

Romans 9:30-10:21

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Date: 31 January 2017

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[0 : 00] As human beings, our actions and our decisions matter. The decisions that you make have permanent and irreversible consequences.

! Human responsibility is a real thing. And it's an awesome thing that we make decisions that can have staggering consequences.! And the same holds true in salvation.

As human beings, we have an awesome responsibility. We make decisions which have eternal consequences. I heard of a student last week in London who went to a lunchtime meeting and wasn't a Christian.

During that lunchtime he heard the Bible taught and proclaimed and became convinced of his sin and his need of a Saviour. At the end of that meeting he cried out to God in faith.

He left that meeting a Christian. It's a decision that will change the rest of his life and his eternity. And whether a person is saved or not rests on what they do about this Gospel message and what they do with Jesus Christ.

[1 : 13] I know if you were here last week, you might say, well hang on a minute. Last week he was saying, Romans chapter 9, it's all down to God's choice. So I've changed my mind during the week. It's not that I've changed my mind, it's that we both are true.

Romans 9 to 11 is dealing with the issue of the unbelief of Israel. Why have the people of God rejected the message of God? chapters 9 to 1 to 29 explain the widespread unbelief of his fellow Jews.

And it taught us that that was down to God's free sovereign choice. So we saw that how God, before the creation of the world, freely, sovereignly chose to have mercy.

God is sovereign, on some people, and not on others. It's a shocking teaching isn't it? God is sovereign and it provokes inevitable questions. Surely that is not fair for God to choose some people and not others.

Well it's not my fault if I don't believe. But we learned last week that the sovereign God who created the world has the right to do what he wants with his creation. With those he made for his own glory.

[2 : 23] But our passage tonight, this afternoon, moves from divine sovereignty that God is in charge to human responsibility. So if we ask the question, why is it that so many Jews were not saved?

Verse 30 of chapter 9 says, what shall we say then? The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it. That is a righteousness that is by faith.

But the 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.

That is Israel, the people of God, they chose the wrong way. And it was their own fault. Chapter 9 to 11 is all about why were the majority of Jews not saved.

And chapters 9 verses 1 to 29 says it's God's free choice. But chapters 9 verse 30 to 10 to 21 is saying it was down to their own wrong choice. Both are affirmed.

[3 : 27] Both are true at the same time. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility. And the Bible teaches you've got to hold on to both of them.

There's two sections. Chapter 9 verse 30 to 10 verse 13 present us with two ways to get right with God. But only one of them works.

Two ways to get right with God but only one of them works. It's one word that keeps cropping up again and again. I don't know whether you've picked it up. It's the word righteousness. And the word righteousness here means being in the right with God.

It means having a right standing before God. Now how do we get that righteousness before God?

Well chapter 10 in verse 3 gives us two options.

A right way and a wrong way. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

[4 : 29] That verse is saying there is a righteousness, a right standing that comes from God, that is given from God. And there is a righteousness that comes from ourselves. God's righteousness and our righteousness.

So first of all the root that doesn't work, a righteousness from ourselves. And one of the characteristics of these self-righteous people if we can call them that. Well verse 31 says, But the Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Or why? Why did they not succeed in that? Because they did not pursue it by faith but as if it were based on works. They thought that the way that they could get to God was by keeping the Old Testament law.

By keeping the rules. So if you look at verse 3 of chapter 10, it speaks of them trying to establish their own righteousness. So the self-righteous, they try to rely on their own works.

And that way of operating with God does not work. It doesn't get you there. And yet it is very, very common.

[5 : 45] To think that the way that you can get right with God. Well actually it is by trying your best. It is not just limited to Jews is it?

That God will accept us because of our works. Some people believe that who are religious.

Some people believe that who are not religious at all. And they think that God will accept them just because, well, they are a good person. God will accept me because I am a good bloke.

God will accept me because I have tried my best. They know the commandments. Maybe they think, well, I have kept the commandments. The variations all on the same theme. That God will accept them because of their life.

My good outweighs my bad, we hear. It is very common. As he lay dying, Lord Nelson said, Doctor, I have not been a great sinner. Thank God I have done my duty.

[6 : 43] My duty. And that attitude is typical, isn't it? It is widespread. Let me say this. I think that that is particularly prevalent in older people.

That when you go to speak to older people about the gospel, what do they say? I have tried my best. I have lived a good life. I have never done anyone any harm.

It is that magnificent statement. I am sure God will understand. And so the self-righteous rely on their works. And secondly, they stumble over Christ. Chapter 9 verse 32.

It says they did not pursue it by faith. They did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.

As it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, a rock of a fence. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. What Paul has done there is he is drawing two verses from Isaiah.

[7 : 40] And he is calling Jesus Christ the stone that God has placed in Zion. But instead of building on Christ as their foundation, the Jews have tripped over him.

He has gotten in the way. Is that true? That when he came they were offended. He came unto his own, but his own received him not. They were so busy keeping the law that they ignored the very person whom the law was pointing to.

Who in the words of chapter 10 verse 4 is the end of the law to all believe. By keeping it perfectly. By dying for our failure to keep it.

He fulfilled the law. So if you ask people a question, good living people, what do you think of Jesus? Who do you think Jesus is? It is very, very revealing.

Because what your view of Jesus is, this lunchtime, reveals where you stand before God. The self-righteous person, they refuse to accept Jesus to be the God sent rescuer and ruler.

[8 : 44] They might like his teaching. But they don't accept him as the God sent rescuer and ruler. He's the stone they fall over instead of the stone they build on. Moral people, upright people are just as likely to reject Jesus as immoral and loose living people.

The self-righteous rely on their works. They stumble over Christ. And here is the shocking one. The self-righteous people may be zealous for God. Look at chapter 10 verse 1. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

For I bear the witness that they have a zeal for God. But not according to knowledge. They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

So you look at the Jews in first century Palestine. And they did very well. They were very zealous. They were good at zeal. Paul in Acts 22 verses 23 recounts how he was brought up, wasn't he? A very strict Jew. And he says that in that state he was zealous for God. I persecuted the way to death because I was zealous for God, says Paul.

[9 : 56] He was so zealous for God as a Jew that he persecuted Christians to death. That is taking your religion pretty seriously. But zeal for God is not enough.

And if you are zealously trying to get to God through your works, you will not get that. Zeal on its own is not enough. Fundamentalist suicide bombers are pretty zealous for their understanding of God, aren't they?

Orthodox Jews, I was in Finchley on Saturday, not long ago. You see, they're zeal for God. J.W. is standing in the cold. They're not knocking doors so much, are they?

Standing by those things. They're zealous for God. The list goes on. But zeal for God is not a past that you can show on the gates of heaven. It's a great lesson for us as evangelicals.

So the three hallmarks of religious, self-righteous people are they rely on their works, they stumble over Christ and they may be very zealous for God. And if that is you this afternoon, you will never get right with God until you face up to the fact that self-salvation does not work.

[11 : 05] And there is no way forward until a person does that. And we need to pray, don't we, for these people who are on this self-salvation path. And Paul's prayer for his fellow Jews, verse 1 of chapter 10, is that they might be saved.

We mustn't assume that good people or right religious people are going to heaven. And we mustn't avoid self-righteous people because we find them annoying or irritating. Self-righteous people need the gospel as much as unrighteous people.

You may very well be somebody who has been put off Christianity because he thought it was all about self-salvation. And self-salvation can be very pleasant, but when you combine self-salvation with religion, it is very and extremely unattractive.

Self-salvation and religious zeal, when you put them together, can really screw someone up. And so they become very critical of others, very hard on themselves, bitter and resentful.

It's not an attractive thing at all. And so if you just assumed, oh that is what Christianity is all about, you need to take another look. Because that is religion, it is not the gospel.

[12 : 23] And the gospel is what this next section is all about. Chapter 10 verses 5 to 13 are about what verse 3 refers to as the righteousness that comes from God. Or verse 6, the righteousness that comes by faith.

What are the hallmarks of this way, of God's way of getting right with him? Verse 5, for Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on law. That the person who does the commandment shall live by them.

But the righteousness based on faith says, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven. That is bring Christ down or who will ascend into the abyss. That is to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth, in your heart.

That is the word of faith that we proclaim. Those words are taken from Deuteronomy chapter 30. And in Deuteronomy 30 verses 1 to 14, Moses is speaking about the law.

And he is making the point that the law is accessible. You can understand the law. But the apostle Paul takes those words about the law and he applies them to the gospel. And what he is saying is that what God is asking of you this lunchtime is not difficult.

[13 : 25] God has done everything. Do you know that? God has done everything. So that you can know him. You don't have to take a trip up to heaven and bring Christ down.

Because in the incarnation Christ has come down. You don't have to go on some journey to the ends of the earth to bring Christ up from the dead. Because God has raised Christ from the dead and has exalted him to his right hand.

And that all you have to do is believe the word of the gospel. All you have to do is believe the word of faith which the apostles proclaimed. It is so simple.

It has all been done. All you need to do is accept Christ. But for some people, for many people, maybe for you, it is too simple. And they find the simplicity offensive.

We have, don't we, a sophisticated mindset. And we want it to be complex and uncertain. And inconclusive. So life has to be this long search for meaning.

[14 : 25] And inconclusive. It has to be something that you debate endlessly. And you can never know. Some people say, oh, we can never really know, can we, whether God exists.

But the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, this Lensite, is so simple. That it is offensive. Maybe to some of you.

It is so clear and it is so simple. That a very small child can understand it and accept it and love it. It is so clear and so simple and so easy that somebody with learning difficulties can accept it and cherish it and love it.

This is saying that you could come to ELT this lunchtime not knowing God and under his judgement. But you could walk out those doors at the end of this lunchtime right with God and know eternal life with him.

[15 : 26] And today could be the biggest day of your life and your eternity. And so how does that transformation come about? How does that happen? Well, simply, and listen to this, simply by accepting Christ and crying to him.

It is that simple. It really is. You could read the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18 if you want. But secondly, faith means it is open to everyone and not some elite.

That if salvation was through our works, then it would be open to people who are, it would only be open to people who are the most moral and upright. But because it is by faith it is open to anyone and everyone.

Do you see that emphasis in verse 4? For Christ is the end of the Lord for righteousness to everyone who believes. Verse 11. For the scripture says, everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.

Will not be put to shame. 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. Verse 13 again.

[16 : 27] For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I fear that my assumption is that good people are more likely to respond to the gospel. Do you know when I go to invite people to the carol service or I go to invite people to some medium where there will be a presentation of the gospel.

I think, well good people, they are more likely to respond so I invite them. But the opposite is probably the case. Because good, living, religious people are more likely to be self-righteous and they are more likely to think that they don't need Christ.

Faith means it is open to everyone. Not just some moral elite. And thirdly, faith means trusting in Christ as Lord and not just the saviour. Verse 9. Because if you confess in your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Verse 12. 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. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is very clear that faith means we accept Christ as Lord.

That is boss, that is ruler, that is king. Because he rules. And it is only because he rules that he is able to save. And without receiving Jesus as Lord, you cannot, you cannot be saved.

[17 : 50] And so today we are not just offering you rescue. We are offering wonderful rescue. But we are saying that to come to Christ and receive his rescue means that you must say, Lord Jesus, I am not in charge of my life any longer.

You are. Jesus is the king who calls us to submit to him. And fourthly means faith. Faith means confessing with your mouth but believing in your heart. Look at verse 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.

They are not two separate conditions. It is not saying you have got to believe in your heart and then at some point later confess with your mouth. Faith in Christ means that you will confess that openly. When somebody comes for Christ, it is public. Christianity is not a private change of heart. It is more like getting married where the allegiance is open and public.

You cannot live underground as a Christian. So everything we looked at last week about divine sovereignty, that stands.

[18 : 54] But we need to affirm the significance of human responsibility. There are two ways people try to get right with God and only God's way works. And if you head down some self-salvation route, you will never get to God.

And you are responsible. You are accountable for that. And you cannot blame God. The place of human responsibility is just as apparent in the final verses of verses 14 to 21. Now in Jeremiah chapter 8 there was that unbreakable chain, wasn't there?

God's grace, this unbreakable chain of God's sovereignty. But we have the chain of human responsibility here. Look at verse 13. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him of whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without somebody preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news. Do you follow the chain there? To be saved you need to call on the Lord. To call on the Lord you need to hear.

[19 : 59] And so you need to believe on him. And to believe on him you need to hear about him. To hear about him you need someone to preach to you. And that preacher needs to be sent by God.

And so for someone to be saved, that chain of events here highlights a couple of things. I think it highlights the necessity of speaking up. You have to hold chapter 9 and chapter 10 together.

God is sovereign and we are responsible. God is sovereign in salvation. He freely chooses people. But it doesn't mean we just leave it up to God to zap people.

William Carey. When he wanted to go to be a missionary. And the church leader said, isn't it? God will save the heathens.

I can't remember the quote now. But with or without you. To have faith means you need to believe the gospel. And to believe the gospel, someone needs to tell you the gospel. Verse 17.

[20 : 59] So faith comes from hearing. Hearing through the word of Christ. And that word of Christ you only hear if someone tells you about you. You cannot figure out the gospel by looking at the night sky.

Or night sunset. There needs to be a messenger who will pass it on. So when verse 18 says. But I ask have they not heard indeed they have. Their voices gone out to all the earth. And their words to the ends of the world.

It's actually talking about Psalm 19 there. And Psalm 19 is actually a psalm about general revelation. What God speaks to us about in creation. But actually when we look at creation.

All we can know is that there is a God. And we're condemned by him. But Paul takes that speaking about general revelation in creation. And he applies it to the gospel. The special revelation. He's not saying that Israel heard the word of Christ.

By looking at the stars and the sunset. He's saying that just as God revealed himself to everyone. Through general revelation. Through creation. So now the gospel has gone out into all the parts of the known world.

[22 : 06] And so if people are going to be saved. They need to hear the gospel. And the chain of human responsibility also highlights the need for faith. But to call on the Lord and be saved.

You need to believe in him. And this faith comes from hearing the gospel. And this is where Israel came unstuck. Had they heard verse 18? Yes they had. Did they not understand verse 19?

Well yes they did. And when God through Moses and Isaiah had warned that the gospel would go to others if they rejected. So where did things break down? Verse 16. But they have not always obeyed the gospel.

Verse 21. But of Israel he says all day long I've held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people. For the people of Israel the salvation chain broke at that link.

At the faith link. They didn't believe the gospel. They were disobedient. And whether or not you are saved eternally or condemned depends on how you respond to the gospel.

[23 : 08] Whether you accept it in faith or whether you reject it. A person's eternal destiny hinges on what they do with the gospel message. It's the biggest decision anyone will ever make in this life.

So this question why did Israel not believe? Why did others not believe? Romans 9 is all about divine sovereignty. That God has chosen to have mercy on whom he has chosen to have mercy. But Romans 10 is all about human responsibility. Only those who respond to the gospel in faith will be saved. How can it be both at the same time?

How can it be? Surely if God has chosen his people before time. Surely our decisions matter very little don't they?

Or if it's our genuine choice or our genuine decision. Well God may have foreseen it but surely he didn't determine it. But the Bible answers and the Bible affirms no both are true.

[24 : 10] Back in 1959 J.I. Packer gave some addresses on evangelism and the sovereignty of God. It's still a brilliant book. And it was written to dispel the notion that if God is sovereign we don't need to evangelize.

And he describes divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He describes it as being an antimony. I'd never known that word since I read it in that book. You've learned a new word today. An antimony is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. And he says an antimony exists when a pair of principles stand side by side seemingly irreconcilable and yet both undeniable. And there are cogent reasons for believing each of them. Each rests on clear and solid evidence but it is a mystery to you. How can they both be squared with each other?

Well isn't that the case of divine sovereignty and human responsibility? Another way of putting it is the apparent tension or the apparent opposition between what God does as king and what God does as judge.

[25 : 24] So as a king he orders and controls all things. And yet as a judge he holds each one to account as responsible for our actions. What should we do with these two realities? God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

Packer writes they must be held together. They must not be played off against each other. And he warns that our minds dislike antimony's. We like to tie everything up into little neat parcels with all the appearance of mystery dispelled and no loose ends hanging out.

Hence he says we are tempted to get rid of one truth in the supposed interest of the other or for the sake of a tidier theology. We have got to resist this temptation.

And so we bow and we recognise that here is mystery. Here is mystery that I cannot solve in 25 minutes on a Tuesday afternoon. And we will not be able to solve in this world.

And I think that puts it very helpfully because we live with this mystery and we worship a God whose ways are beyond our understanding. And isn't that exactly the same point as the end of Romans chapter 11.

[26 : 33] Where it says, Oh the depths of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgements. And how unscrutable are his ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord. For who has been his counsellor. Who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid. For from him and through him. And to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Heavenly Father we are all the things.