

How Can They Believe?

October 30, 2022

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Romans 10:1-17

Session Outline

1. Futile Attempts at Righteousness (Romans 10:1-8)
2. True Righteousness by Faith (Romans 10:9-13)
3. Urgency of Sharing the Gospel (Romans 10:14-17)

Theological Theme

Paul stressed the vast difference between believing righteousness can be achieved by the law and the truth that righteousness comes by faith in Christ alone.



Leader Guide

How Can They Believe?

Introduction

Remember being little and believing in something that turned out to not be true? Maybe you were sure you knew where those presents came from around your tree or how your stocking was magically full of what you most wanted. You may have been certain about how money appeared under your pillow after losing a tooth.

Though these are examples of childish beliefs people grow out of with age, the point is the same. Your faith in something, even extreme faith, did not make it so. No matter how hard you trusted and believed in any of those childhood magical beings, it didn't make them a reality. It is possible to have zeal and faith in something that is not true.

- ❓ What was a childhood belief you held strongly? How did you respond when you found out the truth?
- ❓ How would it have looked if you refused to believe the truth and kept clinging to that childhood faith?

Session Summary


Paul was heartbroken over the state of the Jewish people. They were still clinging to old ways of thinking that taught righteousness was obtained by keeping the law. These people were zealous but wrong. Their passion was based on religious tradition instead of the truth of Jesus. Paul desperately wanted them to understand the law couldn't give them right standing before God. If the law could do that, Jesus's death on the cross would have been unnecessary.

God made it clear that there is no way for someone to be saved except through Jesus and His work on the cross. Paul strived to help the people recognize and understand the simple truth of the gospel. God established the way to salvation through Jesus on the cross and yet man still tries to complicate the issue. Paul unapologetically stated that salvation is available to any who choose to believe in Jesus as their Savior. God offers salvation to all, but every human is responsible to make the choice to believe or not.


1. Futile Attempts at Righteousness (Romans 10:1-8)

Paul shared his heart and exposed his soul about the burden he felt for his people. His heart was broken for the way he saw His fellow Jews missing out on the truth. We can learn from Paul that a broken heart moves us to action. Paul wasn't just concerned. He was concerned and because of that concern, he turned to God in prayer. We should respond in like manner when we see those around us make poor choices spiritually or believe lies over truth. Prayer is always the right choice.

Notice how Paul described the people in question. He said they had zeal but no knowledge. If anyone would recognize what it looks like to have zeal for God but not enough knowledge it was Paul—he was exactly like that before his conversion experience. This is where many sincere Christians and devoted religious people can go wrong. It is possible to be deeply committed and devout, yet still live contrary to God's Word. Paul was a persecutor of Christians and firmly believed in what he was doing until he encountered the Lord.

 How is it possible to be devoted and devout in your faith yet still believe falsehoods over truth? Has this ever happened to you?

Paul was concerned for these people because they were ignorant of the righteousness of God. He wanted to make it clear that it is futile to pursue righteousness through anything other than faith in Jesus. Paul said they were seeking to establish their own righteousness and that wouldn't cut it. Not only did they lack knowledge, which led them astray, but they also believed they could earn or achieve righteousness by their own efforts.


 What are some forms of "righteousness" that people seek instead of the righteousness of God?

It's sad when people choose to trust in a wrong belief and cling to tradition over the righteousness of God. To do so is to ignore the truth and face eternal consequences. Paul took the next few verses to contrast man's attempts at righteousness with God's true righteousness. Lining up wrong beliefs with truth makes the right path clear. Paul used this tactic to encourage his people to recognize and choose Jesus every time.

In declaring Jesus as the end of the law, Paul emphasized that obedience to the law was no longer the basis of salvation. This does not mean there is no standard for Christian living or that our behavior doesn't matter. The key is to realize that the Word is near us, and we don't have to work to get to Jesus or try and earn our salvation by keeping a list of rules. Instead of having to stress over the futility of achieving righteousness by keeping the law, when we accept the gospel and trust in Jesus, we will be saved.


The Path to Belief

Paul argued that only a remnant of Israel ever believed (9:27–29). In rejecting Christ Israel was following a precedent already at work in earlier days. The Jews' zeal was commendable but nevertheless misguided. The only way of acceptance before God was faith in Christ and was (and is) within the reach of all. Those who believe in their heart and confess with their mouth "Jesus is Lord" will be saved. People cannot believe unless they can hear, and they cannot hear without a preacher. Though Israel heard, they still rejected God's message.

 Application: How have you pursued futile attempts at righteousness? What will you do to trust the gospel now?


2. True Righteousness by Faith (Romans 10:9-13)

After contrasting the different approaches to righteousness, Paul described in detail what righteousness by faith in Jesus looks like. It is not something to be achieved by works or effort but received by confessing and believing in Jesus Christ. This was a difficult concept for people who had been trained and educated that they must work and follow rules for everything. It is also struggle in our culture today. We live in a world where we constantly work and strive to be and do better. We have a “leave it all on the field” mentality that pushes us to work harder to hone our craft and make every effort. But the gospel tells us the work has been done. We can rest assured that Jesus is and will always be enough.

 Where do you have a “leave it all on the field” mentality in life? While this can be a good thing in some areas, how can it impact your trust in Jesus alone?

Paul summed up faith in Christ as confessing and believing. The word “confess” is more than just admitting sin. Confession is about agreeing. When you confess Jesus is Lord, you are agreeing with who the Scriptures say Jesus is and what He has done. It is your acceptance and belief in His work on the cross and your faith in Him as Messiah. Confessing Jesus as Lord also carries with it weight that He is the ruler of your life. You no longer serve anyone or anything else.


When you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, you are also believing in His work on the cross. It is not either the cross or the resurrection—when you believe in the resurrection, you are trusting what Jesus did on the cross. This belief is more than just intellectual acceptance or head knowledge; it must be taken into your heart as well. Moving from the head to the heart is about living differently. That is how confession and belief go hand in hand. When you believe in your heart, you will confess with your mouth. You will be moved to action for the sake of Jesus.

 How would you describe the difference between believing in your head and believing in your heart?

This combination of confession and belief in Jesus results in righteousness and salvation. Paul desperately wanted his people to get this. He clearly explained the difference between the way they had been taught and the life changing eternal truth of Jesus. The very fact that it is simple is part


of why people struggle to accept it. It can be difficult to switch your mindset from performance-based acceptance, but this is crucial for those who want to be saved.

Note that Paul called out both the Jew and the Greek to emphasize that salvation is the same for everyone regardless of nationality or culture. In Paul's day, there was a tendency to believe if people were born into a certain family or lineage, then they could expect salvation by virtue of their birth. But in Jesus there is no distinction as to who can be saved. Paul declared again that true salvation is through faith alone, in Christ alone, and it is available to anyone who chooses to confess and believe.

 Application: What needs to change in your life based on the availability of the gospel to all people? How should this change your daily actions?

3. Urgency of Sharing the Gospel (Romans 10:14-17)

After covering the details of salvation, Paul moved to what should be the natural response of people who have confessed and believed in Jesus Christ. There should be a sense of urgency when considering the lost among us. Paul looked at those around him and was brokenhearted that they were missing out on Jesus. How often do you look at people around you who are believing the wrong things and love them enough to be brokenhearted? What about the ones who have zeal and passion for what they believe but have completely missed true salvation? Are you willing to confess with your mouth what you believe in your heart so that they too might come to saving faith in Christ? That is exactly what Paul instructed believers to do.

 Who comes to mind when you think about people around you that are missing out on faith in Jesus?


When God transforms your heart and life, you should not keep silent. As a believer, it is now your responsibility to be involved with sharing how others can know Jesus also.

Preachers need to teach the Word of God and they need to be sent out and equipped. God could have chosen any means He wanted to get the message of the gospel out, but He invites His people into the process so that we can be part of His saving work. This is a privilege and a responsibility. The use of the word "preacher" does imply a pastor or church leader, but anyone who has a relationship with Jesus should also share the gospel. Do we care enough about the lost to share how they can be saved by confessing and believing in Jesus? Whether you are an ordained minister or an "ordinary" believer, we all are part of the body of Christ and have all been called to spread the good news.

 How does our church support, encourage, and send people to spread the gospel?

Those who are actively living out their faith are partnering with God in reaching the lost world. We all share about things that are important to us. We talk about what we are passionate about and if you have received Jesus as your Savior, you have been rescued from eternal death and separation from God. If we recognize the weight of this truth, how could we not have passion? The good news is meant to be shared.

Sadly, although the gospel is simple and for everyone, not all will receive it. Israel heard and yet they did not believe. Paul stated that faith comes by hearing and hearing through the Word of God. It is a sad possibility to hear the Word and not exercise saving faith in Jesus. Each person is responsible for his or her response to the offer of salvation but all who are believers have been called to continue speaking up, preaching, and sharing our own stories of faith so that as many as choose to believe can be saved.

 Application: How and when will you speak up and share the good news of the gospel this week?

Conclusion

Paul was concerned and broken over the state of his people. They had heard the gospel but missed the point of true righteousness. They were still trying to work out salvation by obeying the law. This led Paul to feel brokenhearted and desperate for them. He spent considerable time explaining the difference in righteousness under the law and true righteousness through faith in Jesus. Paul stressed that the Israelites possession of the promised land was not about their own work, merit, or efforts nor was their salvation.

It is only by confessing with our mouths and believing in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead that we can have eternal life with Christ. Our culture can get caught up much like the Israelites and miss out on saving faith because we think we must do something to earn God's acceptance. Paul reinforced the simplicity of the gospel and challenged his readers to be committed to sharing the good news with everyone. He made it clear that salvation through Jesus is the only way and is available to anyone who chooses to confess and believe. It is our responsibility to take the message of salvation to all the world.

- ① What do you need to stop clinging for earned righteousness? How do you need to pursue true righteousness in Jesus?
- ① Where do you need to move from believing in your head to believing in your heart?
- ① How is God calling you to support and encourage those being sent to spread the gospel around the world? How is God calling you to share the good news yourself?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for sending Jesus to do everything necessary for salvation. Confess ways you have attempted to earn favor instead of living in faith. Ask for opportunities to share your faith with someone this week.

Additional Resources

- *Romans 8-16 for You* by Timothy Keller
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans* by Tony Merida
- *Be Right* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- Nothing They Need

Main Passages

- Mark 6:30-44

Session Outline

1. See Jesus's Compassion (Mark 6:30-34)
2. See the Need (Mark 6:35-38)
3. See the Miraculous (Mark 6:39-44)

Memorize

How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

- Romans 10:14-15

Historical Context of Romans

Purpose

Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be identified from his direct statements in the text and inferred from the content. He expressly wrote that he wanted to impart spiritual strength to the believers at Rome (1:11–12; 16:25–26). He asked for prayer for the difficult task he was undertaking (15:30) and that he might be able to come and see them (15:32). He hoped to enlist the Roman churches to support a mission to the west (15:23–29). The content of the letter shows that the churches experienced tensions between believers from different backgrounds. Paul wanted them to be united and to avoid dissension and false teaching (16:17–18). The content also reveals his exposition of what is essential Christianity and what are matters of indifference.

Author

Paul the apostle is the stated and indisputable author of the book of Romans. From the book of Acts and statements in Romans, we learn that Paul wrote this letter while he was in Corinth and on his way to Jerusalem in the spring of AD 57, to deliver an offering from the Gentile churches to poor Jewish Christians (Ac 20:3; Rm 15:25–29).

Setting

All of Paul's writings grew out of his missionary/pastoral work and were about the problems and needs of local churches. The book of Romans is also of this genre, but it is the least "local" in the sense that Paul had not yet been to Rome. This letter was his opportunity to expound the good news message (the gospel). He could discuss the essence of sin, the salvation accomplished on the cross, the union of the believer with Christ, how the Spirit works in the Christian to promote holiness, the place of the Jewish people in God's plan, future things, and Christian living or ethics. Though Paul did not write Romans as a systematic theology, his somewhat orderly exposition has been the fountain for the development of that discipline.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Roman house churches has been preeminent among the New Testament writings for its theological and pastoral influence. It focuses on the doctrine of salvation, including the practical implications for believers as they live out the salvation given to them through Jesus Christ.

Extended Commentary

Romans 10:1-17

10:1 Paul saw no contradiction between election and prayer. Only a sovereign God, who has rights to move unilaterally in the affairs of humanity, can answer prayer. Among unbelievers we do not know beforehand who is “elect” and will come to faith upon hearing the gospel, but we can know that “God our Savior . . . wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1Tm 2:3–4). Paul therefore prayed for Jewish salvation, and we must be diligent to share the good news of Jesus with everyone. It is never proper to give up on someone as “non-elect.”

10:2–3 Both zeal and true knowledge are necessary if one is truly to know God and serve him. In his zeal as a non-Christian Pharisee, Paul (then called Saul; see Ac 7:58 and note there) persecuted the church (Ac 22:3–5). Likewise, zeal among unbelieving Jews led to Jesus’s unjust execution. In spiritual blindness they not only missed God’s way of righteousness, they opposed it.

10:4 Christ is the end of the law in being both its fulfillment and its termination. Any system of salvation based on performance is excluded.

10:5–7 Paul quoted Moses on both sides of the issue. In Lv 18:5 (cp. Gl 3:12) obedience to the law brings life, but no one can keep the law and gain righteousness (as implied by Paul’s citation of Moses in v. 6). Faith-based righteousness is from Christ. He is accessible. He died for us and was raised from the dead. Moses pointed out that God’s revelation was accessible, and Paul quoted his words to show that Christ is accessible.

10:8 The nearness of the message of faith is at the heart and mouth of people, just as Moses proclaimed the nearness of God’s revelation.

10:9–10 Jesus is Lord is a confession of faith. “Lord” is the translation of the Greek word *kurios*. This is the regular way of translating the Hebrew name for God (Yahweh) in the Greek OT (the LXX). Jesus is not only the Messiah (Gk Christ = Hb Messiah), but he is also Lord (1Co 8:6). Not only do we believe that the man Jesus was raised . . . from the dead, but we also believe that he shares the same nature with God. This is the start of the understanding of Christ’s two natures, as articulated at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). Jesus is fully human and fully God. Christians by definition believe and confess this truth.

10:11–13 Paul cited biblical support for the universal offer of salvation. Salvation is for both Jew and Greek (i.e., Gentiles) since the same Lord (Gk *kurios*, v. 12) richly blesses all who call on him. The promise is for all who call on the name of the Lord (*kurios*, v. 13). As the prophet Joel said, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Jl 2:32). Jesus is the Lord.

10:14–15 What must occur for someone to call on the name of the Lord? Someone must first be sent to proclaim the gospel message, and then listeners must pay attention and believe. In the absence of any one of these factors, no one can call on the name of the Lord.

10:16–21 Paul quoted several OT passages to show that the conditions described in vv. 14–15 had been met for Israel. The gospel message was proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire. The Jews listened and simply did not believe. The Gentiles heard too, and many embraced it. Paul’s citations show that the Gentile conversion was predicted in the OT. Ultimately, all peoples are a disobedient and defiant people. Israel was singled out in this way due to their consistent rejection of God’s message and messengers (see Ac 7:51–60).¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).

Author Bio

Timothy Keller (Romans 8-16)

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, which he started in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three young sons. Dr. Keller’s books, including the New York Times bestselling *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*, have sold over 2 million copies and been translated into 25 languages.

Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Romans)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Right)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.