

Lesson 24: Presuming on God, Israel Misunderstands the Role of Faith, part 1

Romans 9:30-10:11

Israel did not pursue the righteousness that comes by faith.

³⁰ What shall we say then?

That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;

³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law.

³² Why?

Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ 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.”

The Requirement of faith continues from Old Covenant to New Covenant

(1) ¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. ² For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³ For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

(2) ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

(3) ⁵ For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.

(4) ⁶ But 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),

⁷ or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

(5) 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 are preaching, ⁹ that 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;

¹⁰ for with the heart

a person believes, resulting in righteousness,

and with the mouth

he confesses, resulting in salvation.

¹¹ For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

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Introduction

Here is the problem. Where we left off last time in Romans 9:29, Paul concluded that Israel has become a vessel of wrath and the Gentiles a vessel of mercy. This makes no sense. How can the people of God who received the promise made to Abraham, who produced the Law and the Prophets, who returned from exile, who gave birth to the Messiah, how can the people of God not be the people of God? And how can pagan peoples who have long worshipped many gods and lived immoral lives, how can these people now be called the people of God?

This is the question we begin today in Romans 9:30-31. It starts this way.

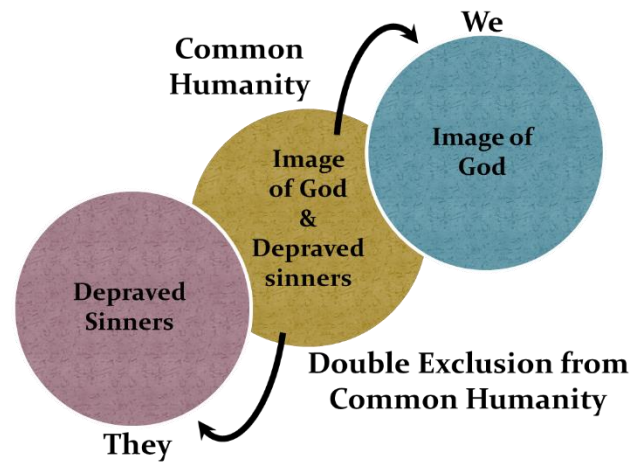
³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law.

How can it be that the traditional people of God have been excluded and those not of the people of God have been included? Our lesson today focuses on Israel’s failure to understand why they were being left out, though the application remains very real for every faith, every denomination, every generation. It is not unusual in Christian history for God to move on from a church or movement long

before people realize that he has left, if they ever do realize it. We should take to heart the stock broker's axiom, "past performance does not guarantee future results." The faithfulness, spiritual vitality and insight of one generation does not necessarily translate to the next generation. In fact, Christian history suggests that every vital movement eventually becomes a lifeless institution.

The question, "Why did Israel not get it?" maintains its relevancy as a question. How do we know that we are included as part of the people of God?

In his book *Exclusion and Embrace* Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf claims this, "Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners (124)." Volf writes of a double exclusion. The enemy deserves to be excluded from shared humanity while I deserve to be excluded from common sinfulness. Reconciliation is possible when I reject both ideas; when I recognize my enemy as a fellow human being and when I recognize myself, in Paul's words, as among the worst of sinners.



Volf's insight helps us understand Israel's inability to accept a new covenant as good news. Israel has clearly defined markers. They see Gentile peoples as vessels of wrath, and they see themselves as a vessel of mercy. Without becoming Jews, Gentiles do not belong to humanity, not to the real humanity that will make up the eternal kingdom of God. Gentiles experience wrath, because they deserve wrath. Israel, however, receives mercy because mercy is her birthright. The Jews are the people of God. It is a double exclusion; excluding Gentiles from the common human family created in the image of God and excluding themselves from the sin of fallen human family. It is also a double mistake. In Romans chapters 9-10 Paul argues that God has included Gentiles, while the majority of Israelites are excluded. They exclude themselves by rejecting the scope of God's mercy and rejecting the necessity of salvation by faith.

First, Paul addressed Israel's misconception about mercy. This was our previous lesson. In Romans 9:6-29 Paul insisted on God's right to include the enemy. Going back through history Paul explains how Israel has been molded as a vessel of mercy. But why Israel? Paul makes a point that this is purely by the free will choice of God. Israel does not receive mercy because of human tradition or collective righteousness. It is an act of mercy. And because it is an act of mercy, dependent wholly on God's choice, God is free to extend mercy to those outside Israel.

Miroslav Volf argues that true understanding of the cross overcomes the double exclusion which insists that those outside our group are less than human, and we who are in the group are somehow excluded from the condemnation of sin. Volf writes, "But no one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without overcoming this double exclusion—without transposing the enemy from the sphere of the monstrous . . . into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness."

This is what Israel failed to do. They failed to see Gentiles as sharing the image of God, also beloved by God. It is the sin of Jonah who grieved over God's mercy to Nineveh. Israel also failed to understand the depth of their own sinfulness. The gospel of grace in Jesus is not just a way to include Gentiles. It is not the law of Moses for Jews and the gospel of grace for Gentiles. The gospel of grace in Jesus is the necessary fulfillment of the law of Moses. As Paul stated back in 3:20, "by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the law comes the knowledge of sin." Israel felt able to exclude the Gentiles because they felt that the works of the law made them righteous.

They did not understand the depth of their own sin. As a result, they misunderstood the requirement that righteousness must come by faith. They misunderstood faith.

Let's summarize: Israel misunderstood that their role as God's people came through God's decision of mercy. They were not better than the Gentiles, and they were just as bad as the Gentiles.

Misunderstanding mercy is a misunderstanding of God's perspective in determining who are the people of God. Israel also misunderstood the role of faith. They believed in faith plus law, that they somehow could attain a righteous standing in God's eyes. This was a misunderstanding from the human perspective of who are God's people. From God's perspective his people are those to whom he shows mercy. From the human perspective, his people are those who believe in and receive his grace by faith.

In our previous lesson, Paul focused on God's perspective, the perspective of mercy. In this lesson, Romans 9:30-10:11, Paul focuses on the human perspective, the perspective of faith. The change in perspectives from God's perspective to man's perspective also moves us from God's sovereignty to man's responsibility. Paul does not solve the predestination verses free will debate in these passages. He teaches us what is true without answering all our questions about how it is true. We see this complementary reality. God is free and sovereign in his right of choice. We see that in Romans 9:6-29. And we see here in Romans 9:30-10:11 that man is responsible to yield to God in faith. Both are true. God is sovereign in his choice, and man is responsible to receive God's offer of grace by faith. In this lesson we move from God's perspective in showing mercy to the human perspective of responding with faith.

As we move through the text, I will not repeat Paul's argument in Romans 1-4 that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus. Paul addresses the question of Israel, having already established that salvation depends 0% on our works and 100% on grace. He is now applying that truth to Israel and to the question, "Who are God's people?" Paul's whole passage on Israel misunderstanding faith should take us through all of chapter 10, but that is a bit too much to cover, so I will save part for later. We will address 9:30-10:11 in this lesson. And the rest in the next lesson. Let's read that text and then walk through it together. Romans 9:30-10:11.

[Read Romans 9:30-10:11]

In this passage about Israel's exclusion, Paul first states the problem that they misunderstood faith, and then he argues the continuity between the requirement of faith from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. We start with statement of the problem in 9:30-33. Israel did not pursue the righteousness of faith. We've already read this. I am going to read those verses one more time.

Israel did not pursue the righteousness that comes by faith.

[Read Romans 9:30-33]

We already addressed the problem in the introduction. Gentiles are in while Jews are out. The truth about Jesus is a stumbling block not just to Jews but to all traditionally religious people. Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim, Hindu. Jesus' death on the cross says, "Your religion does not satisfy God." As soon as we become self-righteous in our religion, whether it is Christian or not, as soon as we start believing we deserve to be in and others deserve to be out, we have begun to lose the message of the gospel. Religion itself, even good religion becomes the barrier.

Paul does not say that the Jewish pursuit of obedience was bad. But it became a problem when they thought themselves to have arrived without the need of the cross of Jesus Christ. They pursued a false path. They misunderstood the way to righteousness. Not only did they misunderstand the way of faith necessitated by the gospel, they also misunderstood that this was the way necessitated by the law of Moses. The law pointed to a need for a savior, an atoning sacrifice. But Israelites had come to identify themselves more by the law they followed, than by the God they claimed. The new way of Jesus required admitting the weakness of the law. More than that, the new way of Jesus required giving up their traditions, or at least admitting that keeping those traditions was not necessary to be

in good relationship with God. Their special position was under threat. Their sense of moral superiority was under threat. Their sense of true theology was under threat. Their sense of identity was under threat. Belief in Jesus simply required too much. The rock of their salvation became the rock over which they stumbled over.

Having stated the problem. That Gentiles are in by faith, and Jews excluded because they refuse righteousness by faith, Paul moves on in 10:1-11 to show that this requirement of faith is a continuous principle from Moses through to Jesus.

The Requirement of Faith is Continuous from Old to New.

(1) Misguided zeal

Paul argues that faith in Jesus is not a new requirement. It has been God's way all along. The Jews have misunderstood the call for righteous in their law as the way a person becomes righteous in God's eyes.

Paul starts the section declaring that he has no ill will towards the Jews. His words in 10:1 echo the lament of his heart in 9:1-5, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation." Paul is not out to exclude Jews. Paul also acknowledges something positive about the zeal of religious people who seek to do what is right before God. He says in 10:2, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge." Lack of knowledge is an ironic charge. Truly religious people seem to know a lot about God. This is certainly true of Jews with all their biblical stories and religious customs and moral laws. Yet the Bible consistently attests that our primary knowledge problem is not a problem of intelligence or education. The greatest Bible scholars from the best religious studies departments in the most prestigious universities can completely miss the basic truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ; truths understood by the smallest child or most uneducated laborer. To give just one example from the Bible John 9 tells of the blind man cured by Jesus. The Pharisees saw only that Jesus made mud on the Sabbath, so they sought to reject him. The blind man saw that he saw and concluded that Jesus is from God. Religious knowledge, even right religious knowledge, does not guarantee the spiritual sight of faith. Spiritual understanding of the basic truth of the gospel is available to all people, young and old, educated and uneducated, religious and non-religious. While tragic, it is not unusual that Israel, with the whole knowledge of the Old Covenant, would fail to see Jesus. As John declared, "the light came to his own, and those who were his own did not receive him (John 1:11)."

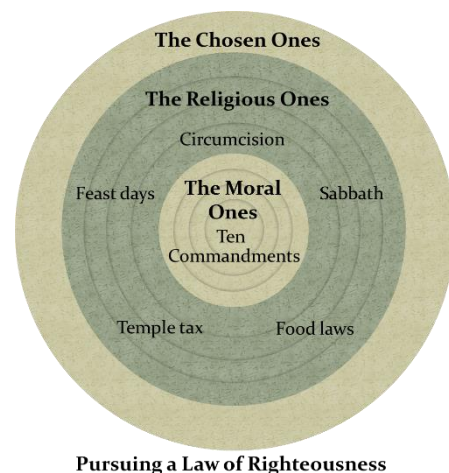
The Jews were zealous, but misunderstanding the way of God described in their own Bible, they failed to submit to that way. Verse 3, "For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." The problem is not that the Jews mistranslated the moral commands of Scripture. At least the group of Pharisees that Paul came from tried very hard to live out the righteous code of Moses. Their error was misinterpreting the call to live out the code of righteousness, as a possible path to be affirmed as righteous God's eyes.

(2) The End of the Mosaic Law

Romans 10:4 declares the true way of righteousness.

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

There are two interpretive challenges in verse 4. The first important interpretation question has to do with the word "end." In English the word end can mean the completion of something, such as "the end of the feast", or can mean goal, such as "he achieved his end." The Greek word *telos* being used by Paul has the same range of meaning as the English. So, which is it? Does "Christ is the end of the law" mean that Jesus is the goal of the law or does it mean that the coming of Jesus completes or



finishes the administration of the law? Interpreters are usually uncomfortable with double meanings, they prefer that we choose one over the other. But good writers do like to use double meanings at times. I think that is what Paul is doing here. We are supposed to understand Christ as both the goal of the law and the completion of the law.

This double meaning is like the double meaning found at the end of a race. We call the end the finish line because the race is over when runners pass that spot. We could also call the finish line the goal because the object of the race is to reach that point as fast as possible. So, it is the end both in the sense of fulfilling the goal and completing the race. Jesus has fulfilled the goal of the law and so brought to end the administration of the law. Jesus is the goal in that the law calls us to a higher righteousness, while also showing us our need for grace. The ceremonies of law consistently point us to the need for an atoning death greater than the symbolic death of sheep and bulls. The goal of the law is to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by showing us our need and foretelling the solution. Now that Christ has appeared that goal is complete, but so also the law is finished. Its time is over.

The second difficult point of interpretation comes from the little Greek word “for.” My translation is more word for word without helping us interpret. It says, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.”

What is Paul not saying? Paul is not saying that under the Old Covenant there was a way of works righteousness that has now come to an end in Christ. Remember from 3:20 that no flesh is justified by law. And remember that Paul concluded the gospel argument in Romans 1-4 with Abraham as his precedent for justification by faith. The possibility of being declared righteous by works never existed, so Jesus can’t be the end of a righteousness that comes from works. That cannot be the interpretation here. We cannot say that for the Jews under Old Covenant there was a valid way of righteousness achieved by moral deeds and religious ceremony, and Jesus has ended that way of righteousness. Such an idea conflicts with Paul’s declaration of the gospel in the letter to the Romans.

So, what is Paul saying? I think the NIV translates the verse well. “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” The Law itself taught that we cannot obtain righteousness by the law. It taught the need for atonement through the ritual of sacrifice, but the sacrifice of bulls and sheep and goats was always symbolic. In this the Law taught its own incompleteness. We awaited the true sacrifice of atonement that would actually take away sin, not symbolically but truly. We awaited the words of John the Baptist who saw Jesus and proclaimed, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” So as Paul argued in 3:25, God had passed over the sins of those who lived before Jesus without making payment for those sins. The death of Jesus was necessary that God might be shown just in forgiving sins already forgiven but not yet paid for. Jesus Christ met the need pointed to by the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes, both those who believed before the death of Christ and those who believed after the death of Christ. Christ brought about the necessary end of the administration of law “so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

(3) The Call of Righteousness

In verses 5-7 Paul quotes Moses to clarify the distinction between the way of righteousness by deeds and the way of righteousness by faith. A critical point to note is that Paul does not quote Old Covenant and New Covenant when he compares the two ways. Paul quotes both points from Moses. He simply updates the second quote according to the further revelation we have of Jesus.

The first way is described in verse 5. “For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.” Paul could be thinking of Leviticus 18:5, “You shall keep my statutes and my judgments, by which a man will live if he does them.” Or maybe he thinks of Deuteronomy 30:15, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply in the land where you are entering to possess it.”

There are two ways that a law of righteous deeds brings life. One way a law of righteous deeds brings life is when that law is fully kept. In that way, when a man stands before God his judge, he is declared righteous with no penalty of death to pay. The law has been kept. He enters into everlasting life by virtue of a righteous life on earth. This way or righteousness has only ever been kept by one person, Jesus Christ.

There is another way that righteousness brings life. Righteous living results in the blessings of life. When we live by the wisdom of God, by the light of God, by the love of God, we experience human life as human life is meant to be experienced. Israel was called to experience this life through obedience just as Jesus called his disciples to obey his commands and experience the abundant life he offered. This pursuit of righteousness with its blessings is the answer to the second question of covenant, “How then shall we live?” But it cannot be an answer to the first question of covenant, “How can I be made acceptable to God?” Recognizing this tension in the law of Moses helps us to understand the call of righteousness. We are always called to righteousness as an answer to how we ought to live, even if the call to righteousness cannot result in establishing our acceptability. Recognizing this tension also helps us to understand Israel’s failure to understand faith. The Jews of Paul’s day took the call of righteousness in the Mosaic law as an answer to the first question of covenant. To the question “What makes us acceptable?” they gave the answer, “Keeping the law of Moses makes us acceptable.” And they argued amongst themselves regarding how much of the law of Moses must be kept to be acceptable, but they were confident that the solution was living out the Mosaic law.

So now, coming back to Paul’s assertion, Moses wrote that “the man who practices righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.” Paul is addressing the first question of covenant in this passage. It is the pertinent question for understanding, “Who are the people of God?” We are not yet asking, “How then shall we live.” We are asking, “What makes me acceptable?” In this case, the quote from Moses establishes the legal, moral truth. If a person seeks to be declared righteous according to the practice of law, then they must practice the righteousness of law. It is the same claim Paul made back in 2:13, “not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” Righteousness based on law requires successfully obeying the law. While establishing this moral principle of law, the law itself assumes that no one successfully fulfills this moral requirement. And so, the law includes another way.

(4) The Way of Faith in the Old Covenant

Now, if we focus in closely on the requirements of the law and the call to righteous living, we might miss the big picture. We might miss that there is another way. But when we step back to observe the Mosaic Covenant as a whole we see major monuments of grace throughout: we see grace at the covenant ceremony with Abraham in Genesis 15; we see grace at the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22; we see grace at the Passover ceremony in Exodus 12; we see grace at the declaration of God’s name in Exodus 34; we see grace at the day of atonement in Leviticus 16; we see grace at the curse of the snake lifted on a pole in Numbers 21; and we see grace at the promise of a new heart in Deuteronomy 30. In the entire sacrificial system described throughout the Pentateuch, we see that God never imagined that one of his sinful people would be able to prove himself righteous by his own deeds. A believer in God can only be declared righteous by faith through the atoning sacrifice of another. That is the clear big picture message of the Mosaic Law. Even Moses did not make it into the physical promise land. How much clearer can the Old Covenant be. The way of God is the way of grace received by faith.

So now, in verse 6 and 7 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-14 to illustrate the principle of faith from the Mosaic Law.

⁶ But 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), ⁷ or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” 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 are preaching,

As Paul quotes, he updates the passage, according to the truth that we have in Jesus. But the original passage without that update still stands as a call to faith. In Deuteronomy, Moses follows the pattern of an ancient near eastern covenant, providing a historical prologue of how this generation came to be by the Jordan river, also providing general stipulations in the form of the ten commandments, providing several chapters of specific stipulations, providing the expected covenantal list of blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion, and then with all that recorded he comes to Deuteronomy 29:29 where he declares, “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.” This statement is a declaration of faith. God has given us what we need to know. Other things he has chosen not to reveal. We must trust God. How Israel will be declared righteous is one of the secret things not yet revealed. We are to trust God and obey, according to the word that has been given.

The in Deuteronomy 30 Moses goes on to give them the bad news that the Old Covenant will not prove successful to reign in the rebelliousness of Israel. Over time, following much patience by God and much rebellion by his people, God will exile Israel from the promise land. They will be treated as a vessel of wrath. But even then, God will show mercy and bring them back and provide for them something the law of Moses did not provide. Moses writes in Deuteronomy 30:6, “Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.” The abundant life that comes from a righteous life needs a new heart. That is a new covenant promise which Paul alludes to in 2:29. Something new needs to happen. The law is not going to be enough. But that new thing is one of the secret things that God has decided to not yet reveal. Israel must trust.

Then in Deuteronomy 30:11 Moses writes, “This commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach.” Now that’s is a strange statement. Is Moses telling the Israelites that righteous living is not so hard after all even though he just said they would fail as a nation because they lacked the new heart that would enable them to live for God? You know, it is strange to promise failure and then claim that it is not too difficult. It sounds similar to Jesus’ statement, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matthew 11:30).” What Christian thinks that living out the teaching of Jesus is a light and easy burden? Is the Sermon on the Mount easy? Is carry your cross light? Is loving your enemy easy? The commands of Jesus can only be understood as light and easy according to the principle of faith, knowing with complete assurance that we fall back on the first question of covenant with the words, “I am accepted! By grace through faith I have rest in Jesus.” That’s what makes it light and easy.

The way of faith was possible for Israel. It was up to them in their day to accept that the word they had was the word they needed. There was not more up in heaven, nor was there more under the earth. They did not need a new angelic vision from heaven nor a revelation from the dead. To live the way of the Lord they needed to believe in God by faith and respond to him by living out the covenant which was given to them. They needed to accept that they could not be righteous but were still safe with God because of the grace he provided.

That is why Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-14. God had revealed his will. Israel was challenged to receive that revelation by faith. Within that revelation were the dual principals of salvation by grace and the call to honor God in righteous living. By quoting that verse, Paul is challenging Israel again to accept the revealed will of God now made known in the gospel of Jesus Christ. In his day Moses asked, “Will you accept the revelation given you?” Paul asks the same in his day, “Will you accept the revelation given you now in Jesus?”

(5) The Way of Faith in Jesus

In verse 9 and 10 Paul gives us a wonderful compact statement of that gospel revelation. The structure of the message is a simply and beautifully balanced chiasm. Remember that a chiasm is a parallel structure where the first thing parallels that last thing, the second thing parallels the second to last thing and so on. The chiasm here is balanced on the four words confess, mouth, believe, heart that are then repeated in reverse order heart, believe, mouth, confess. There is also a central

phrase that has no parallel element. See if you can hear the central phrase as we read the text. Let's read the two verses, Romans 10:9-10.

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

The parallelism focuses down to the central phrase "you will be saved." Looking at the parts of the passage Paul does not want us to think that we are to confess one thing with our mouth and believe another thing with our heart. When we notice that the passage is chiasmic, we see that the paired components complement one another. Confessing with your mouth is not separate from believing with your heart but rather the outward response of true belief. Also, recognizing "Jesus as Lord" and "that God raised Jesus from the dead" are both parts of the same message. Both are to be believed in the heart, both are to be confessed with the mouth. Likewise, in the second half of the passage, the result of righteousness and the result of salvation are two parts of the same thing, both of which come from true belief in the heart which is confessed with the mouth. It is simple. It is beautiful. It is powerful. Paul is not attempting here to set down a formula. There is more we need to believe. But it is hard to imagine believing this much and not believing the rest. Do you know and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he is King of all, that he is both with God and he is God? And do you confess that God raised him from the dead, which of course means that you believe he first became man and died? This is the same brief statement of the nature of Christ that Paul gave us in 1:3 when he said, "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." "Born a descendant of David," that's Messiah. That is to believe that Jesus is Lord. And, "Who was declared Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead," that's to believe that God has raised him up. If you accept God's revelation of Jesus as the true Savior who died for you and was raised again, you will be saved.

In verse 11, Paul returns to one of his favorite Old Testament writers, quoting Isaiah. This is Isaiah 28:16, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." The full quote is up in 9:33, "'BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.'" Paul connects the two ideas. For Jews, Jesus has become a rock of offense. They are ashamed of a crucified Messiah and they look down with contempt on the way of grace. But the one "who believes in him will not be disappointed." The literal Greek word there is shame. "He who believes in him will not be put to shame." It is opposite of the reaction prophesied by Isaiah which was fulfilled by the Jews. They felt the idea of Jesus shameful, a rock of offense. It brought them offense to think that this was their Messiah. And yet, Paul reminds them that Isaiah foretold that anyone who believed in this rock of offense would himself not be shamed. If you choose Jesus, then no matter what shame anyone might attempt to put on you, when you stand before the judgement seat of God, when you arrive before your Savior, you will not be put to shame. Your faith will be validated, not by the strength of your faith but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. If you believe in him you cannot, in the end, be put to shame.

And this quote takes us all the way back to Paul's original thesis in 3:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." I am not ashamed because in Jesus Christ I will not be put to shame. It's also to the Jew first and also to the Greek. The Jew is not excluded by nature of the gospel. The Jew is excluded by refusing to accept Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Law. Jesus is the one true answer to humanity's greatest need. God does not exclude people from the blessing of life in him. Sin excludes people. We exclude ourselves. The gospel includes, inviting everyone to come and drink and be

satisfied. Israelites in the day of Paul had misunderstood these two truths: that no one is too far gone to receive mercy, and everyone is too far gone in sin not to need salvation by faith. The rebellious heart of sin excludes, the grace of God includes.

The Double Exclusion of Religion

As Paul declares in verse 12, “There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.” We are not done with the passage on Israel’s failure to understand faith. We will pick up in verse 12 in our next lesson. I want to end this lesson by coming back to Miroslav Volf’s assertion. He described a double exclusion. This double exclusion is strong in traditional religion. If salvation is earned through a religious system, then those who reject that particular system are excluded from being part of the new humanity made possible by that system. Also, those who are in the system exclude themselves from the sinfulness that overcomes humanity and affects everybody outside their system. Religion says, “Those others are out because they deserve to be out, and we are in because we deserve to be in.”

The temptation to this double exclusion exists in all forms of religion, even the forms holding most closely to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot keep the temptation out of our communities because it is a principle of the human heart. We cannot help but believe that those who are in somehow deserve to be in and those who are out deserve to be out. It is hard not to believe that our group is somehow superior.

And yet, notice how the language of exclusion is contrary to grace. Exclusion claims some deserve to be in and others deserve to be out. The language of deserving is the language of the law. To deserve is to have earned by birthright or by status or by deeds or by wealth. The gospel of grace rejects the idea that anyone deserves the mercy of God. You do not deserve the mercy of God. Grace is a free gift. It is not obtained by works. When we accept the right of God to extend mercy to any human being, and when we acknowledge that we ourselves do not deserve mercy, then we reject the double exclusion. We acknowledge that everyone belongs to the human family for whom Christ died. And we acknowledge that we deserve to be excluded just like everyone else because of our sin. God’s mercy teaches us to look at ourselves in a new light. Having deserved to be excluded, we have been invited in. The right response to that is wonder and gratitude. God’s mercy also teaches us to look at others in a new light. Everyone else is a potential son or daughter of the King. The right response to that is invitation, proclaiming the gospel to every person and inviting every person to come in.

Who would we keep out? Who is not good enough to be invited in? Who can you envision not inviting into your home, sitting down together over a good meal? Who would you exclude from your fellowship? Sin excludes. Religion excludes. The grace of Jesus includes all who will believe and enter in.

Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as important, confusing, interesting or strange in Romans 9:30-10:11?
2. What does it mean to you that Christ is the end of the Law? Do you see Jesus as more the goal of the law or more the completion of the law?
3. From the perspective of an Old Covenant believer, what does it mean to pursue life through the law as an answer to the first question of covenant and what does it mean to pursue life as an answer to the second question of covenant? (Which is referred to in 10:5?)
4. What is confusing or odd to you about Paul’s quote of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in 10:6-8? Does the context of Deut. 30 help you understand Paul’s use of the quote or just make it more confusing?
5. What stands out to you in the chiasm of 10:9-10?
6. Considering Miroslav Volf’s concept of double exclusion, Israel can be said to exclude Gentiles from the positive aspect of common humanity as fellow human beings made in God’s image and to exclude themselves from the negative aspect of common humanity also being depraved by sin. Who are the outcasts, the enemies, the depraved, the unworthy in your cultural setting? Who would not be welcomed into your home or church? What changes when you consider the outcasts as made in the image of God? When you see yourself just as fallen as them? Just as much in need of mercy?