

Though I know I was meant to look through both chapters 9 and 10, tonight I want to focus on the first part of Chapter 10. And I want to start with a question. Have you ever heard people say that it doesn't matter what you believe in as long as you are sincere? Now if you said that to a policeman, I'm pretty sure he would disagree with you, since it does matter what you believe because it may be illegal. Normally when people say this they are talking about religion. What I'm wondering is why can't there be right and wrong in religion as well?

What Paul is doing here at the start of Chapter 10 is talking against the idea that it doesn't matter what you believe in. He is showing a deep concern for his people the Israelites because largely they are unconverted to following Christ. They are sincere about their faith, faith in the Law of Moses, in the traditions of their forefathers like Abraham. They are sincere, but sincerely wrong.

The word Paul uses to describe them is zealous. And zeal without knowledge is a dangerous thing. Just think of people like suicide bombers and the like. No one would deny that they are zealous for what they believe; after all, they give their own life! But they are so very dangerous, taking the lives of many people for what? Something that ultimately is meaningless.

The problem that the Israelites had I think partially comes from a misunderstanding of what it takes to be righteous with God. Paul wrote this letter to a church that was largely full of Gentiles and a few Jews because what had happened in AD 49, was Emperor Claudius kicked all the Jews out of Rome, and that meant that the church there became predominantly full of Gentiles.

Both knew that God was a holy God, and what they needed was a way to be made righteous before him. However the Jews had a preoccupation with the Law and its place in the life of Christians, while the Gentiles tended to be arrogant about the fact that it was only by faith that they were saved and didn't have to worry about the law.

I think sometimes we can have a similar problem to the people then; we hear that word righteousness a lot in church and may wonder, what does it mean? Well righteousness basically means being right with God. If we believe the world has been corrupted by sin, and God cannot accept us like that and what we need is a way to be made right with God. That concept - being right with God, is righteousness.

For Paul here in Romans it comes down to two views of righteousness. One was right. One was wrong. Verse 3 says "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." Two views of righteousness – God's righteousness and self righteousness.

For the Jews they thought that righteousness came through the law. When Israel first came out of Egypt and God said they would be his people, he gave them the law as a way to live, commands for them to keep covenant with him and receive some very great promises. But by itself, it was never a way to righteousness.

The only way that someone could be righteous through the law Paul speculates is to "live by it" And that means always. Perfectly. There is never any time in thought or deed that you can break it, otherwise you are not righteous. So no, the law wasn't there to help people be righteous, the law was there so we could be conscious of sin. You remember we read that part of Romans chapter 3 earlier and we saw how Paul talks about the law as something that condemns. But it is more than that. In Galatians 3:23 & 24 it says:

“Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”

The law shows us how far we have fallen short of God’s grace and points us to Christ, as Christ is the only one with righteousness that is acceptable for God, because it is God’s own righteousness. Here in Romans Paul says that Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

You could read this verse and think that perhaps we don’t need the law anymore as Christ has ended it. He hasn’t ended it in the sense that it is completely useless; Christ has ended the idea that we can be right with God any other way than through him. No matter how good we are as Christians, how many church services and special conferences we attend in a year, how many times we have Lord’s Supper, none of that brings us closer to being right with God. Christ is the only way.

That’s the thing isn’t it? We can so easily treat righteousness as something that has to be “done”. We have to be made righteous to stand before God so what do **we** have to do? The answer is nothing. There is nothing that *we can* do to be right with God. And some people hate that. People want something that they can be responsible for that makes them right. They want to be right with God on their own efforts. Well thankfully the message of God doesn’t bend to the will of people. Righteousness is not something that **we do**...it is something that **we are** through Christ... Through Christ there can be righteousness for everyone who believes.

For the people Paul was writing to this was important, it meant that for Jew and Gentile alike, if they confessed in Jesus as Lord, they would be saved because of Christ’s righteousness, not because of the law or anything else. Righteousness is a gift from God and not something that the Jews, the Gentiles or us had to work to achieve.

Paul compares the gift of righteousness to the gift of the law that Moses had received in Deuteronomy. Basically back then the Israelites had just been given the law and there was a whole list of blessings for them if they followed it. Moses says to them that it isn’t too difficult for them to get these promises and laws because God had given it to them. It wasn’t high in heaven or in the abyss but given to them. And Paul is saying the same thing here in regards to righteousness. The righteousness that we have through Christ is by **faith** and doesn’t demand that we are some sort of superhero. No one had to ascend to heaven to bring Christ down, or to go the depths to raise him from the dead. Christ did it all for us. It is God’s righteousness - We just need to accept it by faith.

What about people who think that their faith is what they do to get God’s righteousness... Well even that too is a gift from God. How many of you have heard that verse, Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness? It’s in Genesis chapter 15 in case you are wondering. Abram does believe but this is only after God spoke to him. God had just said, “I am your shield and your very great reward” and Abram questions “What can you give me since I remain childless”. God responds and says, you will have offspring as many as the stars. And then Abraham believes and has faith. Ephesians 2 also says that faith is a gift from God so that no man can boast in himself.

So what do we have to do? Is there any response that we should have? Paul says what we need to do is call upon the lord. Verse 9 “If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” What we have to do is what God says. Confess with our mouths and believe with our hearts. It’s an open offer. To everyone. We just have to call upon the Lord.

Being a Christian is not something that happens by osmosis. That is sitting here in a church building doesn’t make you a Christian any more than me leaving my Mazda in a Ferrari dealership would make it a Ferrari no matter how long I left it. It’s a conscious decision that we have to make and the work of God. If you are sitting there and pondering, “but what about predestination and who God calls, and free will and and...” just stop for a moment and listen to what Paul is saying here, what the key to righteousness is, leave that other stuff to one side for the moment. The key is, whoever calls upon the Lord will be saved. It’s intended be a comforting promise.

There’s another great promise snuck in this section too. It says in verse 11, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” Paul is talking about a trust that implies action. It’s a similar sort of trust that we have for our favourite chair at home. We trust that it will hold us and we sit down in it with our whole weight. We can trust in Christ and he will never let us down.

I’m not saying that life will be easy. There are still plenty of things in this life that we will need to plan for and think about. But if we confess that Jesus is Lord, it means that we believe he loves us, he will look after us and ultimately we will be saved because of his death and resurrection.

We like sometimes to have other options, back up plans. We see the economy falling over a bit and start thinking what should we be doing with our money, should we diversify our funds into different things, or should I just take it all out of the bank and stuff it under a mattress. Or now that the government has guaranteed it put everything in the bank! Well that may be well and fine for now, but in the greater timeline of eternity, there are no back up plans, we have to put all our eggs in the one basket. God is a jealous God, there is only one way to salvation and that’s through Christ.

Now for a lot of us, this is probably not new. In fact you probably know it well and have taken comfort from it in the past. I still think that it’s good to remind ourselves of the message of the gospel, the good news of Christ because it is so easy for it to get lost amongst our busy lives. I want to make sure that we grasp the complete nature of what Christ has done for us.

My father pointed me to a passage in 1 John 3 and read me something from a commentary on it which I thought was really appropriate. It says there that some Christians may be concerned about the second coming and wondering if for them it will be a day of joy. They think of things like Jesus parable of the Talents and are concerned about a day of reckoning for everyone when Jesus returns and he will want to know what we have been doing with the heritage that he left behind. John however points out in 1 John 3:2 that now we are children of God. The return of Jesus will disclose the truth about God’s relationship with us, not evaluate whether that relationship is satisfactory. Through Christ we are God’s children *now*.

That’s it. That’s pretty much what I wanted to share with you today. Pretty much. But there is just one more thing.

Given that we have this comfort in Christ shouldn't we tell others about it? I'm not going to go into detail on the rest of the chapter but let me just share with you this verse "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" I've just started working at CMS, Church Missionary Society and seen there are so many places in the world where the word of God needs to be heard. But that need is not just around the world, it's also here in Australia. We have been hearing about Connect 09 at the church and have had that figure, 60% of people in Sydney don't have any contact with a church, and 60% of those people have no contact with a Christian at all. In population of over 4.3 million that's a lot of people who haven't heard of this comfort. So if you have taken comfort from this passage, share that comfort with the people around you. We are called to spread the Gospel through the world and that means you, it means me. We need to be able to think how as part of the body of Christ we can share in this task. Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

So when you leave here and go home and see the people around you who may have no contact at all with a Christian, think how you can connect to these people to share the gift of Christ. And if the thought of sharing the Gospel starts making you feel all nervous and the pressures of the week start creeping back in on you, just take a deep breath and remember the assurance that we have had in this passage. The promise that we can share with the world, that we can take deep comfort from is that if you have confessed Jesus as Lord then between you and God, everything is alright. Not because of who you are and what you have done, but because of Christ. We can leave here and rest secure with that knowledge. If we repent and believe, if we trust in Christ, we WILL be saved. And we will never be disappointed.

Let's pray

Lord we thank you so much that all are saved through faith in Christ. Thank you that we can be right with you. We are so glad that we don't have to worry about how we might achieve this righteousness ourselves, about what we have to do, but that we can depend on Christ and his righteousness. Thank you that Christ will never fail, never forsake us, and never disappoint us. We pray that this message will reach deep into our hearts so that it shows in how we live, that the unreached people of the world and of Sydney will see us and wonder about you. Give us the courage to share your word with them. We pray this in your precious son Jesus name, Amen.