



## GIVING AWAY THE GOOD NEWS

SERIES: GUILT, GRACE, AND GLORY

Catalog No. 1209

Romans 10:1-21

21st Message

Gary Vanderet

August 20th, 2000

One of the lasting marks for me of our time in the Philippines was that I gained a renewed sense of the importance of people. God loves people. People matter to him. This is the thrust of the book of Romans. In the opening eight chapters the apostle Paul explains how God reached out to mankind and took the initiative to love us. For two thousand years Israel had that role of proclaiming to the nations that God loves people. But now there is a new Israel, the church of God, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, who are his missionaries.

In chapters 9-11, Paul addresses the problems of Jewish unbelief. The focus in chapter 9 is on God's sovereignty, i.e. God's right to choose according to his purposes. In chapter 10, the focus is on human responsibility, the need to understand the gospel, to proclaim it, and people's need to respond in faith. It is true that God chooses and draws those who come to him, but it is also true that no one comes without voluntarily responding to his call. What can we say about Israel? Can they still come to God? Yes, on the same basis as Gentiles. Jews can come to God not by keeping the law, but by believing the good news that God has done everything necessary in the person and work of Christ. Man simply has to accept that and receive Christ.

Thus in chapter 10 there is a switch from the past to the present, from Paul's explanation of Israel's unbelief to his hope that they will yet hear and believe the gospel. Jews must come to God on the same basis as Gentiles; therefore the proclamation of the gospel to Jews is precisely the same as that made to Gentiles. The significance of this chapter is that it teaches Christians how to evangelize, how to share their faith, not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. This chapter is a primer on evangelism.

The first thing that Paul says is that we must love people. We need to be concerned about others. The apostle models that in the opening verses.

**Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.** (Rom 10:1, NASB)

Paul begins this chapter just as he began chapter 9, by sharing his love and longing for his Jewish brethren. That is where evangelism, or any ministry, must begin — with loving people and making friends. There is nothing difficult about that. In order to love people we have to be with people. We have to mingle more. That is the whole point of the incarnation. God came to earth and mingled with us. He was Immanuel, "God with us."

In my travels I have found that people in the East understand this truth much better than Westerners. There, everything is based on relationships. In Mother Teresa's *A Simple Path*, she quotes a certain Brother Jeff:

In the West we have a tendency to be profit oriented, where everything is measured according to the results. And we get caught up in being more and more active to generate results. In the East, especially in India, I find that people are more content to just be, to just sit around under a Banyan tree for half a day just chatting to each other. We Westerners would probably call that wasting time, but there is value to it. Being with someone, listening without a clock, and without anticipation of results, teaches us about love. The success of love is in the loving, not in the result of loving.<sup>1</sup>

Effective evangelism is based on relationships. That is why we need to evaluate our relationships occasionally. A good question to ask oneself periodically is, How many non-Christian friends do I have? Unfortunately, many Christians are inclined to spend all their time with their believing friends. They find that lifestyle to be safe. But you can't love people if you are not with them. When God wanted to impart truth to us, he became one of us. If we want to impart truth to our friends, we have to be one with them.

Preparing for our trip to the Philippines, I read a lot of material on evangelism. I was amazed at the number of things that focused on strategies and techniques that were so non-relational. Sharing the gospel is not about getting our lines down pat and learning when to smile. We need to get to know people and understand them. And, most importantly, we need to care about them. As one person put it, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." There is no lasting influence without sustained, loving contact.

The second thing we learn from Paul's model is that we need to pray for people. Prayer is the highest expression of our dependence on God. Paul prays that God might open the hearts of his unbelieving Israelite friends so that they will be able to hear the gospel; only then will they understand it for what it is. In another place Paul says that the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, so that they cannot see the face of Christ. It takes a work of God inside to change. The same God who caused light to appear in the beginning must do that again in people's minds, so that the light "comes on" and they see.

That is where prayer comes in. Prayer delivers us from the feeling that we need to convince people about the good news, that persuasion is important. But we don't have to argue with people. Our job is to love them and impart whatever truth we know. It is God's job to open their eyes so that they see it. That is very liberating. If they ask you a question you can't answer, you can say you don't know. Evangelism is God's business. He delights to use us as his mouthpiece, but it doesn't depend on us. Our job is to make friends and impart truth, and put the whole process in God's hands.

Thirdly, we need to understand people. Here the apostle reveals some things that are helpful to know about non-Christians.

**For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.** (Rom 10:2-4)

Paul is referring to the zeal of his fellow Israelites. If you have seen *Fiddler on the Roof* or read the writings of Chaim Potok, you will understand what the apostle is saying. God is the most important element in the thinking of the Jews. But I have found this to be true of some Gentiles as well. On our trip to the Philippines we were constantly running into Mormon missionaries at our basketball games. They were zealously attempting to capitalize on our being there. But notice Paul says that sincerity is not enough, because one can be sincerely mistaken. He is referring to zeal without knowledge, an enthusiasm without understanding. That is dangerous.

The particular ignorance that Paul identifies in the nation of Israel is a failure to recognize their own need of righteousness. They honestly feel that they can muster up enough of their own righteousness, somehow, some way, to make themselves acceptable to God. But this ignorance is not limited to the Jews. The average person thinks the same way. He tries to approach God on his own. He imagines that all his good deeds will outweigh the bad things he has done and that will ensure him entry into heaven in the end. People do not understand the concept of God's righteousness, his utter holiness, and their complete inability to measure up to his standards. They fail to grasp how sinful they are compared to how holy God is.

With our twisted minds we tend to look at upright, religious, moral people and think, "Those people are almost perfect." We think that if perfection were a 10, certainly they are at least a 9.5. How could God send someone to hell for a measly half-point? When we think like that we are manifesting a spiritual absent-mindedness that is scary, a fuzzy rationalizing that should have no part in a Christian's thinking. The Scripture is very clear. Paul used the opening chapters of this book to show that no human being comes close to moral perfec-

tion. God is so holy that our best deeds of righteousness are like filthy rags in comparison.

At times when I share the gospel, someone will say to me, "You must think I'm a bad person, that I would need all this forgiveness or righteousness. But I'm really not that bad." Then I'll take a glass of water, and say, "To the human eye, this looks like pure water, doesn't it? You wouldn't hesitate to drink it. But remember what you saw when you took a single drop of tap water and put it under a microscope in biology class. Do you remember the dirt, the sediment, the living creatures, the herbicides, all the contaminants in just a single drop of water, in what appears to the naked eye to be crystal clear water? Now multiply that drop by all the drops that are in that glass and you will get the point. This glass of water is not as pure as you think it is. In the day of reckoning, our lives are going to be put under God's microscope. Every little piece of dirt, every imperfection, every contaminant, every impure thought and improper motive, every devious plan, every self-centered perspective, all of that will become magnified. Then it will be obvious that we are not scoring in the 9's. We will never be able to muster up enough righteousness to make ourselves acceptable to a holy God."

We need to abandon our righteousness and receive Christ's righteousness. What usually taints our thinking on this subject is the irresistible urge to compare ourselves to other human beings instead of to God's holiness. Some of you will relate to this because you did it for years. I pray you are not still acting this way. Usually it starts by identifying the dregs of society: the porn kings, the drug czars, the serial killers, the rapists. They are way down at the bottom. But, they are made in God's image, so that on a scale of 1-10 we have to give them a 1. That automatically bumps our own righteousness quotient up to about a 5, because we are way better than that.

We continue to explain to ourselves and anyone else who will listen that there are a lot of nasty people loose in society. Colleagues at work or school friends lie without batting an eyelid. They run roughshod over other people's feelings. They cheat and cut corners if it serves their purposes. But they are much better than those other folks, so they must be at least a 5 — which puts us at least in the 7's. Now we start to count the long list of admirable character qualities that we possess. We are gainfully employed. We haven't stolen too much from our company. We are kind to most. We keep our word for the most part. We are faithful to our spouses for the most part. We attend PTA meetings, buy Girl Scout cookies, and support public television. Not very many people do those things. Clearly this puts us several steps above these others. We are at least in the 8's now.

But we aren't done yet. We go on to list our religious involvements, our spiritual merit badges. We go to church almost every Sunday. We are involved in a home fellowship. We've done some ushering on occasion. We may even have gone on a missions trip. We

think we're rather spiritual people. We are definitely in the 9's, maybe even 9.7 or 9.8. Compared to all the other people on the planet, we are way up there. That must be good enough for God, isn't it? Would a loving God quibble over a few tenths of a point? This way of thinking is widespread.

This mindset permeated the thinking of the Jews in Paul's day. That is why they tried to establish their own righteousness. They didn't think they needed a Savior. It dominates our day as well. Most people that you know are confounded by your need for a Savior. Who needs Christ's righteousness when our own is sufficient? they ask. Until men and women subject their righteousness to the measuring rod of God's holiness, however, they will wrongfully rate themselves in comparison to other people and will wind up with a score way higher than they deserve. If someone is thoroughly convinced that he is an 8 or a 9, then we are wasting our breath talking to them about their need for a Savior, because in their own minds they don't need one.

But the law has a good purpose. It is designed to drive us to Christ. That is what Paul means when he says, "Christ is the end of the law." We try and try to be good and we fail, because we discover that God demands absolute goodness. Then we find ourselves standing before Christ and learn that he is the answer. He is the righteousness of God. He bore our sins in his body on the cross. God puts our unrighteousness on Christ. Then he imparts his righteousness to us, so that we have sonship. We are adopted into God's family and we belong to him on the basis of Christ's death, his sacrifice for us, and not anything that we have done.

So we need to care about people, to love them, pray for them and understand them.

But we also need to understand the gospel itself.

**For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), '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, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; for "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Rom 10:5-13)**

Paul says that Moses knew that it was not by keeping the law that one becomes righteous. He taught salvation

by grace through faith, just like Paul. Moses knew that the law would not work. Paul quotes Deuteronomy, and says that if we try to keep the law as a means for salvation, then we have to keep all of it, every jot and tittle. If we are going to get to God by being good, then we have to be absolutely, perfectly good. And Moses knew that was impossible. No, salvation by faith has always been available and accessible. In fact, salvation is as close as your mouth and your heart. You don't have to take any long journey to heaven or hell to find Christ. God has already done everything necessary. Christ has already come, he has already died, and has already risen. He is available to us now. Our part is simply to inwardly believe and outwardly confess: to believe in our heart that Jesus rose from the dead, and confess with our mouth that he is Lord. John Stott writes, "The content of the belief and that of the confession need to be merged. Implicit in the good news is the truth that Jesus Christ died, was raised, was exalted, and now reigns as Lord and bestows salvation on those who believe."<sup>2</sup>

Paul is saying that a person's nationality, spiritual background and religious heritage make no difference. Everyone who enters heaven does so on the basis of the person and work of Christ. The up and out and the down and out, the rich and the poor, the moral and the immoral, Jews and Gentiles — everyone goes through the same door, the person and work of Christ, to get to heaven.

So Paul says we ought to proclaim this good news. He exhorts us to do this, using four rhetorical questions:

**How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of Good things!" (Rom 10:14-15)**

Paul is not referring to the "clergy" here. If we have heard the gospel, and if we have believed, and Christ is dwelling in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, then we are "preachers."

Feet are not the most beautiful parts of the body. But Isaiah said, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel." He was speaking about those who brought to Jerusalem the good news that the days of captivity were over. Our message is similar, and it is indeed beautiful. God could have written all of his messages in the sky, but he condescended in a very real sense to preach the gospel through us. We are his spokesmen to share it with others.

Paul goes on to say that not everyone will respond, and why they won't.

**However, they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice**

**has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, “I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you.” And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I was found by those who sought me not, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” But as for Israel He says, “All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.” (Rom 10:16-21)**

Israel’s scandal is that they don’t believe the very message they were called upon to preach. But Paul says it’s not because they haven’t heard. They have heard enough of the gospel. The problem is that there is something wrong with their hearts. The Gentiles didn’t understand all of it any better than the Jews did, but they believed it. And so we have the other side of the coin concerning Israel’s unbelief. In chapter 9, Paul explained it in terms of God’s purpose of election, but here in chapter 10 he attributes it to Israel’s own disobedience. Thus we see that election and evangelism are not incompatible. Our responsibility is to share the

good news of the gospel throughout the world so that everybody is given the opportunity to hear and respond. But we know that not everyone will respond. Paul reminds us that it is not because it is not intellectually credible. The problem is a moral issue: it is hardness of heart. They do not want to submit to God’s righteousness. They want to do their own thing. They want to make up their own rules.

So we are left with the question, How will people hear if we don’t share the good news with them? There isn’t any other way. We must spend our life doing something in this world, and there is nothing more significant than telling people how they can know God and helping them find eternal salvation. We had a great time playing basketball in the Philippines but, in terms of eternity, basketball is very insignificant. What was important was to use the game as a platform to share the good news about Christ. And what an awesome responsibility it is, to affect the eternal destiny of another human being! That is why as Christians we must love people and be concerned about them, that we might be used of God to lead them to the Savior.

© 2000 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino

1. Mother Teresa, *A Simple Path* (Ballantine Books, 1995).
2. John R.W. Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), p. 283.