

#30 One Gospel, One People — “Truth Confessions” 2017.09.24

How many of you are Gephyrophobic? Go ahead, raise your hands, don't be shy! If it helps, I will tell you that I am one of you! Of course, all of you know that this is the technical term for the fear of bridges. Now, to be honest, I am not sure if I am afraid of bridges in general or just bad collapse and kill you kind of bridges.

I think part of my fear goes back to the famous film footage of the Tacoma Narrows bridges in Washington State that began to swing and sway in the wind. If you haven't seen that footage, you have something other than kitten videos to search YouTube for—preferably after the service.

The film footage is terrifying as you watch a bridge began to twist and turn in increasing intensity, until the span collapsed into the water below. The bridge, nicknamed “Sturdy Gurdie” didn't end up being so sturdy in its gurdies.

Now let me show you a few bridges and you tell me if you would be eager to cross any of these marvels of human engineering.

Here is the first photo. Notice that the first bridge beside it has collapsed and so they went and built a bridge of the same quality and character to replace it. We have a similar scenario in this next photo, with a local actually using it! Notice again, the broken and abandoned bridge right next to it. But in this case, the bridge that is broken actually looks sturdier than the bridge that the man is walking across!

Then we have this bridge with the bus going across it. This is in Lebanon. How would you like to take that bus to work every day?

I don't know about you, but all of these bridges do nothing to make me think my Gephyrophobia is anything but well founded and completely reasonable. I mean it begs the question: Why did the human cross the bridge? I don't know, but I am not so sure they got there!

If I was going to have to cross a bridge, the bridge I would cross would look more like this! It would have to be substantial and far better than the slapped together, makeshift excuses for bridges that we've looked at thus far. And it would also have to be so much better than the bombed-out excuse for a bridge we saw the bus crossing. I just wouldn't take those bridges.

Imagine being in a life and death situation and you have to depend on bridges like these, but only worse, because the span is infinitely longer and exponentially higher.

The amazing thing is, most people do it all the time. In fact, people have been given the choice between those rickety death traps bridges and the most secure, never-fail, bridge ever created and they still chose the death traps! It is hard to wrap your head around!

Please turn with me to Romans 10 and we are going to begin in verse 4.

As you turn there, let me remind you that we are in the middle of Paul's rhetorical argument that bridges chapters 9-11, "bridges" get it? See what I did there?

As I have already said several times, we need to look at this section of Romans as a whole before we come to any specific conclusions about what Paul is saying. Otherwise we are guaranteed to have some mistaken ideals that Paul never intended to communicate.

Now, you will remember that the argument that Paul is presenting is one in which he is defending Yahweh against the accusations that Yahweh broke His promises and His Word to the nation of Israel. And this accusation comes as a result of the overwhelming positive Gentile response to the gospel in comparison to the relatively anemic response of the Jews. The Jews, for the most part, had flat out rejected the Good News about a righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus.

Now, last week we moved from the first part of Paul's argument, which had to do with the fact that God kept His promise to Israel because His promise to Israel was to make them a special people in order to carry out His purpose of bringing the world a salvation that is by grace through faith and Yahweh fulfilled that promise with the birth, life, ministry and sacrifice of Jesus. There is more subpoints to stage one of Paul's argument, but this gives you the big picture.

Last week we started the second part of Paul's argument which begins in Romans 9:30 and carries through chapter 10.

Paul begins this second section, in much the same way he began the first part of his argument—with a lament for his kinsmen. Paul declares that while Israel, had a zeal for the things of God, their zeal was not according to knowledge. They misunderstood the purpose of the Law, which was to point out just how treacherous and rickety and downright impassable are any of the bridges we try to make to reach God. No one is capable of making a bridge strong enough and long enough to reach the other side, but still we try. Instead of taking the one bridge that is guaranteed to get us to God, which is faith in Christ, we try and we fail to build one on our own.

Paul says that they did not know the righteousness of God, but instead sought to establish their own righteousness, their own bridge. But actually, the real problem was not knowledge, it was choice, it was choosing independence over salvation. Paul puts it this way at the end of verse 3: “they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” So, it wasn’t that they weren’t aware of the bridge God had made, they just weren’t interested in using it.

And this is the point that Paul is making in this second part of his argument. God did not go back on His promises to Israel because the lack of Israel’s response to the gospel was their own choice. They preferred to cross a bridge of their own making.

We pick things up with verse 4: *“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*

There is a progression in the first part of chapter 10. Verses 2, 3, 4 and 5 all begin with the same word, which is usually translated as “for,” but the NIV only translates the first one in verse 2. The word is used to introduce a confirmation or an explanation or a reason for what was said before it. So, in the case of verse 4, Paul is explaining his statement in verse 3. What was the righteousness they did not know? It is that “Christ is the end of the law” and now there is “righteousness for everyone who believes.” Now what exactly does that mean?

How is Christ the “end” of the law? The Greek word translated as end has several possible meanings. It can mean “end” in the sense of the goal or fulfilment of the Law and along with it, its completion. This would be the meaning of Jesus’ words when He declares: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”* (**Matthew 5:17**)

Or, it can mean that, for everyone who believes, Jesus terminates the Law as a system or means of obtaining righteousness. I think that the first option is certainly included in what Paul is saying, but it isn’t the entire point. I believe he is primarily talking about ending the Law as a system or means of obtaining righteousness because even though Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses, we know there are still laws of righteousness at work in our world.

Perhaps we could put it this way: Because Jesus fulfils or completes the Law in Himself, He has ended the place of the Law in obtaining righteousness. Righteousness is achieved not by doing, but by believing and only by believing.

This has a few results for us to consider: It removes the Law of Moses as a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. In Ephesians 2, Paul talks about the dividing wall of hostility between the Jews and the Gentiles. He talks about how the Gentiles were without God and without hope. The Mosaic Law, as a system of righteousness restricted access. It was not a righteousness for everyone and this is the essence of what is deeply ingrained in the Jews and the Jewish Christians. The Law had formed them into a highly separate people. It was a world comprised of them and Yahweh and only them and Yahweh. But, Jesus ends the Law as a system of righteousness, so that righteousness can come to everyone who believes. Access has been opened.

That is what Paul is getting at in Galatians 3 when he writes: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (**Galatians 3:28**)

So, Christ ends the very thing that separates the Jews from the rest of the world and now the “true Israel” or the “remnant” are not only Jews that have a righteousness by faith, but also Gentiles that have that same righteousness by faith.

The other result we have here is the idea of Christ ending, not just the Mosaic Law, but also any system of law, as a means of righteousness. In Romans 2 Paul has already talked about a law that is written on the human heart. We all have an internal compass that points out right from wrong. That compass can be corrupted. It can be wrong. But, it still points to a general sense of what is right and what is wrong and it convicts us of our guilt when we have gone against it.

What Paul is saying about Jesus applies to this law as well. Jesus ends that moral law, that internal system, as a means of righteousness. What this means is that we are no longer talking about a just a Jew versus Gentile issue, we are talking about two approaches to life. There are those who build their own bridges and those who chose to trust in the bridge that God provides. So, it doesn't matter whether you are Jew or Gentile or Muslim or Hindu, or humanist or anything else. Jesus has made our normal approach to life obsolete! He has ended it. He has taken it off the table. Now, you can choose to dismiss Christ's work, but it doesn't change the fact that doing is done and faith has won. I worked hard on that so can we say it together? “Doing is done and faith has won!”

Now, in saying that I am not saying that morality and honouring God by struggling to grow in Christ-likeness doesn't matter. When we get past Paul's closing arguments at the end of chapter 11, Paul is going to start talking about how we are to live our lives in view of what Christ has accomplished for us. But, the point is,

there is no doing that will earn your salvation. No matter how good you are, no matter how dedicated you are, no matter how comparatively righteous you are, Christ has put an end to you trying to be good enough. It isn't even an option. Why? Because trying to earn your salvation is a study in disappointment.

Let's say we have to cross a river, but the current is too strong to actually get across. In fact, no one is a strong enough swimmer to swim to the other side. All that happens is that you start your way across and the current takes you down river and deposits you on the same side, just further down. So poor swimmers start to swim and they just get kicked back to the river bank almost immediately.

The stronger swimmers make it a bit further across, which results in them being taken further down the river before they are kicked back. And the strongest swimmers might even make it almost half way across the river before the fatigue gets to them. They may end up kilometres further down the river because they stayed in the current long enough to be carried that distance. So some did better than others, but the point is no one made it across so who cares how far down the river you ended up, you are still on the same side as everyone else. That is what it is like to try to live up to any standard of righteousness. No matter how good or how strong you are, you are never going to achieve your goal. You are never going to make it to the other side.

Now, Paul has been telling us since chapter 2 that a righteousness based on keeping all of the law is impossible. So, let me ask you a question? Do we have the kind of God who asks us to do the impossible so that He can sit back and watch us as we get frustrated and discouraged? Does God enjoy laughing at us as we look at each other and compare how far downstream we made it before we failed? Does it please Him that we like putting others down for their lack of accomplishment because it makes us feel better about our own lack of accomplishment? No! God loves us! He is on our side! That's why He sent Jesus to put an end to our failure and give us His way of victory. And this is the point of what Paul is trying to get at in this passage.

But, before we talk about that, we need to finish talking about the personal bridge builders and the swimmers in verse 5

Paul quoting from Leviticus 18:5 writes: *"Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.'"*

Now, in the original context Moses is telling the Israelites to live according to God's standards, rather than the standards of the people they are going to remove from the Promised Land. The original thought is, "Live in a way that pleases God and you will continue to have a good life in the Land and God will bless you," and it was given in the context of the covenant, in other words, it was given in the context of God's grace and

mercy, but what Paul is doing here is using the interpretation of this passage that the personal bridge builders had. He is using a text they would quote in the incorrect way they would quote it.

And a misuse of this verse points to a way of righteousness that is by the law: it is only those who do these things that will be able to live by them. If you don't do them, you don't have a way across the bridge. Someone who trusts in their own abilities to build a bridge, can't have one board break, one misstep, one cable snap, one slip or one gust of wind knock them off balance. If any of these things happen, they won't make it across.

And then Paul quotes, or at least alludes to Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Now this is interesting, because Paul seems to be using Moses to contradict Moses, but he is not, he is using another quote from Moses to contradict the incorrect interpretation of the quote from Leviticus. This was the common approach to correcting someone's interpretation of a Scripture.

We would sit down and go through the Scripture that had been misinterpreted and explain why we believe the other person has misinterpreted it. But the approach in Paul's day wasn't to point out the error in the other person's interpretation, it was simply to quote another Scripture that corrects the misconception. It's ingenious when you think about it.

So, Paul, using Deuteronomy 30:12-14, personifies the "righteousness that is by faith" and writes: *"But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

It's kind of hard to understand what Paul is getting at here. Can't he quote a more understandable passage from Deuteronomy? Let's see if we can figure it out.

In the original context, Moses is talking about the Law. And the point is that the Law isn't something the Israelites had to go searching for, it was given to them. It was something that wasn't too hard to understand, or some mystery to discover. They didn't have to send mighty men off on a quest to find out God's opinion on things. It was all there delivered to them through Moses.

Now, given the original context, you might be wondering what kind of interpretive magic it is that Paul is using here to take what originally referred to the Law and the keeping of the Law and then turn it around to refer to Jesus and a righteousness that is by faith! But in order for us to understand what is going on we need to dig a bit deeper.

First, context is everything and in the context of Deuteronomy you have, in chapter 28-29, Moses telling Israel of the blessing for faithfulness to God and His Law and the cursing of Israel if they were unfaithful to God and disobedient to His Law. Then Moses goes on to point out that Israel isn't going to do very well. They are going to be unfaithful and disobedient and they are going to be scattered among the nations.

So built right into the context is the message that they would fail in keeping God's Law, but then, in the beginning of chapter 30, Moses speaks of a future time when God's people would return to Him and they would be gathered together and God would bless them again and bring them into the land and bless them more than their forefathers and *"The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live."* (**Deuteronomy 30:6**)

So, just prior to the quote that Paul is using, is this promise of a future time when God would change the hearts of His people so that they would be able to love him with all their hearts and souls and live.

Paul is taking that promise of a future in which God changes the hearts of His people and the time in which they come out of the exile and are gathered together and he rightly applies it to Christ, who is the One who ended the exile of God's people through His coming. He is the one who, through His sacrifice and the ministry of the Holy Spirit changes hearts.

Summing up, for the Israelites of Moses' day to learn the will of Yahweh required no effort at all, for Yahweh had freely and graciously revealed His will. They didn't need to climb up to heaven, or cross over to some far away land to find out what God wanted. God had already graciously provided it.

And what Paul is doing in Romans is applying the same principle to Christ and the righteousness that is by faith that He provides. There is no need to go up to heaven or down to the netherworld to retrieve Christ. In the incarnation Christ came down from heaven, and in the resurrection, He came up from the depths, or literally abyss.

In the original context, faith was demonstrated by accepting the Law and submitting to Yahweh, in the wake of the resurrection, faith is demonstrated in accepting Christ and by submitting to Him.

And how can that be the case? Because Jesus is the end of the Law. He is its fulfilment. He is its goal. He replaces it as a means of righteousness, because He is now the means of righteousness. To put it another

way, Jesus is more than the embodiment of the law; because He is Yahweh incarnate, He, rather than the law, is now the focus of how God reveals Himself. He Himself is the Word.”

Now Paul doesn’t just pull this idea out of thin air. There is a thread in the Old Testament in which the “word” or “law” could be replaced by the divine name of Yahweh. For example, the writer of Psalm 119 declares: *“I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.”* (**Psalm 119:19**) Now, let’s compare this with Psalm 27, which says, *“Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior.”* (**Psalm 27:9**)

And in Psalm 31 we read: *“Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.”* (**Psalm 31:24**) and let’s compare that with these words, again from Psalm 119: *“You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.”* (**Psalm 119:114**)

We could continue with more examples, but you get the point. Since we have an Old Testament precedent of substituting “God’s Word,” or “Law” with the divine name Yahweh, Paul’s use of substituting “Jesus Christ” for “law”, or “command” or “word” makes a lot more sense. He is following an established pattern and He is declaring Jesus to be Yahweh at the same time! Basically, He is telling those who have focused on the Law, that they must focus on Jesus because He is Yahweh, the One who not only gave the law, but who also is the end of the Law.

This idea is further underlined with what he is about to say in regard to Jesus as Lord. You see, the Greek word for Lord doesn’t just mean master. It is used in the Septuagint to refer to “Yahweh.” So, to confess Jesus as Lord is to confess Him as Yahweh. But, let’s not get ahead of ourselves here.

What Paul saying about the righteousness that is by faith is that God has done it all. You don’t have to have some superhuman strength and go on an impossible mission to find God and know and please Him. You don’t have to climb up to heaven, as if you could. God took care of that. He sent His Incarnate Son. He came to us and became one of us. And either do you have to go down into the depths and somehow defeat death. Jesus already did that, referring to His resurrection. God has done it all through Christ. Christ is the answer. Christ is everything. He is Yahweh come near.

Paul is saying, “You have no excuse! God has given you the way to Him through Christ, so stop trying to get to him on your own rickety old, death traps of a bridge! You won’t make it. Stop trying to swim to the other side. You won’t make it. Take the strong, secure and only guaranteed way of connecting with and pleasing Me, come to Jesus.

Continuing on, Paul asks, continuing to quote from Deuteronomy 30, *"But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That 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 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:8-10)*

Paul takes the idea of the "word" and he refers to the gospel with it. The idea behind verse 8 is simply this: What can be closer to you than what is your heart and mouth? Paul is saying, "The gospel is right here. You know it. You have it. All you have to do is accept it."

Now it may seem strange that Paul mentions confession before belief. Usually we think of belief having to come before confession. There isn't much use confessing something unless you believe it, but Paul is simply following the order of the wording in Deuteronomy 30. Then he immediately goes on to reverse the order to believe and confess in verse 10, so as to correct any possible misconceptions.

Now, as a quick aside, let me just say that this is a good text to point out that you should never use just one text and consider it to be the complete teaching on the subject. I have heard lots of people who have used this passage to speak to how we come to Christ. All we need to do is believe and confess. OK, but what about repentance? Doesn't Acts 2:38 talk about repentance? And what about baptism? Does Acts 2:38 and a bunch of other passages talk about baptism?

More to the point, is it true that all we need to believe about Jesus is that He rose from the dead? Is that all we need to understand about Christ to be saved? Don't we don't have to understand, for example, that He died for our sins on the cross?

The point I am making is that you should never use one passage on a subject as if it is the only passage on the subject. The context of each passage dictates emphasis and what is mentioned and what is left out. For example, Paul has already talked about baptism in Romans 6, so why would he repeat it here? Let's make sure we take into account all that God's Word says on a subject before we draw any conclusions on what the Bible teaches on a subject.

Having said all that, many commentators point out that Paul's use of the aorist tense in the words "confess" and "believe" point to one foundational moment in one's past, which is most likely the moment of baptism. As does the wording in verse 12, when it talks about "calling on the name." This was a common phrase connected with baptism, for example in Acts 22:16 we have these words to Paul, after the scales fell

out of his eyes. “And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’ (Acts 22:16)

Many commentators also make the point that confessing “Jesus is Lord” is a formula that was commonly used at the time someone was baptised.

But regardless of all this, let’s not miss out on what Paul is zeroing in on. Why does Paul just focus on confessing Jesus is Lord and believing that He rose from the dead? Well first of all, the resurrection is where Jesus is declared Lord. It is where His divine nature is revealed.

Remember what Paul says in the beginning of Romans: *“and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 1:4)*

The point of declaring Jesus as Lord is that it is declaring Him to be Yahweh. It is declaring Him to be God, which is the whole point of what Paul has been talking about in this passage. The Law provided by Yahweh has been replaced by Yahweh as the means of being saved. Obviously, the key barrier to the Jews receiving the gospel is this very point, who is Jesus? It all boiled down to them believing that Jesus was Yahweh incarnate.

Paul finishes his argument by using a few more quotes from the Old Testament, one has already been quoted by Paul in 9:30 and it is from Isaiah 28:16. *As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”* The idea here is that at the judgement, those who are in Christ will not face punishment for their sins, in fact, they will be rewarded for their faith. And because we are saved by faith in Christ, verse 12 declares that, *“there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.”* What an amazing promise! There is no difference because we all have the Lord and He blesses us all the same. Finally Paul declares ¹³ for, *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

This is another quote. This time from Joel and I think it is no mistake that it is from the very same passage that Peter used on the Day of Pentecost about the coming of the Holy Spirit. The passage from Joel speaks of the coming of a new day, when like Deuteronomy 30:6 tells us, God will circumcise our hearts so that we may love Him with everything we are and everything we have.

OK, what is the point of all this? All that Paul is really saying is this: “When it comes to righteousness, whose are you going to trust, your or God’s?”