

## Avoiding Dead Religion

### Romans 10: 16 - 20

- The difference between what Paul is teaching in Romans 9 and Romans 10 is like the difference between the words can and may.
  - In Romans 9, Paul is dealing with the question of can—do we have the ability within ourselves to be saved? And the answer is no. We are dead in our sins, and therefore unable to choose God, so therefore God must choose us.
  - And In Romans 10, Paul is dealing with the question of may. Do all people everywhere have God’s invitation to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved? And the answer Paul and the Bible gives is yes.

**Romans 10: 13** For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

**Isaiah 55: 6 – 7** Seek the LORD while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked man forsake his own way and the unrighteous man his own thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that He may have compassion, and to our God, for He will freely pardon

- In Romans 9, Paul is telling us that the only way we can be saved is if God chooses to take our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.
- But as Paul comes to Romans 10, Paul also wants to make it clear that everyone, Jew, and Gentile alike, may call on the name of the Lord to be saved. Do you see the difference?
- All may do it, but only those whom God makes alive by regenerating their hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can call on the name of the Lord.
- How does a person know that God has regenerated their heart? It’s simple. The answer is right at the beginning of the text we are considering this morning from Romans 10: 16 – 20 but before we go there, let’s just take a moment and review the build up to the verses we are looking at today. That way we can be sure to get the complete context.

**Romans 10: 12 – 13** 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. <sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

- The Gospel, the riches of God’s grace, the good news of Jesus, is for everyone—Jew and Gentile alike. All a person needs to do in order to have the riches of God’s grace as their own is to call upon the Lord for salvation.
- That is why Paul goes on in verses 14 and 15 to give an exhortation to us to be a person with beautiful feet and go into the world and announce the good news of the Gospel, so that all whom God has called will call upon Him.

**Romans 10: 14 – 15** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

- Enflamed with the truth and the hope of the Gospel in their own lives, God’s people, those whom the Lord has already called, are to go, with beautiful feet, and make the Gospel known to all men everywhere, so that they too can believe and be saved.

- Our job is not the can part of the equation, our job is the may part. That is, God must be the one to change their heart so that they can call upon the name of the Lord. Our job is to simply, with great joy, go and let all people know of this great salvation that has found us, so that it can find them too.

**Romans 10: 16-20** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. <sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed, they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." <sup>19</sup> But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." <sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

- What does Paul mean in verse 16? Think of all the people who encountered Jesus, heard his teaching, witnessed his miracles, yet still did not come to faith and believe in him as the means of their salvation.
  - The same is true in churches on Sunday morning. Think of how many people come and sit in church, week after week, hearing the gospel, maybe serving in some capacity, maybe even being baptized, and partaking in communion, yet still don't really come to a point where they give up their life and place their faith in Jesus. All because people simply get religion, not Jesus.
    - Jesus described people like this as he quoted the prophet Isaiah in:

**Matthew 13: 14 – 15** "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. <sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes.

- Hearing but never understanding. Seeing but never perceiving. Why? A hardened calloused heart.
  - When Jesus spoke those words, they were directed primarily at the Pharisees, the religious people of his day. They were a proud people, and their pride gave them calloused hearts. They saw no need for the gospel, or for Jesus, because in their view they kept the religious rules better than everyone else.
  - Now think of what I am saying, because we need to apply all of this to ourselves, or it is worthless. The Pharisees had their religion down pat, but all that did was make them proud and harden their hearts even more. Could the same thing happen to us?
    - The problem with religion, and knowledge about religion, is that when a person gets good at it, they stop seeing their brokenness and sinfulness. "How can I be broken and sinful? I play by the rules better than everyone else. I don't need righteousness that comes from outside of me. I have a righteousness of my own."
    - We need to realize that it is easy for us to hear and understand our religion without really hearing and understanding Jesus and the Gospel. How do we know if that is happening to us?

**Romans 10: 16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"



There is the question that we must give careful consideration to. The answer to that question is how a person knows that they have been regenerated by God, saved. They obey the Gospel. They don't just know the Gospel. They believe and obey it. Now I know that sounds the same as obeying rules, but it is nothing like that at all.

### 1. Are we really believing what we are hearing?

- People who have truly called upon the Lord and been saved, are people who don't just hear the Gospel, they are people who believe the Gospel with faith that produces thanksgiving and then, as a result, obedience to the Gospel. That is what Paul is saying in verse 16.
  - Christian faith brings obedience, but not just any obedience, obedience to the Gospel. It takes true faith to have true obedience.

**Hebrews 11: 6** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- Faith is the necessary ingredient for an obedience that is pleasing to God. How does a person come to faith? Paul told us in detail in verses 14 – 15, and he summarizes it again for us in verse 17.

**Romans 10: 17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

- The word of Christ is the Gospel. It is believing that:

**Romans 4: 24 – 25** (Righteousness) will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- There is the Gospel, the word of Christ, that Christ was crucified for our sins and raised from the dead for our justification. This is what we must believe to be saved and to live a life that is pleasing to God.

- But how do we come to that belief? Paul told us in Romans 10: 17. It is by hearing. So then, should we jump to the conclusion that if people lack faith, it is because they haven't heard? Paul addresses that in verse 18.

**Romans 10: 18** But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed, they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

- As Paul quotes these words, from Psalm 19, he probably has in mind his fellow Jews, because everything in the Old Testament, all the law and the prophets, pointed them to Jesus. For example:

**1 Corinthians 10: 1 – 4** For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

- Jesus and the Gospel loom large in the pages of the Old Testament. Look what Paul says in verse 2. The crossing of the Red Sea was a baptism that marked them as moving from slavery to freedom. Paul makes it clear that this is not just a historical event, although it was that too, but rather

an event of spiritual significance—a picture of the Gospel—of Jesus making a way for us to move from slavery to sin to freedom and blessing.

- While on their wanderings in the wilderness, God sustained them with manna and water from the rock. What does Paul call these things? Spiritual food and drink. In the wilderness, the Jews daily had to depend on God to supply their physical food and drink. Again, this points us to the Gospel and to Christ. Jesus even made that connection for us.

**John 6: 50 – 56** But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.... <sup>54</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>55</sup>For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup>Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.

- Just as the Israelites in the wilderness had to feed on what God provided to them in order to survive, the Word of Christ, the Gospel, demands that we feed on Christ daily in order to be sustained spiritually.
- In fact, look how Paul concludes those verses about Jesus being part of the Old Testament exodus.

**1 Corinthians 10: 4** they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ

- We need to meditate on this for a moment. First, look what Paul is saying. Christ accompanied Israel on the Exodus. In some way the presence of Christ was manifested among the Israelites. Paul is not literally saying that Christ was a rock there in the wilderness, but rather that it was Christ who opened up for Israel streams of water.
- Every year, the Israelites celebrated the Festival of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, to commemorate God's care of them during the exodus. On the last day of the feast, the high priest would take a large container of water and pour it down the steps of the Temple to symbolize the water from the rock. Listen to what happened when Jesus showed up at the Temple on the day this celebration was taking place.

**John 7: 37** On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup>Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

- Jesus is clearly connecting himself to that event.
- Do you remember that during the Exodus from Egypt that there were two times in which the Israelites were in the wilderness with no water to drink? The first time is in Exodus 17 and happened early in the Exodus. As Israel cried out to God, God told Moses to strike the rock, and, as Moses did that, water gushed from it to quench the thirst of the Israelites.

- But years later, in an account found in Numbers 20, the Israelites again were without water. This time God told Moses to merely speak to the rock and water would come flowing out of it, but instead, in anger, Moses struck the rock, not once, but twice.
- You may recall that because of this disobedience, God told Moses that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Why such a harsh penalty from God? Because of what Paul says there in 1 Corinthians 10: 4—“That rock was Christ.”
- So, think what happened. God allowed the rock, that was Christ, to be struck the first time, but it was never to be struck again. It is an Old Testament picture of Christ, whom God the Father would allow to be struck once for our sin, but never again.
  - It is an amazing picture, but the main thing that we want to see is that Jesus, and the Gospel are there in the pages of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, in the Gospels, in the book of Acts, Christ has been preached to the Israelites. A lack of hearing was not an excuse.
- But what about a lack of understanding? Well, look what Paul says in:

**Romans 10: 19 – 20** But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” <sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”

- In these verses Paul is referencing the Gentiles. As a people the Gentiles didn’t have any of the advantages the Jews had.
  - Look what Paul says about them. They were not even a nation. Now, obviously the Gentiles had organized themselves into nations. Paul was living in the Roman Empire. But what Paul means by that statement is that they were not a special people in the sight of God like the Jews were. Remember what Paul wrote about the Jews in:

**Romans 9: 4 - 5** They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. <sup>5</sup> To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

- The Jews had been given every advantage. They not only had heard the Gospel rustling in the pages of the Old Testament, but they had also had it all clearly explained to them by the prophets and by Christ, himself, during his earthly ministry.
- On the other hand, the Gentiles, as Paul says in verse 19, were a foolish people with literally no understanding. They knew and understood nothing about the true God. In verse 20, Paul points out that they were not even seeking God, and yet the Gospel, and salvation, had found them.
  - ◆ I can say this about the Gentiles because I am one of them myself, but the fact that the Gentiles got the Gospel and repented and were saved is proof that anyone can understand

the Gospel, repent, and be saved, if God works in their heart. So, the problem with the Jews could not possibly have been a lack of understanding.

- In fact, think how the Jews reacted to the Gentiles coming to faith. Paul points out their reaction, in verse 19, as he quotes Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. They became jealous.
- If Paul's fellow countrymen did not understand the Gospel, if it was utter foolishness to them, why then the emotional reaction, the jealousy because the Gentiles were embracing it? It would have been just another example of Gentile foolishness, chasing after another false religion. "Who cares what the Gentiles believes" they would say. "We have the real thing."
- But that wasn't their reaction at all. They were jealous, because they knew that the Gospel being received by the Gentiles was a message of salvation by the grace of God, apart from keeping the Law, and that it was being taught not as a contradiction of Judaism, but as the fulfillment.
- They had heard the Gospel and understood it perfectly well, but the Gospel had produced no change in them, no obedience to the Gospel.

## 2. What obedience to the Gospel is.

- Notice, Paul is speaking about something very specific here. It is a certain kind of obedience. An obedience that many Gentiles were coming to, but many Jews were not. So, think about that. Religious people weren't getting it, irreligious, Gentile, pagans were.
  - Gospel obedience and religious obedience, that is following the rules and rituals of religion, are two very different things. The Jews had religious obedience (at least a form of it) but from what Paul writes here in Romans 10, it is clear that they didn't have obedience to the Gospel.
- So, we can see clearly what obedience to the Gospel isn't. It is not mere adherence to rules, rituals, and even the Law of God. In some form or fashion, the Jews had all of those things, but according to what Paul writes here, they did not have obedience to the Gospel.
  - But don't mishear what I was saying. I was not saying that obedience to the Law of God doesn't matter. Remember I used the word mere. Obedience to the Law of God is a big part of Gospel obedience, but it is not the sum of it. A person can seek to be obedient to the Law of God but still not even be close to having Gospel obedience.
- So how does Gospel obedience differ from religious obedience? Paul bookends his letter to the Romans with an explanation of Gospel obedience.

**Romans 1: 5** the obedience of faith

**Romans 16: 26** the obedience of faith

- Gospel obedience is an obedience that is driven by faith and comes from the heart. But faith in what?

**Galatians 2: 19 – 21** through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now

live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

- A life of obedience to God, that is pleasing to God, starts with a death to self and a death to seeing the Law and observance of rituals, as your means of righteousness. Since we are no longer looking to ourselves and our obedience as our means of righteousness, we must look outside of ourselves, to the grace of God shown to us through Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 3: 9** Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

- So, obedience to the Gospel is first, and primarily, to die to yourself and all your self-efforts to find a righteousness of your own, and see the obedience of Christ, and his death for you as your righteousness that comes to you by faith alone.
- Do you remember earlier, we looked at Jesus' words where he told people that just as Israel daily fed on manna in the wilderness, his followers must daily feed on him? What does it mean to daily feed on Christ?
  - Well to feed on something, you first have to hunger.

**Matthew 5: 6** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

- Feeding on Christ starts with a hunger for real righteousness. To have that, you daily have to see that you have no righteousness of your own, and then in your hunger come to Christ, in repentance, for forgiveness and be satisfied in his righteousness. Repentance that leads a person to feed on Christ is the heart of Gospel obedience.
  - Now notice the importance of the Law. It brings us to that place of death to self. It makes us see our hunger and realize that on our own we can't satisfy it—only Christ can. That is the first and primary thing that the obedience of the Gospel does.
  - But the function of the law and the obedience of faith don't stop with a death to self. They also bring us to a life in Christ. What does that mean? A life of love, mercy, and forgiveness that is marked by gratitude and joy. Feeding on Christ daily in repentance and faith is the first part of Gospel obedience, and then living a life of love, forgiveness and repentance is the second part that flows naturally out of the first.
- The law is integral to both parts. The law shows us our need to feed daily on the righteousness of Christ, and then as we do that, the law shows us how to live a life of love filled with joy and thanksgiving.
- Now that qualifier, of joy and gratitude is what separates mere obedience to the law from Gospel obedience.
  - "What kind of obedience do I have?" Is our obedience out of duty or out of joy and gratitude? This question is the best litmus test for whether or not a person truly has Gospel obedience.

- Why do I say that? If we are obedient out of duty, then what we are really trying to do is still earn a righteousness of our own. To put it in terms that I spoke about earlier, we are feeding on ourselves rather than Christ. Do you know what happens if you feed on yourself instead of Christ? You become consumed with self—a slave to self.
- Living in constant fear that if we falter, we will lose our place in the family. But a son has no need to serve out of duty because their place is secure.

**John 8: 35 – 36** The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. <sup>36</sup>So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

- Through faith in Christ, a person’s place is secure in the family of God, so they serve and obey out of delight rather than duty.

### 3. So how do we get this Gospel obedience?

- It takes a special kind of hearing. Look at verse 17 again.

**Romans 10: 17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

- The Greek word for hearing is the word “hupEkousan” and it literally means hearing under. So, the hearing that Paul is talking about here is not just listening but coming under the authority of what you hear.
- What does it mean to do that? It means we don’t just hear to learn and gain knowledge. That leads to dead religion. No, we hear and listen to bring us to our knees so that we daily feed on Christ.
  - Are you doing that? Are you doing it with your family? Are you daily looking to feed on the word of Christ? When you sit down with your family for a meal, are you just eating, or are you taking time to feed on Christ?
- To feed on Christ is more than just reading a few verses, or even a lot of verses from the Bible each day. It is allowing yourself to come under those verses so that they lead you to repentance and faith. If your Bible reading doesn’t lead you to feed on Christ, if it doesn’t bring you anew to repentance and faith, then you and your family are going hungry, and you will soon have dead religion.
  - We are so hurried and so rushed these days. We hardly ever eat together, much less feed on Christ together. But let me urge you to take time to do both each day. Not just to feed on a meal, but to feed on Christ together as a family. As you think about all the things that seem so important to your family, consider these words of Jesus.

**Mark 8: 36** For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

- We so willingly place ourselves under the authority of so many things that can never satisfy us. That maybe seem to hold out the hope for happiness but, in the end offer no real lasting joy.
  - The greatest joy you and your family will ever know is found in an obedience to the Gospel that brings you to feed on Christ each day, so my greatest hope for each of you and your families is that you will:

**Colossians 3: 16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly