

Romans 10:5-17
Ezekiel 20
Psalm 103

“Righteousness, Preaching, and Faith”

November 16, 2008

In Romans 10 Paul quotes Moses from Leviticus 18:5.

“The person who does the commandments shall live by them.”

We could go to Leviticus 18 and look at the context.

But we would be very puzzled.

Because it would not be very helpful.

And so instead we need to read Ezekiel 20.

Because in Ezekiel 20 we hear how the prophets *used* Leviticus 18:5.

And in Ezekiel 20 we hear that God alone can save his people.

READ Ezekiel 20

Sing Psalm 81

Read Romans 9:30-11:6

In Ezekiel 20 certain elders of Israel come to the prophet in order to inquire of the Lord.

That sounds like a good thing.

But God says in verse 3 that he will not let them inquire of him.

And God reminds them that when he brought them out of Egypt
he made a covenant with them.

He gave them his laws and rules,

“by which, if a person does them, he shall live.” (20:11)

But then, in the wilderness the house of Israel rebelled,

and “rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live” (20:13).

And then God destroyed the rebels in the wilderness.

But he had mercy on their children and he brought them into the promised land –

“a land flowing with milk and honey.”

But their children also rebelled against the LORD

“and were not careful to obey my rules,

by which, if a person does them, he shall live.” (20:21)

And so God said that he would send them out of the land – back into the wilderness.

He handed them over to their own ways, “rules by which they could not have life” (v25)
so that they might know who God is.

And now, now that they have been handed over to their enemies,
they want to inquire of the LORD!

In response the LORD says he will not let them inquire of him.

Rather, he will bring them into the wilderness of the peoples, and he will judge them.

“I will purge out the rebels from among you, and those who transgress against me.

I will bring them out of the land where they sojourn,

but they shall not enter the land of Israel.

Then you will know that I am the LORD.” (v38)

And God promises that the day will come when he will save them –

“and you shall loathe yourselves for all the evils that you have committed.

And you shall know that I am the LORD,

when I deal with you for my name’s sake,

not according to your evil ways,

nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,

declares the Lord GOD.” (v43-44)

So yes, when Paul says in Romans 10:5 that Moses writes about the righteousness of the law

“that the person who does the commandments shall live by them,”

he is quoting Leviticus 18:5;

but he is quoting Leviticus 18:5

within a well-established tradition of prophetic interpretation.

In Romans 9 Paul has just laid out the history of God’s purposes with Israel.

He has shown that Israel has failed to reach a law that would lead to righteousness.

NOT because the law was deficient,

but because they did not pursue the law by faith.

If Israel had pursued the law by faith,

then they would have reached the law that led to righteousness,

because they would have reached Christ.

And Christ is the end of the law (the goal of the law) for righteousness

to everyone who believes.

Why should you care about this?

Paul is going to get there in chapter 11

when he says, if this is how God treated Israel,

then this is how he will treat you (you, Gentiles),

if you should rebel.

Paul's point, for you, as much as for Israel,
is that you need to believe in Jesus.

And Paul starts by contrasting two sorts of righteousness:
the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith.

1. The Righteousness of the Law and the Righteousness of Faith (10:5-7)

*For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law,
that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. (v5)*

Paul is not saying that the law required perfect obedience.
The law did not require sinless perfection.
Certainly, the law required you to love God with all your heart –
and when you sinned against God, you brought a sin offering to cover it.
But the righteousness based on the law is focused on doing or not doing.

And so Paul contrasts the righteousness of the law with the righteousness of faith.

*But the righteousness based on faith says,
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). (v6-7)*

This is really interesting!
Some people have said that Paul is “anti-law” or “anti-Moses.”
Because he quotes Moses to describe the righteousness of the law.

But he also quotes Moses to describe the righteousness of faith!
In verse 5 he quoted Leviticus 18:5.
Here in verses 6-7 he quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-13.

In other words, Moses describes *both* the righteousness of the law *and* the righteousness of faith.

Okay, that's the easy part.
Moses teaches both the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith.
But what is Paul doing here?
Look back at Deuteronomy 30.
In Dt 29-30 Moses is laying out the blessings and the curses of the covenant.
He has just warned that if they rebel,
God will do to Israel what he did to Egypt.
And he has promised that *when* Israel rebels (not if, but when!)

God will have compassion and will bring them back from Exile.
Returning to the present, Moses addresses Israel in verses 11-14, and says,
*For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you,
neither is it far off.
It is not in heaven, that you should say,
'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us,
that we may hear it and do it?'*
*Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say,
'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us,
that we may hear it and do it?'*
*But the word is very near you.
It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

So in Deuteronomy 30, the righteousness of faith is saying
that the commandment is quite doable.
You don't need anyone to ascend into heaven to bring the commandment.
You don't need anyone to go over the sea to some distant land to find the commandment.

No, the word is very near – in your mouth and in your heart.

If you ask me, this sounds very much like Leviticus 18!
It sounds like Moses is saying that God has already given you his word.
He has told you what to do.
Now go do it and you will live!

But Paul says that there is all the difference in the world between Leviticus 18 and Dt 30.
The difference has to do with your focus.
The righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith have the same content:
God's word – his law – his *Torah*.
The difference (as we saw last time) is found in whether you pursue that law by works,
or by faith.

If Christ is the end of the law,
in other words, if the whole purpose of the law was to lead to Christ,
then that means that you do not look to yourself for righteousness, but to him.

Watch what Paul does with Dt 30.
Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'
Moses had said that you *cannot* ascend into heaven to bring the word down.
Paul understands that since Christ is the end of the law,
that there is a Christological reference there.
Do not say in your heart, "Who will bring about the incarnation of the Word?"
And likewise,

Do not say in your heart, “Who will descend into the abyss?”

Moses had spoken of crossing the sea.

Paul takes a little liberty with this,

and sees Moses’ question of crossing the sea

in terms of Christ’s descent into the abyss.

(And given the identification of the sea and the abyss in scripture,
this is not particularly surprising!)

But Paul says that the righteousness of faith says

“do not say in your heart who will bring up Christ from the dead.”

The righteousness of faith does not say, “who will bring about the incarnation?”

The righteousness of faith does not say, “who will bring about the resurrection?”

In other words,

the righteousness of faith does not seek its own righteousness.

Remember, we have seen continually throughout Romans that “righteousness”
includes more than “being just.”

Righteousness has to do with God being just, AND justifying the ungodly.

Righteousness has to do with the gospel –

the good news that God has done what the law could not do.

The righteousness of faith does not try to bring about salvation.

There is nothing you can *do* to save yourself.

Who among you could bring about the incarnation?

Can you make God appear in the flesh?

And how are you at raising the dead?

The law does lead to righteousness –

but only by faith in Jesus Christ!

And God has displayed his righteousness in doing what we could not do –

and raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

So what is the righteousness of faith?

2. The Word Is Near You – in Your Mouth (Confession) and Heart (Faith) (10:8-13)

But what does it say?

‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

And now Paul explains what Deuteronomy 30 is all about,

when you see that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness

to everyone who believes.

*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. (v8-9)*

Notice that Paul includes both the heart and the mouth (like Dt 30).

First, you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

In the Roman world the emperors claimed that Caesar is Lord.

Paul says that your final allegiance cannot be Caesar.

Your Lord – the one who rules you – must be Jesus.

AND you must confess this with your mouth.

Your allegiance to Jesus must be public and open.

And, second, you must believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

It's not that this is of any less importance.

These two things go together.

Confessing Jesus is Lord,

And believing in the resurrection of Jesus.

*For with the heart one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (v10)*

If you do not confess that Jesus is Lord,
then you cannot be saved.

Why is this so important to Paul?

Isn't the heart what really matters?

Paul will not accept such a dichotomy between the heart and the mouth.

If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead,
then you must say so!

To believe in your heart without confessing with your mouth
would be like thinking to yourself "I love my wife,"
but never saying it!

If the thoughts and beliefs of our hearts
do not result in the appropriate words and deeds,
that calls into question whether the heart really believes it!

Faith and confession must go hand in hand.

And Paul quotes two passages of scripture to demonstrate this:

For the scripture says,

'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' (Is 28:16, LXX)

*For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;
for the same Lord is Lord of all,
bestowing his riches on all who call on him.
For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* (v11-13) (Joel 2:32)

Isaiah 28 says that everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.
Joel 2 says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And so Paul says that this demonstrates that both faith and confession are necessary.
For with the heart one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

There must be both the inward faith and the outward confession.
Salvation requires both the inward and the outward.

And, Paul says, this is true both for the Jew and for the Greek.
Because the same Lord is Lord of all,
bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

That is a remarkable thing.
That God should bestow his riches on us!
We have already seen in chapter 8 that we have been adopted into God's family.
We have become fellow heirs with Jesus.

God has called us into his family.
Therefore, we are to respond by calling upon his name.

But this provokes Paul to ask a series of questions:

3. Faith Comes by Hearing, and Hearing through the Word of Christ (10:14-17)

*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?
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!' (v14-15)

If the righteousness of faith proclaims the gospel of Christ,
then if people are going to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus,
someone will need to go preach to them.

Sometimes people wonder about "those who have never heard."
Can someone be saved who has never heard of the name of Jesus?

Paul is not addressing this question directly,
but his answer would seem to be:
“Go preach to them!”
If they have never heard of Jesus, then they cannot call upon him,
and if they cannot call upon him, then they cannot be saved.

This is why we must send preachers to the ends of the earth—
both to Jews and to Gentiles—
so that all the nations may hear, and believe, and call upon the name of the Lord.

So, whom shall we send?
It seems clear to me that Paul uses this string of questions to provoke the church in Rome.
The gospel will only go as far as preachers are sent!

As I listened to the reports from around the world at the ecumenicity meeting last week,
I heard of how 20% of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand are vacant.
They need more pastors.
I heard of how pastors in Africa often have to care for 5 or 10 congregations,
because there are not enough preachers.
And in the Reformed Church of Japan there are those arguing for women pastors
because there are not enough men in the church.

How will they hear without someone preaching?

We sometimes distinguish between the “internal call” that a man hears from God,
and the “external call” that comes from the church.

Both are essential.

Sometimes the church can get over-eager
and can call someone whom God has not called.
But other times the church can be too passive
and can neglect to call someone whom God has called.

Has God called you to preach his word?

There is great need for ministers of the gospel to preach Christ, and him crucified.

But while Paul is here talking about the preaching of the Word by the ministers of the gospel,
I should point out that the whole church participates in this as well.

After all, “how are they to preach unless they are sent?”
Somebody has to do the sending!

And for that matter, someone has to believe the message,
and obey it!

As Paul concludes:

But they have not all obeyed the gospel.

For Isaiah says,

'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' (v16)

The gospel has been sent.

The word has been preached.

But not all Israel has obeyed.

Paul's last two quotations from Isaiah come from chapters 52-53, where Isaiah speaks of the return from exile, and he points to the suffering of the Servant as the one who will redeem Israel.

So when Paul quotes from Isaiah 53:1,

“Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

His hearers will be thinking of the suffering Servant.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (v17)

In our day we are obsessed with the visual.

But Paul says that faith comes through hearing.

The foolishness of preaching is the means that God has ordained to bring salvation to the nations.

So the question for you is:

will you obey the gospel?

Will you believe in Jesus,

and stop trusting in your own righteousness?

And do you confess that Jesus is Lord?

Is he your master?

Is he your king?

Does he rule you?