

## Same Lord

### Romans 10:5-15

Today's lectionary text is in the middle of Paul's extended theological wrestling with the fate of his fellow Jews. Paul anguishes over the fact that most Jews continue to seek righteousness through the law rather than through faith in Christ. We are not so different – although we know salvation is a gift we keep trying to work our way to heaven. Therefore, it is not surprising that we should find, here in the middle of Paul's explanation of the salvation of Israel, a treatment of the relationship between Christ and 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 means this in several ways. The word he uses is *telos* and can mean "termination," but it can also mean fulfillment or purpose. These are the different ways in which Christ is the end of the law. First, he terminates the law as a means of salvation. Second, Christ is the culmination of the law by doing what we were incapable of doing, reconciling us to God and to one another. Therefore, the incarnation represents the very purpose of the law, namely, uniting us with God.

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. In verse 5, Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, which places the burden of salvation on human fulfillment of the law. Then in verses 6-8 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 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 our Lord now stands. These passages from Deuteronomy end 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 the Lord. 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). The reformer, Martin Luther, knew this as well. He 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 to God and righteousness before God.

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, another reformer, said, 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." Jesus is Lord!

However, we are not to throw out the baby with the bath water. The law continues to function after Christ. Lutheran theologians see a twofold function of the law. The law serves to condemn us of our sinfulness and the law functions to restrain evildoers. Where Luther saw these two differences between grace and law, Calvin saw a third. The

law 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 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 our Lord. In this sense, the law does not terminate with Christ; it still has a role in Christian life.

Christ himself was the only human being who was capable of upholding and obeying the deeper meaning of the law. The commands of the law had to do with 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, unconditional, *agapē* love to his fellow human beings. He lived the life the law 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.

Because Christ is the completion of the function of the law, fulfillment of the function of the law, and the perfect adherent to the law, 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 community of God. **Kyle D. Fedler**

All this is good for us as believers, our salvation is secure, but now that we are Christians Paul tells us we are to share the good news with others; this means we are to be about the work of evangelism. We know it exists, but we are vaguely embarrassed by it. It is not proper to go around airing one's personal faith to others, especially those who

might not share that faith. It is uncomfortable, not the kind of thing one would want to do, not something to talk about in polite company. Evangelism is one of those ideas that has somehow lost its way, at least in some religious circles; it has come to be associated with itinerant preachers, tent revivals, and fundamentalists—expressions of faith and ministry that seem out of place in our modern world, even offensive to some.

This is odd because evangelism is the work of those who are messengers of good news, all who call Jesus Lord. The word itself has the same roots as "angel." No matter what the times are like, we could all use a little good news; we could all benefit from more angels around us. Why then is it be so difficult for us to engage in evangelism and to support those who would talk about their own faith if Jesus is our Lord?

Evangelism is something that must always happen in context; there is no one-size-fits-all approach. For example, some Christians consider mission to be the most acceptable form of evangelism, while others are more comfortable going out and talking about faith, even in public, nonchurch, places. Perhaps our setting loosens the lips and softens the heart so that we can speak of personal faith in an open and unselfconscious way; and for another faith to take a more hands-on, problem-solving approach. Even though they are different, both forms of evangelism—social justice or witnessing to one's faith—are equally valid.

The tension around evangelism is from the motive; the tension is between doing and believing. When we think we can "save" others, whether by goods works or persuasive words, we have missed the mark. Paul offers a gentle correction to us who would bring Christ to others. He reminds us that Christ is Lord and 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. We cannot even save ourselves (vv. 5-7).

Some of us are comforted by this. We see this as permission to sit back and let God do the work of salvation. It feels like an easy way out. Some 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 raises 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"? What does it mean that Jesus is Lord; the same Lord of both the Jews and Greeks?

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 same Lord. The attention to who is in and who is out is no longer the focus. No, the focus is on the One who calls and claims, redeems and loves. We are called to start in the center and live as though the circle is infinite—which, of course, it is.

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. There is no paradox of being versus doing; instead, they are opposite sides of the same coin. Just as

no one has a monopoly on the gracious abundance of the Lord's love, so those of us who know that love in our very being are to ensure that others do too.

Faith is an embodied reality. In this brief passage alone, Paul speaks of lips (vv. 8, 9), mouth (v. 10), heart (v. 8, 9, 10), and feet (v. 15). The way for us 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 in context for those who hear. God is Lord, but humanity could not hear or live up to God's expectations; so God gave up God's unknowable majesty and was born in the form of a human child, became Jesus our Lord, so we could hear and understand in our human context.

We are to do the same, framing our message so it can be understood—human to human, somebody to another body. Depending on the context, this could mean witnessing to one's 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 in Jesus our Lord – the same Lord who lived, died and rose again, are to be messengers of the good news of faith. **Martha C. Highsmith**

The Jesus of whom Paul preached and of whom he asked us to give witness is the same Lord yesterday, today and forever more. Our righteousness can only come through faith in Jesus.