



Responding to Sovereign Grace

Romans: Let God be God, Part 3

Romans 9:30-10:21

David Sunday

November 26, 2017

Let us listen together to the Word of God, the Word of life, as we turn in our Bibles to Romans 9:30. We'll read God's holy Word through Romans 10:21. Let's worship God together as we listen to His holy and life-giving Word:

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

^{10:1} Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 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. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹²

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ But 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? ¹⁵ 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!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

*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.”*

*¹⁹ 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.”*

*²⁰ 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.”*

²¹ But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Lord, may that not be said of us. May You find in us today hearts that are responsive to Your Word. May we believe in the One You have sent, for there is salvation in no one else. There is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved. Only in Jesus can salvation be found, and in Jesus we have all the salvation we could ever need for all eternity. Give us faith to trust in Him today. Lord, I pray that no one within the sound of my voice today would be lost. We pray for salvation for everyone in this room. Make us messengers of Your salvation to a world that so desperately needs to hear and believe this message. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The question before us is: how can those who have heard the Bible ultimately fail to be saved? How can those who have been exposed to the teaching of God's Word end up ultimately lost? The truth that Paul is proclaiming is that anyone who is ultimately lost can blame no one but themselves. No one in hell will be able to say to God, “I'm here because You did not choose me.” Everyone who ends up lost in hell will be there by their own responsibility.

Last week we saw that whoever is saved only has God to thank, not ourselves. It is God Who saves. But this is a passage that emphasizes human responsibility. How do we respond to the grace God has shown us? There's a terrible irony in this passage, which is that those who

knew the most about God are failing to respond to Him; yet those who weren't even seeking God are being found by Him and saved by Him. Today we will do a solemn inquiry into three obstacles that can keep Bible-hearing, Bible-knowing and Bible-believing people like ourselves from truly believing in Jesus and receiving salvation. What are these three obstacles in this passage? 1) Misguided zeal. 2) Overcomplicating the simple. 3) Stubbornly rejecting beauty.

Misguided Zeal

We see misguided zeal in Romans 9:30-10:4. The irony of these verses is that those who knew the most about God did not come to know Him. Those who were most earnestly seeking righteousness did not succeed in reaching righteousness. The reason they did not succeed is *"because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works."* Nowhere in the Bible does God ever propose that sinful people could be declared righteous by Him through our works. It's not in the Old Testament. It's not in the New Testament. There's only one way to be right with God and that's through faith—a message that is throughout the Scriptures.

In the writings of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 28, God said He was going to place a rock in the pathway of sinners who were trusting in themselves and they would trip over that stone. That stone is Jesus. Paul quotes Isaiah 28 in Romans 9:33, *"As it is written, 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'" Christ is a stumbling block for people who are trying to reach righteousness through their own works. For people who are pursuing a righteousness not through faith, but through their own works, Christ is someone they're going to stumble over. Blaise Pascal, the French mathematician, gave this reason for why people stumble over Christ:*

Jesus Christ came to blind those who saw clearly, and to give sight to the blind; to heal the sick, and leave the healthy to die; to call to repentance and to justify sinners, and to leave the righteous in their sins; to fill the needy, and leave the rich empty.

If you think you can reach righteousness with God through your own works, you're someone who thinks you can see. You're someone who thinks you're healthy enough to be pleasing to God. You're someone who thinks you can be righteous in yourself and that you are full enough in yourself to be acceptable to God. If you think these things, you will stumble over Christ, because Christ came to give sight to the blind. He came to heal those who knew they were sick. He came to justify sinners. He came to fill the needy. In order to receive Christ, you have to see yourself as blind, sick, sinful, needy and dead. It's the only way to be saved.

There's something about knowing the Bible and striving to live a moral and upright life that can make you stumble over the way of salvation that is in Christ alone. There can be in the heart of a Bible-believing religious person a lethal root of poison that can lead to damnation. Because deep down in our hearts, we can be dishonest with ourselves about our own sin. We can be lacking self-awareness of how desperately we need salvation. We can be smug and self-satisfied, looking down on others who are less moral, less spiritual, less religious. We can wake up in the morning, says Richard Lovelace, assuming we're justified by our holiness. He writes:

We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification... We start each day with our personal security resting not on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in religion. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved...to a self-righteousness which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace.

We start lying about who we really are, thinking ourselves better than we are. This is what causes us to stumble over Christ. Paul is very, very concerned for his fellow Jews because they're rejecting the Messiah. He's praying to God in Romans 10:1, from the depths of his heart, that they might be saved—that they would recognize their need for a Savior. He says in verse two, *"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."* They're not slackers. They're passionate. But they're passionately misguided.

Paul explains why in verses three and four. They were ignorant of the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, and *"seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God's righteousness."* They said, "I'd rather have a do-it-yourself religion. I'd rather make myself moral and acceptable before God. I will not submit to the righteousness that God has revealed in Jesus Christ. I will not bow the knee to Christ as King." Paul is so burdened for his fellow Jews, because they are zealous—but their zeal is misguided.

Friends, we Bible-believing Christians can be the same way. We can be very zealous about our own spirituality. We can be zealous in religion in a way that's really about our own righteousness, trying to justify ourselves, proving how radical or rigorous we are, thinking "I'm not a slacker." And one of the ways you can see this smug, false zeal in your heart is by the way your religious morality makes you look down on other people. Ray Ortlund diagnoses this kind of false zeal like this:

How does the zeal of the flesh reveal itself? Because it's driven by law, it treats people with law. It does not rejoice over them but finds fault, jumps to conclusions, accuses, is argumentative, doesn't listen, gloats when a brother is down and loves to come out on top. This zeal isn't for God.

A whole lot of Bible-believing Christians have those characteristics. Looking down on others. Being argumentative. Not listening. Gloating when someone is down. This kind of zeal isn't for God. Ortlund continues: "It's for self. And it's powerful. It diminishes the future of the church by robbing everyone of beautiful things that might have been."

There's an irony of religiosity in these verses. Sometimes the people who are trying the hardest to be pleasing to God are the very ones who miss the provision God has made for us to be acceptable before Him. We stumble over Christ. If you're trying to establish your own righteousness, you will fail to receive Christ. Verse four says, "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" He is the One the law has been anticipating and pointing us toward all along. He is the One Who is the meaning and the ultimate goal of the law. All the law's commands, promises and rituals are pointing us toward Christ.

Christ's coming in the flesh and dying on the cross for our sins is God's way of saying to us, "The righteousness you need is not a righteousness you can achieve. It's a righteousness I am giving. It's a righteousness I am providing." And the way to receive that righteousness is to submit to the King Who brings it. So we must lay down our weapons, put down our swords and say, "I trust in You, Jesus." There's something inherent in morality and religiosity that can blind us to this simple truth.

Misguided zeal keeps many people from receiving salvation. Far too many people in churches are comfortable with their own religiosity, thinking that's what will make them acceptable before God. We should always be in prayer for our fellow church-goers and church members, praying that none of us would fail to submit to the righteousness that God has revealed in Christ. We should be praying for people who come to church who have not really trusted in Jesus that they may be saved, as Paul does here. Lots of people in Christian churches need to be saved, and misguided zeal can blind us to that reality.

Overcomplicating the Simple

Here's the wonderful news for everyone who has come to the end of seeking to establish your own righteousness: the way of salvation is not complicated. It is simple, it is clear and it is

accessible to all. Don't overcomplicate what's simple. The second way Bible-believing people can miss the way of salvation is by overcomplicating the simple. If justification was by the law, it would be a hopeless quest.

Look at Romans 10:5, where Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5: *"For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them."* If anyone could perfectly obey the law, they could receive eternal life. But who could ever do that? Sin makes all of us law breakers. So praise God that He has revealed another way of righteousness, a righteousness that is based on faith. Moses understood this as well.

Paul goes on in verse six, *"But the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'"* What is Paul doing here? He's quoting Moses in Deuteronomy 30. In that passage, Moses knew that Israel would stray from God's law and would fall under the curses for breaking the covenant. He anticipated that the people of Israel would return to the Lord and want to be restored in their relationship with Him. They would be coming to Him with repentant hearts.

In Deuteronomy 30, Moses says to the people, "The Lord your God is going to circumcise your heart. He's going to give you a new heart, so you will love Him with all your heart and soul, and live." Then Moses tells them, "Do not think the way that is pleasing to God is inaccessible or beyond your reach. What I am telling you today is not impossible to do. You don't know need to send someone up into heaven. You don't need to cross over the sea to gain access to God's words. God's words are very near you. They're not above or beyond you. They are actually inside you, in your hearts and in your minds."

What Paul is doing here in Romans is taking Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30 and applying them to the gospel. John Stott explains what's happening here: "What Moses had said about his teaching, Paul now affirms about the gospel." What Moses was saying, Paul is saying. The gospel is not remote or unavailable. There's no need to ask who's going to ascend into heaven to bring Christ down or to descend into Hades to bring Christ up—because Christ has come. God has sent His Son. Christ has died and been raised from the dead. We don't need to raise Him from the dead—God did that. Therefore Christ is immediately accessible to anyone who has faith in Him. We don't need to do anything. Everything that needed to be done has already been done.

Listen to what John Stott says: "Moreover, because Christ Himself is near, the gospel of Christ is also near. It is in the heart and mouth of every believer. The whole emphasis of these words is on the close, ready, easy accessibility of Christ and His gospel." Let me repeat that. In

Romans 10:6-8, the whole emphasis is on the close, ready, easy accessibility of Christ and His gospel. God has graciously provided a way. He has made it simple. He has made it clear.

Look at these verses again and I'll read a paraphrase to help us grasp what Paul is saying here—how he's taking Moses' words and applying them to the gospel. This paraphrase is from Ray Ortlund: "Never create imaginary problems that make justification seem totally out of reach." Don't create imaginary problems that make it seem as if God is unwilling to save you. Don't create imaginary obstacles that make salvation seem out of reach. "For example, don't say things like, 'Who could possibly ascend to heaven to bring Christ down?' as if He had not come down to us already. Or, don't say, 'Who could possibly descend into the underworld to bring Christ up?' as if He had not been raised from the dead."

Don't complicate this. God has not put before us an impossible task. God has done everything that was necessary to save us in giving us Christ. All that God needed to do to bring sinners into His grace and favor He has done in Jesus. Therefore, trying to establish your own righteousness before God is not just wrong-headed, but it is rebellious. It's refusing to submit to the righteousness God has revealed in Christ. Faith understands this. Faith says, "God, I know You've done everything I need to be righteous through what Jesus did on the cross and I believe in Your gospel." This is not inaccessible to those who believe.

Look at verse eight: "*But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart' (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim).*" It's near. It's accessible. What is this word of faith? Paul makes it crystal clear in verse nine. Here is the gospel, plain and simple: "*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.*" Verse ten, "*For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*"

There it is. This is not complicated, friends. This is not obscure. You might be scratching your head a little bit about Deuteronomy 30 and what's that all about. But here in verse nine, this is clear. It starts with "Jesus is Lord." The Greek word is *Kurios*. It's the same word that was used throughout the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to Yahweh. To say that Jesus is Lord means you're saying Jesus is Yahweh. He is "I am Who I am." He is eternal God. To Jewish ears, this was radical. They grew up saying the *Shema* in their synagogues: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Phil Moore says, "Confessing Jesus as Lord meant accepting He is God, and that the Lord is not just one, but three-in-one." Jesus is Yahweh. He is the eternal God. Also, to confess that Jesus is Lord means that He is the supreme authority over all the world, over all the universe. Caesar is not lord; Jesus is Lord. He's Lord of the universe and He's Lord of your life. You can't

say, “Jesus, I’d like to take You as my Savior, but I don’t want You as my Lord.” You have to bow before Him and crown Him as your King. You must submit to His authority.

You have to believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, which means you also have to believe Jesus actually died. You have to understand that He died for your sins and that He was raised again for your justification so you can be declared righteous before God. You need to confess this with your mouth and believe this in your heart. You can’t separate the two from one another. What comes out of your mouth is an expression of what is in your heart. It’s not enough to just mouth the words. Demons can say Jesus is Lord—and they do.

It’s got to come from a heart that believes. A heart that believes cannot be hidden. If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, that means you believe this in the center of your whole personality. You believe this in the depths of your heart and are entrusting your whole self to Jesus. You’re transferring all your hope for righteousness on to Him. And if this is where your heart is, you can’t keep it hidden. What’s in your heart is going to come out of your mouth. There’s no such thing as a secret Christian. To believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead means you’ve got to confess Him to the world.

This starts in the waters of baptism. If you’re baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, you are saying, “I’m a follower of Jesus.” You, as a baptized Christian, can go into the world but you cannot hide that you believe Jesus is Lord from your neighbors or the nations or your workplace or your school. They can see He is Lord, because He’s changing your life. You’re not the same person you once were.

It’s impossible to just believe that Jesus died for you, rose for you, is Lord of the universe and Lord of your life without repenting of sin. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. If you turn to Christ in faith, you will turn away from your sin and self-reliance. If you trust in Jesus, you will stop trusting in yourself. And when you repent and put your faith in Jesus, you will never regret it.

Paul says in verse 11, “*For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’*” You’re not going to find at the end that your faith was in vain. When you stop trying to establish your own righteousness—when you say, “Jesus, You died for me. You give me the righteousness that I so desperately need”—you will find that in the end, you are blameless in God’s sight, holy and acceptable to Him. God will say, “Welcome, My child, into My eternal Kingdom.” You will not be put to shame when you put your hope in Jesus.

This salvation is not by works of the law. It’s not just for people who have religious privileges or who are morally superior or who come from an elite group. This salvation is available to all people from all nations—every race, every tribe, every language, both Jews and

Gentiles. Verse 12 says, *“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.”* He has more than enough riches to share with everyone who comes to Him in faith. Jesus showers His riches on His children. Just as the Scriptures say in the book of Joel, verse 13, *“For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”*

There it is! Simple. Clear. Don’t overcomplicate this. Does this sound too simple to you? I’ve talked to people who say, “Oh, I know that. But I still don’t believe I’m saved. I don’t believe I’ve gotten it. I don’t believe I’ve done enough.” They’re looking for something more than what God has done in Christ to be sufficient for their salvation. They’re wanting something magical to happen, or maybe some mystical practice they have to do, or some moral hard work, or some spiritual technique. Paul is saying, “Oh, no. You need the cross of Jesus—He has done it all.”

Martin Luther used to talk about the “theology of glory” versus the “theology of the cross”:

- The theology of glory says you have to go through a whole lot of spiritual, heroic gymnastics in order to get saved. You’ve got to go down into the depths, then climb the ladder to ascend into heaven.
- The theology of the cross says God has bridged the gap. He has come down and died in your place through His Son. God has raised Him from the dead. All you need to do is call on His name, believe God raised Him from the dead, confess with your mouth that He is your Lord, bow your knee and submit to Him—and you will be saved. It’s that simple, but we complicate it.

I want to tell you a story of a pastor I respect named Jared Wilson. He illustrated well how we can overcomplicate this simple gospel message and the tragic consequences that come from that. When he was in ninth grade, the student ministry team of his youth group in a Baptist church in New Mexico went on a retreat. His youth pastor sent them away on a Saturday afternoon after lunch with this assignment: “Get away by yourselves somewhere, listen for God and don’t return until you’ve heard from Him.” Here is Jared’s description of what followed:

Late that night we all sat around our cabin living room floor and shared what God had allegedly spoken to each of us. I write ‘allegedly’ because I wasn’t sure I’d heard anything from God. But that didn’t prevent me from coming up with something to say, the gist of which I’ve completely forgotten, but which I’m sure was expressed in such a way as to demonstrate the exemplary quality of my spirituality. One by one, every member of the team shared the sweet nothings God had whispered in our ears. But one girl—just a sophomore at the time—became more and more visibly upset. By the time it was her turn to share, she was weeping. “I didn’t hear anything from God,” she blurted out. “I never do.”

To the best of my recollection and to our credit, we were all sympathetic. Sometimes God just holds back, we assumed, or sometimes we're not listening well enough. Our distraught teammate continued, "What's wrong with me? I talk to God all the time, and I beg Him to talk to me—but He never does. I really want to hear from Him. Why won't He answer me?"

I don't remember what our youth pastor said in response to this startling honesty, but that moment has haunted me ever since. I don't know if any of the other students actually heard something specific from God. I suspect more than a few just made things up, as I did.

We were all afraid not to hear from God, not to fulfill the assignment. We didn't know what that might mean for our personal faith and for our spiritual credibility within the group. But here was one girl with the courage not to care about her own credibility. She was hurting and desperate. She was bold enough to clear the haze of our spiritual self-congratulation with her brokenness.

Twenty years went by and Jared Wilson found that girl on social media. He says:

From her profile, I could tell she was not exactly ministry team material anymore. She's now a 30-something-year-old Goth girl. She changed her name to that of some Hindu goddess, listed vampire porn as one of her interests. She's also very proud of being an 'out' bisexual. But she remembered me and our time at church. We spent some time catching up. I asked her about that moment at the retreat. I said I'd never forgotten it—but she had. She didn't remember that at all.

What she did remember, though, is that all during those days, her step-dad was sexually abusing her—a recognized leader in the church, a Sunday School teacher and an occasional deacon. The whole time we were holding up as virtuous some vague notion of real spirituality, this young girl needed someone to rescue her who took the gospel more seriously. The tyranny of hyper-spirituality our church culture has foisted on us set us up for disappointment, because it held up religious experiences as the means of God's grace, rather than the finished work of Christ on the cross.

That's the means of God's grace. Don't say, "Who will ascend into heaven? Who can go down into the depths? Who can find a word from God?" No. The word is near you. It's in the heart of all who believe the gospel. Jesus died and was raised. He's at the right hand of the Father. He gives life and bestows riches on all who call on His name. That's the word we need to hear. Not some mystical, vague ladder into heaven that we climb. The ladder has come down to

us. Christ has come down from heaven to save us; all we need to do is believe on Him and submit to Him.

Wilson continues:

I can only imagine how crushing the disappointment of my friend's spiritual inexperience felt in light of the sin being inflicted on her. I don't know if anyone could be blamed for not knowing about the abuse, but I do know that holding out something unattainable to someone in the pit of despair is evil.

Holding out something unattainable to someone in the pit of despair is evil. The gospel we proclaim, friends, is the answer for anyone in the pit of despair and it's not unattainable. God has made it very attainable for anyone and everyone who will call on the name of the Lord. It's far more attainable through faith than all our religious experiences and esoteric mystical spiritualities can ever achieve.

Wilson concludes:

Our brand of super-Christianity claimed too much and not enough. It failed her, where Christ would not. No wonder she gave up on the whole thing.

It makes me ask what kind of gospel are we proclaiming to the world? Is it something only the super-spiritual can grasp? Or is it good news for anyone who is in the pit of despair? Are we proclaiming the God Who has bridged the gap, the God Who has come near, the God Who has triumphed over all our enemies, the God Who is ready to lavish His riches on all who call on Him? Are we proclaiming the simple word of faith?

Or are we overcomplicating the simple message of the gospel, which is available to anyone? Are we giving the impression that somehow people need to experience something more, something other than what God has done in Christ in order to attain salvation? May it never be, friends. All that anyone needs to do is call on the name of the Lord.

How do people come to call on the name of the Lord? Verse 14 says they must believe in the truth of Jesus in their hearts. *"And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"* The message of the gospel must penetrate through the ears into the heart. *"How are they to hear without someone preaching?"* The message must be communicated, heralded, announced. Someone has to be bold and loving, speaking the truth. I love what Tim Keller says: "A herald was, in a sense, a living newspaper; heralds were a major means of transmitting news by making announcements in the marketplace and city streets. So the word 'preach' does not refer only to what today are called 'sermons.' Heralds operated in the streets."

I'm not the only preacher in this church. Every believer is a herald of the good tidings of great joy. You are called to preach in the streets. You are called to preach to your neighbors. Verse 15 asks, *"And how are they to preach unless they are sent?"* Christ sent His apostles into all the world. The church sends out ordinary Christians like us. We are an apostolic church—a sent church—sent out into the world. We are apostolic. We're not an enclave, keeping the message to ourselves. We are sent out to be missionaries and preachers and messengers of the apostolic message into all the world. Evangelism is a group project. The church is partnering together, sending ordinary Christians out to pulpits, to the public square, to the nations and to our neighbors.

Wherever we go with the message of the gospel of peace, our feet are beautiful, because we're bringing the good news. Are you motivated to bring this gospel to others—the simple, clear message? This may sound a bit harsh. Someone has said that when it comes to missions, Buddhists give their first-born, Mormons give two years, but Christians give excuses. May it never be said of New Covenant Bible Church. May we delight so much in this gospel that we're motivated to make it known to others, because we believe—as verse 17 says—*"Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."*

Rejecting Beauty

Not everyone believes what they hear. Beautiful feet are often rejected and trampled upon, just like Christ was despised and rejected. Men hid their faces from Him in shame. Sometimes people can hear the Bible and reject the beauty that's being presented to them. That's the last way religious people miss salvation. We reject the beauty. Isaiah prophesied this long ago when he said what Paul quotes in verse 16: *"Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"* The reason religious people, including the Israelites and some Bible-believing people, never get saved is not because they haven't heard the message of the gospel.

Paul quotes Psalm 19:18 which speaks of creation's voice going out into all the earth and its words to the ends of the world. He's saying that the gospel has been spread as widely as that. The Jewish people in Paul's day had heard the message of the gospel. And friends, you have heard the message of the gospel. You've heard it today. None of you will ever be able to say to God, "But I never heard." He'll be able to say to you, "Where were you the morning of November 26, 2017? Were you not in St. Charles, Illinois, at New Covenant Bible Church, hearing that 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? You have heard the message."

“Well,” you might say, “but I didn’t understand.” Paul says in verse 19, “Foolish Gentiles have understood this message. Are you telling me, Israel, you who know the Bible, that you can’t understand this? Yes, you can.” If God can make foolish people understand, He can make you understand. That’s no excuse. God is able to reveal Himself to those who aren’t even seeking, according to verse 20.

That’s the funny thing. Maybe you came to church today, thinking, “No way I’m ever going to be a Christian.” But God could be revealing Himself to you right now; He could be drawing you to Himself right now. He could be doing a surprising work in your life—and you never even anticipated it. That’s the kind of God He is. *“I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”*

Here’s the heart-wrenching tragedy of it all. In verse 21 God says, *“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”* They’re not being saved—not because God’s not willing to save. They’re not being saved because their hearts are disobedient and stubborn and contrary. God is saying, “I’m holding My arms out wide.” Isn’t it a beautiful thing that only on the cross a man dies with his arms stretched out wide. The only way a man dies like that is when he’s crucified on a cross. It’s as if to say to all the world, “Come to Me. Come to Me and I will save you.”

This, friends, is amazing grace. This unimaginable, beautiful love. This is our God. Will you trust Him? Will you put your faith and trust in Him today? We’re going to conclude with a confession of faith. This is a way all of us can affirm together that we believe Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. This is a confession that helps us be specific about what it means to put our faith and trust in Jesus.

For some of you, this may be the first time you’re really believing Jesus is Lord. This confession gives you words to express that. For others of us, this is a reaffirmation of our faith in Him. Before we affirm our faith in the Lord Jesus together I want to pray.

Lord, if there’s anyone here right now who’s in a battle between faith and unbelief, between stubbornness and submission—if there’s anyone right now who’s stretched out over the chasm that separates heaven from hell—I pray that by Your Spirit You would grant them faith. Give faith in the gospel to that person today. And Lord, for all of us who do believe, how we thank You for what You’ve done for us in Christ. Amen.

Let’s confess our faith together.

A Confession of Personal Faith

I confess that Jesus is Lord.

I confess that Jesus shares the name and nature,

the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and
eternality of the one and only true God.

I confess that Jesus died and was raised, opening
heaven up to unworthy sinners. I am such a sinner,
and I gladly embrace His atonement for me.

I confess that Jesus rightfully owns me,
every part of me,
every moment of my time,
every dollar in my possession,
every opportunity granted me,
every responsibility thrust upon me,
every hope I cherish,
every person whom I love and treasure.

I am personal property of the Lord Jesus Christ.
He deserves my allegiance, loyalty and trust
twenty-four hours a day,
in all places, in all aspects of my life,
both public and private.
He is worthy of my obedience.
He is worthy of my utmost.
He is worthy of my very blood.
I confess that Jesus is Lord.

“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.” This is amazing grace. Everyone’s face in heaven is going to be marked by a look of amazement. No one’s going to be smug or self-satisfied in heaven. So let’s get ready for that by being amazed at the grace of which we’re going to experience!

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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