

The Gospel to Us, in Us, and from Us

The Word to Us

Jesus not only came himself to preach the gospel to us, but also gave the gospel to the apostles to preach and teach, through the Spirit. Paul's longing and prayer is that by taking that gospel to the Gentiles, jealousy will stir the Jews to turn back to their God.

Paul's Desire and Prayer for the Jews

Paul has compassion on the Jews, continuously asking God for their salvation (no doubt members of his own family!). Paul *knows* how the Jews think – before his conversion, he embodied their characteristics:

- Zealous
- Without knowledge
 - Failing to realize that Jesus completes (finishes) the law.
 - Thinking righteousness can be achieved through obedience to the law
- Unsubmissive
- Proud
 - Unwilling to humble themselves by agreeing that God has provided his own righteousness in which to clothe them.

Jesus: The Last Word

The Law of Moses

“The man who does these things (obeys the law) will live by them” (v. 5) This is the theory of all religious activity except true Christianity. There are many works righteousness schemes: driving a Prius and installing solar panels as a Green devotee; reaching meditational and mindfulness heights as a Buddhist; attaining excellent self-control as a Stoic; or compiling an excellent record of good works and appropriate rituals as a Catholic, a Muslim or a Jew. One example—Catherine of Siena

Inspired by the severe asceticism of the Desert Fathers, Catherine wore a nail-studded girdle around her body that constantly tore at her flesh, calling the gaping wounds her “flowers.” She also wore a hair shirt and scourged her body three times a day with a chain tipped with sharp hooks. And, she never allowed herself to sleep more than one-half hour every other night.
(from Pam Frost's lecture at the *truthXchange* symposium)

Even religions that seem to free you from moral constraints have their own set of moralistic rules, bringing anguish as devotees try to escape God's natural distinctions and laws.

Trying to keep the Old Testament Law shows us our own sin and failure. The law is a schoolmaster that shows us how impossible it is to be righteous in our own strength (Gal.3:24). It drives us to Christ. No one is righteous – not one. Yet Old Testament believers realized that sacrificing bulls could not truly appease God's wrath against sin. There was gospel in Moses' message, a Paul shows us in verses 6–8, where he is picking up what Moses says in Deuteronomy 30.

The Gospel of Moses

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 *For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*

How can Moses say “it is not too hard for you”? What is the “it” that “is not beyond your reach?” It is something that can be proclaimed, and thus heard (Dt 30:13) and in verse 14, it is named as “word.” There is grace in this passage. God will minister to their hearts and souls even in their less specific knowledge of the gospel. God sets their hearts and souls on fire by his love, even in the Old Testament.

The reason obedience is “not too difficult” for us is that God provided righteousness for us out of his whole-hearted love for us!

Jeremiah 32:38-41 *And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with all my heart and all my soul.*

It is this love that makes obedience possible, even easy.

2 Peter 1:8-9 *For if these qualities (goodness, faith, knowledge, self-control, etc.) are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.*

The Gospel of Christ

Paul sees the accomplishment of going up to the heavens and descending to the depths of the earth as fulfilled in Christ. Perhaps he is thinking that Jewish legalism tries to undo the death of Christ and his ascent to glory in heaven. We don't have to go up to the heavens or down to the depths of the earth to find righteousness. That righteousness, that word, is **in our mouth and hearts** by the Spirit of Christ. In fact, Paul elsewhere shows us that Christ descended into the depths and was raised to the heights on behalf of the church:

Ephesians 4:7-14 *grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*

The Word In Us

In Our Hearts: Believe

“with the heart one believes and is justified (made righteous)”

God sees our hearts and knows if we have true faith. It’s also true that he *sets* faith in our hearts by his Spirit. Does this mean we are always completely full of faith and strong belief? Obviously not. As Christian believers, we are commanded to help sustain the faith of others, to lift the weak knees and dangling hands (Isa 35:3; Heb 12:12; Gal 6:20).

It is Jesus perfect life and his death for us that provides the basis for our belief:

Romans 5:19 *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

Having accomplished what God sent him to do, Jesus ascends into heaven, telling the disciples that he must leave so the Holy Spirit can inhabit the hearts of believers (John 14:26). Thus “the word” (Christ) is in us.

In Our Mouths: Confess

“with the mouth one confesses and is saved”

“confess with our mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

1 John 4:2-3 *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God.*

This cannot mean that speaking some particular words will save us. The confession includes repentance, calling out to God, and believing in Christ’s accomplished work. It leads to commitment in the form of baptism, which in the early church was the occasion of public profession of faith in Christ:

Acts 16:29-33 *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family.*

Our verbal confession also includes a consistency of life. We cannot loudly confess Christ and at the same time lead a life of abandonment to sin. A true Christian longs to become more like Jesus!

We are Safe in our Confession

Rom 10:11 *For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."*

As we confess his name and hold out through every trial, Jesus will confess *our name* before the Father:

Rev 3:5 *The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.*

The Word from Us

This safety that we have for eternal life with Christ gives us courage to stand up and speak his name before the world. We cannot afford to be ashamed of the gospel!

***Luke 9:26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.*

We are God's ordained means of making his gospel known to the world.

The Process of the Gospel

In Romans 1, we saw that God lays down a foundation of understanding available to all:

***Romans 1:18-20** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

***Psalm 19:1-4** The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their measuring line goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. The Good News is given to us from God*

But nature cannot preach the gospel. God uses "preachers" (of the Word). We send them, but we also are those preachers. All Christians preach the gospel!

***Acts 8:4** Now those who were scattered went about **preaching** the word.*

As the good news is preached, people hear it, believe it, and call on the name of the Lord in faith. God draws many who are not seeking! God stirs the hearts of those who will believe as well as the hearts of Christians who speak the words of truth. As we saw last year in our study of the minor prophets, there will always be those who refuse the good news of the gospel, but we must continue to speak it into their lives, with the prayer that Paul expressed at the beginning of this passage: his "heart's desire and prayer" that all Israel will be saved. May we not forget to take up Paul's prayer for the Jewish people as well as non-Jews, and take our part in sending preachers of the gospel as well as in being preachers of the gospel. Through us, all day long, God reaches out his hands "to a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom 10:21).

Can we commit in our believing hearts to allow the glorious name of our precious Savior to come through our lips to others, as often as possible?