

Rejection of salvation

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- [0 : 0 0] Now let us turn to Romans chapter 10, reading from the beginning. Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.
- For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.
- For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, that the man which doeth those things shall live by them.
- But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? That is to bring Christ down from above.
- Or who shall descend into the deep? That is to bring up Christ again from the dead. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.
- [1 : 1 1] That is the word of faith which we preach, and so on. But it's these first seven to eight verses that I want us to consider together tonight.
- The apostle has argued that God's electing love is not confined to Jewish people. The electing love of God crosses all national barriers.
- And Paul has stated for us that the true Jew, the real child of Abraham, is the person who, like Abraham, believes in God implicitly.
- And he trusts in God alone for salvation. Indeed, the tragedy as far as Israel as a people were concerned was their pride.
- And this is what Paul is underlining here in these chapters as he writes to the Romans. Their pride has been their downfall.
- [2 : 3 7] You see, they imagined these Jews that by human effort they could please God. By what they could do in a human fashion, they could place God in their debt.
- And that God would be bound to reward them because of what they had done. And so they refused, these Jewish people. They refused to accept God's way of salvation through Christ.
- They would have nothing to do with that way of salvation. They refused it. As Paul says, they regarded Christ, these Jews, as a stumbling stone.
- As a rock of offense. And so they failed to obtain the righteousness of God. They were now a people cast off from God.
- Because they refused to submit to God, God had cast them off. Now Paul goes on to elaborate on how the Jewish people made the gravest mistake that a people can make.
- [3 : 5 2] But in doing this, Paul here expresses his heartfelt grief. The grief that he has for these brethren of his who have obstinately closed their hearts and their minds to the grace of God.

Let's consider this Jewish rejection of God. Let's consider this Jewish rejection of God's way of salvation. And as you and I think of this Jewish rejection of God's way of salvation, we are really seeing the condition of men and women today who reject God's way of salvation.

You see, the apostle repeats what he had said in the opening verses of chapter 9 about his deep anguish of heart.

He says this, brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

That's my great aim. That's my one desire, he says. Although he says, I seem to you to be casting you down.

[5 : 10] Although it might appear to be as if I'm telling you and I'm making it hurtful for you, I'm telling you that God has cast you off. Yet nonetheless, says Paul, my heart's desire and prayer to God is that you might be saved.

I long to see you brought in. I long to see you included among God's elect people. Paul understood better than all of us because he was an inspired apostle.

He knew better than all of us the doctrine of predestination. The doctrine of God's electing love. This man, Paul the apostle, was well aware that God's choice of a people was irrevocable and certain.

But that didn't mean that he was to remain inert. That he was to stay silent about salvation, the salvation of the lost.

And you see, this is the unscriptural awfulness of the hyper-Calvinistic position. I've mentioned this hyper-Calvinistic position before and I say it again.

[6 : 36] This is the unscriptural awfulness of the hyper-Calvinistic position. That it views the state of the lost with indifference.

The hyper-Calvinist, he looks at lost men and lost women and he says, Well, if they're to be saved, they're going to be saved, they'll be lost, they'll be lost. And the hyper-Calvinist does nothing.

Absolutely nothing. Paul never adopted that sort of attitude. Never. Read the life of this great man.

Read the prayers of this great man. And he is the same man who has elaborated for us the doctrine of God's predestination. And as he looks at his lost brethren, the children of Israel, he yearns for them and he prays for them that they might be saved.

That's what he prays for. And that is the scriptural attitude towards lost men and women. And that is the attitude that must characterize the Christian church.

[7 : 56] And that is the attitude that has to characterize our church and this congregation. It must characterize you and me if we are Christians.

I ask you, Christian friend, are you feeling like that? My heart's desire and prayer to God is that my people might be saved.

Look around you. Look in your family circle. That father who's going step by step to a lost eternity.

Do you long to see that father brought to Christ? That mother who loved you so well but who shows awful indifference to the claims of God.

Is she a concern upon your soul? That family of yours, that son or that daughter who's proving to be so difficult.

[9 : 05] Do you yearn over that son or daughter that they might be saved? And if you yearn over them, are you praying for them?

Look at your neighborhood. The neighbor next door to you. All these folk down the street from you. Lost.

Lost. Is it your yearning that they might be saved? What about the community that we belong to?

This community. And God alone knows how lost it is. But does it trouble us? Does it cause us concern?

And we have to ask ourselves the question, do we yearn over them? Pray for them? Can you, Christian friends, say, as Paul was able to say in this epistle about his brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God is that they might be saved.

[10 : 20] And you can almost see this great man day after day. He's got this burden on him. And he brings this burden to the throne of grace.

And he yearns and longs and prays. And it's not only that, but he went and he did something about it, didn't he? Wherever there was a synagogue, he went into it and preached the gospel.

Wherever he found a community of Jewish people, there he went to penetrate that Jewish community with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He went over the Roman Empire.

Not only preaching to the Jews, but to the Gentiles. Now, where in lay the mistake of the Jews that led them to reject God's method of salvation?

Well, Paul tells us here it wasn't because they were lacking in enthusiasm. They had tremendous enthusiasm as far as religion was concerned.

[11 : 28] Was there ever a people so enthusiastic about their religion as the Jewish people? And indeed, to this very day, the Orthodox Jew, he will put you to shame with his enthusiasm over his religion.

Here Paul says, I bear them record, and he knew from the inside he wasn't a man who was talking from the outside who could only see things as an observer.

He knew it intimately from within because he had been a Jew himself. He was a Jew himself. And a Pharisee of the Pharisees. I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, he says, but not according to knowledge.

Zeal. What is zeal? Well, if you look up a dictionary, the dictionary meaning of zeal is boiling or passionate ardour for anything.

It means enthusiasm in all its intensity. But we've got to remember that zeal is not something that is neutral.

[12 : 56] Or rather, I should have said, zeal is something that is neutral. It's not something that is not neutral. Zeal is neutral. It's a neutral quality.

And what I mean by that is this. You can have a zeal for doing something that is good. But you can also have a zeal for doing something that is bad, evil, wicked.

Paul knew something about zeal in his pre-conversion days.

He was then intensely zealous for the religion of his father. Listen to him. In his letter to the Philippians, he writes this, and we've quoted this many times, and I make no apology for quoting it here this evening, but this is what he says in that epistle.

If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I mourn. Circumcise the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, and Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee, concerning zeal, persecuting the church, touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

[14 : 29] And if you turn to his letter to the Galatians, chapter 1, verse 14, he says this, he says that he profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being exceedingly more zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

But you see, the zeal that made him such an intensely religious person was the same zeal that made him hate Christ and all that Christ stood for.

It was the same zeal that made him ask for letters to persecute the Christians wherever he found them, at Damascus or anywhere else.

He hated Christ. He hated Christ. And he hated Christ's church. But he was a very religious man.

As Anders Nygren puts it, zeal for God that is not enlightened can carry men very far from God.

[15 : 47] And this was the trouble with Paul in his pre-Damascus days, and it was the trouble with his Jewish brethren. They had a zeal, but their zeal was based on ignorance, and it stemmed from pride.

Look at the zeal of those who follow the Ayatollahs in Iran. What zeal they've got.

And they are intensely religious people. But you see, their zeal is based on ignorance.

It's the same we might say with regard to the ardent Romanist, who can't see beyond all the trappings and all the things that he sees around him, who can only see his religion with his eyes, and not beyond it.

And so he likes to see the altar. He likes to see the burning candles. He likes to see the man, and he's only a human being after all, isn't he, dressed in his vestments, in his robes, with all sorts of colors.

[17 : 10] And oh, it makes such an impression, doesn't it? And if this man, dressed in all sorts of colors, in his robes, says to this man, do this, do that, do the next, he'll do it.

Full of zeal, wants to do it. But so often, with the poor Romanist, if he doesn't know Christ, it's a zeal based on ignorance, isn't it?

And this is what Paul is talking about. He's saying about his Jewish brethren, that they thought that the way into God's favor, was by human effort. They believed, these Jews, that man had the capability, of reaching up to God, and of placing God forever in their debt.

And that attitude, is in substance, the same as the attitude of Adam, in the garden of paradise.

Adam believed, when he was tempted, that he had the capability, of being on equal terms with God. And the pride of Adam, and the pride of the Jew, is the pride, of the unbelieving heart tonight.

[18 : 41] It's the pride, that is in your heart, if you haven't submitted, to the righteousness of Christ. It's that, abominable pride, that is in your heart, that is keeping you back, from the Savior.

So that you say to me, I don't need Christ, so long as I behave well, God will be pleased with me. So long as I do this, so long as I do that, Christ will be pleased with me.

Oh, that stinking pride, that refuses to accept, the Saviorhood, of Christ our Lord.

You see, the idea of Nathan the Syrian, the general, is not far from any one of us. The instructions of Elisha the prophet, were too simple.

Elisha was saying to this great man, on the authority of God, he says, I'm asking you to do a very simple thing, and that is, bathe in Jordan seven times.

[19 : 50] Now I want you, said Elisha, to put your faith in God, in these instructions. Believe what I am saying to you, as God's prophet.

Go and do it. Oh, no. No, that was too simple. Too simple for Nathan. Why should he go and bathe in this Jordan seven times?

The men who were nearest to him came and said to him, look master, if this prophet had bade you do some great thing, would you not have done it?

Yes, if Nathan had been told to do this, that, or the next thing, he would have done it, if it had been a difficult thing to do. But the simplicity, of the instructions given to him, were beyond.

It was all beyond. And like Nathan, we think in terms of the elaborate, in terms of personal effort.

[21 : 00] And so, that is where we fail to understand the meaning, and the purpose of Christ, and the death of Christ.

Why is it that there are unconverted people, in the Free Church of Scotland? Why is there unconverted people, in this congregation here, at this time?

It's because they have failed, to understand the meaning, and the purpose of Christ, in his life, and in his death.

And so, they prefer to establish, their own righteousness. And as a consequence, they reject the Savior, whom God the Father has provided, who is the end of the law, for righteousness.

You see, these Jewish people would say, but we are sincere. We are sincere, in all that we do.

[22 : 04] Is that not enough? We are sincere, in keeping to the law of Moses, and the traditions of our fathers. Is that not enough, being sincere? But you know, you can be sincerely wrong, can't you?

It depends on which way, the sincerity is taking you. I can be sincerely wrong, in the way I act, in what I may do.

And what profit will there be, for me at the end of the day, if I've been, sincerely wrong? My sincerity won't be of any avail, it won't be of any use to me.

Augustine puts it like this, it's better, he says, to limp, in the right way, than to run with all your might, in the wrong way.

Isn't there something in that? Let's listen to the great theologian. It's better, he says, to limp, in the right way, than to run with all your might, in the wrong way.

[23 : 28] And that's what was precisely wrong, with the Jews. Instead of limping in the right way, they were running, with all their might, in the wrong way.

But Paul brings to our attention, another aspect here, and that is the contrast, between the human and the divine method, of salvation.

You see, he takes us back, to Leviticus, and to Deuteronomy. He says, about his brethren, they being ignorant, of God's righteousness, and going about, to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves, unto the righteousness of God.

For Christ is the end of the law, for righteousness, to everyone that believeth. Then he goes on to say, For Moses describeth the righteousness, which is of the law, that the man which doeth these things, shall live by them.

Now, says Paul, to these Jewish people, you're putting your trust in Moses, and in the law that Moses has given. Well, Moses says, that the man which doeth those things, shall live by them.

[24 : 45] You remember how it runs in Leviticus, we read it together. This is what Moses said, Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which of a man do, he shall live in them.

I am the Lord. What Moses was saying was this, that the only way to be justified, in God's presence, and merit his favor, is by keeping God's law, in its entirety.

Moses says, if you want to be justified, in God's presence, then there must be no deviation, from the law of God, not even by an iota.

You must not deviate, from God's law, not even by an iota. In other words, if we were able to keep God's law fully, then we could stand before God justified.

That's the sum and substance of it. You see, if you keep the law of God, in its entirety, then God cannot condemn you. Because God can only condemn lawbreakers, lawbreakers, he cannot condemn a man, who keeps his law.

[26 : 09] God can only condemn a man, who breaks his law. So if it were possible, to be able to keep the law of God, in its entirety, then you would stand before God justified, and you would be a righteous man.

But to achieve that, you see, you've got to be perfect. And your doing of the law has to be perfect.

As Charles Hodge puts it, it is the clear doctrine of the scriptures that obedience to the law, to secure justification, must be perfect.

But that's the rub. Who of Adam's race, has lived a perfect life? And how can a man who is imperfect, and we are all imperfect, we've been born imperfect, how can we imperfect beings, keep perfectly, the holy law of a perfect God?

It's impossible. You see how impossible the situation is? It cannot be done. And what Paul is arguing here, is this, that the righteousness, from the human point of view, is beyond us.

[27 : 36] No matter how we may try, we cannot make ourselves right with God. To be righteous, to be at peace with God, says the Apostle Paul, then you must keep the law perfectly.

And isn't that our dilemma? How can we keep the law of God perfectly? And if we can't keep it perfectly, then what are we going to do?

Paul says to these Jews, Moses, he says, describes the righteousness, which is of the law.

And Moses says, that the man who does these things, in the law, must live by them. In other words, if you want to keep that law, says Paul, if you want to make yourself righteous, according to the law of Moses, then you must keep that law perfectly.

And there must be no deviation from that law. Not even by a hair's breadth. So you see how impossible he has made the situation for the Jewish people, and you see how impossible he has made the situation for us.

[29 : 01] Our problem is to be right with God, to be delivered from our sin. Our need is for a Savior. The righteousness that the Jews tried to establish, and which they thought would please God, was a righteousness of their own making.

And that was their mistake. And that is the mistake that we may make. It's the mistake that we have made, before our conversion.

And if you are unconverted, it's the mistake that you've been making. What is the mistake? It is this. You imagine that if you do this, and do that, and refrain from that, and refrain from this, then that will make you righteous.

That's not so. God is not interested in your puny righteousness, or in mine. God wasn't interested in the righteousness that the Jews were trying to establish.

The righteousness that they required is the righteousness that comes by faith. And now Paul turns our attention to that other passage from Moses, which is in Deuteronomy.

[30 : 27] In verse 6 he says, But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? That is to bring Christ down from above, or who shall descend into the deep?

That is to bring up Christ again from the dead. Now, he doesn't quote precisely what Moses said. He used the words of Moses in a script, in a Christ-centered context.

But let's listen to what Moses said. For this is the commandment which I command thee this day. It is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.

It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up to heaven for us, and bring it down? That we may hear it and do it. Neither is it beyond the sea that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it.

But the word is very nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. In other words, Moses was saying, the things that are revealed for faith, and for life, and for life, are accessible to us.

[31 : 42] And these phrases that Moses uses about ascending up into heaven, or crossing beyond the sea, are expressions denoting the impossible.

Moses is saying, you see, you don't have to do the impossible to be at peace with God. You don't have to ascend up into heaven because you could never do that.

Nor do you have to cross the seas. And in the days of Moses, you didn't try to cross the seas. You didn't have the craft that would take you to cross the seas.

To cross the seas in Moses' day, that was an impossible thing to do. You were hazarding your life by trying to cross the seas.

And so what Moses was declaring was this, that the way to God is not impossible. Moses was saying, God has put at your disposal the very words, whereby you can make your deepest longings known to God.

[33 : 01] And in the instance before us, Paul quotes the words of Moses in the context of Christ. And he says, to obtain the righteousness that will put us into favor with God is not something that is beyond us.

We don't, says Paul, have to climb up to heaven in order to find God's righteousness in Christ. We don't have to descend into the abyss, into the deep, to find the righteousness of God in Christ.

Christ. No, he says, Christ is near us. He is not far from us. He has come, says Paul, from heaven.

He has come in from heaven, made his advent, into this world he has lived among us. not only has he lived among us, says Paul, but he has died, he has descended into the grave and he has risen again from the grave.

He voluntarily submitted to death for us. He paid the price. He made satisfaction for us, made penal satisfaction to God's law. And so Christ, says Paul, is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

[34 : 26] You don't have to go searching. You don't have to put any human effort into it. No, says the apostle Paul to his Jewish brethren, there is Christ who has fulfilled the law for sinful men and sinful women.

Put your trust in him. Take him as your saviour. That is your righteousness. But what saith it the scriptures, the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.

That is the word of faith which we preach that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

If you believe in this Christ whom God has sent, if you believe in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, if you believe that he did all that for you, then you will be saved.

You see, the mistake made by the Jews was that they thought that they could merit God's favour by personal righteousness, a personal righteousness of their own, a righteousness based on human effort.

[35 : 57] And as I've said, that is the mistake that men and women are making today. Is it your mistake? Is there someone here tonight and you fondly imagine that your good behaviour is going to make God reward you?

Is there someone here who believes that it's your kindly compassion expressed in doing good works? And how many people there are tonight and this is what they believe, so long as you do good works, so long as you help your brother who's in need, so long as you put into practice a good life like this, then God is going to be in your debt.

or is there someone here and you believe that it's your impeccable life that's going to save you?

It's your impeccable life that's going to save you. Your impeccable life that's going to bring you to heaven. I say that won't do.

In God's estimation, you are a polluted sinner. All your righteousnesses are as filthy rags in God's sight.

[37 : 33] I say this, you need Christ as your righteousness. You don't work to gain him.

You simply accept him as God's gift. Will you accept him?

Come unto me, says Jesus. I will give you rest. You say, minister, you're making it too simple.

All I've got to do is to believe. That's all. That's all. If I were to say that you had to do something more, I would be going beyond scripture.

And let me not say that, because whoever adds to this revelation or takes from it is answerable to God. it's done.

[38 : 43] The great transaction's done. I am my Lord's and he is mine. Is that what you can say? May God grant it.

Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray that our trust and confidence may be in thee as our Savior and our Lord.

We confess that we have been trying to establish a righteousness of our own. We have thought that it is by some human effort, by reaching up, by going down.

we have searched in vain, trying to find a righteousness that would place us in thy favor and that would put thee in our debt.

But thy word is showing to us that this cannot be accomplished by any human effort. That what we are asked to do is to believe, to exercise faith and to accept the righteousness that is offered to us in Christ.

[39 : 54] May we accept him gladly as our righteousness, as the one who has reconciled us to thee. Take us to our homes in safety and blot out our sins.

For Jesus' sake, Amen.