

God's Way Is The Right Way

(Romans 9:30–10:13)

Opening Story: Running the Wrong Way

If you are a sports fan you may recall the story of how, on New Year's Day in 1929, Georgia Tech played the University of California in the annual Rose Bowl football game. In that game a man named Roy Riegels, the center of the California football team, recovered a fumble.

In all the excitement and pressure of the moment, Reigels became confused and began running the wrong way. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, saw what was happening and ran with all his might, overtook Reigels, and tackled him just before he could cross the goal line and score for the opposing team.

This was during the first half. Everyone was wondering what Coach Nibbs Price would do with Roy Riegels in the second half. During half-time Riegels sat alone in a corner, wrapped a blanket around his shoulders, with his face buried in his lap.

Three minutes before the start of the second half Coach Price addressed the team and said, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second."

Riegels never moved. The coach called him and again he never moved. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second."

Reigels said, "Coach, I can't do it to save my life. I've ruined you. I've ruined the University of California. I've ruined myself. I couldn't face that crowd in the stadium to save my life."

Then Coach Price reached out and put his hand on Riegels' shoulder and said, "Roy, get up and go on back, the game is only half over."

Roy Reigels went back in and Coach Price said there has never been a man play football as Roy Riegels played that second half. Sadly though, he was never able to overcome the nickname that he had earned by that one mistake on the field. He was forever known as "Wrong Way Reigels."

I know that life isn't fair and that sometimes we really make some dumb mistakes. All too often, one single mistake, one act of rebellion, or one moment of sin and failure will stay with us for the rest of our lives. We will be forever branded and known by the mistake that we made. It may even be etched into our tombstone like some of the ones you can find in cemeteries today.

Here are a few tombstones that I found, which record the wrong way each of these individuals went in life.

Here lies Lester Moore, Four slugs from a forty-four, No Les - No More.

Here lies a man named Zeke, Second fastest draw in Cripple Creek

Here lies the body of Jonathan Blake. He stepped on the gas Instead of the brake.

Intro: I am certain that all of us here this morning have made a wrong decision and went the wrong way at one time or another. Most of us are afflicted with a disease known as "Doing it my way." No matter what anyone says, "I am going to do it my way!" Unfortunately, this tendency to do it our way affects some of the most important issues in life. **Particularly when it comes to acquiring eternal salvation.** Many people want to seek salvation their way, rather than God's way. The people of Israel were like that. They are the primary focus of chapters 9, 10, and 11 of Romans.

Paul pointed out in our previous study, Romans 9:14-29, that the Jews were God's chosen people. He had elected them according to His sovereign will. However, in spite of all their marvelous privileges, the majority had repeatedly chosen to reject Him. Paul concluded that even if the people of Israel become as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a small remnant will be saved (Zech. 13:8-9). If not for the grace of God, Israel's depravity would have led to their total destruction; they would have become as Sodom, and would have resembled Gomorrah (v. 29). There is no trace of these godless cities today. Why did the Jews always choose to reject God's way, and go the wrong way? It just didn't make any sense.

This leads us back to the question being leveled against God by Paul's critics: **"Have the promises of God failed?"** Paul's first response to that question was to discuss the mystery of God's sovereign elective purposes. We looked at that last Sunday morning. We have no claim on God based upon ancestry or family ties. That is, God does not save people on the basis

of birth or family ties. God says, He will have mercy on whomever He chooses to have mercy.

Paul next moves from divine sovereignty to human responsibility. This is the other side of the coin. As I stated last week, while I cannot explain to you how human responsibility harmonizes with divine election, I accept both to be true. In my present state as a fallen finite being I cannot comprehend how both of these seemingly contradictory truths harmonize. However, the Bible teaches both, and I accept both as true. ***God decrees and we decide.*** Here my friends, nobody, and I mean nobody attains a right standing before God who does not voluntarily respond to God's gracious call. We must come to God in the way He has appointed. It has always been by grace through faith. This is the only way to be saved, it is the right way, because it is God's way.

Sadly, many in Israel did not come to faith in Christ. Why? Because they tried to please God by their own works of righteousness, and not by faith. The Jews rejected God's gracious gift of His Son, and attempted to please Him with a self-righteousness based on Law-keeping.

This is a very practical lesson for us today. There are many people in churches today, who like the Jews of old, insist that they can attain a right-standing with God and secure a place in heaven based on doing things their way. Rejecting God's way of salvation through faith in His Son Jesus Christ will result in eternal consequences. Look with me first of all, at the people of Israel's denial of the right way, Romans 9:30–10:4

I. Israel's Denial Of The Right Way (9:30–10:4)

Once again, we are talking about the nation of Israel, and Paul presents four reasons why the nation of Israel denied the right way, God's way of salvation.

A. They failed to attain a righteous standing before God (vv. 9:30-32a)

v. 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.

Paul continues with a shocking paradox. Once again he asked his familiar rhetorical question, **What shall we say then?** How is it that Gentiles, who never sought a right standing before the One True and living God, came to

attain righteousness, but Israel, who sought for righteousness didn't find it?

The Gentiles attained God's righteousness by placing their faith in God's Son Jesus Christ. Following the churches establishment in Jerusalem, the good news about God's provision of forgiveness and life through His Son spread quickly throughout the Gentile world. Many Gentiles heard about the gracious provision God had made in sending His Son to Calvary to die for the sins of the world. They believed the message, and put their faith in Christ alone for their eternal salvation. As a result, God graciously granted them His righteousness—a right standing before Him.

The Israelites by way of contrast, pursued a law of righteousness, but did not arrive at that law. But Why? Why did Israel not attain to God's standard of righteousness? Paul provides the answer in the first half of verse 32a

v. 32a—Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works of the Law.

The Law here refers to “the Mosaic Law.” In seeking to attain God's righteousness by observing the Law, the Jews were trying to do it their way. In spite of what God had said about simply trusting Him, and placing their faith in His Son, they stubbornly kept on seeking acceptance on the basis of their keeping the Mosaic Law. They rejected God's provision of grace-righteousness and tried to please Him with Law-righteousness. They thought they could earn God's righteousness by strict obedience to God's Law.

Keep in mind that it was not wrong for the Jews to keep God's Law, but it was impossible to keep the Law perfectly (James 2:10). The Law was given to show the Jews that they could not keep it perfectly. Their failure to keep the Law should have caused them to cast themselves in faith on God's mercy and grace. But they refused to come in God's appointed way, and they went right on trying to do it their way. As a result, they failed to attain a right standing with God.

Paul goes on to explain how they stumbled over the stumbling stone, v. 32b

B. They stumbled over the stumbling stone (v. 32b-33)

32b They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written,

“BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK

OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

This is a quotation out of the Book of Isaiah 28:16. The background here is Assyria’s approaching invasion of Israel and Judah. Isaiah called on the people to place their trust in God, He was the One and only stable and certain source of refuge. Those who put their trust in Yahweh would never need to fear. He would be their Rock of Refuge. He promised to take care of all who put their trust in Him. For all of those who refused to put their trust in Him, that Rock of Refuge would become a stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offense. That is exactly what was happening to the people of Israel in Paul’s day. Instead of placing their faith in Christ as their Rock of eternal refuge and salvation, they were trying to earn their way to heaven by their good works. As a consequence, their Rock of refuge had become to them a Stone of stumbling.” The Jews were tripping over Jesus Christ, who alone provides the right way of salvation.

C. They were zealous for God, but not in accordance to knowledge (10:1-3)

Paul continues in Chapter 10, verse 1 with an expression of his deep spiritual burden for his Jewish brethren. 10:1—Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

This is the same way Paul began back in chapter 9, verse 3. Do you remember? He had a sincere heart-felt desire to see his people saved. He had said he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren according to the flesh.

Even though Paul was explaining why the Jewish people had missed the salvation God provided for them through their Messiah, he was writing with a heavy heart. He prayed continuously for their salvation, no doubt believing that God would continue to bring a remnant to faith in Christ.

Paul next affirms that while they were zealous for God, their religious devotion was not based on knowledge.

v. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

As you all know the Jews were the most zealous and religious people on the face of the earth. However, in spite of their devotion to the Law of Moses,

and their religious zeal in worship and service, it was not according to knowledge. In spite of all their zeal it was all for nothing. Why? Because Law-keeping was not and is not the right way to obtain a right standing with God, and they should have known that. The Old Testament scriptures made it clear that a right standing with God is based solely on an individual placing their faith in the Person of God and His promises.

Paul continues in v. 3—For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Although they possessed the scriptures, and their Messiah had presented Himself to them as the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6), they willfully rejected Him. Rather than subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God, they willfully rejected Him and sought to establish their own righteousness. **They were determined to do it their way!** They had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

There is one more thing in connection with the Jews’ denial of the right way, God’s way, they misunderstood the true purpose of the Law, v. 4

D. They misunderstood the true purpose of the Law (10:4-5)

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

Christ is “the end of the law” in the sense that through His death and resurrection, He has terminated the ministry of the Law. He was actually the end or goal to which the Law pointed. He is what the Law was all about. Christ provided the righteousness of God to which the Law only pointed. That is, the Law could show us where we fall short, but it couldn’t do anything to change us. It was designed to lead us to Christ, the One who can change us. He is the One who provides us with a right standing before God when we believe in Him. But when we believe we are no longer under the Old Testament Mosaic Law. Paul says this same thing in **Galatians 3:24** that the Law served as a tutor to lead us to Christ. But now that we have come to faith in Christ, we are no longer under the tutor. Therefore, we are no longer under the Law. This is not our rule of life in this marvelous age of grace. God never intended for us to earn our salvation by keeping the Law or doing any good thing. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and not of works, that no man may boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

v. 5—Paul quotes Moses’ words from Leviticus 18:5 to show that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on Law shall live by that righteousness. The Law demanded perfect righteousness. James explained in chapter 2, verse 10 of his letter, “Whoever, keeps the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” One sin no matter how small makes a man a sinner and brings him under condemnation. The Law was not designed to provide righteousness, but to show men their need for Christ, who alone provides righteousness.

Sadly, many religious people today are making this same tragic mistake. Like these Jews of old, they think they can earn their way into heaven. They are convinced that their good works and religious deeds will provide them with the righteousness of God. The number of people who profess faith in Christ, and yet have never received Him as their personal Lord and Savior is alarming. George Barna estimates that roughly 4 out of 5 people who profess to be Christians are trusting not in Christ by faith, but in their good works and charitable contributions to get them to heaven. Having rejected God’s way to heaven, and seeking to establish their own work’s-based righteousness, they do not have a right standing with God. **As King Solomon said long ago**, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end of it is the way of death.”

Alright, having discussed the reasons for Israel’s denial of the right way, Paul next provides a description of the right way in verses 5-13. He says three things in his explanation of what the right way is. First, it was revealed in the Old Testament, vv. 6-11

II. Description Of The Right Way (10:6–13)

A. It was revealed in the Old Testament (vv. 6-8)

6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks thus, “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), 7 or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

Paul next quotes loosely from Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 30:12-14, which emphasize God’s grace in His dealing with the people of Israel. God was near, He dwelt in their midst. All they had to do was believe in Him by faith.

Paul explained that God's way of salvation was not difficult or complicated. God's way of salvation is based on faith. The sinner doesn't have to perform some supernatural feat to be saved. All a person has to do is believe in Jesus Christ. We do not have to ascend into heaven to find Christ, He had come of His own free will, through the agency of the incarnation. Likewise, there was no need for anyone to descend into the abyss because He has been resurrected, and has ascended to the right hand of God the Father in heaven.

Paul's point here is that God has provided everything we need to be saved. The incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ are two major doctrines of the Christian faith. We have to believe that God has sent His Son to die in our place, and that He raised Him from death for our justification—in order to declare us in right standing because of our faith in Christ.

v. 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 are preaching,

The Gospel, the word of faith in Christ that Paul preached, was available and accessible to all. This is the message that we are talking about. It is near, it is on our lips and tongues as we confess our faith in Christ. This is the message Paul was talking about here. He was simply saying the message of salvation by faith is in your mouth and in your heart. We can respond to this message positively. The right way to obtain God's salvation is simply to believe, and you shall be saved. Respond to the word of faith by believing in His Son.

B. It requires faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 9-10)

vv. 9-10 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Jesus is Lord! If you will believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord you will be saved. This my friends is one of the major affirmations of the Christian faith. Paul is confessing Jesus is Deity. Did you know that the word LORD is used over 6,000 times in the Greek Old Testament to translate the name Yahweh. Paul is talking about Christ's deity. The right way, the only way to obtain eternal salvation is to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth shares the same divine essence, name, nature, holiness, and authority, and power, and majesty, and eternity of the One and only true God. Jesus Christ is God in

human flesh. You must acknowledge that in order to experience God's way of salvation.

We also need to acknowledge that Jesus Christ arose bodily from the grave triumphant over sin and death. Do you see it in verse 9 "Confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you shall be saved." Christ's resurrection was the supreme demonstration that His death was sufficient to pay for the sins of the whole world. The act of faith alone is what assures us of eternity with God in heaven. This my friends is the right way of obtaining eternal life. This is the only way. Any other way leads to eternal ruin. God's way requires faith.

Paul concludes in verse 11-13 that God's way of salvation is available to all.

C. God's way of salvation is available to all (vv. 11-13)

v. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Paul repeats the same words he used back in verse 33 of chapter 9. "Anyone who believes in Jesus Christ will not be disappointed or embarrassed." He is a Rock of refuge for anyone who will place their trust in Him. He will see you through whatever difficulties may come into your life. Cast all your cares upon Him for He cares for you. This is a promise to all who call upon His name, v. 12

v. 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him. That would include you and me. All who call upon Him will be saved.

v. 13 For, "WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED" (Joel 2:32).

Whoever expresses their faith in God, and calls on Him for salvation shall be saved. All who put their faith in God's Son, all, whoever they are, shall be saved.

Closing Story: don't continue in life going the wrong way, it can be costly:

An atheist was taking a walk through the woods. "What majestic trees! What

powerful rivers! What beautiful animals!” he said to himself.

As he continued walking alongside the river he heard a rustling in the bushes. Turning to look, he saw a 7 foot grizzly charging towards him. He ran as fast as he could up the path. Looking over his shoulder he saw that the bear was closing in on him. His heart was pumping frantically and he tried to run even faster.

He tripped and fell on the ground. He rolled over to pick himself up but saw the bear raising his paw to take a swipe at him.

At that instant the atheist cried out: “Oh my God!”

Time stopped.

The bear froze.

The forest was silent.

It was then that a bright light shone upon the man and a voice came out of the sky saying:

“You have denied my existence for all of these years, teach others I don’t exist and even credit creation to a cosmic accident. Do you really expect Me to help you out of this predicament? Am I to count you as a believer?”

The atheist looked directly into the light. “It would be hypocritical of me to suddenly ask you to treat me as a Christian now, but perhaps, could you make the BEAR a Christian?”

“Very well,” said the voice. The light went out, and the sounds of the forest resumed.

And then the bear lowered his paw, bowed his head and prayed: “Lord, bless this food which I am about to receive and for which I am truly thankful, Amen.”

If you are here this morning, and would admit that you have been trying to make it to heaven by your own way, would you consider crying out to God in the privacy of your own heart. Ask God to forgive you of your sin and invite His Son, Jesus Christ to come into your heart. For with the heart man believes resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses His belief in Christ resulting in salvation. Come to God through His appointed way. It is the right way, and what is more, it is the only way!

Closing prayer:

Closing song: We Believe