

October 30, 2011

Good morning church family. This does feel like a family. This month I reached a little anniversary – being here at the church for 5 years. It's been a great experience for me to be a part of this church family – and for my family to be inside this family. I can just look back and when I first came here and I looked like I was 35 years old ... *Now* look at me!

ROMANS 9:30 – 10:13

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

¹⁰¹ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them [Israel] is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on 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, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (ESV)

- The Two Ways of Righteousness (9:30-33)
- Why The Wrong Way Fails (10:1-4)
- Why The Right Way Succeeds (10:4-13)

My family and I have been watching the old William Wyler film from 1959, *Ben-Hur*. And there is an emotional scene where a Roman prefect, Quintus Arrius adopts a young slave named Judah Ben-Hur. Arrius had tormented and even tortured Ben-Hur, but without giving too much away, there was a shipwreck, and Ben-Hur saved the life of his Master. And in return, Arrius adopted this slave, giving to Ben-Hur all of the rights of a Roman citizen, as well as making him his first born son. It's a powerful and joyful scene. Which ultimately leads to the possibility that through this one man, a community of slaves and outsiders and rebels, the Jews, might be accepted as full participants in the community and the Roman Empire... well, that is the hope... And then there is this strange character of the carpenter, but....

Anyway, it reminded me of the book of Hosea. And you'll remember that it's in that book that this man Hosea is required to marry a woman who is an adulteress. And the names of this woman's children had symbolic significance. One child was called *Lo-ammi*, which means in Hebrew "*not* my people." God, you'll recall, had expressed his judgment against the 10 tribes of Israel that had become apostate at that time, and he had declared his anger and wrath at them by saying "You are no longer my people. But I will call those who are not my people, my people so that the failure of one group of people became the occasion for God's expanding his mercy to those *outside* his community.

And Paul recalls exactly that story up in chapter 9, v. 25:

²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,
 "Those who were not my people
 I will call 'my people,'
 and her who was not beloved
 I will call 'beloved.' "

²⁶ "And in the very place where it was said to them,
 'You are not my people,' there they will be called
 'sons of the living God.' " ¹

In other words, those people who had NOT been in the family, not been in the community, not been followers of the law because they hadn't been given the law or the covenants... would be adopted *into* the family of God. Paul is saying that the Gentiles would experience an affection from God that they had no claim upon.

And friends, that is exactly what you and I have. That is what we call grace – having an affection that we have no claim on. This is better than what Ben-Hur had. He received affection that he had to earn to be released from bondage, but you and I are adopted – men and women alike – as first-born sons of the living God because of... nothing we have done. Nothing in us that in the sight of God is lovely. And yet he is pleased, in his mercy, to call us his people. To adopt us into his family where we have no birthright or entitlement to that affection. And it's in Christ that he calls us his "beloved."

Think about this: the culture in which we live repeats the myth, over and over again, that God loves everybody equally, and that it is no big deal to be loved by God. God IS love, he is a loving God, so of course he loves us. God loves everybody, so of course we're buddies, or as I saw on a T-shirt in Princeton, "Jesus is my homeboy."

But Paul says, no, this love, this adoption, your relationship to God is *not* a birthright, but rather a gift and a privilege. Because we have no claim on the love of God. There is nothing in me that he should desire me, but in his mercy he has turned his affection to all who put their trust in him.

¹ Romans 9:25–26.

And Paul's point is that there have always been two ways to righteousness – two ways to be right before God – v. 30: "What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would *lead* to righteousness *did not* succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works."

Paul's asking, rhetorically, WHY? Why is it that someone who hasn't been in the redemptive, covenant community has found the pearl of great price, but those that had the clues, the map, the oracles of God and the law, have missed it?

And his answer is that God came to his own and they received him not. The one whom God appointed, Paul says, to be the cornerstone of his house, the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God, became the stumbling block (v. 33), the rock of offense. Israel, in other words, tripped over grace. They fell over their own Messiah because they couldn't fathom the idea that they couldn't receive God's favor through their own righteousness.

I told this story just over a year ago when this idea of righteousness first came up, and this is the place to be reminded of it: Spurgeon told this story of a King.

He was a good king. He had a vast kingdom and many, many subjects. One day, one of the king's subjects, a gardener, came into his courts. He brought with him a huge carrot. He presented the carrot to the king saying, "Thank you, O king, for ruling justly!" The king was impressed with the gift, and perceived that the gardener was skillful and hard working. He said to the gardener, "because I can see that you are a skillful gardener, and would be a great service to me, I am giving you the much larger land next to your garden to farm. Go and produce good fruits!" The gardener left and did as the king had commanded. Meanwhile, a horse breeder, another of the king's subjects, overheard their exchange. He noticed the king's generosity and favor on the gardener and so the next day, he brought one of his choice horses before the king as a gift. The king, putting together what had happened, took the gift from the breeder saying, "thank you."

Turning to leave, the king was interrupted by the breeder who said, "O king, but what about the favor you bestowed on the gardener?" The king turned to look at the breeder said, "Ah yes, that gardener gave his carrot to me, but you have given this horse to yourself."

This is the question that keeps coming up, over and over in this book: Whose righteousness matters? And the answer is, it's not yours that matters, but the king's. And if you ask, "Don't I contribute *something* to my salvation, my justification, my righteousness before God," Paul ultimately says, "Yes: sin, rebellion, hostility, hatred of God, and idolatry."

It's very simple. There have always been two approaches to being right with God – any formula that includes *something* you contribute (whether it's all you, or half-you, half-Jesus, or whatever percentage you want to come up with) or it's all grace, it's all of Jesus.

- Why The Wrong Way Fails (9:32-10:4)

Point two: Why the wrong way fails.

Back in the late 17th, early 18th century, in the colonies in New England, if a man wanted to be ordained as a Congregationalist minister, he had to give a "yes" to this question: "Are you prepared to be damned for the glory of God?" This was a psychologically and theologically mistaken question, if for no other reason than Paul tells us in Romans 8 that it's impossible for a believer to be separated from the love of God in Christ. But the intention was to reveal the same zeal and the same passion that Paul himself professed back up at the beginning of chapter 9: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart." The anguish is so great that he says, "If I could, I would be accursed and cut off from Christ." In other words, "Damned for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

And we still have this word zeal as a part of our ordination vows: **Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel?**" The point was and is, Paul was zealous to see people brought to faith in Jesus Christ, and so must we.

But there is an interesting thing about zeal. Zeal or passion is never enough. As Tim Keller says, zeal without knowledge – without knowledge in particular – is fanaticism. Paul knew this! After all, Paul – when he was Saul – had himself been VERY zealous. Read Acts 13-17, and you'll see that Paul's enemies were as zealous to see him out of commission as he was to see them saved!

And so there is zeal for God WITH knowledge, and zeal for God WITHOUT knowledge. **Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the *truths* of the Gospel?**

This is Reformation Sunday. Which makes it all the more interesting to note that one of the most famous evangelical leaders in our country recently said that "The first Reformation was about doctrine; the second one needs to be about behavior... We need a reformation not of creeds, but of deeds. It's time to stop debating the bible and start doing it. This is the new reformation I'm praying for."

The irony is that Paul says here – and history shows that this continues to be right – that there has always been a play for the heart and for action, over and against the head. Nearly anything we do in the church today can be justified by its success in conjuring emotional passion and zeal for good works regardless of how quickly and how many victims of these "revival fires" get burned out in the process.

Protestants long complained that Catholics used works – things like the veneration of Mary, and the naming of saints – as ways to stoke up the passions and zeal of its members, but we Protestants are just as capable of zeal – reaching to the heavens in works righteousness. There are all kinds of reasons for this, but one of them is that many people think that the Christian faith is essentially about ethics. It's easy to see why. Ethics are common to all religions. The culture thinks that is what religion is all about – doing good works.

And ethics IS something we share with other religions. We agree ethically with Muslims and Jews and Hindus on certain ethical issues, as an example. But when you do that, when your zeal is focused on ethics and works, on deeds over creeds, you move away from the distinctives of the gospel.

Believe me, the problem of the evangelical church, is *NOT* too much doctrine.

For instance, have you wondered why, after, so many impressive evangelistic campaigns over the years, there really doesn't seem to be a massive mobilization of the laity in the effort of mission and evangelism? According to Gallup, evangelicals make up as much as a quarter of the US population. So why isn't there a major revival in this country? Just before the Great Awakening in this country – I know this is hard to believe – but just 10% went to church every week back then. Here we are, with more numerical, greater financial and more technological resources, and yet there is no great evangelistic movement at the moment.

Now, you could say that it's because ministers like me aren't telling people as often as we should how important evangelism is. But I suspect not. We did a ten week class on evangelism last year, and another 6 weeks on apologetics, and then there are all kinds of how-to-witness seminars going on at many churches that I know of...my sense of other pastors is they are discouraged by the lack of soul-winning.

So why? Why aren't we motivated? Paul gives a key when he says that, "being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God's righteousness."

In other words, it's full conviction of a particular truth that produces zeal, not the other way around. We often think that great feelings and great actions are what matter, but great thoughts gets in the way. And in fact, if zeal, if passion, if actions and works saved you, these people would lead the parade. Paul is *moved* by their zeal. I think he feels as I do – the zeal of many people I know I not only admire, but their love for the Lord and their willingness to obey puts me to shame.

But the scary thing that Paul says here is that it is possible to have tremendous zeal for the Lord – enviable zeal for the Lord – *and still be under his wrath.*² You are, Paul says, *ignorant* of the righteousness of God, and you seek to establish your own, and because of what you don't know, you refuse to submit to God's righteousness.

Sinclair Ferguson says, "If you ask most members of most protestant churches how they are to be acceptable before God, they will tell you, "Because of what I have accomplished, in my small way. I am better than most, and so I think God will accept me."

² Michael Horton says that "If zeal and activities are to determine whether God is pleased with an individual or a movement, we should be sending apologies to the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses for criticizing such deeply committed zealots." White Horse Inn, 1996.

And it's just this response that breaks Paul's heart, because this had been his heart. Don't you see? Paul is really saying, "Don't be like me." You know, there is that place in Philippians 3 where Paul says "You know, there was a time when I was just like this, and if anybody had asked me, 'How are you doing in life and with God?' I would have said, as far as righteousness under the law is concerned, I'm blameless. Oh, I know I'm not perfect, but God isn't going to find any real or significant flaw in me."

But God penetrated Paul's blindness. In fact, I would say that there must have been a day – the day perhaps when Paul's zeal without knowledge of the gospel collided with Stephen's zeal with and for the gospel, that this was the moment when Paul saw what a fool, what a sinner he was, trusting in and pursuing his own righteousness.

But all of that gain became loss. Seeing grace in Stephen's faith right before his death, he knew he had to confess his righteousness as sin. That is a key component in the knowledge of the gospel. We use, Paul says ("I know; I did it myself!") our righteousness to get to God but when you do that, what you do is you keep what God gives away from you. Stephen repented, and God gave him his righteousness in Christ, but you gave yourself your own righteousness.

What we understand and what we believe DOES matter.

Isn't the verb there in v. 3 kind of odd? It doesn't say that they refused to "seek" God's righteousness. No, it says they refused to "submit" to the righteousness that comes from God. And that makes all the difference.

The message of the righteousness of God COMES ONLY in Jesus Christ. It is THE message that will come and deconstruct your own righteousness. Your own pride, your own-self sufficiency, and takes away anything you might try to offer God.

It's weird, but the only thing that builds up resistance against the righteousness of God is the message that this very righteousness can *only* come through God's free grace. It's a mystery, but there you have it: that the message of something FREE – free grace, your sins forgiven in Jesus Christ – that hardens so many hearts.

That really is, by the way, the key to understanding the parable of the sower. The seed, the good news, the word of God, is given and tossed everywhere, it's sown on all different kinds of soil. But the soil that's hardest is the pathway. And the reason the pathway is hardest is that this is the very place where the sower actually lives and moves.

This is why the "wrong way" – living by works – fails: Some of you have heard the gospel a thousand times. Some of you are very young, and you've heard your mom and dad talk about it over and over, and they almost seem in pain to get you to understand it. You almost feel bad for them, don't you? You might be pushing back at the gospel. You don't want to need what they're giving because it sounds like oatmeal. But some of you are old. And you've heard the gospel many thousands of times. And you won't submit to it, because really, you fear that everything you've built up – who you think you are – would collapse. The gospel, grace, forgiveness, God's righteousness – that's stuff is for everyone else – but you're "good."

You know some of the same people who are hard soil when it comes to the gospel will at other times, when hard times hit, say, "If I just believed enough, or if I could just have that sort of experience, or get that anointing, or follow that formula." But the bible actually says something that I think a lot of evangelicals would say is heretical: *understanding ... is primary*.

Proverbs tells us that "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is."³ Thinking and the heart are held together in the bible – you can't separate them. Your thoughts about God, about ourselves, about your neighbor, about your job, about history and the nature of the church...all of these things determine the practical flow, the actions of your life.

This is a hard one. I can witness at the beach and on the boardwalk, have a fish glued to my bumper, vote for the only godly politicians, and really feel like I love the Lord... but if I believe that any part of my acceptance before God depends at any point on what I do, what I feel, or experience, or willed, or decided or became, I am as just as under God's judgment as a serial murderer.

The only way we can be reconciled to a just and holy God is to have Christ's righteousness, his holiness, credited to our account – this is the gospel. THIS is what produces true zeal and real revival.

- **Why The Right Way Succeeds (10:4-13)**

Over the years there has been a lot of ink spilled on what Paul means by "Christ is the end of the law." Some people have taken this to mean that the law has no place at all in New Testament.

But the word there for end is *telos* or end – we use it in the word "telescope," right, to see out into the "ends" of the heavens. It can mean the finish of something – like at the end of the movie, when it says, "The End." It can mean termination. But in other places it means the end in terms of fulfillment or culmination. Or the goal of something. What Paul really means in v. 4 is clear when you read it in context: Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness*. All of the commandments are reaffirmed in the New Testament, so that what Christ does is fulfills the law, he keeps those commands perfectly, and then as Romans 4 says, His righteousness is imputed to you. Reckoned or credited to you. There is an end to the law as a way of obtaining righteousness.

And this is so important because this defines the 2 religions of the world. There is every other religion, and there is the gospel.

When Paul says in v. 9 that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," he doesn't mean that Christ helps me save myself. Or helps lift me up, but that Christ does EVERYTHING for my salvation, and all I do is confess that he has done it all. Full stop. I contribute nothing but the confession of it – how his death and resurrection saves.

³ Proverbs 23:7 KJV

Some will say, "C'mon, you're always harpin' on justification." But look at the thief on the cross – was he ever able to articulate the doctrine of justification?"

Well, no. But what *DID* the thief say? He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He didn't use or even know the word justification, but the sentiment is this: I am surrendering my eternal future to you. I'm a convicted thief. I've got nuthin'. But you've done nothing wrong, so I surrender to you."

About 150 years ago, in the worst slum district of London, there was a social worker whose name was Henry Moorehouse. One evening as Moorehouse was walking along the street, he saw a little girl come out of a basement store carrying a pitcher of milk. She was taking it home. When she was a few yards from Moorehouse, she suddenly slipped and fell, and the pitcher dropped onto the sidewalk and broke. The milk ran down into the gutter, and the little girl began to cry as if her heart would break. Moorehouse quickly stepped up to see if she was hurt. He helped her to her feet, saying, "Don't cry, little girl."

But she kept crying. She kept saying, "My mommy'll whip me; my mommy'll whip me."

Moorehouse said, "No, little girl, your mother won't whip you. I'll see to that. Look, the pitcher isn't broken in many pieces." As he stooped down beside her, picked up the pieces, and began to work as if he were putting the pitcher back together, the little girl stopped crying. She had hope. Maybe this stranger could repair the damage. She watched as Moorehouse fitted several of the pieces together until, working too roughly, he knocked it apart again.

Once more she began to cry, and Moorehouse had to repeat, "Don't cry, little girl. I promise you that your mother won't whip you." Again they began the task of restoration, this time getting it all together except for the handle. Moorehouse gave it to the little girl, and she tried to attach it. But, naturally, all she did was knock it down again. This time there was no stopping her tears.

Finally Moorehouse picked the little girl up in his arms, carried her down the street to a shop that sold crockery, and bought her a new pitcher. Then, still carrying her, he went back to where the girl had bought the milk and had the new pitcher filled. He asked her where she lived. When he was told, he carried her to the house, set her down on the step, and placed the full pitcher of milk in her hands. Then he opened the door for her. As she stepped in, he asked one more question, "Now, do you think your mother will whip you?"

And she said to him, "Oh, no, sir, 'cause it's a lot better pitcher 'an we had before."⁴

The reason grace, where someone does EVERYTHING for you, when you know you've got nothing to contribute, works so well, is so powerful, is that God holds out a new pitcher filled with the new life of Jesus Christ and places it in our empty hands. And he assures us that he won't judge us now, because "it's a much better pitcher than we had before." In fact, it is a perfect one. It is the very righteousness of God's Son.

Let's pray.

⁴ Illustration taken from Boice, J. M. (1991-). *Romans* (1139). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House.