

THE WORD OF CHRIST

Romans 10:1-21
Key Verse 10:17

Lesson 10

"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."

God is the sovereign Lord of history. He is the one who elects and calls and justifies and glorifies men. He is the almighty God, and he has the power to save or destroy; he can exercise his power in any way he chooses. It is amazing that he chose to use weak and foolish men as instruments for his redemptive work. And he chose to work through his word. I Corinthians 1:21b says, 'God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.'

Salvation is God's gift. It is foolish and useless to try to earn salvation by doing all kinds of good work for God or for people. We cannot earn salvation by going to church or by writing slogans or by participating in religious ceremonies. God gives his gift of salvation to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. Those whom God saves through Jesus are given God's work to do. He does not save us so that we can sit down and do nothing; we were saved so that we might be used by God as instruments of righteousness. We were saved so that we might grow up in the image of Christ to be salt and light, and to preach his gospel to a dying world.

1. Believing the word (1-13)

Paul was still thinking about why the Jews failed to obtain the salvation which God had prepared for them. They had zealously pursued righteousness (9:31; 10:2). Paul himself had been among the most zealous to serve God. He had killed Christians, thinking that he was serving God. But God does not want our unenlightened zeal. He will not accept the righteousness that people try to establish by their own efforts. People who try to establish their own righteousness by keeping the law fail to do so for two reasons: First, they become proud. They are too proud to submit to God's righteousness. They are too proud and spiritually blind to come to God with uplifted hands, saying, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." They are too proud to accept the shame of the cross as their glory. Second, they cannot fulfill the requirements of the law. Only Christ has completely obeyed and fulfilled the law. Verse 4 says, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."

If one decides to depend on his own will power and faithfulness in keeping the law, then he must keep it all and he must keep it to the end. If he fails at any point, or if he takes even a short spiritual vacation he fails the whole exam. If a part of the law is broken, it means that the whole thing is broken. Those who break the law are condemned.

We can only be free from the law when we belong to Jesus, for Jesus alone has kept and fulfilled the law. Everyone who has faith in him is justified. Everyone who ignores him and tries to keep the law himself will fail. So the Jews, in spite of their zeal, missed the way of salvation.

Moses knew that God's provision for our salvation was simple and uncomplicated. He also knew that men couldn't live up to all the requirements of the law. (5) Earnest seekers expect some hard provision or impossible task, But Moses says in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, 'Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, 'Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it? Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it? No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.' The word about which Moses and Paul spoke is the word of the gospel--the word of Christ.

Seekers after God sometimes fail to realize the utter simplicity of the faith which God requires. There are some who seek Christ, but seek him in asceticism or in various kinds of spiritual experiences. But Christ is very near. He is in the word of the gospel that has been preached to us; he is in the words of the Bible. That word is in our mouths and in our hearts. What is that word, and what must we do with it? It is gospel, and we must confess it with our mouths and believe it in our hearts. Confession and heart belief; Heart belief and confession--these cannot be separated.

First confess with your mouth. We confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. He is our King. Isaiah called him 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace... I Peter confessed, 'you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus wants us to confess him before all people. We must confess our sins (1 in 1:9) and we must confess his cross--and we must confess him as Savior and Lord. This is a love confession. He is Lord. We are no longer ruled by pride and passion, by our own feelings and plans and ideas or motivated by our own zeal. We are ruled by Christ. He wants us to have a clear identity as his people. When Peter confessed Jesus as Christ and Lord, Jesus promised to build his Church on his confessional faith. Later, Peter denied Jesus and wept bitterly because of his failure. Jesus came and loved him and forgave him and restored him. We must confess Jesus before all people, for we confess with our mouths and are saved.

Second, we must believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. It is the fact of his resurrection that we must hold fast in our hearts. It is easy to believe that evil men crucified Jesus--because many people die unjustly in this sinful world. But to believe that God raised him from the dead is to believe something that is humanly impossible. With God, the Almighty Creator, all things are possible. Because God raised Jesus from the dead we know that his sacrifice for us was accepted and our sins are forgiven. We have new life in Christ. The key of victory is in the hands of God who

raised Jesus from the dead--and he gives that key to all who believe in their hearts. It is resurrection faith that we must hold in our hearts. We believe in our hearts and are justified.

Third, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, man and woman; human condition makes no difference. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. To call on the name of the Lord is the most ancient way of saying that we must put our trust wholly in God, depending on nothing, on no one else. The people of Seth's line (Ge 4:26) called on the name of the Lord; Abraham built altars and called on the name of the Lord. This quotation in verse 13 is from Joel, and Peter quotes it in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2.

2. Preaching the word of Christ (14-21)

When we believe in Jesus, we call on him for mercy and forgiveness. We come to him with repentant hearts, seeking his help. And he receives and forgives us. He saves and blesses all who come to him. How then can we believe? When we hear the word of the gospel and accept it in our hearts, faith is born. Just as God ordained that the problem of man's sin be solved by faith in Jesus, so he has ordained that this faith be planted in people's hearts by the bearing of the word of Christ. But how can people hear if no one tells them? Isaiah says that the feet of those who bring good news are beautiful. But Jesus depends on his people in every age to go and tell, to share this word of Christ with the unbelieving world. It is Jesus himself who sends us into the unbelieving world to share the word of the gospel with people so that they might hear and believe. We do not go and proclaim the gospel because of human reasoning. The failure or success of our preaching cannot be our major concern. Computer calculations about human need and people's response do not send us out with the gospel. Our Lord is the one who sends us. The Body of Christ, the fellowship of believers are the ones who ordain and send out and pray for--and go to unbelievers, at the command of Christ. Our call rests on the command of our Lord. (Acts 1:8; Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15)

Israel heard but did not believe. God continues to stretch out his hands like a loving Father, waiting for their return. He sought to stir them to belief by giving his love and his gospel to the Gentile world in order to make them jealous. He wanted to use any means to bring them to faith in Christ.

God works in the events of human history according to his own sovereign will and in his own way--but the basic method that he has chosen to redeem the world from sin and save men from wrath is the calling and sending of his people to preach the gospel of Christ to a world that is dying. He has no other plan or method. He works through weak men. We who have been saved, have been saved because we heard and believed the word. We have been saved so that we may tell the world that Jesus

died for our sins and that God raised him from the dead. When dark, sin-enslaved hearts hear the word of Christ, they are warmed and faith is born. Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.