

THE BOOK OF ROMANS

Lesson 23, Chapter 10

Paul opened Romans chapter 10 by saying this: ^{CJB} **Romans 10:1 *Brothers, my heart's deepest desire and my prayer to God for Isra'el is for their salvation; ² for I can testify to their zeal for God. But it is not based on correct understanding...***

Lots of zeal for God, but it is: "Not based on a correct understanding". Some translations say: "But not according to knowledge". Others say: "Not enlightened". The Greek word that is being translated by these various phrases is **epignosis** and it means **precise** knowledge. In other words, the problem is not the Jewish peoples' passivity, stupidity, wickedness, or disinterest in God; they actually have it at least partially right. Rather it is that on the one hand the meaning and purpose behind what they know about the Law and the Prophets is missing from their knowledge; and on the other hand the Synagogue leaders and Traditions of the Elders have made the people so focused on manmade minutia and trivialities that they have missed the bigger picture and it has led them off course. And the bigger picture is Messiah.

How is it that the Jews are so firmly devoted to the God of Israel, and know so much; but have so much of it wrong? According to Paul they are pursuing the right goal, righteousness, but in entirely the wrong way. It isn't just the less educated and lower end of the Jewish social scale that has it wrong; it is every level of Jewish society including the leaders of the most prestigious rabbinical academies and even the Priesthood that is supposed to be God's servants and the ultimate experts on the Holy Scriptures.

So here stands Paul saying essentially: all of you are wrong and I'm right. Sounds rather arrogant, doesn't it? But this is exactly what Yeshua sent Paul to do: straighten people out. This is what Yeshua is sending all of us, His followers, to do in a world that has made science and economics our gods. Even in non-democratic societies (as in the Jewish society of the New Testament era) when the majority of people and their leadership hold a common worldview and accept a certain way or agenda, someone who comes along to challenge it usually isn't welcomed with open arms. Martin Luther faced such a thing when he challenged the self-serving doctrines of the Catholic Church. Dr. King faced such a thing when he dared to challenge the American status quo and demanded equal rights and respect for people of color. But long before them the Apostle Paul challenged the entire Jewish religious establishment and said: your conclusions about following God and the purpose of The Law are not based on a correct understanding. We all know the results of Paul's stand; scores of thousands came to belief in Yeshua. But in a handful of years from when he wrote these words he would be martyred for those same beliefs.

Today there is a movement within the Christian faith that goes by a number of names, which seeks to challenge the doctrines of the religious establishment. You and Seed of Abraham

Torah Class are part of that movement. Like Paul we stand together and say to our brethren of the faith: you have much of it right, but you also have much of it wrong. Your traditions have undermined the Word of God, tainted the truth and made the Body weaker. And like Paul who called upon God's written Word to plainly prove his allegations and to re-establish the divine truth at a critical juncture in human history, so do we. And like for Paul, a relative few who listened to him had their eyes opened and they believed; but the majority turned a blind eye towards the Scriptures that were shown to them (the Scriptures they claim to be knowledgeable of and devoted to) because long held, cherished customs and traditions are very hard to give up no matter how erroneous the Bible might prove them to be.

Our zeal and devotion to a particular denomination or congregation or person isn't evidence of having it right. And neither does it impress God. What impresses God is to search for and accept the correct understanding, as evidenced by His Word to us, and then with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to act upon it regardless of the personal cost. I realize that all I've said to you so far today comes from the examination of but a single Greek word that Paul uttered: **epignosis**.....precise knowledge. But just as the implications of that one word were enormous in Paul's day so are they in ours.

Paul claims that the problem for worshippers of the God of Israel is not the lack of interest, but rather the lack of **precise** knowledge. It is the lack of **correct** understanding, which inherently means that an incorrect understanding has been accepted and this dangerous situation must be resolved. Essentially, in all of his letters that we find as Bible books in the New Testament, that is what Paul is trying to do but it is a monumental task; it is complex and controversial and he will have to face never ending criticism and opposition. Paul was both a courageous and a stubborn man. But he was also fully sold out to the Lord and to the divine truth. Christ knew what he was doing when He chose Paul.

Let's read Romans chapter 10 from the beginning.

READ ROMANS CHAPTER 10 all

Paul says that despite "their" great zeal for God, "they" have incorrect understanding. Who is "they"? Who has incorrect understanding? Clearly it is Jews because gentiles do not have a heritage of worshipping the God of Israel nor do they begin with a knowledge of The Law of Moses and the Prophets. Bottom line: as we discussed in earlier lessons regarding chapters 7 and 8, much of what Paul says is directly aimed at Jews and here is another case in point to begin Romans 10. What does Paul say that the incorrect understanding revolves around? It is an ignorance of God's way of making people righteous as opposed to the way that the Jewish people are currently seeking righteousness. And even the type of righteousness they are seeking is not sufficient to deliver them from eternal death. The proper (the only) way to a saving type of righteousness is God's way; and God's way is through trust in His Son Yeshua.

So since we know that at this point in Romans 10 he is addressing Jews, primarily, and the issue is righteousness, then the serious matter Paul has thus far been concerned about in his letter to the Romans is Israel's general state of unrighteousness and especially as it relates to their election as God's chosen people. There is nothing more dangerous to Israel, and nothing

more dangerous to us, as believing (for all the wrong reasons) that we are right with God.....but we're not. So Paul has set two foundation stones: first is that Israel (in general) is in a condition of unrighteousness before God even though they believe that they have striven for righteousness. And the second is that even though this unrighteousness is the result of unfaithfulness to God and an incorrect understanding of God's ways and purposes, due to God's character of always keeping His promises and because of His unfathomable mercy, God has not rejected Israel.

So Paul is going to continue to discuss the relationship between Torah observance (obeying The Law) and the righteousness gained from trust in God through Christ. And despite a widespread attitude and doctrine within the Church that there is NO relationship between Torah observance and righteousness in Christ, Paul has at every turn refuted that notion usually by exclaiming: "Heaven forbid!" However explaining exactly what that relationship is and how it works in the lives of Believers has been quite a challenge for Paul for two reasons: first, as concerns Jews, what Paul is explaining flies in the face of the Jewish Traditions (*Halakhot*) and the many accepted interpretations of Scripture as taught by the religious leadership. And second, as concerns gentiles, by nature they have little understanding of Jewish Traditions OR Holy Scripture and so it is difficult to find a context and vocabulary from which to explain these important matters of sin, salvation, repentance, trust, and redeemed living. The Jews have much to unlearn before they can re-learn the correct understanding; and the gentiles have much to learn so that they can have any actual understanding at all!

So in verse 4 Paul tells his readers what God's way is to obtain righteousness: it is to pursue **the goal** of The Law of Moses; and the goal is Messiah. However the CJB reads a little differently in verse 4 than most English versions (even though it is the superior translation). The usual way we are used to seeing it is more as it is in the KJV: ^{KJV} **Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.** We had a brief discussion about this verse to end last week's lesson, and I quoted the eminent Bible Scholar C.E.B. Cranfield from his Commentary on Romans to make the point that this verse has been terribly misquoted and misunderstood over the centuries. The misunderstanding has to do with that little 3-letter English word: "end". In Greek the word is **telos**. And while a valid English translation of **telos** can be "end", it does not mean "end" in the sense most common to English speakers today; the sense of terminating or abolishing something. Rather the word "end" is meant in the same sense as in our well-known Western expression: the end justifies the means. That is: the goal justifies whatever it takes to achieve it. So the English words goal, aim, purpose, and intent are probably better choices to express the meaning of **telos** than the word "end" in this verse according to our use of the English language in our day. Finish, terminate, and abolish are simply misunderstandings of the Greek **telos** in this context. Thus despite the insistence of much of Christianity to the contrary, this verse is Paul explaining that Christ, Messiah Yeshua, is the goal of The Law to attain righteousness. However while indeed righteousness in Messiah is the goal of the Torah (the Law of Moses), the **type** of righteousness that is the goal is a very unique type; it is a saving type. Let me be clear in what I'm saying: not all types of righteousness are created equal. And the saving type, the supreme type of righteousness for humans, is available only by trusting in God through His Messiah. Once again: this verse has nothing to do with terminating anything; and especially has nothing to do with terminating The Law because the idea of terminating doesn't appear here.

Let's break for a moment and discuss the issue of righteousness as the Jews saw it and why it presented such a difficulty for them, and why they viewed Paul with such skepticism. Jews did NOT imagine righteousness in the same way as Christians do. Jews imagined righteousness as but doing what God demands and thus as pleasing Him. So a righteous Jew was a Jew who had a great zeal to please Yehoveh by obeying the Law of Moses and thus his goal was God's favor. For all practical purposes this righteousness only had to do with the time period while that person was alive, beginning at the age of accountability and terminating upon his death.

It is also important to remember that Jews had no thought of "dying and going to Heaven", which has in modern Christianity become perhaps the prime (if not the only) reason to be righteous in God's eyes so that when we inevitably die, we're assured of our place in Heaven. Jews in the 1st century A.D. didn't have much of a developed idea of an afterlife. And what little they did have was not something that was universally agreed to within Jewish society. Rather it more resembled ancestor worship (although it wasn't exactly that). Thus we hear a hope about a person dying that they will go to be with their ancestors. Where this reunion of the recently deceased and his ancestors took place was believed to be on earth; or better, **under** the earth. In Hebrew this was Sheol. Sheol was the grave, but depending on exactly how one thought of the afterlife, Sheol was also the entry point into the place of the dead; or it was actually the place where the dead existed in some unspecified form. The righteous dead (those who obeyed the Torah) had a more pleasant afterlife than the unrighteous dead who were usually envisioned as being eaten up by worms (although most Jews acknowledge that this was the fate of all humans) and their existence ceasing.

So for a Jew to be righteous was to follow God's laws and commands and to strive to remain ritually clean. There was nothing beyond that. However because of the development of the Synagogue after the Babylonian exile, and because the Pharisees were the Synagogue teachers (not the Priests), then the Traditions developed by the Pharisees (the **Halakhah**) that was purported to derive from the correct interpretations of the Torah, was what the average lay person was taught, believed and lived by. So in reality Jews followed **Halakhah** and not the actual Law of Moses (although they saw them as more or less the same thing). Oddly enough, in some cases this **Halakah** actually reflected the concept of the goal of The Law as righteousness in Messiah; so what Paul was preaching was hardly new and innovative. However, different Pharisees saw such matters differently and so on this subject there was no consensus. The Essenes (the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls), interestingly, believed and wrote that righteousness was less an issue of works and more an issue of God's mercy.

Listen to this excerpt taken from scroll 1QH, from what is called the Thanksgiving Hymns of the Dead Sea Scrolls, written by the Essenes at least 100 years before Christ was born. The truth of this theology sounds like something Christ Himself would have taught.

".....and I have no fleshy refuge; and man has no righteousness or virtue to be delivered from sin and win forgiveness. But I, I have leaned on Thy abundant mercy and on the greatness of Thy grace.....and thou has created me for Thy sake to fulfill The Law, and to teach by my mouth the men of Thy council in the midst of the sons of men, that Thy marvels may be told to everlasting generations and Thy mighty deeds be contemplated without end. And all the nations shall know Thy truth and all the peoples Thy glory. For

Thou hast caused them to enter Thy glorious Covenant with all the men of Thy council and into a common lot with the Angels of the Face....”

So it is important for the average Bible student to understand that never did the Essenes teach that obeying The Law brought a saving righteousness; and yet they also saw that continuing obedience to The Law was still required by God. Not Paul, Christ, or any other New Testament author, or person quoted in the New Testament, are found fighting against a belief among Jews that obeying the Law of Moses brought a **saving** righteous with it (salvation) and thus a trip to Heaven upon death as a reward. That is because such a belief did not exist within Judaism (except perhaps in some isolated instances). So the usual Christian condemnation of Jews and so-called Judaizers as teaching folks to “follow The Law in order to work their way to Heaven” is a fantasy, if not a slander.

Part of Paul’s challenge, and mine and yours as well, is simply in the definition and use of the word “righteous”. Biblically, indeed there was and remains a type of righteousness that comes from being obedient to God. And yet there is another type of righteousness that comes ONLY from God’s mercy and grace, and this is the kind that saves us. Paul addresses this dilemma of explaining and understanding the types and sources of righteousness in another of his letters, the letter to the Philippians. I’m going to give this to you from the KJV because the CJB obscures the point I’m making.

Philippians 3:8-9 KJV

⁸ Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, ⁹ And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

The point is this: Paul is saying that there are two basic and legitimate types of righteousness; both of which remain relevant. There is the righteousness that comes from obedience to The Law; and there is a different and saving kind of righteousness that comes from trust in Christ. They are both properly called “righteousness” but it is meant in two different senses. One type does not replace the other. Righteousness from our trust in Christ is a merciful act of God. Righteousness from being obedient to God’s commandments is something we earn and is an act that we do ourselves. Both types are true righteousness, and both types are valid, but each is for a different purpose.

Let me give you an analogy. As living creatures we must have food to eat or we will starve and die. So without doubt, food is necessary to sustain life. But we must also have air to breathe or we will suffocate and die. So without doubt, air is necessary to sustain life. If we are lost in the wilderness without food, we still have air and so have life.

Thus in a sense air is superior to food for life. But at some point we must have food or even with plenty of air we’ll die. When we finally find that food and eat it, does that replace our need of air? Obviously not. Rather both are needed; they are complementary, each serving entirely different but necessary functions. It is the same with the kind of righteousness that comes

from obedience to God's commandments, and the different kind of righteousness that is a free gift from God because of our trust in Christ. One type is indeed superior to the other but both are needed as they each serve different but necessary purposes in our faith walk with God. Our trust in Christ does NOT substitute for obedience (air does not substitute for food); and our obedience does not substitute for trust in Christ (food does not substitute for air).

As always, Paul depends upon the Holy Scriptures to make his case. Verse 5 quotes a portion from Leviticus 18:5. But as is the standard way that a Rabbi expounds upon a Scripture, he only quotes a small portion that brings to mind for the listener or reader the entire passage. And here Paul reminds his readers that Moses wrote down the Torah and made it clear that the person who does the Law will attain life by doing so. This fact is God-given and not a Tradition.

Leviticus 18:1-5 CJB

^{CJB} Leviticus 18:1 ADONAI said to Moshe, ² "Speak to the people of Isra'el; tell them, 'I am ADONAI your God. ³ You are not to engage in the activities found in the land of Egypt, where you used to live; and you are not to engage in the activities found in the land of Kena'an, where I am bringing you; nor are you to live by their laws.

⁴ You are to obey my rulings and laws and live accordingly; I am ADONAI your God. ⁵ You are to observe my laws and rulings; if a person does them, he will have life through them; I am ADONAI.

So here is Paul saying that the Lord made it clear through His Mediator Moses that His elect are indeed to obey God's laws and commands and if they do, the elect will have life through them (life as opposed to death....a positive life experience as opposed to a negative life experience). Please note: either what God said to Moses, and Moses wrote down here in Leviticus 18, is true or it is not true. Assuming it is true, then either it remains true or God has changed His mind and (according to some Christian doctrine) obedience to The Law has been flipped on its head and now such obedience brings death and darkness. If that is the case, then just how trustworthy is our God? The good news is that it is not the case; God still expects His worshippers to observe His Torah and through the obedience to the Torah we will have life. But now Paul switches and shows the other side of the coin regarding Scriptures that speak of how a worshipper gains and sustains life. He quotes several verses from Deuteronomy 30.

According to Rabbi Joseph Shulam, what Paul is doing is a standard rabbinical technique for examining a Bible passage. That is, in this case two different biblical approaches are taken to explain something; in this case it is to explain how one gains life. So Paul is going to quote and compare the two approaches from the two sets of Scripture. Let's read several verses to find the intended context that Rav Sha'ul wants to present to us.

Deuteronomy 30:10-19 CJB

¹⁰ "However, all this will happen only if you pay attention to what ADONAI your God says, so that you obey his mitzvot and regulations which are written in this book of the

Torah, if you turn to ADONAI your God with all your heart and all your being.

¹¹ For this mitzvah which I am giving you today is not too hard for you, it is not beyond your reach. ¹² It isn't in the sky, so that you need to ask, 'Who will go up into the sky for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?' ¹³ Likewise, it isn't beyond the sea, so that you need to ask, 'Who will cross the sea for us, bring it to us and make us hear it, so that we can obey it?'

¹⁴ On the contrary, the word is very close to you- in your mouth, even in your heart; therefore, you can do it!

¹⁵ "Look! I am presenting you today with, on the one hand, life and good; and on the other, death and evil- ¹⁶ in that I am ordering you today to love ADONAI your God, to follow his ways, and to obey his mitzvot, regulations and rulings; for if you do, you will live and increase your numbers; and ADONAI your God will bless you in the land you are entering in order to take possession of it.

¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, if you refuse to listen, if you are drawn away to prostrate yourselves before other gods and serve them; ¹⁸ I am announcing to you today that you will certainly perish; you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Yarden to enter and possess.

¹⁹ "I call on heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have presented you with life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, so that you will live, you and your descendants..."

Clearly Paul is not quoting Deuteronomy 30 in order to disagree with it! He is not using this Torah passage to dispute God or Moses or to say that God has changed His mind or that Moses was wrong. Rather Paul is using it in a positive way to make his case about the challenging issue of righteousness and trusting and how one gains life. Notice verse 14: it says that the Word (God's Word, His instruction) is in your heart. This is referring to faithfulness as the motivating factor for obeying God. And God makes the same bargain time and again with Israel; do My commandments **because of** your faith and trust and this will gain you life. Disobey my commandments and go follow other gods (that is, show a lack of faithfulness and trust in the God of Israel) and gain death.

Also notice in Deuteronomy 30:19 that the classic Hebrew couplet is used; that is, two sets of terms are compared side by side. In this case God says that life and death are synonymous with the blessing and the curse. Life equals blessing; death equals curse. And this is what Paul is speaking about in this and others of his letters when he speaks about "the curse of the Law". The curse of the Law stands as opposed to the blessing of the Law. The curse comes from disobedience; the blessing from obedience. The curse comes from lack of faith and trust; the blessing comes from faithfulness and trusting. Yet still many Believers claim that Paul says the Law itself is a curse! Nothing could be more slanderous towards God or un-Scriptural in its principle than holding such a position. To contend that the Law of Moses is a curse upon human kind is to call God a liar and a fraud and Paul has gone to great lengths to say just the

opposite.

Paul now connects what Moses said in Deuteronomy 30 with the person of Yeshua. After quoting from Scripture, "Do not say in your heart, who will ascend to Heaven", Paul says that this is about how it is not necessary to go to Heaven to bring down the Messiah because it is already done. And then next after quoting more Scripture, "Who will descend into Sheol (the grave)" he says that is not necessary to bring Christ up from the dead because it is already done. Here is Paul's point: he is demonstrating the direct connection between Yeshua and the Torah. They are not two separate unrelated entities but rather they are as fused as the hydrogen and oxygen atoms that together make water. Even more than being fused together, within The Law itself Christ is its very essence, goal, purpose, and meaning. Messiah Himself said the same thing in the Book of John.

John 5:46-47 CJB ⁴⁶ *For if you really believed Moshe, you would believe me; because it was about me that he wrote.* ⁴⁷ *But if you don't believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"*

What Moses wrote was the Torah. But Yeshua says that from the bigger picture it was actually about Him that Moses wrote (so tightly interconnected are Messiah and The Law). So Paul is merely echoing this same thought as found in John 5. But even more, Yeshua makes this startling statement (and I paraphrase): how is it possible for you to believe what I tell you if you won't accept what Moses says is the truth?

Believers: here is yet another statement from our Savior that makes it plain that we are to believe and take to heart what Moses wrote; not wad it up and throw it in history's dust bin. There is no other reasonable way to spin what Yeshua said. If we can't accept what Moses wrote (and how can we know what Moses wrote without accepting its validity and carefully studying it?), Christ questions how we are in any way capable of understanding and believing what He says. The Torah is the foundation for what Christ proclaims. Take away the foundation and the house will quickly collapse.

Here's the thing: when we read Paul's writings honestly and without prejudice, there is an obvious tension between the type of righteousness that comes by obedience to the Law and the type of righteousness that comes by trusting in Messiah. Where one kind of righteousness begins and the other ends, there is not a stark line because there is overlap. As Christ says, even His own essence and purpose is contained within The Law of Moses and in fact is its goal. Not surprisingly because of this close inter-relation between Christ and The Law, The Law of Moses from its inception required trusting and doing, just as salvation in Christ requires trusting and doing.

Matthew 7:21-22 CJB ²¹ *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants.* ²² *On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?'* ²³ *Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!"*

Thus for The Law and for Christ, while doing the Word is commanded (following The Law) it must be done in the context of trusting God; otherwise it is hollow and legalistic. But the next question is, what is trusting? What, exactly, is this trust that Moses, Yeshua, Paul and others say is a mandatory element of our relationship with God? In verse 9 Paul breaks it down into two key components. Trusting is 1) a sincere **inner** belief in the nature and character of the God of Israel, and 2) a sincere **outer** belief that is confirmed by proclaiming this belief in public by means of confessing it. The Bible uses the metaphor of the heart as the location of this sincere inner belief; and our mouth as the instrument to speak and profess the truth of The Gospel outwardly. What are we to sincerely believe? First, that Yeshua is Lord and second that God raised Him from the dead. And what happens when we do this? We are saved.

Continuing with the theme of heart and mouth as found in Deuteronomy 30, in Romans 10:10 Paul says the heart is involved because it is the repository of this trust that we have and thus it is the engine that keeps our trust alive and well and functioning. Our mouth is used to continue to make it known to others because it is the organ of communication among humans; we are not to keep the Word of God, and the way to saving righteousness, only for ourselves.

We'll continue with Romans 10 next time.