

Introduction: How Scripture Interprets Scripture (Ezekiel 20)

In Romans 10 Paul will quote Moses from Leviticus 18:5,

saying that the righteousness of the law says,

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

In Leviticus 18:5, God is saying to Israel,

that they shall not live like the Egyptians –

and they shall not live like the Canaanites;

Israel must not walk in the practices of the nations –

rather, Israel must keep the LORD’s statutes and rules.

And God says,

“if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.”

It’s not immediately obvious that this establishes a “righteousness of the law”

But that’s why we read Ezekiel 20.

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

And in Ezekiel 20 we hear the *history* of Leviticus 18:5.

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

But they kept rebelling.

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 says that he will judge and destroy them.

In other words, Ezekiel retells the story of Israel in the darkest, gloomiest terms imaginable.

I want you to think about your story – the narrative of your life.

How do you tell your story?

When you tell your story, you may tell it like the book of Chronicles –
a story that highlights the good times – the glory days of your past.

Or maybe, if you are a good Calvinist, you may tell it like the book of Kings –
a story of ups and downs – of rebellion and repentance –
always with hope at the end!

But I have never heard anyone tell their story like Ezekiel:

I was a rebellious child.

I was jealous of my brother and mean-spirited toward my friends.

I got a little religion in my teen years,
but it was just a mask for my insecurity and pride.

Sure, I went to church and led people to Christ, and all,
but my heart was still set on my idols.

In college and seminary, I looked good on the outside,
but inwardly I still was more concerned with myself than others.

No, I don't keep God's rules –

I prefer my own way of doing things.

God says I should love him – but no, truth be told, I serve other gods most of the time.

Ezekiel says “that’s your story.”

And Ezekiel makes it clear, that unless and until God *does something* about this –
that will continue to be your story!

But 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 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, yes!

But he quotes Lev 18:5 within a well-established tradition of prophetic interpretation.

Read Romans 9:30-11:6

1. The Outward and Ordinary Means

How does God use preaching to save you?

In our high-tech age, preaching may seem a little out of date.
Why not use more flash and bang?

It's worth noting that even in the first century there were critics of preaching.
The Roman mystery religions had more flash and bang.
The pagan temples had greater pomp and ceremony.

Paul refers to the "foolishness" of preaching.

But Paul insists that the message of the gospel is essential for salvation.
And that message must be *preached*.

As he says in Romans 10:13: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
But how can 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?"

We are going through the topics of the Shorter Catechism –
looking at the basics of the Christian faith –
how the scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God,
and what duty God requires of man.

You can summarize the Catechism by saying
that it starts with the *history* of salvation,
then it discusses the *order* of salvation,
and concludes with the *way* of salvation.

We started last fall with the history of salvation –
from God's eternal decree before the foundation of the world,
through creation, fall, and our redemption in Christ.
Because the history of salvation
is all about what God has accomplished in Christ for our salvation.

Then we turned to the order of salvation –
how the Spirit of God applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ,
by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.
The order (or application) of salvation deals with union with Christ,
justification, adoption, sanctification, etc.

Through the spring we explored the Ten Commandments –
what it means for us to love God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.

Now, we are looking at the way of salvation –
“to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin,
God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life,
with the diligent use of all the outward means
whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption.”

As Ezekiel makes it clear –
the only way we get saved is if God saves us!
Salvation belongs to the LORD!

That’s why the catechism starts with what *God* does in salvation!

But God also requires that we *respond* –
as Paul puts it: “whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Question 88 of the Shorter Catechism deals with means of grace generally:

Q. 88. *What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?*

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

How does Christ communicate the benefits of redemption to us?

This is a really important question!

If Jesus died on the cross, and rose again from the dead,
but the benefits of that death and resurrection remain distant from me –
then so what?!!

Back in question 30 the catechism had asked how the Spirit applies Christ’s redemption to us:

“The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ,
by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.”

But how?

Were you just walking down the street one day,
and suddenly the Holy Spirit worked faith in you!

Probably not.

2. Especially the Preaching

Probably somebody said something to you.

God uses *means*.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Paul says in Romans 10 –

“faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”

Our catechism has two questions on the word (which we’ll cover today),
seven questions on the sacraments (which we’ll cover in the next four weeks),
and then ten questions on prayer (which will get us through the end of the summer).

The two questions on the word deal with the two sides of how communication works.

Communication is a two-way street.

Q 89 deals with how *God* makes the word effectual to salvation,
and then Q 90 deals with how *we* are to hear the word.

Q. 89. *How is the word made effectual to salvation?*

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

There are some people who come to faith in Christ simply through reading the Bible.

And that’s great!

But the catechism follows Paul’s focus on preaching in Romans 10.

How are they to believe unless they hear –

and how can they hear unless someone preaches.

The preacher is first and foremost a herald –

a messenger who has been sent to proclaim tidings from the King.

And this message of the Word (the gospel)

is designed to do two interrelated things:

- 1) convince and convert sinners,
- 2) build them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

And you see Paul doing this as well in Romans 10:

3. Convincing and Converting – and Building You Up

In Romans 9 Paul lays 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 there was anything wrong with the law,

but because they did not pursue the law by faith.

And so in Romans 10 Paul contrasts two sorts of righteousness:

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)
(the quote from Lev 18:5)*

The righteousness of the law is our natural way of thinking.

If only I was better at doing what God said...

Or maybe you don't care about God –

maybe you have an entirely different law as your standard!

Maybe your life is governed by the law of career advancement –

well, the one who does these things shall live by them.

If you can only jump through the right hoops,

you can achieve success in your career!

Just try harder, work harder, do better – keep going, you'll make it!

But 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.

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.

This sounds a lot 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.

Leviticus 18 explains the righteousness of the law.
Deuteronomy 30 sets forth the righteousness of faith.

What's the difference?

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 is 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.

But 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 the law is always trying to be good enough –
when Israel seeks a righteousness according to the law,
then Israel is seeking its own righteousness.

But 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.

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 cannot produce righteousness –

but it does point to righteousness –

As Paul said earlier in Romans 3:21,

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it –

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

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

by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

So what is the righteousness of faith?

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);

When you see that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes,
then the word is near you (that is, the word of faith – the gospel that Paul preaches).

Notice here in verse 8 how Paul emphasizes *preaching*.
Why is the word near you?
Because you have heard the word of faith that we proclaim.

Moses had said that the word was near you –
but Israel had misunderstood what Moses meant.
Israel thought that if only they could *do* what God said,
then they would live!

But Moses had been perfectly clear that Israel was going to fail –
and that Israel's hope was that God would be merciful to them and save them.

You're gonna die!
There is *nothing* you can do to cheat death.
There is no way that you can be good enough – work hard enough – long enough –
to attain to life.
It's a dead end road – and the dead end is death itself.

And that's why Paul applies Dt 30 to the church and says:

*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.

And Paul explains why both are necessary in verse 10:

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

Even worse, it would be like thinking,
"I love that woman" –
but never saying "I do."
If you never say "I do" – then you're not married!
In order to be married, it's not enough to think, "I'm going to marry her."

If the thoughts and beliefs of our hearts
do not result in the appropriate words and actions,
then it's just a fantasy!

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.
There's the emphasis on in the inward disposition.
But Joel 2 says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
There's the outward confession.

After all, Paul says,
it is with the heart that one believes and is justified,
and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

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.

4. How to Hear the Word

But, of course, not everyone who hears the word is saved!

And so Q 90 deals with how we are read and hear the word:

Q. 90. *How is the word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to salvation?*

A. That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation and prayer; receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

We've already seen how Paul emphasizes the centrality of *faith* and confessing Christ.

God promises that he will use the word to convince and convert you –

to build you up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

But if you want that to happen,

then you need listen carefully – and prayerfully!

You need to receive the word with faith and love –

lay it up in your heart – and practice it in your life.

How do you prepare to hear the word?

I know that some families use the scripture readings

and even the prayers from the order of service

in their family worship during the week.

But what are you talking about on your way to church?

Are you having a big fight in the car?

And then you put on your “happy face” just in time to walk in the doors?

It's not easy to pay attention to a sermon.

When I was in seminary, one of my assignments was to interview three lay people,

three people whom I really respected,

and ask them several questions.

One of the questions was “how much of the average sermon do you pay attention to?”

The three answers ranged between “half” and the “three-quarters.”

I've tried to remember that over the years!

I realize that most of you are probably only hearing about half of what I say.

And for some of you with small children,
half would be a good day!

But God promises to use the *preaching* of the gospel –
the proclamation of the *good news* of what Jesus has done –
to save you.

As Paul concludes:

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.

Do you want the word to bear fruit in your life?
Then be attentive to it.

Sometimes you'll learn something new from a sermon.

Most times you may not.

But the point of the sermon is not always to teach you something new.

It is to proclaim Christ Jesus.

The point of the sermon is to call you to faith in Jesus Christ,
to repent of your sins,
and to walk in newness of life.

Sometimes that will involve teaching you something new.

Other times it will mean simply reminding you of what you already know–
but aren't acting like it!

Sometimes sermons will comfort you,
sometimes they will convict you.

But faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.