

Religious, But not Saved

Romans 10:1-8

I want to begin today by relating a fictional story that Steven Cole tells about a woman and her husband. Imagine a dear old lady who all her life has faithfully attended church. She has helped with the nursery and children's ministries, worked in the kitchen during socials, and served in the women's missionary society. Everyone who knows her says that she is one of the sweetest persons they know.

She is married to a mean old man who has no time for religion. He says that the church is full of hypocrites and do-gooders. Why should he hang out with people like that? He prefers his buddies at the local tavern, who can tell some good off-color jokes, place a friendly bet on a football game, and who swap stories about their latest fishing or hunting adventures. He scoffs at her religion and her church attendance.

If you were to ask her, "On what basis do you hope to get into heaven?" the question would shock her. Why would you even ask? If she could find words to reply, she would say, "Well, all good people go to heaven. I've always tried my best to be nice to others. I've served at church in various ways. And I've usually been able to ignore the mean comments that my husband hurls at me. God knows that I've done the best that I could. I feel that I will go to heaven because I'm a good person."

Lately, her husband hasn't been feeling very well. But like most tough old geezers he avoids the doctor like the plague. But finally he gets feeling so bad he goes to the doctor who runs a few tests and then finally gives him the bad news: "You've got advanced cancer. If you had come a few years ago, we might have gotten it. But there's not much that we can do now."

He goes downhill fast, so they arrange for hospice care. One day, a hospice worker who has been very kind to him shares the gospel with him. She tells him that God offers forgiveness for all his sins as a free gift if he will repent of his sins and trust in what Christ did for him on the cross. She leaves him with a Gospel of John. Since he knows his time is short, he devours it. As he reads, God opens his eyes to see his sin and his need for the Savior. He sees that Jesus is God's Son, the Savior of all who trust in Him. He puts his trust in Christ. He gladly shares it with the few who come to visit him in his last days. He dies, and goes to heaven.

His wife wouldn't ever say it, but she is secretly relieved that he is gone. He was always so difficult to live with. She continues with all of her religious activities through the church. A few years later, she dies. Because she was trusting in her own righteousness, this nice old lady goes to hell. She had never trusted in Christ as the necessary perfect righteousness that God gives to all who believe.

That story illustrates what Paul is teaching in Romans 10. Paul is explaining why many of the very religious Jews, zealous for God, missed being saved. Today we are going to study Romans 10:1-8. But I want you to hear the whole context as I read Romans 10:1-13:

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above)

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 which we preach):

9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Notice that this whole section is about being saved. In verse 1 Paul prays an earnest and heartfelt prayer for his people, the Israelites, **"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."** He concludes this section in verse 13 quoting the prophet Joel, **"For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."**

This leads us once again into the tension that we have already seen in Romans. On the one side is the sovereignty of God, who completely independent of anything people do, chooses to save some. He will have mercy on some, and He will harden some, and we make no contribution to His choices. On the other side is our complete responsibility to choose. Paul is now at the second of these poles. He is praying that they will hear and believe, that the truth will penetrate and change them, that they will make the choice to respond to God that is theirs to make. God is sovereign and we are responsible; both are true.

Chapter 10 is filled with persuasion, prayer, preaching, sending, and going. Those who take the gospel to others are described as beautiful, and they proclaim it because it will give life to anyone who will hear and believe.

I believe it is possible for a person to be religious and still be lost without Jesus Christ. Paul is writing about people here who were highly religious—his Jewish brothers and sisters. They had a zeal for God, but yet he said, "I am so burdened for them because they need to be saved. They don't know Jesus Christ."

Let me tell you some things about religion this morning.

I. It is possible to be religious and not be saved.

That is Paul's burden in verse 1, **"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."** Back in chapter 9 Paul had written, **"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish**

that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites,” (Romans 9:1-3).

It's possible to be religious, but not be saved. Some people don't like that word, saved. Many people hear that word and picture a poorly dressed guy who has a bad complexion and garlic breath invading our personal space with a big, black Bible looking us right in the face saying, "Brother, are you saved?" We think it is only the territory of religious fanatics. But the word saved is a good Bible word, and we ought not to avoid it. In Acts, chapter 16, the Phillipian jailor as he was getting ready to take his own life said to Paul, **"What must I do to be saved?"** Paul said, **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."** It's the most important question you can ever ask. "How can I be saved?"

Paul has already taught us in Romans that we are all born with a horrible spiritual disease: sin, rebellion against God. We are self-centered and prefer ourselves to God and our ways to God's way. We are under the wrath of God because of our sin. We deserve judgment and death. And there is nothing except God saving us that will set us free from that condition. Paul is praying for salvation because people are lost and desperate. We are dead in our sin until life becomes ours as a gift from God. We don't just need religion. We need to be saved.

Sometimes people think it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief, as long as you are zealous. Well, that's what Paul said about the Jews. He said in verse 2, **"they have a zeal for God."** Is that all it takes? How about the Muslim who bends down on their prayer cloths five times a day facing toward Mecca reciting prayers? How about the Mormon missionary who goes door-to-door seeking converts? How about the Hindu who religiously adorns the shrines of his gods? What about the Jew who religiously observes Sabbath and the law of Moses?

Paul says, **"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."** Zeal or sincerity is no mark of truth. It takes more than just zeal.

So Paul prays that his fellow Jews might be saved. We should be praying for the lost. What does Paul say in Romans 10? He said, **"my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."** That word prayer there means, I constantly am asking, I constantly am petitioning God. "God, save these people, save these people, save these people"

Are you praying for people to be saved? Does it even bother you that not everybody is saved, or does it just give you a sense of complacency—at least I'm saved?

Does it break your heart that there are people that you relate to every day that are without Christ? Can you do as much as Paul did and say, "It's my heart's desire and prayer to God for them to be saved"?

Let me give you an assignment. Just go home and take a 3x5 index card and fold it over one time. On that card write down the names of 3, 4 or 5 people that as far as you know they don't know Jesus Christ. That's all you do right now. Just write it down. Write down the names on that card. Entitle the card, "Wanted for Jesus", and you have your own little personal "wanted" list. You don't show it to them. You don't show it to anybody except maybe a very trusted prayer partner. But, you take that 3x5 index card and put it in your wallet. You put it in your purse. You carry it with you in your pocket. You put it in your money clip so you see it several times during the day and when you see that list all you do is just pray for them. Pray for them. Pray for them to be saved. How do you pray

for the lost? You pray for whatever is standing between them and God to be removed whether it be sin, whether it be pride, whether it be arrogance or bad attitude. You pray for God to draw them to Christ, to convict them of sin, to grant them repentance and faith.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND NOT HAVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul says it's also possible to be religious and not have righteousness. Now, the word righteousness means to have right standing before God. To get to heaven you have to have righteousness. You will not get to heaven unless somehow, somewhere you have attained a position of righteousness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, **"For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."** Have you got that down? Without righteousness you are not going to go to heaven.

Look at verse 3. Paul says, **"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."** He said, "There are two kinds of righteousness and there are two personal options you can choose when it comes to righteousness.

Two ways to righteousness:

1. Man's way: I will be good and do good—God will see that I am religious

There are some people who believe, like Santa Claus, God is making a list and he's checking it twice. He's going to find out who's naughty and nice. They think nice people go to heaven. Naughty people go to hell. They believe they can get to heaven by doing good works because they believe themselves to be good people. That's what Paul is saying about his Jewish brothers. He said, "They think that by establishing their own righteousness they can accept being accepted by God."

And if that was true of the Jews, it can also be true of people who call themselves Christians. There are people on the church rolls of every church who think they are going to stand before God and hold up their church membership card. "I'm a member of New Covenant Baptist Church." Or, they're going to hold up their contribution giving record, or they're going to hold up their baptismal certificate, or they're going to hold up their attendance certificate in Sunday School and say, "Look at me, God. Look how good I've been." And they think God will say, "Good for you. You are righteous."

But that is not what the Bible teaches. Remember Romans 3:10-12?

10 As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

Look at what the Bible says in Isaiah 64:6-7:

6 But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.

7 And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities.

Friend, you are no better than the generation of Jews Paul was writing about. They are zealous for God and they try to establish their own righteousness. That's option number one.

The problem with it is what? It leaves you lost, dead in sin, bound for hell.

Here's personal option number two when it comes to righteousness.

2. God's way: believe in Jesus and God grants "righteousness" to us.

We have seen over and over again in Romans that righteousness is a gift that God gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Verse 4 says, **"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."**

Now, Christmas is the gift-giving season we are most familiar with, of course. For months now you have probably been receiving Christmas catalogs focusing on all the spending and hoopla that go with Christmas. And most of us, whether or not we will admit how entrapped we are by materialism, like to be effective and creative gift-givers. We like to find just the right gifts for special people. We enjoy the thought of someone's opening a gift from us and being flooded with appreciation for our thoughtfulness.

But the Christmas season at its heart is not about any gift-giving that we should do, but about the gift of God to us. It is supremely about how God the Son himself chose to abandon the privileges of heaven and to be squeezed down into the form of a poor child born in a stable, who would live a life of ostracism and rejection, and who would finally die as a criminal on a cross. He is God's gift to us. God is giving us something we do not deserve and cannot completely understand.

You probably hear the song The Little Drummer Boy more than you want to around Christmas time. There are some interesting lines in it. The little boy observes wise men and others bringing gold and very marvelous gifts to the King, and he says to himself, "I have no gift to bring that's fit to honor him. I'm a poor boy." But then he finally decides, "I'll play my best for him." Now, if he is saying thank-you by that, that's one thing. But if he is saying, as so many of us subtly or unconsciously want to say, "I will make the best version of me possible; I will take whatever I find in myself, put it into the most attractive package, discipline it, and offer it to God to make him happy," then that is incredibly dangerous and foolish. The line "I have no gift to bring that's fit to honor him" is always true. I have no gift to bring---and I never will have. The best version of me is not good enough to offer him. No matter how zealous or focused or energetic I become, no matter how much better I can make myself, it is still not going to be fit to honor him.

Yet the anguish of Paul in this passage is that his fellow Israelites, the people of his nation, sought to establish their own righteousness rather than discovering the righteousness that comes as a gift. That very commitment to doing it themselves meant that they missed the opportunity to receive life as a gift, the righteousness that is by faith. Verse 6 says, "Don't imagine heroic and disciplined deeds for yourself. Don't tell yourself, 'I'll climb the highest height, heaven itself, and there I'll find the Lord.' Don't say, 'I'll descend to the depths of the sea, into the very caverns where Christ has gone in death and burial, and find him there.'"

The righteousness that comes from God is a gift of His grace and mercy and it is by faith. It's not your righteousness; it's the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Everybody in this room is either standing in their sin trying to be righteous or you are standing in Christ and now you are declared righteous by God. That's what Paul is saying. It is possible to be religious and not have righteousness.

III. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND NOT HAVE SAVING FAITH.

Paul talks about the righteousness that is by faith in verse 6. Then, in the last part of verse 8 he uses a phrase, the word of faith.

The word of faith isn't just believing facts about God. Somebody says, "Well, okay, pastor, you are really giving a hard time to religious people. I'm a religious person. I believe in God." Well, friend, good for you! But, do you think for one moment that every person that simply believes that there is a God is going to be saved? Look at what James writes in James, chapter 2, verse 19. He says, "**Do you believe there is one God?**" **He is being sarcastic. "Good! Even the demons believe that! And they shudder."** Do you know what he is saying here? He is saying some of the demons have more faith than some of you who claim to have faith. You say, "I believe there is a God somewhere. I believe he is powerful. I believe there is a heaven and there is a Hell. Folks, faith is not just believing facts about God.

True faith is activated by two things. First of all it is activated by your heart, and then activated by your mouth. That's why Paul writes in verse 8, "**The word is near you.**" Look at verse 9. "**It is in your mouth and it is in your heart. That is, the word of faith.**"

But, do you know what the Jews did? They hardened their hearts and they gagged on God's word in their mouths. You must believe in your heart, and you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and you will be saved. Isn't that amazing? That salvation is so near. Moses said it! Moses said, "Salvation is so near to you!" You know, there still may be some of you in this room who are reaching out to something so far away trying to be good and do good, to act religious. Folks, salvation is right here! It is activated by faith in your heart and confession of your mouth.

Letting God give us the gift of salvation is simple even while it is profound. Paul says two things are involved in discovering this gift: First, we believe in our hearts that Jesus was raised from the dead. That is really a summary of a fuller statement. Jesus was executed on our behalf. The burial of his body was the burial of our sin nature. And then Jesus was raised again to new life so that we might live in Him. The simple belief that God raised him from the dead really means that we believe the reason that he was raised from the dead and understand what went into all of that, and we agree that it really happened: Our sins were really paid for, the tomb was really empty, and God really loves us; we are persuaded of it at the deepest level.

The second thing that allows us to discover the gift of salvation is that we are willing to confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus. Confess means to say it in public. We are willing to take a stand, to march under a banner, to say that now Jesus is our Lord and give the world the right to hold us to it. There is only one Lord, and his name is Jesus.

That is a lot like marriage, isn't it? One of the easiest things to do in the world is get married; you can get married in five minutes. I know weddings often last for an hour or more because a lot of things get included in a wedding ceremony to make it pretty and special. But there is nothing lengthy, difficult, or hard to understand about the actual marriage. Just two critical elements are required if you're going to be married: First, it has to be true in your heart. You give yourself to somebody in love so that you are willing for the rest of your life to forsake all others and grow together despite the circumstances---sickness, riches, poverty, or whatever comes. And second, you have to be willing to stand up in front of witnesses and say so.

Believe and confess. There is nothing particularly heroic about either of those things. They don't take a lot of discipline, zeal, or religion. God has done all that is necessary to save us, and all we have to do is believe it and confess it. When you do this, God gives

to you the gift of the righteousness of Christ. You become a child of God having been born again by His Holy Spirit. You walk and talk with your Lord Jesus every day.

There is nothing wrong with being religious, but if you substitute it for having a relationship with Jesus Christ, it will send you to Hell. It is possible to be religious and be lost. You say, "Well, pastor, how can I be saved? How can I have righteousness? How can I exercise saving faith?"

Turn from your sins; admit that you are a failure. You'll never do good. You'll never be good enough. Say, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I deserve death in Hell, but Jesus I place my faith in you and the act of sacrifice that you made on the cross. I believe God raised you from the dead, and now, Jesus, come into my life. I stand in your righteousness alone, and I make you the Lord, the boss of my life. When you do that, you change from being a religious person to a born again believer.

God's way of salvation is not the way of the sweet little old lady, the way of being a good, religious person, because you can never be good enough. Turn to Jesus, admit you are a sinner, you need a Savior, believe that Jesus is that Savior, the Son of God who died for you and is risen and lives for you now. Confess Him as Lord and master of your life. You will be saved!

IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND:

I. NOT BE SAVED (1-2)

II. NOT HAVE RIGHTEOUSNESS (3-4)

Two ways of righteousness:

1. Man's way: I will be good and do good—God will see that I am religious
2. God's way: Believe in Jesus—God grants "righteousness" to us

III. NOT HAVE SAVING FAITH (5-8)

Salvation is activated by your:

1. Believing in your heart
2. Confessing with your mouth