

Sunday September 27, 2020
Lesson 4: Faith, Salvation, and Righteousness
Scripture: Romans 10: 5-13

Context:

Our lesson continues in the Book of Romans as we move to chapter ten, a chapter continuing on the focus on grace and the purpose of the law. Paul uses logic to help his readers understand the importance of faith alongside grace and how it ties to the understanding of law presented in the Old Testament. In addition to the ties between the concepts, there is also a tangible expression of faith to come from our words.

Our lesson begins with Paul referring to the patriarch of the Israelite people, Moses. By including him in any of his arguments, Paul helps to align the law with grace and faith. The religious Jewish people of Paul's time revered any ideas or words spoken by Moses. However, there were very religious people led by Moses who had come to the conclusion they could use their own religious piety to merit God's grace.¹ Their attitudes led them to believe they could determine who went to heaven and who went to hell.

For Paul, this is dangerous for the Christian faith. Anytime something taken from religious life is turned into a guide by which humans can calculate salvation and leads to idolatry. Idolatry is a form of rebellion in which one becomes unwilling to be subordinate to God as Creator and trust God to uphold the relationship.² In this case, people who spend more time focusing on righteousness and how it draws them closer to God end up alienating themselves from God. As they spend more time making lists and drawing lines in the sand, they miss out on experiencing the true grace and love from God.

Referring to lines from the Old Testament about the word and the heart, Paul asserts how the Lordship of Christ is what will bring true freedom. Only a trust in Christ can lead to true redemption. Because Christ, not the law, is the basis of a trust of God, Christ fulfills the law as the focus of salvation.³ He is the one people should place their faith in and it is his words and actions which deliver us from ourselves. Thus, Paul makes a point for people to confess Christ is Lord and then place full trust in him.

Paul continues beyond verse nine to discuss how placing this faith in Christ will lead people to the places where they need to be. He quotes from the book of the old covenant in verse eleven to remind the people of how the God of the old covenant is the same God of the new covenant. Moving on to verse twelve, Paul asserts faith is now open to all including the Jew and the Greek because Jesus is Lord, who reaches out to all who call upon him. God wants people to call upon Christ and not themselves to discover how to live and grow as the people of God.

¹Achtemeier, Paul J. "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for First and Second Kings*, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 168.

² Ibid., 168.

³ Ibid., 169.

Application

Perhaps one of the reasons the book of Romans stands as one of the most popular books of the New Testament for Christian teaching and instruction is because of the timeless messages found there. Each chapter is full of admonition for how Christians are to live righteously from age to age. Faith, grace, and the purpose of the law are all interweaved and from time to time, we need to reread the passages and see where we are strong in our walk with Christ and other places where we need some work.

Today's lesson helps us think a little bit more about the doctrines around eternal life and the lordship of Jesus Christ. Often Christians reduce eternal life to beliefs about what happens when we die. How often do we hear people ask questions around heaven and hell? Every youth pastor or pastor in the South has had teens and youth parents ask about a trip to the local judgment house. People talk about jewels in their crown and what they are seeking to do in order to get said jewels. People keep their roles on membership books who may cross the church doors once or twice a year, never show up to a meeting, give perhaps twenty bucks a year, and believe that said membership at x,y,z church will lead to a fantastic welcoming committee at the Pearly Gates.

The chapter today though reminds us we may be missing the point when these things become our focus. Once we move on figuring out the ticket between heaven and hell, we become focused on righteousness. We seek righteousness not so much because we want to grow in our walk with Christ as much as we want to avoid a punitive result after this life.

Thus, we take verses like verse nine: "Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," and turn them into a formula. We know the term in the South as "getting saved." Yet once again we fall into the trap of turning our faith into something which doesn't demand anything of us and allows us to tell God how our life and death will pan out.

The point of Paul's words are to remind us that eternal life begins with Christ. And it is by his Lordship we are to live, following him not just with our salvation one and done moments, but with our entire lives. We are to discern God's call on our lives and follow wholeheartedly, growing deeper in our trust in Christ. Along with our trust in Christ, we are to realize our place is not one of judgment towards others. We are not to get in the business of playing the Heaven and Hell game, reminding people of their place on this list. At that point, we have planned salvation for ourselves and taken a responsibility from God. God is the one who sits on the judgment throne for all of us.

Jesus is perfectly capable of ruling the world and dealing with those who do not follow him. He has done it before and will do it again. He does not need us to speak for him full of pride and arrogance.

He does need us to speak in other ways though. He needs us to say: "Christ is Lord" and then step it up in how we direct our time, energy, and resources. He needs us to trust him to lead us and for us to stop taking all the time to judge others. He calls for us to have faith in him and to lean on him even when we cannot see the path in front of us. He does not want us to focus about what Heaven will be like when we die; he wants us to focus on the Kingdom of Heaven on earth and how he invites us to help him to show peace, love, and mercy.

What do you think is the danger in thinking of salvation only in relation to going to Heaven or Hell? What does it mean to profess Jesus as Lord of your life? How can we speak for Jesus in the ways he wants us to speak? What does the Kingdom of Heaven look like on earth? Why can it be detrimental to think of Heaven just as a place we go to when we die?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009