

Romans 9... 10... 11

The first century Jews Paul was addressing were holding on to their keeping of the Law as a means of achieving righteousness - a right standing with God.

Paul argued that the way of righteousness has always been by faith, not by the Law. It is by what you believe, not by how you behave.

You cannot achieve righteousness, but you can receive it.

Verses five through seven contrast these two ways of righteousness:

Righteousness achieved by law is described in verse five.

Romans 10:5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

"Shall live by them" means find eternal life by them. The Scripture quoted here from Leviticus is true. If you perfectly and perpetually keep God's law, you will be declared righteous by God.

But the Jew knew that no one could ever perfectly keep God's law! They should have known, therefore, that your attempts at keeping the law could never make you right before God.

Any attempt to live by the Law is doomed for two other reasons:

1. Before you are even born, sin is imputed to you as a member of the fallen human race.
2. Everyone inherits a sin nature at conception.

So, really, keeping the Law is a fantasy!

James put it like this:

James 2:10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

The Law is unforgiving that way. I've often used the example of being pulled over by a cop for speeding. The fact I am keeping many other laws doesn't cancel out the fact I broke one law. I am a lawbreaker. I am guilty.

Unlike traffic laws where I can get the infraction removed from my record, there is no provision in the Law of God to permanently expunge my sins.

Righteousness received by faith is described in verses six and seven.

Romans 10:6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*)

Romans 10:7 or, " 'Who will descend into the abyss?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

Quoted from Deuteronomy, these verses have a dual meaning:

1. When he says, "Who will ascend into heaven?", he is talking about those who seek to be right before God by living saintly lives that would be deserving of heaven. It's an exaggeration - as if you could be so righteous that you would simply ascend into heaven! On the other hand, you can't "descend into the abyss." In other words, no amount of suffering for your sin in the next life could ever atone for it sufficiently for you to earn the right to enter heaven.
2. The second meaning of these verses is to point towards Jesus. He both "descended" and "ascended." They prophecy about His incarnation and about His resurrection. While showing you that suffering and saintly living cannot save you, Paul also shows you the sufferings and sanctity of your Savior. It is faith in Jesus as your Substitute that saves you.

If by your works of sanctity or suffering you could achieve righteousness and get to Heaven, what was the incarnation of Jesus

necessary for? Why did He descend & ascend? Is He only one way to Heaven or is He THE way to Heaven?

Paul sneaks in two of the doctrines the Jews had a tough time with - the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Again we note Paul's emphasis on using the Scripture to prove his point to the Jews. It makes his point, God's point. He was making God's point in ways they could not refute.

The Law itself is against 'the Law' as a means of obtaining a right standing with God!

Righteousness cannot be achieved; it can only be received. How is it received?

Romans 10:8 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 preach):

When Paul says "the word is near you," he means to link that with the phrase in parentheses, "that is, the word...which we preach." In other words, salvation is not hard to find! It is being proclaimed in numerous ways by God's servants.

What he means by saying that the word is "in your mouth and in your heart" is also explained in the parenthesis. It is "the word of faith" that is "in your mouth and in your heart." The "word of faith" is the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. When you hear the Gospel you have opportunity to believe God. If you simply believe in your heart, then God saves you. This always leads to the outward confession of faith before men by the words of your mouth.

One commentator writes:

Similar attitudes confront the proclaimer of the gospel in today's world. While the religious systems of self-effort vary in many degrees from those Paul wished to counter, the fundamental attitude of many people is that they must do something

to merit or earn their salvation. This attitude is perfectly understandable in those societies where people have learned all their lives that "there is no such thing as a free lunch." The task of the modern-day evangelist is still the same, namely, to explain the impossibility of salvation through self-effort and the availability of salvation through faith in Christ.

Then, after folks are saved, we have the problem of wanting to put them under some part of the Law. Groups add something to salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone. Baptism is a good example.

Even among those of us who preach grace and don't add anything per se, we can still make it sound like works are necessary to maintain salvation. It is admittedly a temptation to preach legalism; after all, it's for a person's own good that you want to give them rules and rites and regulations to follow.

But we can no more relate to God through the Law than we can receive His salvation through it. Ours is to remain a relationship of love.