

Salvation is for All

Romans 10:5-15

⁵ Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." ⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "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, On Your Lips And In Your Heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Today's scripture is in the middle of Paul's extended wrestling with the fate of his fellow Jews as they continue to seek righteousness through the law rather than through faith in Christ. Paul wants them to seek salvation in Christ rather than the law. Romans 10:5-15 is an expansion of Romans 10:4, where Paul states that Christ is the "end of the law." Paul uses scripture to show us how Christ is the end, termination, fulfillment and purpose of the law.

First, with the coming of Christ, the function of the law as the means of reconciliation with God has come to an end. In its place is Jesus Christ. Paul demonstrates this by weaving Christ into Old Testament passages about the law. Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, which places the burden of salvation on human fulfillment of the law. Then Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-12, which says: "Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is to too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?'"

In Paul's creative use of these passages, where the law/commandment once stood, Christ now stands. This passage from Deuteronomy ends with the declaration that "the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe" (Deut. 30:14). When Moses talks about "the word" he is referring to the commandments—the law. In place of the law, Paul inserts Christ. We do not need to go to heaven to know God, God has come to us in the form of Christ who is near—as close as our hearts and mouths. Christ has replaced the law as the way to salvation.

With the coming of Christ, the law no longer serves the function of reconciling humans with God. In fact, the law has become an obstacle to salvation. "The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me" (Rom. 7:10). Martin Luther knew this as well. He too tried to achieve salvation, not by strict adherence to torah, but by strict adherence to the medieval pillars of sacraments and cooperating grace. Like Paul, Luther found that what had once promised life brought only more doubt, despair, and death. So, both men understood that, in one sense, the coming of Jesus represents the termination of the law as the primary means of reconciliation and righteousness.

Jesus is the end of the law in that he has fulfilled the very function of the law; he has reconciled humans to their Lord. As John Calvin says, Christ is the "meaning, the authority, the fulfiller, and the way to the fulfillment of the Law. He is Himself the righteousness before God, the divine justification that everyone is to receive and can receive through faith."

So how does the law function after Christ? Theologians see a threefold function of the law. The law serves to condemn us of our sinfulness. The law functions to restrain evildoers. It not only restrains evildoers and reveals human sinfulness; it "serves as the best instrument for enabling them [believers] daily to learn with

greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they (we) aspire to follow."

In other words, the law is still good, as Paul says in Romans 7:12: "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good." Because we have a God who is faithful and constant, those moral laws that pleased God in the time of the Israelites continue to guide us in God's will, even with the coming of Christ. In this sense, the law does not terminate with Christ; it still has a role in Christian life.

In fact, Christ himself was the only human being who was capable of upholding and obeying the deeper meaning of the law. With a few exceptions, all torah commands had to do with one of these two primary relationships: human-human, God-human. Christ showed us what the law was intended to do and be. He was in harmony with God the Father, and he showed pure *agapē* love to his fellow human beings. He lived the life the torah was designed to create.

Finally, Christ is the very purpose of the law. The law was given in order to join humans and God. With the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the purpose of the law has been achieved; God and humanity have been united. **Kyle D. Fedler**

So, in light of what Christ has done, what is our role in this Christian life? Paul says we are to share the good news that salvation is for all! Evangelism or sharing the good news is something that must always happen in context; there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Some of us are comfortable doing mission and consider it to be the most acceptable form of evangelism, while others of us are more comfortable going out and talking about faith, even in public, nonchurch, places. Even though these are different, both forms of evangelism—social justice and witnessing to one's faith are equally valid.

The tension around evangelism is not from the methods employed but rather from the motive; the tension is between doing and believing. Those of us who feel that, by our actions, we can "save" others, whether by good works or persuasive

words, have missed the mark. Paul offers a gentle correction to us who would bring Christ to others. He reminds us that Christ is already present. It is not up to us to save the world. God has already done that. It is up to us to believe that this is true and live as though we believe. We cannot save others by our actions alone.).

Some of us are comforted by this. We see it as permission to sit back and let God do the work of salvation. It feels like an easy way out. Others of us find the whole discussion of salvation to be old-fashioned and not especially relevant for the complex issues facing the church and the world in the twenty-first century. We skip over this to get to what we see as the substance of making a difference in practical ways. For many of us Christians, though, a thoughtful consideration of Paul's teaching raise big questions: If God in Christ has already done it all, then what are we supposed to do? What is our purpose in the world? What does it mean to "confess with our lips" and "believe in our hearts"?

For us questioning Christians, it is important to understand that neither private piety nor street-corner sermons will do. What the apostle is urging is a life of interior and exterior authenticity, a life based on faith. We may not be able to change anything, but faith can change everything.

This Christian faith creates an entirely new geometry. The circle of believers that was once defined by its boundaries, the law, is now defined by its center, Christ. The attention to who is in and who is out is no longer the focus. Rather the focus is on the One who calls and claims, redeems and loves. We are called to start in the center and live knowing the circle is infinite.

This radical inclusion incorporates all who believe, however they express that belief (v. 10). The infinite circle wraps around those who speak and witness, showing their faith with their lips, and those who pray and ponder, practicing their faith in their hearts. Jews and Greeks alike are in, because no one is out. God's generosity extends to all.

We who are made in the image of God are to be generous, as well. Just as no one has a monopoly on the gracious abundance of the Lord's love, so those who know that love in our very being are to ensure that others do also.

Faith is an embodied reality. Paul speaks of lips (vv. 8, 9), mouth (v. 10), heart (v. 8, 9, 10), and feet (v. 15). The way for believers to explain God to those who have not heard is not through theological brilliance, scriptural proofs, or doctrine and dogma. Instead, it is living out the word that is within (v. 8), and doing that in a way that makes sense.

We are to frame our message so it can be understood—human to human, somebody to another body. For some of us this means witnessing to our own faith by speaking about it, or by engaging in actions that proclaim that faith in concrete ways. In any case, the instruction of Scripture is clear: those who believe are to be messengers of the good news of faith. **Martha C. Highsmith**

Commentator Mary Beth Anton tells the story of a woman in her church turned fifty and, in an effort, to celebrate the occasion her husband offered to give her a grand party. She began making plans but was troubled by the expense and the fuss dedicated to her birthday. So instead of a party for herself, she and her family threw a Thanksgiving feast for the members of the church and its neighbors, including the community who gather nightly to share their meals at the local soup kitchen. She hired the best country-western band in West Texas.

On the night of the party, all were welcomed, both neighbors who had never darkened the doors of the church and lifelong members. Everyone sat around tables eating and listening together as the band played old-time gospel hymns. Following dinner, Jody Nix and his Texas Cowboys cranked it up. Before long the wooden dance floor at the front of the fellowship hall was full of dancing couples young and old, members and neighbors dancing and laughing together.

She says she does not know if anyone was converted that night, but Jesus was present and introduced all around. She does know that several who had never been to church before are attending worship regularly on Sunday mornings. Because of the party, the members of the church have renewed their efforts to welcome visitors into their midst. *How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?* How are they to become acquainted with, get to know, believe in, and confess one whom they have never had the chance to really meet? With Paul, we must commit ourselves to evangelism. *How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!* **Mary Beth Anton**

Because Christ is the termination of the function of the law, fulfillment of the function of the law, and the perfect adherent to the law, our job is to tell others, human beings need only believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, in order to be united eternally with the beloved community. **Kyle D. Fedler**

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