

Paul's Letter to the Romans Lesson 7

We must never forget that the entire ninth chapter of Romans portrays Paul's longing and desire for his Israelite kinsmen. Even into chapter 10 Paul says:

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. ²For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul's Israelite kinsmen are zealots for God, but they are zealots with a false theology. Their Jewish leadership has created laws loosely based on God's Law that have led the Israelites away from the intent of God. The Jewish people are rejecting the righteousness of God. They reject Christ who fulfills all the demands of God's Law and fail to accept the One who can wipe away their sins. Throughout this lesson Paul quotes from the Old Testament, striving to correct the mindset of his Israelite kinsmen in the church at Rome so they are adequately prepared to present the gospel to their unbelieving kinsmen in order that all Israel will come into the righteousness of God.

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

Righteousness of God - Paul has very loosely restated Moses' statement from Leviticus 18:5 which states, "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD." Paul uses this verse intentionally. Of all the Pentateuch, Leviticus is the most legal in its content. Leviticus is one of the few books in the Old and New Testaments that can be read like an IRS (Internal Revenue Service) code book. Each sentence within Leviticus addresses a new facet of God's desire for His people. Leviticus is the book that tells the Israelite what he needs to do to be different from all the other people in the world. The instruction in Leviticus 18:5 is interesting. First, the Lord tells the people to live by His statutes and judgment. Second, the Lord states that a man only lives by His statutes and judgments "if he does them." What is the Lord saying in this instruction? He states that His statutes and judgments are effective in a person's life only if that person lives his life according to the instructions of His statutes and judgments. Paul's loose translation of Moses' words makes the same statement. The Israelite still following the Old Testament law will either stand or die by the letter of the law. But we must remember that Paul has already made the argument in this letter that the statutes and judgments of the Lord bring only the curse of death. Faith in the Lord is still needed to bring about eternal life free of the curse.

⁶But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), ⁷or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." ⁸But 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, ⁹that 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; ¹⁰for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Righteousness of God - Within this passage there are two editor notes within the parentheses that are not found in the earliest and most reliable texts. It is unfortunate that these editorial notes remain in the NASB text because they cloud the clear intent of Paul's writings. Leaving these phrases out and comparing the above passage to the original source, Paul's purpose for this passage becomes clear. If we were Israelites living within 30 years of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we would readily understand the power behind Paul's quote from Deuteronomy 30. The Israelites of that day lived and breathed the Pentateuch, but today, we as Gentiles have little concept of the true emphasis Paul was making within this passage. We do not want to short-change our study by giving a brief commentary on this point, but it is imperative that we pause and look at the entire context of Deuteronomy 30. Moses is at the end of his life, about to leave the children of Israel at the Jordan River, ready to climb Mt. Nebo where God will bury him. This text is one of his last speeches to the people before he transfers his leadership position to Joshua. It is a prophecy which time has proven to be accurate.

Deut. 30:1-20 So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ²and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. ⁵And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶Moreover 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. ⁷And the LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. ⁸And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. ⁹Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; ¹⁰if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. ¹¹For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. ¹²It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who will go up to

heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it? ¹³Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it? ¹⁴But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. ¹⁵See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ¹⁶in 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, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

Evidently, Moses understood the plight of the Israelites. He understood Israel's future rebellion against God. He understood Israel's focus on the outward action of the law rather than the inward intent of the law. He understood that the outward sign of circumcision did not save a person and bring forth eternal life. He understood that only the circumcision of the heart satisfied the demands of God. He understood that salvation was not found high in the heavens or across the deepest seas; salvation is near the heart of all human beings, even as near as their own mouths and hearts. Salvation is simple, it is easy, and it is obtainable. Everyone who places his belief in the Lord can choose life rather than death.

¹¹For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." ¹²For 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; ¹³for "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

Righteousness of God - Once again Paul quotes from Isaiah.

Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone *for* the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes *in it* will not be disturbed.

Paul uses the word "disappointed" and Isaiah uses the word "disturbed." Neither word expresses the true intent of God in our language today. We would say that he who believes in Him will not be without an eager excitement. Believing in the Lord brings about an inexpressible joy.

Paul places emphasis on this belief in the Lord because it is clear that He is the tried and tested stone, the cornerstone laid for the foundation of our faith. It is quite possible that Paul also had in mind the words of Jeremiah as he penned this letter.

Jeremiah 17:7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD and whose trust is the LORD.

Although Paul primarily addresses the Jewish believers in Rome, interspersed within the letter he addresses the Greeks too. Any man, Jew or Greek, who trusts in the Lord is blessed. One's nationality makes no difference when it comes to belief in the Lord. To give emphasis to this major theological point, Paul quotes from Joel.

Joel 2:32 "And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Jew or Greek, nationality is set aside when it comes to salvation. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and thus obtain the righteousness of God.

¹⁴How 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? ¹⁵And 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!"

Righteousness of God - Paul makes a passionate plea, striking at the heart of His plan to spread the gospel. Notice how Paul picks up on the final word from each question to launch the importance of the next question, all leading to God's plan. How can a person call upon the name of the Lord if he does not believe in the Lord? How can a person believe in the Lord if he has not heard about the Lord? How can a person hear about the Lord if there is no preacher? How can there be a preacher unless a preacher is sent? The preacher is God's instrument in His plan for disseminating to the world His eternal good news, His eternal glad tidings. Paul quotes from Isaiah:

Isaiah 52:7 How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, *and* says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

It is the preacher who announces salvation. Nothing is more important to the gospel message and God's plan than the preacher. Is the music ministry important? Are the ushers and greeters important? How about the administrators, secretaries, janitors, and printers - are they important? Truthfully, all of them are important, but their importance is always secondary to the preaching of the gospel by the preacher sent from God.

¹⁶However, they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"

Righteousness of God - The preaching of the gospel brings about the righteousness of God, but not all who hear the preaching will heed the gospel message. Even Isaiah's message was rejected by many.

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. ¹⁸But 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."

Righteousness of God - Paul's use of Psalms 19:4 is very interesting at this point in his letter. Making clear the importance of the preacher in God's plan for the gospel, Paul directly states that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Attach Paul's statement to the Psalms 19:4 reference and we conclude that the entire passage is supporting the voice of the preacher; however, when we look at the entire context of Psalms 19, a different conclusion must be determined.

Psalm 19:1-14 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. ²Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard. ⁴Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun, ⁵Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course. ⁶Its rising is from one end of the heavens, and its circuit to the other end of them; and there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether. ¹⁰They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. ¹²Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*. ¹³Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not rule over me; Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. ¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

When Paul asks the question, "Surely they have never heard, have they?" and follows with the Psalms 19:4 quote, Paul is actually circling back to the original theme of Romans 1 when he says "man is without excuse." The voice of all of God's creation, the sun, moon, stars, animals, and plants cry out the word of Christ to the ends of the world. Psalms 19 adds to the story that that

the Law is perfect. Additionally, the testimony, commandments, and judgments of the Lord are true. Psalm 19 concludes with the preacher's prayer that the words of his mouth and the meditation of his heart are acceptable to the Lord, just as the voice of creation and the voice of the Law are acceptable to the Lord.

¹⁹ 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."

Righteousness of God - Pulling from the last words heard from Moses while he was still on earth, Paul quotes Moses' address concerning Israel's tendency to fall into idol worship, an act which angers God.

Deut. 32:21 'They have made Me jealous with *what* is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation, for a fire is kindled in My anger, and burns to the lowest part of Sheol, and consumes the earth with its yield, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.

Israel had the words of the Lord in her hands and she still turned to idols. Paul knows that Israel knew the truth and repeatedly turned from it. In God's plan, He would take His gospel message to the rest of the world. God even warned the Israelites that His actions would cause them to be angry.

²⁰ 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." ²¹ But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

Righteousness of God - Moving from the words of Moses to those of Isaiah, we see that Paul confirms the Lord's desire to spread the gospel message throughout the world.

Isaiah 65:1-6 I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask *for Me*; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, Here am I, here am I, To a nation which did not call on My name. "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk *in* the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, ³ a people who continually provoke Me to My face, offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; ⁴ who sit among graves, and spend the night in secret places; who eat swine's flesh, and the broth of unclean meat is *in* their pots. ⁵ Who say, Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am holier than you! These are smoke in My nostrils, a fire that burns all the day. ⁶ Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay.

The nation of Israel has disappointed the Lord; yet, He made a promise and a covenant with them, and He will keep His word. Even though Israel has rejected the Lord, the Lord has not rejected Israel.

Romans 11:1 I say then, God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!