

## Several Difficult Passages in Romans 10 and 11 and One in Hebrews 6

In Romans Chapter 10, Paul writes that “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (verse 4). Does this mean that the Mosaic law is over and done with? We don’t need it? No. That’s not what Paul is saying. This verse does not say that Christ has replaced the law, as if all we need to know is Christ died on the cross for our sins and believing in Him brings eternal life. Paul would be horrified at such a mis-reading of his letter. The Greek word that the NIV translates as “end” is *telos*, which is better translated “culmination.” Christ is the culmination or fulfillment of the Mosaic law. The law does not “save” (in the N.T. sense) and was never intended to. The law teaches what righteousness is. The O.T. saints were to obey the law to live righteously before their holy God who was there in their midst. Christ saves us because He fulfilled all righteousness, and His righteousness is imputed to us by faith. To know what righteousness is, we study the law and then apply it to our lives today. When Paul wrote to Timothy, “you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15) those “Scriptures” that Paul referred to was the Old Testament. If we’re saved, we need to live righteously before God, which means we need to know what righteousness is. We glorify God by living out His Word, which includes the righteousness that the law reveals

Paul then writes, “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 . . . for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (verses 10,13). These verses are misused by well-meaning Christians doing Gospel outreach. It implies that all we need to do is say aloud, “Jesus is Lord,” and that profession, along with an acknowledgment of His resurrection and saying “Jesus,” saves us for eternity. That’s akin to belief in magic. That is not what Paul is saying. The paragraph beginning at 10:5 draws upon Deuteronomy 30:11-14, because the same situation back then, when Moses penned Deuteronomy as that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation was about to cross the Jordan and enter the Land, applied in the day that Paul wrote Romans. Those Israelites back then knew perfectly well the message that Moses was teaching: They were to walk before God in trusting obedience, with love for God and each other, avoiding evil. That message was “in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deut. 30:14). Paul is writing into Romans the very same words because his readers knew perfectly well the Gospel message. Read the two paragraphs together and it’ll be obvious that Paul is reciting Deuteronomy here! Jesus didn’t need to be incarnated or resurrected again. Paul’s readers already knew it! The Jews at Rome Paul was addressing, who would have known the Deuteronomy passage, needed to acknowledge (“confess”) who Jesus is and believe in Him. The Greek word translated “confess” is *homologeō*, which literally means “to say the same.” In other words, we say the same that God does, or, we admit as true, who Jesus is and we believe in Him. Jesus is deity. He is the Messiah promised to Israel. He is the obedient, righteous Son. He offers life in His name. And more. To “call on the name of the Lord” is how the prophet Joel expressed exercising faith, thus receiving the Spirit and salvation (Joel 2:32). And those Jewish readers in Rome would also have known the Joel passage. “To call on” means “to appeal to.” And “the name” means “the person,” that is, the Person of Jesus.

Our Gospel presentations, especially as they typically are printed in commercially available tracts, are too skimpy to be meaningful. Using these verses to bring someone to salvation without first spending time to impart the necessary understanding is totally inappropriate. That’s because salvation is based on a loving, trusting relationship, and that can only occur by knowing and understanding all that is fundamental to the Gospel.

Paul writes further, “Did they [ethnic Israel] stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles . . . how much greater riches will their fullness bring?” (11:11-12). The word “fullness” refers to their future restoration. Note the three words, “not at all.” Those three words are compelling. Those three words mean that ethnic Israel has not been rejected by God. They have not been replaced by the Church as the “people of God,” as amillennials and postmillennials allege. Those three words mean that there’s a glorious future for the nation of Israel, affirming the premillennial understanding of Scripture. Paul nails this truth with verse 15, “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” And again in verses 25 and 26, “Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be

saved.” What happened at the Exodus is reversed at the cross. God hardened Pharaoh so that Israel could be redeemed (Pharaoh representing Gentiles). At the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent, God hardened Israel so that Gentiles can be redeemed. But Egypt will yet be saved in the future, and so will ethnic Israel. That’s why Paul writes that the hardening of Israel is “in part,” so as to accomplish God’s great purposes. God is holy and good, so He will be faithful to His people Israel as He is to the Church. Count on it.

Now let’s think about the olive tree metaphor in Chapter 11, verses 17 to 24. Please read this passage in your Bible. It’s important that we understand it. The prophet Isaiah referred to the Nation of Israel as a tree chopped down, but its root remains so it can grow again in the future. Isaiah was referring to judgment, followed by restoration. Paul is using that familiar metaphor in Isaiah here in Romans. As Paul adopts it, Christ is the olive tree’s root. The unbelieving Jews of the nation are “broken off” but the believing Jews are grafted in. Gentile believers are “wild,” but they are grafted in too. Paul writes this to warn Gentile believers to understand that their salvation depends on the Nation of Israel, Israel’s God, and their Messiah and King. Gentile believers are not to be proud or arrogant regarding Israel, because Gentiles are saved only because Israel’s God, the Creator, shows them mercy. And the Nation of Israel will be restored and glorious in the future. Implicit in this metaphor is the necessary understanding that Jesus is not only Jewish, He is representative of the Nation of Israel. He is the ideal, obedient Israel, the New Israel, the personification of Israel. As Jesus rose from the dead, so will ethnic Israel, when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom and rule from Jerusalem. We need to be humble and understand the big picture that’s there in the Word so we can know how we are to participate. Our identity is that of the Jewish Messiah and we’re invited in the Gospel to fellowship eternally with the God of Israel.

Hebrews Chapter 6 has a notoriously difficult passage we should also discuss. Can one lose salvation? Some argue from verses 1 to 6 that one can lose it. I don’t think that’s right. Let me explain. The author wrote to Jewish believers who, perhaps due to persecution and/or pressure brought by Judaizers, were threatening to go back to Old Testament Judaism, with circumcision, observance of Sabbaths, dietary laws, special festival days, etc. They likely had come under the influence of Judaizers who demanded commitment to and observance of Judaic religion. (It was because of them Paul had to write his Letter to the Galatians.) In verses 1-3, the author advances his principal argument, viz., the need for believers to move on to maturity. He speaks of repentance, baptism, and resurrection, which would apply only to followers of Christ. These readers are believers! Then in verses 4 to 6, he engages in an *ad hominem* type of argument, in which one takes an opponent’s view to its logical conclusion to show how absurd it is. So the author says that if those who are “enlightened,” “tasted [i.e., experienced] the heavenly gift,” “shared in the Holy Spirit,” and “tasted [experienced] the goodness of God” and have “fallen away,” they cannot be brought back because that would mean crucifying Christ again. In other words, if they understood the cross, believed in Christ and the atonement he made for them, but then turned their back on it and returned to circumcisions and such, they would be denying Christ and rejecting what He did for them. They would be apostate. This rhetorical argument doesn’t mean that those readers did that. It was a hypothetical case, a type of reasoning to serve as a warning to them not to do it. The author in fact then states his confidence in verses 9 to 12 that they wouldn’t do something like that but would instead move on to maturity in their salvation.

We cannot lose our salvation, assuming we really had it and weren’t just making an empty profession. We can’t lose it because Christ is our High Priest who is continually making intercession for us. If it weren’t for that essential on-going work of Christ, Satan would indeed sift us like wheat. But let’s not miss the main argument because we’re hung up on a difficult paragraph: We must, *must* go on to maturity. We cannot be smug about our salvation and remain infants, indifferent to God’s will and purposes for us.

Dear reader: A gracious and merciful God has brought us into a love relationship with Himself. We’re saved not simply by making a profession of faith but by the Person, life and work of the incarnate Son, the living Lord Jesus. He is the most perfect and beautiful Person in existence. We know Him in the Word and in our lives as He expresses Himself thru us. Let’s humble ourselves and be faithfully committed to Him. There’s nothing greater in life than to be like Him and to serve Him and to bear fruit for Him in gratitude for all He did, is doing, and will do for us.