

Getting the Gospel Right
Romans 10:1-13 (08/11/13)
Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

PBS recently had a fascinating special on the Ghost Army of World War 2. It consisted of about 1100 actors and artists who were flown over to France after the Normandy invasion with the one goal of deceiving Hitler. It is called the Ghost Army because everything was fake: fake tanks, trucks, guns, airplanes, landing strips, radio transmission, you name it. Powerful amplifiers and huge speakers blasted the sounds of fake army movements that could be heard 15 miles away. It was all pretension and deception, a fake army unit that had no reality to it. In this case it saved thousands of Allied soldiers' lives.

Similarly, the Jews of Paul's day had a ghost religion. It looked real, but it was all empty. They invested huge amounts of energy trying to work their way to heaven without Jesus Christ. Their religion was a sham, and in their case, it was a disaster. It had no spiritual reality to it and was leading them straight into judgment and God's wrath. And there are plenty of ghost Christians today; they look like the real deal, but there's no reality in them either. Our passage this morning applies to our day as much as it did to ancient Israel. Pastor J. D. Greear, author of the book *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart*, claims surveys show over 50% of Americans have prayed a sinner's prayer and think they are good to go with God, even though there's no detectable difference between their lives and those outside the church. They are "ghost" Christians. What about you? Is there spiritual reality in your life or are you a "ghost" Christian?

Romans 10:1-13 gives us God's answer to this problem. Romans 9 has been pretty intense, focusing on God's sovereignty in saving whomever He chooses, and why Israel had not come to Christ when Christ came to them. Romans 10 is going to focus on the simplicity of the gospel. Many of us learned the Romans Road, beginning in Romans 3:23 and ending right here in Romans 10:13, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." So Paul's purpose this morning is to clearly and simply lay out how a Jew or Gentile, you or I, can be saved.

First, the gospel should be your biggest concern for yourself and others in this world. – v. 1
Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them (Israel) is for their salvation.

What a heart Paul had for his people. Even though the Jews had rejected and murdered Christ, even though they had persecuted the early church, and even though they had committed to killing Paul himself more than once, yet Paul's heart was for them. He knew them; he knew their hardness and deadness. He knew that God would have to give them new hearts just like God gave him a new heart on that Damascus Road. There are two things to draw from his testimony in this verse.

Do you have a heart for others like Paul did? You have unsaved people in your life. You know people who reject Christ. What do you do about it? Do you just write them off? They may be totally wrong and we may totally disagree with them. Paul totally disagreed with the Pharisees. He knew exactly what they believed and how wrong and even dangerous their teaching was; but he loved them, was concerned about them, and wanted them to know it. Sometimes we have to say hard things that lost people just don't get. Sometimes the world and maybe even personal friends think we Christians are just people who are against stuff. Christians are against abortion. Christians are against homosexuality. Christians are

against living together outside of marriage. Christians are against just about everything. And we do stand with the Bible against these grievous sins.

But is that all they know about us? We are to expose false teaching and false religions just as Paul did, but we've got to say it in love. Elders are told in Titus 1:9 to expose false teaching. We need to be strong in the faith and unflinching in what we believe, especially the core issues of the gospel and the Word of God. But Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24-25, "The Lord's bondservant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those in opposition!"

That's our *modus operandi*. Strong, yet gentle. Unflinching for truth, yet loving that lost person. Don't get me wrong. Even Jesus blistered the religious leaders in Matthew 23, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees...." But He dealt with sinners with great compassion. People need to know we really care about them and especially about their relationship with God. They are going to die any day now. Where will they go? "My heart's desire and prayer for them is for their salvation," writes Paul. Richard Baxter, the Puritan preacher from the 1600s, said, "I preach as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men."

Do you live with Paul's values and priorities? Paul lived for the salvation of others. What are you living for? We all struggle with this. Paul said "I endure all things for the sake of God's chosen people, that they also may obtain salvation and eternal glory!" What is your biggest concern for your family, for your friends, for the people where you work? They may tick you off and you may be tempted to give them a piece of your mind, but will that give you a platform to share the gospel? We may have to ask for forgiveness of that person in our family or at work and then ask God to use our confession to soften their hearts.

Second, most people do not understand the true gospel – vv. 2-4

For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Have you ever explained the gospel to someone as clearly as you can, that we're saved by faith in Christ alone, purely by grace alone and not by works. You've gone over it and over it, they agree with everything you say, you ask them if they've ever received Christ by faith alone, and they say, "Yes, I was baptized about ten years ago." Nothing proves the deadness of the human heart like the failure to grasp the gospel of grace. Here Paul points to three misunderstandings about the gospel which are just as true today.

Zeal proves a person is right. Wrong! Zeal driven by truth is a good thing; we need lots of it. Romans 12:11 says we are to be zealous in spirit, boiling over with fervency. But people can even have a zeal for God, and be dead wrong. Those Muslims fueled by zeal and hopes of a paradise of carnal delights will fly airplanes into buildings and blow themselves up for a god who doesn't exist. Theirs is a blind, misguided zeal. You probably know people with great zeal for religion; they'll invest their lives in a religion like this Jewish religion, but it's all not according to knowledge. Paul was one of them. In Acts 22:3 he confessed he was "zealous for God just as you all are." People can be very zealous for religion and completely miss the gospel. The gospel is something you have to know, it is facts, it comes to us as a message to be received and believed. Zeal is like a high speed train. Make sure your zeal is running on the tracks of the gospel.

Then Paul points to their self-righteousness. This was the real problem. They had a zeal for Sabbath laws, all kinds of them. Every movement on the Sabbath was either prescribed or proscribed by their fine

mesh of law. They had rules of what they could and could not take out of the house in case of fire. They could rescue enough food for the Sabbath, but not more. They could not ask a Gentile to extinguish the fire, but they weren't to hinder him if he wanted to put it out. They couldn't cut their nails or hair on the Sabbath. They couldn't carry ink enough to write two letters or wax enough to fill up a small hole – these would all mean carrying a forbidden burden on the Sabbath. They were going about seeking to establish their own righteousness. This isn't unusual!

What's the problem? What's most people's problem? They don't know really know God. They don't understand God's holiness and perfect righteousness. They don't realize their own righteousness isn't good enough. So in their self-righteousness, their proud self-righteousness, in their religious self-confidence and certainly, which was a total illusion, empty of reality, they stubbornly refuse to confess their sin and their need of God's righteousness which the gospel provides! Only the Spirit of God can flush a religious man out of his self-righteous confidence and bring him to see how far short he comes of God's righteousness.

Most sadly, these Jews had no clue about Christ, why He came, what He came to do. Jews saw the Law as an end in itself, not pointing to the coming Messiah. This is true today. Beware of just believing in principles and guidelines from the Bible and missing the Person of the Bible, Jesus Christ. That law was designed to direct Israel until Christ came, and to strip her of all her self-righteousness and point her to her need of a perfect righteousness—the righteousness of Christ. Here's the beauty of the gospel – Christ ends your efforts to save yourself. He came and kept that law perfectly! He is the righteousness of God. But Israel as a nation, in her zeal and Law and proud self-righteousness, missed the very Person their Law was pointing to.

Third, we need to clearly distinguish between legalism and grace – vv. 5-7

For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."

How much of God's law do you have to keep in order to live? All of it! Plus, you have to obey from the heart, not just externally. James 2:10 says if you offend in one point you are guilty of the whole thing! People have no idea how far short they come of God's perfect righteousness. Can you jump across the Grand Canyon? Could you swim across the ocean to England? Of course not. Neither can you keep the law perfectly from your heart. Legalism says, "I can please God by my own efforts." Grace says, "No, you don't even come close to God's standard of righteousness." Only one Person has, and you need Him!

Paul refers to these verses in Deuteronomy to explain that your salvation is totally of grace and totally accomplished by Christ. Don't think you've got to accomplish some great feat. Those epic journeys like the Hobbit make great novels and movies. We have to take the long, dangerous journey to slay the dragon, fighting trolls and goblins and giant spiders and Wargs and what not. Here's the good news. We don't have to try to go up to heaven or descend down into hell to accomplish our salvation. Jesus took that long journey down from heaven as a Man to go to the cross and pay the penalty for our sins, and then to rise up from the dead conquering every one of our enemies, Satan, death, and sin, forever. We can't do it. Christ fought and defeated the dragon for us! And that's why salvation is not a human achievement but a gift from God.

Finally, God has made salvation a very simple thing – vv. 8-13

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"--that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "Whoever will call on the name of the lord will be saved."

Ah, the simplicity of the gospel. In one sense salvation is impossible; only God in sovereign mercy saves us. In another sense the gospel message is so simple; anyone who can think should be able to grasp it. You don't have to do anything great to get it. It comes to you as an announcement from God. The gospel is a simple combination of facts that you and I are called upon to embrace in repentance and faith. The facts are all about who Jesus is and what Jesus has done some 2000 years ago. It's good news. Michael Horton was reading Romans as a teenager and shared his findings with his pastor. His pastor asked, "So when were you saved, Michael?" Immediately Michael answered, "2000 years ago!"

In our efforts to try to make sure people are really saved we've made the gospel more difficult than it really is. It's not about how you feel about God or how deeply you've been convicted or how hard you've believed or the degree of your repentance or looking inside for the marks of sincere faith. Some books I've read about the gospel make it so complicated I wonder if anyone but the most brilliant Hebrew and Greek scholars could possibly understand it. Here's God's simple message to you about the faith of the gospel, not your self-righteous legalistic efforts. In verse nine it's about our mouth first, then heart, and in verse ten he turns it around.

First, the confession of your mouth. Why your mouth first? Because your mouth speaks out of what fills the heart. Do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord? That means you freely acknowledge that Jesus Christ is not only God but also your ultimate authority. You used to live under the authority of substitute lords – Lord Religion, Lord Money, Lord Success, Lord Pleasure, especially Lord Self. Turning from these deadly lords, you confess Christ as your Lord. To confess is to openly and publicly identify with Jesus. It means you refuse to deny Him. Many of these Romans will have opportunity to confess Jesus as Lord in the Roman Coliseum and face the sword or the lions or worse. When they ask, "Who claims to be a Christian here," you freely confess, "I do!" regardless of the consequences.

We aren't saved by our confession, but if we are saved, we will confess Christ. Our mouth reveals what's in our hearts. What fills our hearts comes out of our mouths. And when you truly believe on Christ, you'll be talking about Him!

Now to your heart. Our words are the fruit pointing to the root, our hearts! Your heart is the inner you, and that's where God works the miracle of regeneration, giving you that new heart that enables you to believe. You hear that God raised Christ from the dead, and then you embrace it as you turn from your old life of going your own way and you turn to Christ and trust in Him alone.

And what's the result in verse 10? With your heart you understand, agree with, and submit to the truths of the gospel, that Christ is Lord and that He accomplished salvation for everyone who receives Him. This is where God imputes to you Christ's righteousness, and without a blink of the eye you confess what you believe, and this proves God has saved you! If it's real, it will come out of your mouth like the apostles in Acts 4:20, "We can't stop speaking about what we've seen and heard!" True, you can say stuff that you really don't believe in your heart. Talkative in Pilgrim's Progress loved to talk about the Bible and Jesus and salvation and was ready to assure the others that he was truly a Christian, but when pressed about his relationship to Christ, he didn't like it.

Verses 11-13 are just rich with the kindness and goodness and assurances of God. Let me ask you seven quick questions from these final verses:

- Who is welcome to believe in Christ? Anyone and everyone.
- What will you never be if you do believe in Christ? Ashamed.
- What's the difference between ethnic groups in the gospel? Nothing.
- How many Lords are there? One.
- How rich is the one true Lord? Abounding in riches.
- To whom is God abounding in riches? To everyone who calls on Him.
- What happens when you call on the name of the Lord? You shall be saved.

People just don't get the simple gospel. They are convinced their own good deeds somehow help get them to God. Some go on long journeys, to holy sites, to experience something spiritual. But the reality is

that there is a simplicity in the gospel that is so refreshing and powerful and assuring. While we're concerned that people really are saved, we must not complicate it. God uses the gospel to bring His people to himself. Have you called on the name of Christ? Have you believed in your heart? Do you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord on Mondays and Tuesdays and Thursdays, and not just in church but at home and at work and at school? Many of you will start school this week. Be prepared to confess Christ to people God brings your way! And pray for those who still don't get it.