

The Message of Salvation to All

It is often said that there are really only two religions in the world, two plans for obtaining salvation. One is to be saved by earning it. The other is to receive it as a gift. Paul puts attempting to keep the law into that first category when, in our Second Reading from today, Romans 10:5-17, he quotes Leviticus 18:5, “The person who has done these things will live by them.”

To be sure, if a person could keep God’s law and do what it requires, then salvation could indeed be achieved that way. But if a person falls short of the law’s requirements, as every sinner does, then the law turns on the would-be earner of salvation with a curse. Deuteronomy 27:26 minces no words: “Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” (See also Galatians 3:10.) That road leads to catastrophe!

Attempting to earn “righteousness that is by the Law” is a totally unworkable option. The alternative Paul presents is “the righteousness that is by faith.” Using the literary device of personification, Paul ascribes the power of speech to righteousness. When righteousness speaks, it first issues a disclaimer. It tells us what not to do: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (which means, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the depths’ (which means, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

Using expressions drawn from Deuteronomy 30:12-14, righteousness by faith says, Don’t embark on a course of action where you try to set up a saviour by yourself - as though you had to go up to heaven and bring Christ down to earth. Or do not presume that you have to go to the underworld to bring Christ back from the dead? Trying to create your own saviour is a foolish and impossible task.

But what does righteousness by faith advocate? What is the proper plan to obtain salvation? It is that which trusts in a message, that which clings to a promise. It is having the righteousness gained by trust and confidence in the gospel message, the message proclaimed in the Word as taught by Paul and his peers.

Paul asks, “But what does it [righteousness by faith] say?” Answer: “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,” This is the Word faith, which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Salvation is not a matter of doing and earning, but of receiving. It is confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord and confidently believing that God has raised Him from the dead as our Saviour and Substitute.

Jesus came down to earth to live the perfect life sinners could not live; He kept the Law for them. He lived a perfect life to earn the righteousness that sinners needed. What’s more, He died the death

sinner's deserved for their many transgressions. With His lifeblood He paid for their lack of keeping the Law. By His perfect obedience He earned the righteousness necessary for our salvation.

Christ has done everything. The Word proclaims this glorious truth to us, and that same Word also works faith in the heart to believe and accept Christ's righteousness. The Word creates the confidence that can say, "This Jesus is my Lord."

Once again drawing from Deuteronomy 30:14, Paul says that Word "is near you, in your mouth and in your heart." In practice, the order of heart and mouth is reversed from what Paul uses here. The Word first penetrates the heart and creates faith there. Then faith, if it is true and living faith, shows itself in the confession of believing lips. Paul uses the chronological sequence of heart and mouth when he repeats this great truth in verse 10: "For with the heart a person believes, so that he is counted righteous, and with the mouth a person confesses and then he is saved."