

# Our Responsibility

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[ 0 : 00 ] I could never do that. They pray for two hours a day and when they say they've been praying for me, they actually mean it. I could never do that. They're the parent who reads the Bible with their kids every day and their kids look like little saints. I could never do that. They've just completed reading the Bible for the fourth time this year from cover to cover.

They talk about Jesus with every single person they've ever met. I've had people say to me in the past, can you pray to God for me because God's more likely to hear from you than he is from me. I wonder, can we make a separation between people that we think are good Christians and people we think are not so good or maybe bad Christians?

Sometimes I wonder if we can see people who look like amazing Christians and think, I just can't be like that person. I don't have the time or the effort. Or maybe they just look a little bit weird. They're so zealous and fanatical. I wonder if sometimes we can see Christians and compare ourselves and think, is that what I should be looking like? I wonder then if it makes us feel a bit depressed about our relationship with God. I'm not nearly as good as them. I'm not a real Christian. Or maybe it does the opposite. It makes us strive harder and to set the bar higher about what our lives are to look like. We are in the middle of a series in the book of Romans called Made New, seeing that we've been made new by God's grace in Jesus. We've seen that we all deserve punishment for our sins, that we have rebelled against God, but he has justified us. He has offered us his grace freely at the cross. And as Steve has showed last week, that our God is sovereign. He is in control of all things. And he offers salvation to those he chooses. And we saw last week that Paul loves the people that he came from, the Jewish people, the Israelites. And we're going to see that again today. But now we come to see the reality of a free gospel, that it comes to people who have no history of relationship with God. It went to the Jews first and now to the Gentiles. And we're going to see that this causes a challenge for the Jewish people, that they were people who were passionate. They strove hard to follow their God. But Paul is going to question today who they are actually trusting in. And today, the challenge for us will be similar. Are we just seeking and striving ourselves to have a particularly good view of ourselves as Christians? Maybe we are challenged by other Christians and go,

I want to look like that Christian. I want to strive hard. And so today, we're going to be challenged by what Paul has to say to think, who are we actually trusting in? And to see if our life is shaped by that. Let me pray for us as we have a look at Romans 9 and 10. Our Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word to us today. I thank you that it speaks to us every day and in every season.

And I ask that you would be with us to hear your word today, Lord. Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we have a look at this part of the Bible, we have two points. The first point this morning is that belief is not enough. And our second point this morning is that belief is enough. But that might seem like a contradiction, but we will get there. First of all, we've seen that Paul has explained that God is sovereign. He is in control of all things. He is the one who chooses who gets to come into his kingdom. And Paul answers the question of why those outside of God's family get chosen and not all of God's people. Have a look at verse 30 with me of Romans chapter 9.

[ 4 : 13 ] What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, those who are not Israel, Jewish people, 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. Paul's saying that there are those people, the Gentiles, who have had such wicked lives, they've been more open to the gospel compared with those people who have been pursuing righteousness.

The Jews knew that they had a deep need for righteousness. But everybody else outside of Israel had no idea how much they needed from God.

But even though the Jews knew they needed righteousness from God, they've pursued it in the wrong way. Why haven't they obtained their goal? Verse 32, because they pursued it not by faith, but by works.

They stumbled over this stumbling stone. As it is written, See, I lay a stone in Zion that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.

[ 5 : 29 ] A stumbling block has been put in the way of the Jewish people. Now, as a parent of children who have Lego, I constantly have stumbling blocks around my house.

I love Lego deeply, and a lot of it's my own fault, because I carried over a good couple of boxes from my own childhood. And there's nothing like finding a piece of Lego in the middle of the night. But this stumbling block is far more painful, far more significant than just an hour moment in the middle of the night. This stumbling block has stopped the Jewish people reaching the righteousness that they've been pursuing.

And this stumbling block is Jesus. This stumbling block has required them to put their works down and have faith in him. Because faith in Jesus demands humility.

As long as anyone pursues faith by works, as verse 32 said, they're going to stumble pursuing this goal. Imagine you were to die today.

[ 6 : 36 ] This is a classic question. Imagine you were to die today. Let's say it's not COVID-related. I won't pick anything in particular then. Let's say you were to die today, and you were to stand before God, and God asked you, why should I let you into my heaven?

What would you say? Just for a brief moment, turn to the person next to you, ask them, what would you say? God says, why should I let you into my heaven? What would you say? Okay, I think that's enough.

Now, I would usually at this point ask for people to shout out things, but I'm not going to do that this week. It could have been things like, I've loved God.

I've gone to church every single week. I've read my Bible cover to cover. I've followed him. I've been a good student. I've been a good parent. I've worked hard. I wonder if the things we say would start with that little letter I, because that's the challenge of the Jews.

If they were to answer this question, their answer would start with that little letter I. I've been pursuing righteousness. I have worked hard in following God.

[ 8 : 13 ] I have used all of my energy and all of my effort to follow God. And God has placed a rock before us, a stumbling stone. This stumbling stone can either be something that stops us in the way, or it can be a foundation which we build our lives on.

The Jews had everything they needed for salvation, but they've tripped over their desire to follow their own path to salvation. Last week, we saw that Paul put the responsibility of belief and unbelief in God's sovereign control.

And it seems that what Paul is now saying is contradictory. On the one hand, Paul is saying, God is sovereign. He chooses who he will. But now he's saying, well, the Jews pursued the wrong path.

There was a stumbling stone in front of them and they chose the wrong way. So which one is it? Well, both of these things are true. God's sovereignty and human responsibility both stand together.

There's a quote, it's a wonderful quote from preacher Martin Lloyd-Jones. He said, we are responsible for our rejection of the gospel, but we are not responsible for our acceptance.

[ 9 : 42 ] This is how God's sovereignty and human responsibility work together. We are all responsible for rejecting God, for choosing to not follow him, choosing our own path.

But God is the only one who is responsible for calling anybody to himself. And for Paul, this is not just a piece of cold doctrine.

This is not just something he theologizes. He's just not just talking about predestination in a very cold clinical context. You can see Paul's pain and his heart for people in verse 10.

Brothers and sisters, sorry, in chapter 10, verse 1. Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God is for the Israelites that they may be saved. I think for us, when we talk about the Jews, it's just a group of people who are of the Bible.

We are in a part of Sydney where I don't know a lot of Jewish people. I know I have Jewish people a couple of generations back in my family lineage. But when I think of the Jews, I just think of the biblical people.

[10:53] I don't know many people who are Jewish. But for Paul, this is family. This is brothers and sisters, his parents, his cousins, the people he worked with, the people he taught, the people in the shops.

This is all of the people who were very close to him that he cared for. And for Paul, this is just like us being concerned for our family and friends who don't know Jesus.

And it's heightened because these people have been longing for Jesus. They've been waiting for him. They've been zealous and desiring God to come.

And Paul speaks positively of these people. He sees how much passion they have towards God. Verse 2 of chapter 10, for I can testify about them that they are zealous for God.

I love this word, zealous. Zeal can be defined as great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective. I love talking to people who are zealous about things.

[12:04] You know, there's some people in our church who are zealous about running. And that's always fun to talk about. You can see their passion just exploding out of them. If you talk to me for more than about eight seconds, my zeal for Star Wars will come out and it's begun to infect my children.

I'm sorry, children. That's just how it is for you. And there, you can hear them shouting out with joy for Star Wars. We're all zealous and passionate about something.

Zeal is energy and enthusiasm in pursuit of a goal. And it's contagious. And Paul can see that the Jews have been zealous.

They have used their energy and enthusiasm to pursue the goal of righteousness with God.

They've been so zealous. They've been willing to go to any lengths to obey God.

Think of the Old Testament laws. You know, sacrificial laws, laws about the Sabbath, cleansing, sacrifices. The Jews were so zealous about the laws that they put laws on top of laws on top of laws.

[13:09] They were so concerned with not breaking the laws, they protected those laws by making sure they didn't even get close to those laws, which ended up being their downfall when Jesus came because they didn't know the heart of the law.

They were extremely focused on pleasing, honoring, and serving God. But, the rest of verse 2, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

This is the complete opposite of the modern thought, it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe it. Have you heard this in talking with people?

Oh, you know, I'm glad you've got your beliefs. I'm happy for you to have your beliefs. It's good that you've got your beliefs. And I've got my beliefs. And so it's good for us. As long as you believe what you believe, I'll believe what I believe, as long as, you know, you try not to force your beliefs on me.

[14:20] You keep yours over there, I'll have my beliefs over here. This is what the modern day view of faith and belief is. And Paul says, no, it doesn't work. Because the Jews were very sincere and devout.

They were zealous about their beliefs. They believed and they would have looked far more devout, far better than many Christians today.

The same could be said of Buddhists and Muslims. We can see people and think, you are so devout, you are pursuing righteousness with all of your energy, with all of your zeal.

But Paul is saying, it doesn't matter how much you believe, it doesn't matter how committed you are, it doesn't matter how much of your life or your money you give away, if it is all a mistake.

If your zeal is not based on knowledge, you're just running very hard down the wrong path. The truth is that zeal without knowledge is just fanaticism.

[15:27] It is my wife Alyssa's birthday this Friday. She's turning very young again. You thought I was going to get in trouble then, didn't you? And let's say out of my love and zeal for her, I made her a birthday cake.

I know, great husband, right? And I'm going to pour a lot of my time and my energy into this cake. And it gets to her birthday and I've made an amazing sponge cake.

One of my favourites. Loads of cream because that's what I like. And as she's eating it, you know, at first she's joyful and happy and thankful that her husband has not only made the cake but

cleaned up after the cake.

And as she's eating it, her face slowly changes, getting more and more concerned with each chew. And Alyssa says, this doesn't have dairy in it, does it?

You know I'm intolerant to dairy. It turns out I've ruined her day in the next couple of days. In that situation, I've had zeal and passion and love and works and I can say, yes, I'm an awesome husband, I'm a great husband.

[16:39] But I haven't had knowledge. And it's disastrous. Belief is not enough. The Jews, Paul says, they've pursued the wrong thing.

And so it doesn't matter how hard we run down a path if it's the wrong path. What are our lives built on? Will Jesus be a stumbling block or will he be the foundation of our lives?

The hard truth is that it is possible to come to church. It is possible to have all outward appearance of following Jesus. But to still in effect be like the Jews, trusting ourselves.

When we come with humility, then we see that we bring nothing except our need. And so on that day when we get to meet Jesus, on that day when we stand before God and he says, why should I let you into my heaven?

I can truthfully say, do you know what God? There is no reason why I should come in. You know me far better than I do. You know that I have rebelled against you.

[17:55] You know that I have hurt you. I've hurt my own family, my loved ones. I've disobeyed you. There is no reason why you should let me in.

Except Jesus said I can come in. Just believing really hard in something is not enough. And yet, brothers and sisters, belief is enough.

Paul says we don't need works to save us. And he uses language from Deuteronomy in verse 6 of chapter 10. Who will ascend to heaven to bring Christ down? Or who's going to descend into the deep?

That is, to bring Christ up from the deep. This is a, it's a picture of what we have to do to get into heaven, to deal with our sins or to be good enough to get into heaven.

But instead, what we have to do, what needs to be done is very near. verse 9, if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

[19:06] I love this explanation by Paul of the gospel. It is this wonderful little summary of everything in the gospel in these two phrases. To say that Jesus is Lord is such a significant claim.

The word for Lord here, it's Kyrios. You know, think all of our favorite tennis player, Nick Kyrios. Nick Kyrios sees himself as a Lord.

That's what his name means. Kyrios means Lord. But it's not just someone who's good at something or who's got authority. This word for Lord is supreme being.

This is the Lord of all things. This has power over everything. And while Nick Kyrios might think that of himself, that is not him. But to say that Jesus is Lord, that declaration means I believe Jesus is the one who sits on the throne above every throne.

He is the one who has supreme claim over the world and my life. And then the second part of this phrase, to believe that he was raised from the dead, is to believe that he died.

[20:16] His death was purposeful. And that death couldn't hold him and so he was raised. And so to believe in these two little phrases, is that Jesus, that person, is God who has control over all things.

And that God died for me in my place. And he has taken my sin. Now we might balk at this a little bit when Paul says all we need to do is say some words.

We might recoil slightly as if Paul is saying we need to do a magic formula, as if we could walk down the street with a piece of paper that says Jesus is Lord and say, say this for me. And if people say it, yes, you're a Christian and you're in.

It's not quite that. In the ancient world, these are two sides of the same coin, speaking and believing. Confessing with the mouth and believing with the heart are not two different things. Anyone who does one will do the other. And so Paul is not adding a work as if we have to say this particular phrase to get in. But it's a picture of the Christian who hands over their hopes into the hands of Jesus.

[21:28] No longer like the Jews trying to seek their own righteousness apart from God, but handing that over to Jesus, trusting that he is the Lord and his death is sufficient.

This is a wonderful picture and it goes out to everyone. Verse 13, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

The Jews' life, their life was shaped by their belief. They believed that to be saved, to be righteousness, they had to pursue it with zeal and energy and everything they had every moment. But for the Christian, well, what is the Christian's life to look like? If we believe that our righteousness is not found in our striving but in what Jesus has done, what is our life to look like? What does it look like then to be a zealous Christian?

To be a Christian with energy and enthusiasm? It looks like one responding to the call, seeking to call others. Have a look at verse 14 and 15 here with me, where Paul pushes the absolute necessity of evangelism.

[ 22 : 43 ] Seeing the call go from those who are saved out to other people. We're going to read it forwards as it's written and then I'm going to read it backwards for us. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in?

How can they believe in the one whom they have not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them? How can anyone preach unless they are sent? Let me take that backwards.

We send people to go and preach so that people would hear so they would understand and believe in Jesus. I think for many of us evangelism seems like this really difficult, scary, big thing that is really difficult.

And Paul just pulls it all the way back down and makes it quite straightforward. Go, speak, explain things, and people will believe.

believe. This is what happens when we believe that God is sovereign and in control of all things. God invites us into his work to speak his word and people will be saved.

[ 23 : 56 ] I find there's this fascinating little irony. We don't do any work to save ourselves, but God invites us into his work to see other people saved.

people will not hear about Jesus unless someone does the work of calling. Now this might sound daunting.

It might sound like it's a call into full-time ministry. You've got to become a preacher. And for my father, who is a minister, this is the passage that God used to call him into full-time ministry.

He heard this and went, yes, you're right. If people aren't trained to preach and then there's no preaching, well, how are people going to hear? And so this part of the Bible, God used wonderfully to call him into ministry, and I'm thankful for that.

But that's not exactly what it's describing here. It is that, but it's not only that. It's not just for full-time ministers of the gospel, but the word for preaching here is done by heralds.

[ 25 : 03 ] Think the ancient world, how announcement and news would go out. You would send a herald, a news person to go to a town. And so, you know, think there's news that needs to get out to the empire.

You would send a herald. And they'd run to the town and they would say, the emperor is dead.

There's a new emperor. And then they'd run to the next town and do the same thing. This is the role of preaching.

This is the word, to be a herald, to go out and spread the news. And so it's kind of like a living newspaper. They had the news and they would go to a town with the news for everybody and they would stand on the street corner and they would shout it for everyone to hear.

But we don't even really have newspapers anymore. Does anybody still get newspapers? Does anybody still read newspapers? It's all online these days. So for us, it's a little bit more like being a living version of Twitter or Instagram.

I don't know where people to go to get news if you get news anymore. This is a really normal picture of news.

[ 26 : 12 ] So we are to be the thing that people are scrolling. Instead of people being influenced by the latest fitness influencer or Instagram chef, people are to go to the Christian to be influenced.

And the messengers must be sent. And so from this church, a number of years ago we sent Sam and Sally Lowe. They were sent from us. They went to the Gold Coast and they have been going out, preaching the word and growing a church.

But tomorrow, this church is also sending all of us. I wish it was to the Gold Coast. It sounds much warmer up there at the moment. But we're all going. We're all being sent tomorrow.

We're all going to our families, to our friends, to the front lines in particular that we have. We're going to universities.

We're going to school. We're going to our places of work. Now we're not going to go and get a soapbox like the Herald and stand and say, Jesus has died for your sins and he was raised.

[ 27 : 20 ] If you'd like to do that, I've got a soapbox for you. That's still a good and valid thing. But we're going to talk about this Jesus who is the Lord.

About this Jesus who has died in our place. Because we believe that he is the Lord. And if he is the Lord, well he's got sovereignty over my life and everybody that we know and their life.

And there's this wonderful picture of the impact of those who share the gospel. Verse 15, as it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Now that sounds really nice, doesn't it?

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Until you remember the first century heralds going from town to town. With cobblestone paths and dusty roads and horses and camels and everything that they bring.

Their feet would have been anything but beautiful. They were most likely some of the grossest, cracked heels, smelliest feet you've ever seen.

[ 28 : 30 ] And yet, can you imagine receiving the very best news from them? You've been set free. War is over. There is peace.

You'd fall at their feet and grab them out of joy. The news is so good that it makes something disgusting amazing. The hard part of the remaining verses of chapter 10 is what happens when this beautiful message goes out and it goes unheard.

Verse 21, Paul talks about what's happened with the Jews. From God's perspective, he says, all day long, I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

Not all of Israel will accept the news. Not all of those who hear the gospel will understand. Not all will believe. And that's the heartbreaking reality of the gospel.

We know from the outset that all are responsible for rebelling against God and God is responsible for bringing in who he chooses. But we never know who is going to come in when we share the gospel.

[ 29 : 42 ] And so there is a wonderful beauty that we share it knowing that God does work and he does save. But we also know that some are hardened, just like the Jews.

No matter how often the gospel is held out to them, some people will never believe. But it is absolutely necessary to share the gospel. Not for us to be right with God.

Not out of compulsion to be forgiven by him. But for their sake. Because just like us, how will people know God unless they hear the call?

How will they hear the word unless someone takes it to them? I read a story about the former US President Jimmy Carter recently. I don't know if you care at all about American politics.

But Jimmy Carter is an evangelical Christian. And as a Christian, before becoming the president, he shared one of his issues when he realised how zealous he was for himself and not for God.

[ 30 : 44 ] As a part of his church, he would visit a few people on a Sunday afternoon and he'd read the Bible with them and he'd pray and have a bit of a chat and then he'd go on with his day.

And he said he was always so proud of his efforts and it left him with a clear conscience throughout the week as if he'd been doing this really good thing. And he counted up his visits one day and figured out that in 14 years he'd done 140 visits.

And he was quite chuffed at that. And then in comparison he reflected that when he was running as governor in 1966, he spent 16 to 18 hours a day trying to reach as many voters as possible.

In the end of his campaign, he had met with more than 300,000 people. And he said, the comparison struck me. 300,000 visits for myself in three months and 140 visits for God in 14 years.

Now we can easily start to think that evangelism is going to earn our place into heaven as if somehow it's the deed that we need to do to make us righteous before God. Don't hear that from me.

[ 32 : 03 ] But brothers and sisters, where is our zeal? Where are we placing our energy and enthusiasm? Is our zeal for ourselves like Jimmy Carter realized?

So we spend our time and our efforts making ourselves look good. Is it running to a particular finish line of success? Following God gets put to one side as we pursue best marks at school, best marks at university, the highest amount of work we can do to get the next promotion.

Are we running towards a finish line of joy and success in only temporary things? Maybe we see this zealous Christian life, you know, this Christian life who shares the gospel with their friends and family in a world of you believe what you believe and I'll believe what I believe and don't you talk about them.

And we see some Christians who are zealous and think, ah, they just look a bit weird. I don't want to be like that person standing on the soapbox. And we go, I'm not going to be like that. So I'm just going to have a bit more of a mundane life.

Unaware of how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Where are you putting your energy enthusiasm? I've got a challenge for you this week.

[ 33 : 29 ] Just a very small taste of what it would look like to be zealous for God. To pursue his call to love other people. To see that call go out.

A very small challenge. I'd like you to reflect on one aspect of God's love for you this week. What is, how has God been good to you?

It could be that you've been reflecting on how sinful you are and how much you need his love and how good he is. It could be that you're so thankful for this community of Christians that God has given you.

One aspect of how God has been good to you and to share that with someone else. Someone who is not a Christian. God is calling you to trust in Jesus as the Lord and to call others to this same Lord because he is good.

Let me pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, that you do indeed call us who are unrighteous.

[ 34 : 39 ] we are all responsible for rebelling against you, but God, we thank you that you call people and God, we thank you that you invite us into your work.

Heavenly Father, equip us, give us words to speak, help us take a moment to reflect on how good you have been. And Lord, we ask that this week you would put one person in our lives that we get to share it.

Father, we know that you are preparing people to come to know and love you. Help us to see them for your glory, Lord.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.