

All you need is faith in Jesus!
Romans 9:30-10:20
February 8th 2026
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Some of you may be aware, through social media, that a crisis is taking place in some charismatic church circles: a prominent leader has been discovered to be a false prophet.

This man would pretend to be receiving prophecies from God about people in the audience, facts about their lives and families. Congregations would gasp in awe—he knew their address, even the name of their dog. But it turns out that he was receiving all that information, not from heaven, but from FaceBook.

Jesus warned a number of times, “Beware of false prophets” (Matthew chapters 7, 24). This tragic case has raised the more whole question: where does spiritual discernment come from?

The answer is this: spiritual discernment comes through the Word of God preached and loved by God’s people. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 Paul warned that in the last days people will....

“...perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved..” (2:10)

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews was dismayed at the spiritual backsliding of the people he was writing to, which was brought on by their *neglect of the truth*. They’re only going to get back on track if they “leave the elementary teachings of Christ and go on to maturity” if they move onto solid food, which will teach them to “*distinguish good from evil*” (chapter 5).

Spiritual discernment, brothers and sisters, comes with an ever-deepening understanding of God’s truth in Scripture. That is why *preaching is at the heart* of our church tradition, at MPC & MHC. This half an hour—what a small slice of our week! - is precious to us! That’s why we’re *making our way through Romans*, including the difficult parts! (Perhaps someone has been thinking, “Romans is too difficult for me!” No, Christian truth, Christian doctrine, by the grace of God will make us discerning believers who are strong in faith.) *May none of us be content* to paddle in the shallows of Christian doctrine but may we all love venturing out into the depths of divine truth!

Introduction—these verses

Let’s remember the puzzle that underlies Paul writing chapters Romans 9,0 & 11. In Paul’s day lots and lots of Gentiles (that’s everyone in the world who is not a Jew, I presume everyone in this room is a Gentile) were being converted, but very few Jews. As Paul went from city to city, Gentiles were coming to Christ in their droves, but very few Jews: Here it is, 9:30-32

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of

righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why Not?"

You would have expected the Jews would rush to embrace their long-awaited Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. Why not? In Romans chapter 9, we heard the divine explanation: the only Jews being saved were the ones chosen by God. That's the heavenly reason, but in chapter 10, Paul explains the human reason Jews were not being saved—they were rejecting Jesus the Messiah, it was their fault, the blame lies wholly with them. Verse 21 sums up the situation, Paul is quoting from Isaiah 65: *"All day long I have held out my hands to a **disobedient and obstinate people.**"*

The present section of Romans, from 9:30-10:21 is jam-packed with quotes from the OT so that a Jew reading it could see Paul's proof in black and white. The reason the Jews were dying in their sins was entirely their own fault! They were pursuing righteousness the wrong way, by works, not by faith; they heard and understood the Gospel but refused to believe it.

Let us draw out three truths from this chapter:

1. The Mystery

Romans 9 and 10 introduce a great mystery: How does "Human Responsibility" (chapter 10) - it was the Jews' fault for rejecting Jesus, and "Divine Sovereignty"—(chapter 9) God chooses who is saved, fit together?

The reason some are saved is that God has chosen them and the reason others are not saved is that God has not chosen them – that's divine sovereignty. The reason some are saved is because they respond to the Gospel, the reason some are not saved is that they reject the Gospel – that's human responsibility.

How do they fit together? The answer is we do not know! It's a mystery we cannot understand. Our minds are too small. We must humbly accept the truth and worship the God who rises infinitely above us.

I don't know about you, but when I come across a truth that is far beyond my tiny mind to grasp, I rejoice! It's comforting, it shows the Bible is not a human book, but a divine one; it reveals a God whose wisdom is deep and whose judgements are unsearchable, a God worthy of our worship and adoration!

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

Human Responsibility and Divine Sovereignty are both true, they are friends who need our acceptance, not enemies who need our reconciling. Let's accept and embrace them both humbly.

The second truth from this chapter is an explanation of the one and only way to God.

2. The Right Path

Let's go back to the Jews of Paul's day. The reason they were not being saved like the Gentiles is that they were going down the wrong path, the wide and broad path that leads to destruction, as Jesus described it in Matthew 7. What was the wrong path?

They were trying to produce their own righteousness, "Look at what a good person I am, I obey all your commands, surely you must accept me into heaven."

"They did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own," (10:3)

They were very zealous in these matters, but their zeal was not according to knowledge, because we know from chapters 1-3, that none of us can live a righteous life, "There is no-one righteous, not even one" (3:10) "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

The Jews were not the only one to make this mistake. All the religions of the world say the same thing: do this, do that and you will get to heaven.

In the 1500s the Roman Catholic church taught "salvation by works," that if you did this religious deed and that religious work, you would be saved. This was what Martin Luther was taught, so he filled his life with religious deeds and good deeds to get to heaven:

- He became a monk and committed himself to poverty, chastity, and obedience. He often went without food for long periods and stayed awake (that's called vigils) to the point that he nearly froze himself to death in his cell, all to earn brownie point with God
- He went on Pilgrimage. During one trip to Rome, he performed what the church told him were acts that would earn him brownie point in heaven, he visited holy sites and climbed the so-called "Holy Stairs" 28 marbled steps on his knees, reciting the Lord's Prayer on every step! Trying to impress God!

Raymond Tallis, the humanist philosopher this very week thinks the same:

"I die after a blameless life in which I have shown my love of God by worship, faith and good deeds. Well qualified (I hope) I leave my mourning relatives and enter eternity where I enjoy eternal life.." (page 413)

Everyone thinks "good works", gets into heaven!

Perhaps there is someone listening to this sermon who believes that they can earn their salvation by doing good works or religious works, and so on. God has brought you to the right sermon!

Trying to earn your salvation by works is the wrong path!

What's the right path? Not by doing, doing, doing, but simply by believing, believing, believing!

*“If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved.**” (10:9)*

We must believe in Jesus Christ, that's it! Believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord, that is God, believe that God raised him from the dead. And if we truly believe that in our hearts then it will come out of our mouths:

*“If you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved.**” (10:9)*

Is there someone here this morning who is trying to please God by your good works? You're trying to produce enough righteousness to make God say “You're a good person, you can come to heaven!” I believe there are lots of those people in this country. And perhaps for the first time, here today, God is saying to you that works is the wrong path. All you need is faith in Jesus Christ, “I believe he is the Son of God, I believe he died for my sins, I believe he rose from the dead” Call on the name of the Lord today, believe Jesus is Lord, believe he rose from the dead, and you will be truly saved!

Is there someone else who wants to become a follower of Jesus but doesn't know how? Same for you! Simply believe that Jesus is the Son of God, risen from the dead. You don't need a religious upbringing, you don't need to have a record of church going, you don't need to be a “good person” all you need is to believe in Jesus Christ—and if you do, say it out loud! Then get baptised!

Isn't the Gospel simple? A child can understand and respond, a philosopher will never plumb the depths of God's wisdom.

(3) The Church's Responsibility

Let's draw out one more truth from this chapter. Since salvation comes to us merely by believing in Jesus Christ, the church has a duty to share the good news with the world so that they can believe:

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Every believer has the responsibility of being obedient to the great commission, to “Go and make disciples of all nations”, Matthew 28, whether that is by going or giving. We are all called to let our light shine before the world (Matthew 5), all called to be prepared to give an answer for the hope we have, (1 Peter 3), but here in Romans 10, Paul is thinking especially of people who are sent, preachers, evangelists, pastors, missionaries.

“How can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?”

Our task as a church is to be constantly and prayerfully looking out for those who God is calling to preach the word and to send them out! How can anyone preach unless they are sent, says Paul? “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matthew 9)

Is God calling someone in this room to be a missionary, an evangelist, a pastor? Is someone feeling the call of God on your life? As young as 19 years old I heard God call me, I didn't know what to. Ten years later, through the leaders of my local church, God called me to be a preacher and a pastor. I thank God for those elders who were constantly prayerfully looking out, who is God calling?

Summary

- Let's accept the mystery —those who are saved are saved because God chooses them (DS), those who are not saved are not saved because they walk out on God. (HR)
- Let's make sure we are on the right path—that we are trusting in Jesus Christ
- Let's look out for those God is calling and send them out