

# HOW THEN SHALL WE BE SAVED?

SERIES: THE MYSTERY OF THE JEWS



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Romans 9:30-10:13  
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Saturday is one of the rare days when I can read the newspaper at breakfast. Yesterday, I read "The Question Man" in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In this column, the reporter interviews people on the street. This time, he asked, "What is wrong with America?" I was intrigued by the variety of answers, some quite insightful. One person said the problem is our foreign policy—we meddle in other nations' affairs. Another person said it is our economy which makes more money shuffling paper than creating something or serving someone. One person said it was the deficit and another the legal system. Another person said it is the individualism destroying any sense of "team spirit."

If I passed out a questionnaire among you and asked, "What is wrong with the church," I wonder if we would get as varied a response. Let me give you my answer. I think our problem is that in our desire to market the gospel and give it mass-appeal, we have destroyed it. Instead of being great and glorious, it has become a mere commodity. J. I. Packer says this distorted gospel no longer produces "the deep reverence, deep repentance, deep humility, (and) a spirit of worship." We have corrupted, polluted, and diluted the gospel to the point that it no longer has any meaning.

In Romans 10, the apostle Paul shares the gospel as God's plan of salvation. But notice he does not talk about the plan of salvation and the human responsibility to respond until he has *first* told us the grand scheme of the majesty and sovereignty of God. When Paul shared with us the glory and might of God in chapter 9, he put us in the dust, like Job, with our faces on our knees in repentance. Only in that place of humility and brokenness, can we hear the plan of salvation and human responsibility.

This passage, Romans 9:30-10:13, has personal significance for me. The last time this text was preached from our pulpit was twelve years ago when Ray Stedman was teaching through Romans. At that time, my father was visiting us due to a family illness. When he came to church with us, it was the first evangelical church he had ever set foot in. Ray's title that day was "How Shall We Be Saved?" This was probably one of the few evangelistic messages Ray has preached, and I wondered how my father would respond. At the end of the service, he leaned over to my friend and

whispered, "That man really knows his business!"

That comment was more profound than my father knew because Ray taught the text in context. I pray that this text will have an impact upon you as well. If you do not know Christ and are in the process of exploring Christianity, I hope that you will embrace Christ through understanding God's plan of salvation. If you are already a Christian, may you embrace its implications for your life.

Before the apostle tells us about this plan of salvation, he talks about the great historical paradox of God's elected purposes in present history. Look at verses 30 through 32 of chapter 9.

## INTRODUCTION: THE GREAT HISTORICAL PARADOX 9:30-32

**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling-stone,...**

In the beginning of the chapter, Paul wrote about God's wonderful elective purposes. When the nation of Israel was born, God delivered them by hardening Egypt. Out of that hardening and judgment came Israel's salvation. Now he says God has turned the tables and put a partial hardening on his people in order that the nations might be saved. This is an amazing historical paradox. The Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness attained it while the Jews who were pursuing the law of righteousness did not arrive at the law but fell instead.

The Old Testament language used here speaks of a chase. All these terms describe the army chasing the enemy after the battle in order to capture them. "*Pursue*" means to chase after someone or something with haste and dogged determination. The Jews, the early entrants into the race for salvation, trained hard in their pursuit of the goal, but they did not even finish the race. Remember Dan Jansen, our winter Olympic hopeful in speed-skating? Our entire nation was pulling for him because his sister was dying of leukemia. He was the world's best, and he was ready. But when the gun went off, in a matter of seconds, he fell

and could not finish the race. The same thing happened to the Jews.

The paradox is that the Gentiles were not even competing in the race, but after they entered the race late, they not only reached the goal, they won. This reminds me of the contrasting spirits of competition portrayed in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. The Jewish runner Abram was determined; he always wanted to beat Eric Little. All of his self-worth was based upon his running ability. But Eric, a man of a different spirit who was willing to forego a race because of higher principles, won the gold. The contrast of those spirits is captured here by the apostle Paul.

Why did Israel fall? Paul tells us in verses 32 and 33:

**Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling-stone, just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, And he who believes in Him will not be disappointed."**

Here Paul brings together two texts from Isaiah which speak about the stone. Isaiah 8:13-15 promises that God will become a sanctuary and says:

**"It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy.  
And He shall be your fear,  
And He shall be your dread.  
Then He shall become a sanctuary;  
But to both the houses of Israel,  
a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,  
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
And many will stumble over them.  
Then they will fall and be broken;  
Then they will even be snared and caught."**

Because of Israel's sin, the prophet says judgment will come from Assyria which will be like the Euphrates River which overflows its banks in a flood of judgment. In the midst of the judgment, if the people will turn from their wicked ways and trust God instead of their own resources, God will become a sanctuary for them.

If they do not, the flood will sweep them away and dash them against this rock. Instead of saving them, this rock will become a fatal



obstacle in the raging torrent. Thus, they are either saved by being in the rock or the rock will destroy them. The point is to either trust in the rock or be shattered by it.

Then Paul takes the second image from Isaiah 28:16 where the prophet says:

**Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,**

**A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.**

**He who believes in Him will not be put to shame.** (Heb. text: "in shame")

In this flood of judgment, God is going to destroy the earthly Zion, Jerusalem. But after that judgment he will build a new Jerusalem, a heavenly reality, with a new temple. In it, there will be a costly, beautiful foundation stone firmly placed. Anyone who believes in this stone will not be "*in haste*." The point is if any man builds his life on this stone, as one commentator says, he "will keep his head when all about him are losing theirs and blaming it on him." Instead of panicking or rushing around, he will trust in God's confidence. The quality of the people who trust in this stone reflects a lack of haste—rest and quiet security.

We gather from the first image that we must either trust in this stone or be shattered by it. The second image reveals that this stone, being the cornerstone, is the standard by which everyone will be measured. If we trust in it, it will yield security in the midst of judgment. Why does Paul bring these texts together? He telling the Jews that they cannot blame their fall on the doctrine of election. They fell because of their own guilt.

One of the fears regarding of the doctrine of election is that it will lead to passivity and irresponsibility. That is not true! Paul says the Jews fell because God in his sovereignty asked them to make a choice. He told them the stone was coming and that they must have faith in it, and he announced the judgment that would result if they did not. But they preferred to give righteous standing to their own lives rather than trust in the stone. This is why they fell.

The same is true today. When the waters of hell sweep our nation in final judgment and we stand before the throne of God, we cannot say that the doctrine of election kept us from belief. God is going to give each individual the full weight of his or her responsibility. If anyone goes to hell, it is because he chose to.

Romans 9 gives us election and human responsibility back to back. Having explained both, Paul says once God started building his new Zion, this new spiritual kingdom founded on the cornerstone, he brought good news to all nations—the plan of salvation. The gospel is now presented before all men for a response. Verses 1 through 3 of chapter 10 reveal the first step of this salvation.

## **I. NOT BY ZEAL ALONE 10:1-3**

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

Paul says zeal by itself is sorely inadequate to produce salvation. Man is not saved by zeal alone. Our culture values sincerity and passion more than truth. Our media never proposes a moral standard. Rather, any person who is sincere is reported as being wonderful. Even Linus in the *Peanuts* comic strip, preaches while sucking his thumb and clutching his security blanket, "It does not matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere."

Paul says this is not quite true. You can sincerely be wrong and go to hell. Zeal can be a godly attribute speaking of a righteous passion and jealousy for God and the things of God. In the Old Testament, men are acknowledged for having a godly zeal for God's holiness (Num. 25:11), God's house (Ps. 69:9), God's kingdom (Is. 9:7), or God's vengeance (Ez. 38:17). But zeal alone cannot produce salvation. I even find myself rebuked by Jews who have more zeal than me. My friend Bruce who is an orthodox Jew is zealous in his concern for the dietary laws, clothing, and the Sabbath. As Christians, we could use more of his kind of zeal.

But Paul says zeal without knowledge is inadequate. Not knowing about the righteousness of God, the Jews sought to establish their own. As a result, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. Although they had zeal, they were sorely ignorant. And their ignorance led to arrogance. They would not subject themselves to God and his righteousness.

How are we saved? It is not by zeal alone. We need knowledge. Paul goes on to explain what knowledge is necessary in verse 4.

## **II. BY UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LAW AND THE MESSIAH 10:4-8**

**For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

The entire text is an exposition of this verse. We need to understand the relationship between the Law and the Messiah. First, we must understand that the law was not given to produce righteousness. Look at what Paul says in verse 5:

**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), 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,...**

The law was never intended to produce righteousness. Deuteronomy makes this clear, for the law demanded nothing less than the complete fidelity of a love relationship to God. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 says: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord alone, and you shall love the Lord your God *with all your heart*, with all your soul and with all your strength." The "*heart*" refers to everything hidden and dark—the inner recesses of our being that no one can see but us and God. Deuteronomy and Leviticus go on to say that if a man obeyed this command he would have life, but "cursed is every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them." Clearly we see that the law could not produce righteousness because of its high demands. It offered life only if man gave his whole heart to God.

Second, the law showed was that man could not perform it because of his own depravity. After he wrote this law, Moses predicted that the people would receive the curse instead of the blessing. It did not take much of a prophet to figure this out after travelling with this crowd for forty years. He said, "For I know your rebellion and your stiff neck; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death?" The disposition of the people was clearly towards wickedness.

If the law could not produce righteousness because of its high standards and because of the nature of the human heart, how are we to respond to it? When we read it, what are we supposed to do? Paul says in verses 5 through 7, "Don't think of righteousness based upon works. The key to understanding the law is to not focus on the difficulty of the commandments but to focus on the work of God who fulfills the commandments."

At the end of Deuteronomy 30, Moses said, "Don't think that this law is too difficult for you to do. Don't say in your heart you have to go to heaven to get this law because it is so lofty or you have to cross the sea to get it." This was a well-known image in the ancient Near East. In fact, there was a story about a Mesopotamian hero Gilgamesh who lost his meaning for life when his close friend Enkidu died. As a result, he made a quest to rediscover it. In his search, he crossed the sea to find the sole survivor of the flood, Utnapishtim, who he thought could give him the

answer to life. He did not get what he was looking for, and the story ends in tragedy.

Our generation is also seeking the answer to life. They will even spend \$235 on a week-end retreat in hopes of finding it. My college gymnastics coach was so intent upon finding life that he majored in Psychology at the University of California at Berkeley. While coaching, he told me he had a dream in which he discovered the answer for life. He wrote it down immediately so that he would not forget it in the morning. When he awoke and looked at the pad of paper, all he had was a scribbled line. He had lost it! After losing his family in a divorce, he spent all of his money to travel to India to find a guru with the answer. I told him I had good news: "The answer is not across the sea or in the heavens. Moses said it is near you. All you have to do is take God's word and put it in your heart."

Moses told the Jews this law was not in the heavens or across the sea. God came down and gave it to them directly so that they could put it in their hearts. Paul says that not only did God come down to give the law, Jesus also came down. When God raised Jesus from the dead, he fulfilled the law that he wants us to keep. When we read the law, we are to look at the Deliverer who came to fulfill the law, and we are to focus on what he did for us rather than on the weight of the commandments. What God asks us to do he will do in us through his Son who has already done it. This is the knowledge we need to save us.

How are we saved? Not by zeal alone—we also need knowledge of the relationship between the law and the Messiah. This brings us to the third law of salvation. We are to place our faith in the Messiah. Look at verses 9 through 11.

### III. BY FAITH IN THE MESSIAH 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 shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

We are to put our faith in the Messiah. Notice Paul describes this faith as a twofold process. First, we must *believe* in our hearts. This implies that it takes time to read and to listen to what people are saying about Jesus. Then we analyze the material with our minds until we are convinced in our heart that these things are true. If our commitment is based upon emotions or feeling, it will not last. Thus, the Scriptures always address the mind in order to get to the heart.

Once we are convinced in the heart, we cannot remain "secret service" Christians. We have to come forward to *confess* with our lips

that Jesus is Lord. In the early church, as soon as someone was convinced in his heart, he was baptized. Though baptism was not a means of salvation, it was the *occasion* when a Christian first made his public proclamation that Jesus was Lord. And this baptism was considered as serious as a wedding ceremony. It was his public declaration before friends and witnesses that Jesus was Lord of his life. He was now "married" to him. Therefore, he was now considered accountable, for he had joined a new community. His old life was finished.

In our culture, we Christians often act just like the world who do not like ceremonies and weddings. Instead of pursuing marriage, they just live together, and if it works out they may eventually make a public confession and exchange rings. Too often, this is how Christians act. We try to live a secret commitment to Jesus Christ. The text says we cannot do this. We must confess with our lips and make our commitment public. We must put our lives on the line. My friend Todd Pickett's song about the Eastern Europeans talks about the cost each couple pays to be married and proclaim Jesus Christ publicly. One line says, "Let the rain come, we will face the thunder, and we'll thunder back with love." That is public commitment!

Paul also reminds us of the content of our faith by restating two great doctrines. First, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Second, Jesus is Lord. Is this content adequate? You might be asking, where is the cross? Paul only talks about the resurrection and the ascension.

If we understand the resurrection, then we understand the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, most human beings thought that he had been abandoned by God and was under his curse because Scripture says, "Cursed is every man who hangs from a tree." God said this was not true. As his servant, Jesus died in our place, took upon himself the full curse of the law, and endured the holy wrath of God for us. To prove that his work was satisfactory, God vindicated his Servant by raising him from the dead, revealing that he was indeed his Son. When we believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we are agreeing in principle with what the cross accomplished.

But Jesus was not just raised. He ascended to be seated at the right hand of God who now calls him Lord. What did this mean for Paul? The word "Lord" was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament more than 6,000 times to translate the divine name "Yahweh." In verse 13, when Paul quotes Joel and says "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord," this word is again translating "Yahweh." Thus, Paul equates Jesus with Yahweh. As Cranfield says in his commentary on Romans:

We take it that, for Paul, the confession that Jesus is Lord meant the acknowledgement that Jesus shares the name and the nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God...in addition [to these is expressed] the sense of His ownership of those who acknowledge Him and of their consciousness of being His property, the sense of personal commitment and allegiance, of trust and confidence.

Thus, because of God's ownership of us, we serve him out of love.

If we are convinced in our heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and we confess that Jesus is Lord, the result is that we will be reckoned righteous and saved from the judgment to come.

Notice that we cannot say that Jesus is our Savior without saying he is our Lord. It bothers me when people give their testimony and say, "I met Jesus as my Savior when I was six. Then I made him Lord when I was seventeen." The text says that when we confess Jesus as Lord and he owns us, then we shall be saved. Saving is what he does as a result of our making him Lord of our lives. Thus we find that faith is a twofold process of believing and confessing; its content is the doctrine of the resurrection and ascension, and it results in the two gifts of righteousness and salvation.

In summary, how are we saved? Not by zeal alone. We also need the knowledge of the Messiah and his fulfillment of the law. Third, we must place our faith in that Messiah. The fourth law of salvation is that this is without distinction. Look at verses 11-13.

### IV. WITHOUT DISTINCTION 10:11-13

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."

Paul is quoting is from Joel who saw God's great order of salvation as including a day when God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon his people after the coming of the Messiah. He said the next great event in salvation history would be the day of judgment for all nations. Between the time of the outpouring of the Spirit and the day of judgment, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

The point of the text is that the gospel is universal. This is seen in Paul's use of the word "whoever." He says there is no distinction, for Jesus is Lord of "all" and abounding in riches for "all." Because Christianity is universal, it is also *exclusive*. People object to Christianity because of its exclusive claims.

We often hear the response, "That is fine for you." They view Christ as one of many antibiotics able to cure man's spiritual malady. When they choose to use another medicine such as *est*, they see no difference.

I think we need to up the claims. The early Christians were radically different from the Roman mystery religions. After all, no other religion was claiming to be "the human race." The early Christians were claiming to be the new race, the new Adam. Since this gospel is now going to all the nations, it is the only way to salvation—given to all without distinction.

This is the plan of salvation. We are not saved by zeal alone. We need the knowledge of the relationship between the law and the Messiah. Then, by faith we accept the Messiah. And this salvation is offered to all without distinction. Before we close, let me share with you some implications this text brings to the human heart.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

First, I think this text destroys the *sin of irresponsibility*. We can never use the doctrine of election as a "cop out." God in his sovereignty has given man dignity. In calling men to repent, he is putting a choice before them. Anyone who refuses to repent and embrace this gospel will be charged and will bear the weight of that responsibility. When we stand before this awesome judge who has given us this gospel, he will ask us how we responded. He is summoning all to repent. If you go to hell, it is because of your own free will and choice to rule in hell rather than serve in repentance.

Second, Romans 10 destroys the *sin of legalism*. The text says that he who believes in

him will not be "*in haste*." As the world looks at your life, are you in haste? When you face conflict and suffering, what is the first thing you do? Do you get on the phone to spread the information and to form meetings? As Christians, we look as "hasty" as non-Christians. When we are in haste, our perspective is wrong. We are always looking at what needs to be accomplished—the commandments—and we add to the list all the time, just as the Pharisees did. Then we become burdened under the weight of everything we have to do. Thus, watching the clock, we end up running around in panic.

Paul and Moses say, "Don't look the commandments. Look at the work of your Savior who descended in the incarnation and has been resurrected. He will write the law on your heart. Everything he asks you to do he will do in you." In order to destroy our legalism, we must meditate on a living person not on a written code. That person, Jesus, is always present.

Third, this text destroys the *sin of nominalism*. We cannot be nominal Christians, for our faith is not a private, inward belief. It has to have public expression which begins with our baptism and continues as we speak and act. Every word and action should give glory to Christ. We are to invest in the King's business. We need to ask ourselves whether our co-workers and neighbors know that we are the King's sons. Remember in the parable of the talent, the owner rebuked the servant who did not make a public investment for him.

Fourth, this text destroys the *sin of passivity*. I have heard the rumor that the Rapture

is coming next week. This reminds me of the scene in the book of Acts when the disciples gazed into the heavens after Jesus left. Angels rebuked these star-gazing apostles, saying, "You are waiting for him to return. You fools! He just commanded you to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Samaria, and the outermost parts of the earth. Your task is to be about the King's business. When you are done, he will return!" His return is not dependent upon our calculation of the date. When you take your car into a mechanic, he does not ask when you will be back. You ask him when he will be done with the car. In God's sovereignty, he has given us work to do. I cannot believe that the Muslim world or even India has fully heard the gospel and had a chance to repent. Our work is not done! Why are we star-gazing when there is so much work left?

I want to commend my wife regarding this work. Ten years ago, when we moved into our neighborhood, I had a vision for leading our neighbors to Christ. Nothing happened for a long time because I was spending my time dreaming. Meanwhile, using her gifts of wisdom and helps, my wife started volunteering in the school system. Last year she was vice president of the PTA. Because of her efforts, we now have many relationships in the community. Just last week, I was in the home of one of these families and shared with them about my trip to Eastern Europe and about how I became a Christian. I would have never had this opportunity without the hard work preceding it—lots of hours of volunteering.

As Christians, we cannot be isolationists or stargazers. We need to be involved in our community. May God grant us the grace of this gospel to remove our irresponsibility, legalism, nominalism and passivity.

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