

Believe

EVERYONE WHO CONFESSES AND BELIEVES IN
JESUS WILL BE SAVED.

Several years ago, I attended a church that posted its philosophy in its buildings and on all of its publications. The saying was “Belong, Believe, Become.” While frequently referenced, the saying was not explained. The church members seemed to feel that the meaning was self-evident. Personally, I took it to mean that Christians should “belong” to a fellowship, “believe” the core truths of Christianity, and “become” more Christlike. The saying was succinct, memorable, and relatable to my Christian life. I was impressed.

Over time, I realized that I had misunderstood the intent of the saying. The pastor had decided that the best way to attract unbelievers was for the church to engage in highly-visible community service activities. Unbelievers attracted to the works that the church was doing would then be encouraged to attend services and life groups, and in this way, “belong” to the fellowship. This seemed like a good outreach plan, until I realized the church was actually adding these unbelievers to the voting membership and including them in various leadership capacities. They had a zeal for service, but they functioned without any real knowledge of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

Zeal without knowledge is a dangerous thing (Rom. 10:2). Paul lamented that the zeal of the Israelites apart from the knowledge of God’s plan of salvation in Christ made them resistant to the message of the gospel. They thought of themselves as good people, and they were in many ways, but they were still lost. Paul stressed to the Roman believers the importance of clearly communicating the gospel to all people, both the secular and the religious, because only faith in Christ can lead to a right standing with God.

The world today also desperately needs to hear the good news about Jesus. And God has given His church the charge to share it. The church shares the gospel so hearers may believe and by faith belong to the people of God and become increasingly Christlike. But to believe the gospel, a person first must hear it—and sharing the message of the gospel is every faithful believer’s God-given mission. Are you fulfilling your mission?

Romans 9:1-10:21

Chapters 9-11 expand on the truths Paul taught regarding the nature of salvation earlier in the letter. The lostness of unbelieving Jews, in spite of their heritage (chap. 2), raised the question “what advantage does the Jew have?” (3:1-8) if salvation comes to all people only by grace through faith. In chapters 9-11, Paul addressed that question in more detail.

Paul’s affection for his fellow Israelites (9:1-3) and his respect for the role they have played in God’s plan (vv. 4-5) remained a major element of his motivation to see them come to faith in Christ. Furthermore, God’s work among Israel was not a failure. The gospel is not a rejection of Israel, but the fulfilling of the promise of God to Israel. However, “not all who are descended from Israel are Israel,” and not all those physically descended from Abraham are heirs of the promise (vv. 6-13). For the promise of God was to Abraham and to all those who shared his faith (4:13-25).

Paul then addressed critics who might have claimed that a gospel which excludes Jews and includes Gentiles on the basis of faith would be unjust (9:14). He pointed out God has the right to operate according to His will, and human beings have neither the right nor the understanding to criticize His choices (vv. 14-21). God is by definition just so His dealings with both Jews and Gentiles are just, including calling forth one people of faith from both groups (vv. 22-24). God had revealed through the prophets His intent to include both Jews and Gentiles among His chosen people (vv. 25-29). Thus, Paul asserted, based on the words of the prophets, that God would draw from all people those who would become His children. For everyone who confesses and believes in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, will be saved.

Righteousness Through Faith (Rom. 9:30-33)

Paul’s encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus confirmed that He was in fact the Messiah. Recognizing this truth required Paul to rethink Jewish traditions, his Scripture interpretations, the role of the Messiah, and the gospel that he had originally rejected.

Through this process, Paul's love for his people did not change, but his understanding of how they and all other people could live in right relationship with God did.

VERSE 30

What should we say then? Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained righteousness—namely the righteousness that comes from faith.

What should we say then? looks back to the Scriptures cited and the arguments presented (vv. 1-29) and leads to some critical observations (vv. 30-33). Yes, God is sovereign and acts according to His will, but God is not arbitrary or unjust. God has acted in the affairs of humanity showing wrath and showing mercy. He has done so in order to “make known the riches of his glory” (v. 23). And by His power and mercy both Jews and Gentiles can have right standing before Him by faith.

For the Gentiles, right standing before God was made possible even though they **did not pursue righteousness**. This does not mean that no one among the Gentiles ever sought to do good. Some Gentiles became God-fearers because they were drawn to Judaism's high moral standards. However, these were exceptions within the ranks of the Gentiles.

Paradoxically, these non-Jews who did not pursue righteousness had nevertheless **obtained righteousness**. Again, Paul was not claiming that all Gentiles have gained a right standing with God. Rather, he was asserting that in spite of their willful ignorance of God and general immorality (1:18-32), God has still cared for them and has made righteousness available to them. The righteousness that Paul was talking about was **the righteousness that comes from faith**.

VERSE 31

But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not achieved the righteousness of the law.

In contrast to their Gentile neighbors, the people of **Israel** had been **pursuing the law of righteousness**. Paul's statement about the actions of Israel points to Jews in general, not the actions of all Jews. Weaving through their history is a persistent thread of devotion on the part of some that survived even the most wicked of rulers and the most difficult of circumstances.

Pursuing the law of righteousness does not refer to the pursuing of *righteousness* but specifically points to the pursuing of the *law*. While the

two actions are related, they are not identical. The law they pursued, the law of Moses, was righteous in that it came from God and called for the adherents to live in a godly manner. However, those seeking to live by it could never do so consistently or completely. As a result, the law also served the function of exposing the person's sin (7:7-13; 10:5). Thus, the righteousness demanded in the law remained out of reach. And Israel, as Paul had already explained at greater length (2:17-29), **has not achieved the righteousness of the law.**

VERSES 32-33

Why is that? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, “Look, I am putting a stone in Zion to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and the one who believes on him will not be put to shame.”

Many in Israel had been following the law in pursuit of righteousness but had failed to achieve it. Anticipating the question that some of his readers might have had, Paul asked, **Why is that?** Israel sought the right goal but did so in the wrong way. Paul had already explained that no one can achieve righteousness by his or her own works. Even those who try to follow the law given by God will fail (3:9-20). Righteousness comes only by faith as Paul illustrated from the life of Abraham (chap. 4). Israel as a people failed to achieve the righteousness of the law because they pursued it **as if it were by works.**

Paul's use of *as if* makes plain that doing the works of the law was never able to make a person righteous. But those who misunderstood the role of the law acted as if keeping it could grant a person right standing with God. They were wrong, and as a result **they stumbled over the stumbling stone.**

Paul then cited Isaiah to make clear that his observations were not just personal opinion but based on Scripture. The combination of Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 also reveals the true nature of the stumbling stone. The **stone** God placed **in Zion**, Jesus, was not sent for the purpose of causing the people to stumble, yet some would stumble due to their own unbelief. Thus, while He will be a “sanctuary” to some (Isa. 8:14), for others He will be **a stone . . . to stumble over and a rock to trip over.** But **the one who believes on him will not be put to shame.** Those who have faith in Jesus will find that He is their sure foundation. But any who reject faith and pursue righteousness as if they could achieve it by works will find that they have become like Sodom and Gomorrah (Rom. 9:29).



Explore Further

Have you ever witnessed to someone who shied away from faith in Jesus by reasoning that he or she was good more often than he or she was bad? How would Paul's teachings to this point in Romans lead you to respond to such an argument? Pray about how you might correct such legalistic thinking while also graciously and

- kindly inviting this individual to turn to faith in Jesus.

Misguided Zeal (Rom. 10:1-3)

The inclusion of believing Gentiles and the stumbling of some of his Jewish brethren did not diminish Paul's affection and respect for his people. But the gospel did shape his desire for his people. Above all, he wished that they would see the truth of the gospel and turn to Jesus in faith.

VERSE 1

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation.

Despite his frustration with many of his fellow Jews' rejection of Christ, Paul told the Roman believers, **my heart's desire . . . is for their salvation**. Paul used an emphatic form of *my*, stressing how personal this attitude was for him. The heart was understood as the center of one's spiritual, emotional, and mental life.

Paul's heartfelt concern for the lost also found expression in his **prayer to God concerning them**. Paul's genuine concern for the lost of Israel led to intercessory prayer on their behalf. He knew that apart from the power of God his efforts would be in vain. For only God can save through Jesus (John 14:6). And the role of the Spirit in convicting, drawing, and transforming people ought never be underestimated.

VERSE 2

I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Paul asserted, **I can testify about them**. Non-Christian Jews still were people who **have zeal for God**. Paul had to affirm that many unbelieving Jews were devout people. In spite of their rejection of the gospel, they had a passionate desire for the things of God and genuinely sought to serve Him. Unfortunately, the Jewish *zeal* for God was misguided in that it was **not according to knowledge**. They were passionate about following the law. They were passionate about observing the traditions of their fathers, as Paul had been (Gal. 1:14). Paul frequently used the term for *knowledge* when referring to a genuine and deep understanding of spiritual things (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9). Such *knowledge* confers an understanding of God's righteousness as revealed in Christ and leads to salvation (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25).

VERSE 3

Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

Paul wrote that the Jews were **ignorant of the righteousness of God**. While the word translated *ignorant* can describe someone lacking knowledge, it can also refer to a person who disregards or willfully ignores some truth. The fact that these same people **have not submitted to God's righteousness** implies that they chose to ignore or disregarded the truth revealed in the gospel.

When Christ came, some people clung to law-keeping and **attempted to establish their own righteousness**, refusing to acknowledge God's Messiah. Their willful ignorance presents a sad picture of a misguided if religious people. Paul looked past their rejection, respected their zeal, and earnestly prayed for their conversion. Such people still exist today, and along with Paul, the Christian's heart's desire and prayer to God should be for their salvation.



Explore Further

Read "Prayer" on pages 1291–1293 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. Pray for the ability to understand the religious zeal of non-Christians. Pray for the wisdom to share the gospel with them effectively and pray for their salvation.

Salvation Available to All (Rom. 10:9-13)

The religious zeal of some Jews blinded them to the truth of the gospel. They could not accept the idea that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (v. 4). These continued to seek righteousness by law-keeping even as they knew that they could not keep the law fully. The message of faith is available to those who have not yet believed (v. 8)—if only they will listen.

VERSE 9

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.

Paul assured his readers, **if you confess . . . and believe . . . you will be saved**. Some question the sequence in this statement. Shouldn’t believing in the resurrection come before confessing that Jesus is Lord? But Paul’s very next statement reverses the order and addresses believing then confessing (v. 10). The reversal of order along with linking confession to the mouth and believing to the heart in both verses implies that Paul did not intend to stress the sequence of the two but their mutually supportive nature. What the heart truly believes the mouth confesses, and genuine confession reflects heartfelt faith.

As a response to the gospel, confession affirms agreement with the message, acknowledging sin and lostness, the need of salvation, and a commitment to Jesus as the only means of salvation. The act of confession **with your mouth** is public by nature. Conviction is certainly a matter of the heart and is meaningful on its own. But confession as a public declaration commits the speaker in a way that a privately held conviction does not.

The content of the confession Paul highlighted was **“Jesus is Lord.”** The use of the title *Lord* for Jesus may have several meanings. Since the same title is used of God, it may point to the deity of Jesus. The title was also used in the sense of “master” and can express a commitment on the part of the speaker to follow or obey Jesus as Lord. As an early confession of faith, affirming *Jesus* as *Lord* also recognized His exaltation by the Father as the Lord to whom all would eventually bend the knee (Phil. 2:9-11).

With confession, Paul linked believing **in your heart**, stressing the inner and genuine nature of the faith. The words of the confession must reflect the genuine commitment of the speaker or they mean nothing.

The resurrection proved the identity of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God (Acts 9:3-22; Rom. 1:4). Thus, believing in the heart that **God raised him** [Jesus] **from the dead** affirms Jesus's identity, His victory over sin and death, and His power to save those who believe in Him (1 Cor. 15).

VERSES 10-11

One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,

Reversing the order from the previous verse, Paul expanded on the nature of conversion. **One believes with the heart** and **one confesses with the mouth**. The former he linked with achieving **righteousness** (right standing with God), and the latter he linked with achieving **salvation** (deliverance from sin). These should not be treated as separate achievements but two expressions of a single reality. There is no salvation apart from righteousness, and there is no righteousness apart from deliverance from sin. In this sense, heartfelt conviction and public confession are the inseparable two sides of the same coin.

Paul supported his explanation of the nature of salvation by citing Isaiah 28:16, **Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame**. The earlier citation combining Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 identified the stone placed in Zion as the one on whom the faithful must believe (9:33). And whoever makes this choice will ultimately find their conviction confirmed and their faith rewarded. They will not be *put to shame*, that is, disappointed or disgraced by finding that their faith was in vain.

VERSES 12-13

since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Both the **Jew** and the **Greek** are saved by faith. Believers from both groups must submit to **the same Lord**. And this one Lord **richly blesses all who call on him**. Paul further supported the truth of the gospel of faith for all with a citation from Joel 2:32: **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**. Again, the prophet made no distinction based on heritage or ethnicity. Any person, whatever his or her background, who calls on the Lord in faith will be saved. And Paul's clear word of hope to the Roman believers is still the message of the church today.



Explore Further

Read “Lord” on pages 1024–1026 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord? How would you explain the concept of lordship to a new Christian?

Go Tell (Rom. 10:14-17)

Although appointed as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul preached in synagogues as he engaged in his missionary journeys. Clearly, he felt that the gospel was for everyone. Conviction led to action, and Paul asserted that all believers should understand the importance of sharing the gospel.

VERSES 14-15

How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

Paul taught that everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved (v. 13). Building on that truth, the apostle asked a series of four rhetorical questions intended to encourage his readers to share the good news with the lost. The questions start from the perspective of a person who has become a believer and acknowledged Jesus as Lord. The sequence then works backward to the beginning point of the person’s conversion.

The one who calls on the Lord is the one who has **believed**, and the person could not have believed without first **hearing about him**. Hearing about Jesus presumes an encounter with a **preacher** and the presence of the preacher who was **sent**. Paul then emphasized the goodness of the entire evangelistic effort with a citation of Isaiah 52:7: **How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.**

Preacher does not refer to an office in the church but an activity. The word means one who proclaims. And Paul did not limit the proclamation of the gospel to a specific category of believers nor to a particular location. The Greek verb translated *bring the good news* is the one that the English verb “to evangelize” comes from. It was used in the ancient

world of many sorts of positive pronouncements that anticipated a happy reception. *The feet* of the messenger carrying good news were considered *beautiful* because of the goodness of the message he carried.

VERSE 16

But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?

Paul lamented, **But not all obeyed the gospel.** He reminded his readers that even the prophet Isaiah had occasion to lament: **Lord who has believed our message?** (Isa. 53:1). The good news of the gospel is not always received with gladness. But the manner of its reception does not determine the truth of a message. Nor does it change the responsibility of the messenger. The faithful preacher knows that the good news of God must be proclaimed whatever the outcome.

VERSE 17

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ.

Paul summarized the point he made beginning in verse 14 to stress the importance of sharing the good news of the gospel. Not all may believe the message preached, but **faith comes from what is heard.** Thus without a message clearly communicated, the lost have no opportunity to respond in faith. And the followers of Jesus do not just carry any message. The message that is true and has the power to transform is **the message about Christ.** Sharing the message of Jesus is the task that God has assigned His children. May we be ever faithful and never silent.

Explore Further



Read “Evangelism” on pages 518–519 and “Mission(s)” on pages 1114–1116 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. How have you been involved in the task of sharing the good news? Pray about ways that you could prepare yourself to be more effective and more engaged in outreach both at home and internationally.