

Romans 9:30-10:21

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Date: 14 November 2021

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[0 : 00] Do turn to Romans, the end of Romans 9, and Romans 10 is page 946 if you've not gone to church by one.

If you're into the Simpsons, you may be familiar with Homer Simpson's grace. Here it is. Dear God, we paid for all this ourselves, so thanks for nothing.

Thanks for nothing. You're allowed to laugh at that. It is irreverent, isn't it? But that is the way that many people live their lives.

They live their lives without a thought for God. Dear God, we paid for all this ourselves, so thanks for nothing. We're self-made people. We don't need God. At least that's the way that many people seem to live.

And even when it comes to our Christian lives, what has God got to do with it? It was my decision. It was my upbringing. My parents brought me to church. What has God got to do with it? So thanks God for nothing.

[1 : 14] I hope that's not what you're saying this morning. In Romans 9 and 10, Paul puts two truths right next to each other. He talked last week in chapter 9 about divine sovereignty.

And then in chapter 10, he's going to talk about our part. Human responsibility. And in chapter 9, we saw that if any one of you is saved, it's all of God's doing.

It's God who takes initiative. It's God who's sovereign in the matter of our salvation. He chooses who will be saved. It's not because there's anything in us. It's not that God saw that there was great potential in you.

It's pure grace. It's simply because God has decided to set his love upon us. For no other reason than that. It's grace, not race.

It's faith, not physical descent. It's mercy, not merit. It's God's choice. That's what Romans 9 has taught us. But now we come to chapter 10, and Paul is going to argue very firmly for human responsibility.

[2 : 17] Why is it that people don't believe? Why is it that the Jewish people didn't accept their own Messiah? Paul's going around the Mediterranean.

It was a matter of strategy and policy. He goes to the Jews first. He'd go to the synagogue. And as soon as he mentions Jesus, they throw him out. Now, why is that?

Surely, the Jewish people with all their privileges and all their background, they're the very people that should be the first to believe in the Lord Jesus.

But they don't. And why don't people believe? And Paul gives us four reasons why they don't believe. And I want to give you those four reasons this morning. The first reason why the Jewish people didn't believe is that they had a foundation, but they stumbled over it.

They had a foundation, but they stumbled over it. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. They had a list like me.

[3 : 18] It's hard to say that. Israel is a picture. It's like a construction site. Like a building site. And the workmen are busying themselves on site, and they keep tripping over this stone.

And nobody knows where this stone on the floor came from, or how it got there, or what it's there for. You go to Ikea. You know, you go to Ikea, and you go around the showroom.

Showroom at Ikea looks amazing, doesn't it? And you think, oh, I'll get that. So you go down to the marketplace, but it doesn't look like the showroom. It doesn't look like the showroom in the marketplace. It's flat-packed furniture.

And so you put it in your trolley, and you get it home, and then you begin to assemble it, isn't it? And there's always seemingly something left over at the end. Those little wooden bits.

Or those little kind of, well, you don't know what they are, but they're left over, aren't they? And you can't for the life of you work out what those little bits in the Ikea furniture are for. So you chuck them in the bin.

[4 : 20] And then you find out, of course, when the book here starts to topple over. The very key thing that you needed. You should have read the instructions first. It's a bit like what it's like here, isn't it?

It's what the cornerstone is. God has put it there in Israel. And not only did he put the cornerstone in Israel, he's told them he's going to put it there. He said this is the key stone in God's plan to save the world.

And they haven't just got it. They've stumbled over it. And they've got fed up of it. And they've tossed it to one side. It's like the parable that Jesus tells.

In the gospel, the man who stumbles over some buried treasure. That parable. In a field. The man isn't out looking for treasure. He stumbles over the treasure in the field.

And then he goes and he sells everything he has so that he can buy that field. And he can have that treasure. And Paul is saying, that's what you've done if you are a Christian this morning.

[5 : 30] That's what the Gentiles have done. People who weren't Jews. The field, it didn't belong to them. It belongs to the Jews. It's their field. But they didn't recognize the treasure that was theirs.

He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. That's the tragedy of the Jewish unbelief. Eugene Peterson puts it like this. He says they were so absorbed in what they themselves were doing.

They were so absorbed in their God project that they didn't notice God in front of them like a huge rock in the middle of the road. So they stumbled into him and went sprawling.

Or let's change the picture. Look at verse 30. He talks about what he calls, let's call it the race for righteousness. Verse 30. What shall we say?

He's trying to explain why the Jewish people do not believe. The Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it. The righteousness is by faith.

[6 : 37] Look at verse 31. But that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

Let's go to the horse races, okay? And Israel are the firm favorites. They were kind of God's chosen people. It's a bit like a horse race.

Let's call it the justification stakes. And the firm favorites in this race are the Jews. And yet against all odds the firm favorites lose the race.

And they even fail to cross the finish line. Where's the finishing line? Chapter 4 verse 10. Christ is the end of the law to all who believe. That's the finishing line. That's where the Jewish people should have ended up.

If they'd been listening to their prophets, if they'd understood the Bible, but instead they're still out on the track wandering around in circles. And the rank outsiders, the Gentiles, who never even knew that there was a race on in the first place, have just wandered into the track and stumbled across the finishing line.

[7 : 44] Isn't that right? He says the same thing at the end of the chapter, doesn't he? He says, I will be found by those who did not even seek me. Isn't that why you are a Christian this morning, if you are?

It wasn't that you went looking for the Lord Jesus. He comes looking for us. And on comes the commentator and the analysts, the pundits of this race.

And they give us the explanation for why things have gone so terribly wrong. They, the Jews, they pursued a righteousness not by faith, but as if it were by works.

And that's still the same mistake that many people make today, even in churches. It's so ingrained in all of us that we think that somehow we've got to impress God.

We think that we've got to somehow get on the right side of God. It's the default mechanism of the human heart. So we always resort to works. So there's some disaster zone and so we try a little bit harder.

[8 : 58] I've let God down so I'm going to pray a little bit more. I must read my Bible more than I used to. I'm going to give financially a little bit more.

That is works. And that's the mistakes that the Jews made. They pursued a righteousness that they thought was a DIY righteousness.

That they could do it themselves. And instead of the righteousness that comes through Christ by faith, they thought they could do it themselves.

You go to the beach, let's imagine it's a sunny day, and you go to the beach, and you're driving to the beach, and the sign says, beach, three miles. You slam on the brakes.

You stop the car and you say, wow. You pull up. You get your deck chairs out. You get the family out. You get the picnic out. You get the food out. And you sit by the side of the road by the sign and you have a wonderful picnic.

[10:01] And then you get home. It wouldn't happen, would it? You wouldn't do that. You wouldn't do that. People say, did you have a nice day at the beach?

They say, oh, well, we didn't actually go there. We just went to the sign. But that's what happened to the Jews. The law of God was a signpost to them. You don't stop at the signpost.

You go to where the signpost is pointing you. And the law was a signpost that was meant to point us to Jesus. So here's the end of the law, says verse 4. As a way of getting right with God, Jesus is the end of that.

You'll never get to know God by trying your best and trying harder and keeping the law. The way to get right with God is by believing in the Lord Jesus. He is the only one who's ever kept the law.

He's done it for us. So Israel's problem, if I can use a big word, is Christological. Their big problem is that they'd fail to understand who Jesus is and what he'd come to do.

[11:08] So they missed the way of salvation. They had a foundation. It was laid for them, but they've stumbled over it. The second reason Paul gives us is that they had a zeal.

They were zealous. They had a zeal, but it was wrong. Listen to verses 1 and 2. It's so moving to hear Paul's concern for his people.

He says, Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

If you had an operation tomorrow and you were given the choice, who do you want to operate on you?

Do you want Paul Levy or Dr. David Lafroy, Mr. David Lafroy? Who would you rather have operate on you? Me or the consultant?

[12:09] Or what about, who would you rather have operate on you? Would you rather have a medical student, first year medical student or a qualified surgeon? What about if they're an enthusiastic medical student?

Would that make a difference? Let's see, you can have a hearing operation either with Mr. Maniali, the ENT consultant, world-renowned, or with a very, very salous and enthusiastic but slightly clueless medical student in the first year.

You see, zeal in and of itself may be really admirable, mightn't it? But it can also be fatal. And Paul was proof of that. So we think of the Apostle Paul, don't we? I've got a book this week of New Comedy on Romans, and there was a drawing, a picture of the Apostle Paul.

He had this kind of dinner plate around his head. He was floating off the ground. He looked like a saintly being. Paul was a murderer. He says, as far as zeal is concerned, before I became a Christian, I persecuted the church.

I separated children from parents. I broke up families. I broke up marriages. I destroyed churches. I murdered Christians. I stood at the side, and I held the coats for people who threw rocks at the head of a man called Stephen.

[13:30] He was a wide-eyed religious fanatic. And he sincerely believed that he was doing the will of God. That is dangerous, isn't it?

What if you believe, what if you sincerely believe that blowing up infidels will give you a guaranteed place in paradise? You can be sincere in that belief, can't you?

But that sincerity is wrong, and it's fatally wrong. So people say, don't they, they say, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere.

It's absolute nonsense. The truth is, you cannot afford to be wrong about Jesus. That's Paul's point. You can afford to be wrong about lots of things, but the way of salvation and the way to get right with God, you cannot afford to be wrong about.

George Bernard Shaw apparently attended an Easter mission in Cambridge University, and the preacher was explaining that Jesus Christ took the place of sinners on the cross, the substitutionary death for Jesus.

[14 : 46] of Jesus on the cross for sinners. George Bernard Shaw was incensed. He got up, he shouted at the preacher, I'll carry my own sins, thank you very much.

I'll carry my own sins, thank you very much. His pride was offended by the very idea that Jesus had to substitute himself for us, for you and I to be right with God.

that Jesus had to live the life that you cannot live. And Jesus had to die the death that you deserve to die. And that offended his pride so much that he got up and he stormed out of the building and said, I'll do it myself, thank you very much, I'll carry my own sins.

That is a fearful thing. to appear before this God, a God before whom no secrets are hid and all hearts are open.

To stand before this holy God who cannot even look on iniquity and say, I'll stand at my own strength. I'll pay my own way.

[15 : 55] I'll carry my own sins, thank you very much. Is that you? You can be really zealous. You can be really sincere, very sincere, but sincerely wrong.

So, if you could do it yourself, why on earth did Jesus come into this world? If you could pay the price for your own sins, why did Jesus bother coming?

And that's Paul's next point, really. You see, they didn't believe. They had a foundation, but they stumbled over it. They had a zeal, but it was misdirected. The third reason is this.

They had the gospel explained to them very clearly. Very simply, they had a word from God, but they complicated it.

They had a simple word from God, but they complicated it. That's the third reason. And verses 5 to 13, it sounds a bit complicated, but Paul is quoting Moses in Deuteronomy.

[17 : 00] Deuteronomy is a sermon. It's Moses' last sermon. It's to say of a Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter, he preached as a dying man to dying men.

That's what Deuteronomy is. That's what Moses is doing. He's preaching as a dying man, he knows he's going to die, to dying men. It's his last sermon, and he's got a lot to say about the way of salvation.

And in verse 5, what does Moses say? He's describing the righteousness that is by law, trying to work your way to heaven. And he says, it's the person who does the commandment shall live by them.

That's the law. Well, that's the law. You know, you go to, I had a cousin called Rhys, and he's a bit older than me.

He's quite a character. And my Auntie Anne shows us cats, loads of cats. And Rhys would get a magnifying glass, and we know where the light comes in from the window.

[18 : 02] You get the light kind of onto the cat, and then move the light around. And so the cat would go absolutely nuts. So that if you've got a cat, you can do it when you get home.

And the cat is reaching for the light. Reaching for the light. All this, and the cat would be jumping up at the light, and Rhys would play tricks with this cat, doing all sorts.

It's jumping and stretching and grabbing, the cat would. Desperate to trying to get the light. You could never get the light. You could never get the light. Moses is saying, if you want to save yourself, you're like the cat.

Scratching. Scratching around. Trying to keep the law. Trying to get the beam of light that's always out of reach. You'll never get it. You'll never capture it. You're never going to do enough.

You'll never be quick enough. And if you're going to try and get right with God by keeping the law, then you're going to have to do everything. Absolutely everything. He says that the person who does the commandments will live by them.

[19 : 07] That's the whole point. You can't do it. Who can do all these things? None of us can. The law is too high. It's beyond our reach.

Haven't we seen that as we looked at the Ten Commandments? That to try and establish your righteousness, that way is a dead end. But then he says, and he tells us the right way, and I think Paul is quoting from Moses, but I think he's kind of putting the words of Moses into the mouth of Jesus.

They certainly come from Deuteronomy, these verses. He's saying that the way to get right with God through the law is a dead end, verse 5, but verse 6, the righteousness based on faith. Then he quotes from Deuteronomy, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Jesus down, or who will descend into the abyss, that is to bring Jesus up from the dead.

But what does it say? The word of faith. The word is near you. It's in your mouth. It's in your heart. That is the word of faith that we proclaim. What does it mean?

It's a great story told about Toscanini. Toscanini, he was a great conductor of the Philadelphia Philharmonic Orchestra.

[20 : 28] You can tell I've read this in a book. Toscanini, the great conductor of the Philadelphia Philharmonic Orchestra. He was known as the master of the art of negative motivation.

Some of you exercise that gift too. He was a master of the art of negative motivation. And Toscanini, in his quest for perfection, he'd often berate and belittle his musicians.

One night, after an almost flawless performance of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, an enraptured audience applauded endlessly. When the applause finally died down, he turned to the orchestra and in a very loud stage whisper, he said, ladies and gentlemen, you are nothing.

and I am nothing. But Beethoven is everything. I think that's what Paul is doing here.

He's putting Jesus' name into the words of Moses. I think that's what Paul wants you to know in Romans 10, that Jesus is everything. That Jesus is everything.

[21 : 39] And wonderfully, it's not about your performance this morning. It's about his performance. You don't have to climb up into heaven.

You couldn't anyway. And you don't have to climb down to the depths. You don't have to climb into heaven because you've brought him, he's come down anyway, isn't he?

He's the word that was in the beginning with God, the word that was made flesh and dwelt amongst us and we have beheld his glory full of grace and truth. And if you could reach heaven under your own steam, well, why did Jesus come down?

And you don't have to go down into the depths to claw your way out of the mess that you've made for yourself because Christ has been there. Do you remember? He was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell and on the third day he was raised.

If you could atone for your sins, if you could make it by being a good little boy or girl, by being a little bit better so that your good deeds were your bad deeds, why on earth did Jesus have to die?

[22 : 46] Why did Jesus have to go to a cross? You see what he's saying, Jesus is everything. It's not about your performance, it's about his performance. All I have needed is hand as provided.

And God has provided in Jesus the perfect life, the spotless life that was laid down in death for me. And all you have to do is to believe in Jesus. Do you see what it says?

If you miss anything else today, don't miss this. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. You just have to agree with God about Jesus. Because God raised him from the dead and God vindicated him.

And if you believe that Jesus died for your sins and was raised again for your justification, if you believe that in your heart, well, confess it with your mouth. Now that's the way of salvation.

It's not complicated. It's as simple as that. You might say, oh, well, surely God helps those who help themselves. No, he doesn't. God helps those who can't help themselves.

[23 : 53] Surely, I need to clean up my life a little bit this morning and I need to sort it out. No. It's salvation that the Bible talks about, not self-help. And you say, well, maybe I need to sort out my theology.

I'm not really clear. I don't know what I believe. I need to do more time thinking and a bit more reading. No, you don't. You're not saved by correct doctrine.

You're saved by Jesus. By the living Jesus. Jesus will sort your theology out. If you call on him, if you come to him, he'll teach you. And maybe you say, well, that's how it starts.

That's the way in. But it gets more complicated afterwards. No, it doesn't. You go on as you came in. As you call on the name of the Lord, you will be saved. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, verse 13, will be saved.

I've loved, I love this story. I've told it to you a few times. I've tried to resist giving it to you for a few years. But here it is. Arnold Prater tells the story about a man who worked for many years in a barber's shop.

[24 : 59] He's about 65 years of age. And this is how Prater describes him. He was the vilest, most vulgar, profane, wicked, talking man I think I've ever met. And he must have had some kind of fixation with preachers because every time I came into the shop, he doubled his output.

One day when I was in, he wasn't there. I asked the other guy where he was. He said he's been taken very seriously ill. He's in hospital. And for a while they despaired of his life. About six weeks

after that, Prater said, as I was entering the post office, I heard a voice call my name and I turned around and I saw that man sitting in his car.

He was a mere shadow of his former self and he beckoned me over and he said in a voice so weak that I had to lean forward to catch his words. Preacher, I want to tell you something. And then he went on.

I was in a coma down there in the hospital. I couldn't move or see. They didn't know it but I could still hear. I heard the doctor tell my wife, I don't think he can last another hour.

And then his voice trembled. So there was a moment before he could continue. Preacher, I had never prayed in my entire lifetime but I prayed then.

[26 : 10] Oh God, if there is a God, I need you right now. And when I said that, I don't know how to put it into words, I was given an assurance that he was there. And then the tears welled up in his eyes.

Oh preacher, oh preacher, I've kicked him in the face every day of my life for 60 years. And for the first time in my life, I call his name and he comes. And all you have to do is call on the name of the Lord.

You don't even have to say it out loud. You can do it from where you're sitting right here, right now. In your hearts. It is simply saying, I cannot do this God on my own, I need a savior.

Abraham Lincoln, on one occasion, he had to sign a really important piece of legislation. It really troubled him. He was the president of the US.

He spent the whole night pacing the floor of his study before he was able to sign that piece of legislation. But in the end, of course, all he had to do was put pen to paper. It was momentous.

[27 : 21] It was an important piece of legislation. It had momentous consequences, but all he had to do was put his pen to the paper. To become a Christian is a momentous thing.

And we need to count the cost. And we need to fully understand what it means to be a follower of the Lord Jesus, especially today. We need to count the cost and we need to understand what he's calling you to do with your life.

And what he wants you to sacrifice. We need to understand that it is momentous. If you become a Christian, it will dramatically change your life. But all you've got to do is call out to him.

The word is on, it's on the tip of your tongue. The word is in your mouth. Do you believe in your heart that Jesus died for your sins and that God raised him for your justification to make you right with God?

Do you really believe that in your hearts? And say it. Call on him. To be your Lord and Savior. One last thing.

[28 : 29] Why didn't Israel believe? They had a foundation but they stumbled over it. They were zealous. They were really serious about religion but they were misguided. They got it wrong. They were misdirected. They had the way of salvation simply explained to them by Moses but they complicated it.

And then the last thing is they had messengers sent to them. And I think that's what you see particularly at the end of the chapter. There's a whole flurry of quotations from the Old Testament. There's a whole cluster.

And he's saying it's not as if you haven't heard. That's often what people say to me. What about those who've never heard? Well, what about them says Paul? Who are they?

Who are these people who've never heard? I don't know who they are. I don't even know if they exist. Psalm 19 is quoted. And it's really kind of repetition.

He goes back to Romans 1 and he says it's not that we don't know. It's that we suppress what we know. So remember what he said in Romans 1.

[29 : 36] He said from the creation of the world his invisible qualities his eternal power his divine nature they've been clearly seen. Ever since the creation of the world the things that have been made so they're without excuse.

In chapter 10 he takes the message of Psalm 19 and he says their voice has gone out into all the world. Creation speaks. And the point he's making here is that the universe itself is a message. We're going to see that tonight in Job. It's a message this world is a message from God that leaves us without excuse. Somebody has said that man's mind his whole psychology is tuned into the revelation which surrounds him.

And so as a generation we can look can't we? We can peer into the structure of the atom. We can stand on the surface of the moon. We've got more reason to believe in God not less.

And so who are these people who've never heard? All of us know far more than we're letting on. It's not that we don't know it's that we suppress what we do know.

[30 : 56] What we know. Jesus is Lord creation's voice proclaims it. For by his power each tree and flower was planned and made. Jesus is Lord the universe declares it sun, moon and stars in heaven cry Jesus is Lord.

By him all things were made that has been made. And so who are these people who've never heard? But there's more to it than that. Because Psalm 19 if you know it it goes on to speak about the law of the Lord the revelation of God.

And he says this converts you this revelation from God. God's voice in creation as you look at it leaves you without excuse. But it doesn't convert anybody.

You need to hear the gospel. And so that question what about those who've never heard? Do you know what Paul's answer is to that?

Go and tell them. Go and tell them. Let's go and tell them. Isn't that what he says? You get to the end of Romans chapter 15 he says something truly remarkable.

[32 : 03] He says from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum Illyricum that's Albania. From Jerusalem all the way around to Albania I fully proclaim the gospel of Christ.

What about those who've never heard? Well let's go and tell them. Let's make sure they hear because if they don't hear about Jesus they won't be saved. Election that God chooses and evangelism go together.

Romans 9 and Romans 10 go together. Look at what it says in verse 14. It says there how will they call on him in whom they've not believed and how are they to believe in him of whom they've never heard?

And again there's just that little of him whom they've never heard. See the only reason that you're a Christian today is because someone shared the gospel with you.

Might have been your parents. Might have been a friend. Somebody was willing to step out of their comfort zone and share the message of Jesus. And Paul says quoting Isaiah how beautiful are the feet of him who brings good news.

[33 : 16] Look at verse 21. Can you look at that? Look at the body language of God. Look at the body language of God. God he holds out his arms.

That's what God has done isn't it for the Gentiles. they've never heard but they've been brought in. They weren't seeking but they've been found. But what about the Jews? Has God given up on the Jews?

No. Verse 21 he holds out his arms all day long. The God and father of Abraham the God of Isaac the God of Israel every time Paul goes to the synagogue he holds out his arms.

And God holds out his arms to a disobedient and unfaithful people. He doesn't fold his arms. He doesn't wag his finger at them. He invites them. And we'll see next week many will respond.

And it means that we as God's people we go as God's church to this community with arms wide open and we implore them. Believe in your heart. Confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[34 : 24] And we know that they will come from the four corners of the earth. And that is how God gathers in his elect. I have got not the foggiest clue who the elect are neither even you. You don't need to worry about it.

And something happens when we do that. Look at verse 14. I want you to see this. That when the gospel is preached can you see it with the footnote and how are they to believe in him on him whom they've never heard.

when the gospel is preached Jesus speaks. And so it's not a lecture what you hear on Sunday morning.

It is Jesus speaking to you through the preaching of his word. Have you heard the voice of Jesus softly pleading with your heart? You've heard loads of sermons you've downloaded masses of information but have you heard the voice of Jesus speaking directly through his word?

Don't be a Romans 9 Christian. Don't be a Romans 10 Christian. Be both. Thoroughly convinced that God chooses and calls people to himself. And thoroughly convinced that we are to go as a church and tell the gospel indiscriminately.

[35 : 45] And are you wondering today if you've got beautiful feet? Is God calling you to be a missionary? Yes. As far as Paul is concerned you're either a missionary or you are the mission field.

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Let's pray.