."—in hard if not impossible places to reach. Paul is stating that in reality the "word" is very close to them, actually residing in the mouth and heart.

And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?" (Thus He declared all foods clean.) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of

the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.

—Mark 7:17-23

Q: OK...how is that possible? How could the Law already be in their mouth and heart?

A: It's the deeper teaching of circumcision. The outward, physical sign of circumcision is **SUPPOSED** to be a visible testimony that their unseen, inward **HEARTS** and **MINDS** are circumcised to God. **Physical** circumcision is worthless without **spiritual** circumcision. And so the Law is worthless to man if his heart and mind are not faithful to God in the first place. It's the same with baptism. The act of baptism doesn't bring about something new—it's meant to visibly testify as to the new things that have **ALREADY** happened **INSIDE**.

Application: *Is there any area of our life wherein what others observe about us—attending church, worship, etc.—does not perfectly fit with what we know to be our true intentions and motivations? Do we realize God clearly sees whether we're **FIRST** devoted to Him before the world sees it in how we live? This is actually the biblical definition of "hypocrisy".*

⁸But 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, ⁹that 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; ¹⁰for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

[Read v.8-10]

Q: Paul completes the transition from the "word of the Law" to "the word of faith". What are the 2 parts it consists of according to v.9?

A: "...confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord..." and "...believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead..."

Q: What is so powerful about the word "confess"? Why is this different than other words such as "state", "profess", "speak", et al?

A: It means to "acknowledge", "admit" or "declare" truth about one's personal standing in relation to Jesus---**He** is Lord and Master, and I need Him in that role as Ruler over me." It relates back to v.2 that our zeal for God must be "...in accordance with knowledge..."

Q: Does the second point—"...and believe in your heart..." have any specific conditions?

A: Yes! We must believe from our heart "...that God raised Him from the dead..." We must believe as fact the truth, power and working of the resurrection.

Q: Why is this important? Is this theological nit-picking?

A: It's the defining difference between those that merely believe in Christ's existence and those who believe He is the Messiah, the Son of God. It's not belief in Jesus as a teacher or historical figure or "a good man", but in all the God qualities and attributes of the very Son of God.

Application: *Do you know someone that "believes" in the existence of Jesus but have not acknowledged Him as Lord and risen Savior? If God opens the door of opportunity for you, what will you say to them? Do you know that their "belief" is not enough?*

¹¹For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

[Read v.11-13]

Q: If you had not studied all of Romans 10 to this point, and simply opened up your Bible and began reading at v.11, what would you think is required for salvation?

A: You might think all you need is belief that Jesus exists and that all you have to do is invoke His name.

Point: This is why it's so important to read, understand, and know Scripture within its proper context. These verses summarize the verses leading up to it, wherein we were given a precise definition of what it means to “believe” in Him and to “call on the name of the Lord.” (See v.9)

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.’”

[Read Matthew 7:21-23]

Q: Interpret this teaching from the Sermon on the Mount in light of the passage we've been studying.

A: People may use Jesus' name, even speak it in the course of their earthly activities, but it has no actual value if the speaker's heart and mind aren't circumcised for God, confessing Him as Ruler and Risen Son of God. In the end, it's the picture book definition of someone practicing “lawlessness”. (Relate that back to the opening paragraph of Romans 10.) Because the Law only comes through a relationship with Christ as Ruler and Risen, not through merely using His name.

Application: Is your ministry in name only or from the heart?