



MAIN COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

Chapter 10

St. Paul begins Romans chapter ten in much the same way as he began chapter nine: proclaiming his great love for Israel (Romans 10:1). If you read Romans chapter two, you will see that St. Paul criticizes some first century Jews for hypocrisy: they claimed to follow the Law, and even criticized others for failing to follow it, but then violated the Law themselves. The Jews mentioned in Romans chapter ten, however, are different: they have a tremendous zeal for God (10:2).

There is a problem, however, with their zeal: it is not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Have you heard the phrase, "You can be sincere, and still be sincerely wrong?" That is the problem with this group of people. They work to make themselves righteous by following the Law, but reject the Person to Whom the Law points: Jesus Christ (10:3-4). St. Paul says that these zealous Jews lack knowledge because, through their relationship with God and their knowledge of the Law and the Prophets, they should have recognized Jesus as their Messiah and worshipped Him. St. John Chrysostom summarizes St. Paul's point: "There is only one righteousness, which finds its fulfillment in Christ...Even someone who has failed to keep the Law properly will be righteous if he has Christ...but the man who does not have Christ is a stranger to the Law as well."

St. John's comment about failing to keep the Law also emphasizes St. Paul's quotation from Leviticus 18:5, "The man who does those things shall live by them" (Romans 10:5). The Jews understood keeping the Law to be the source of life (Deuteronomy 6:25); the problem is that it is impossible to fully keep the Law, meaning that humans need salvation apart from the Law (see Galatians 3:10-14).

In Romans 10:6-8, St. Paul adopts another statement by the Holy Prophet and Godseer Moses (from Deuteronomy 30:12-14) to reinforce the righteousness of faith. Moses teaches that the Israelites have no excuse for not following the Law: it is neither too high or low to be found, but instead "is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Deuteronomy 30:14; quoted in Romans 10:8). Likewise, the first century Jews have no reason to reject faith in Christ: they are unable - and have no need - to rise to heaven or descend into the abyss to find Christ and make His righteousness available, because He is available to them in the "word of faith" preached by St. Paul and other Christians (Romans 10:8). This "word of faith," Fr. Lawrence Farley tells us, is "the same basic message of obedient love to God as is found in the Law."

Notice the meaning St. Paul finds in Moses' teaching that the word is "in your mouth and in your heart:" "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Righteousness comes through your whole-hearted belief in God, and you confess (which in this context does not refer to the Mystery of Confession, but instead means to profess or proclaim) this transforming belief.

St. Paul is teaching us two things in this passage. First, righteousness is inseparable from true faith in Christ; we cannot earn salvation exclusively through following a system of rules and practices (as beneficial as those rules and practices may be). Secondly, this faith must be professed to others: just as a man and woman make public marriage vows, and happily tell others about the person he or she married, so we must verbalize our faith. In other words, Christianity is not simply a doctrinal system to which you agree: the teachings of the Faith must be believed, lived, and shared.

St. John Chrysostom explains this point, “The understanding must be strongly fixed in pious faith, and the tongue must herald by its confession the solid resolution of the mind.” This is the reason that your godparents or sponsors professed their - and, by virtue of their intention to assist in raising you as a Christian, your - faith before your baptism. It is also the reason we recite the Nicene Creed during every Divine Liturgy.

Romans 10:11 echoes a theme from 5:3-5: Christian belief and hope is not unfounded, and will not be proved false; God will fulfill His promise of salvation and reconcile us to Him. This promise is not restricted to the physical descendants of Abraham; it is given to all people, as even the Jews should know because it is promised by the Holy Prophet Joel, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32; quoted in Romans 10:13 and referenced in Acts 9:14).

There is a problem for the Gentiles: how are they supposed to know that they need to call on the Lord (Romans 9:14)? How shall they believe in Him if they’ve never heard of Him? “How,” St. Paul asks, “Shall they hear without a preacher?” In this passage St. Paul addresses one of the reasons for which he writes the Epistle: to explain to the church in Rome his mission to the Gentiles. He continues, “And how shall they preach unless they are sent” (9:15)? The Greek word for “sent” - *apostelo* - is related to the Greek word for “apostle” - *apostolos*. St. Paul is saying that he, an apostle (Romans 1:1), is being sent by God to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (his quotation from Isaiah 52:7 even uses, in the Greek LXX, the word for “gospel” when it refers to “glad tidings of good things”).

Commentators disagree on whether Romans 10:16 refers to Jews who have rejected what they have heard, or whether it refers to the Gentiles having not heard the Gospel. Many commentators believe it refers to disbelief among the Jews, linking to this verse Hebrews 4:2, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us (Jewish Christians) as well as to them (Jewish unbelievers); but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”

Other commentators, such as St. John Chrysostom, believe verse sixteen is a response to a Jewish objection: how could St. Paul claim that the Gentiles are intended by God to be recipients of the Gospel if so few of them have responded? Fr. Lawrence Farley explains St. Paul’s response, “The apostle concludes that *faith comes from hearing* the message, and this possibility of *hearing* only comes through the apostolic preaching of the *Word of Christ*” (see Romans 10:17).

St. Paul understands the underlying point of the objection of some Jews: how could the Gentiles have heard God’s good news, since God never spoke to them (Romans 10:18)? The answer is that God *hasspoken* to the Gentiles. St. Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 as evidence that nature proclaims the Creator; the entirety of the point is made in Psalm 19:1-4:

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork
Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge.
There is no speech nor language
Where their voice is not heard.
Their line has gone out through all the earth,
And their words to the end of the world.*

Since God has spoken to the Gentiles, it is inaccurate to object that He does not care about them.

St. Paul foresees another objection: even if God *did* speak to the Gentiles, how were the Israelites supposed to know that He did so? The Apostle believes the answer lies in a prophecy from the Holy Prophet and Godseer Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21: God would provoke the Israelites to anger through His interaction with a group of people who - according to the standards of the Law - were so corrupt that they did not even deserve to be called a nation (see Romans 10:19). St. Paul further quotes the Holy Prophet Isaiah, who boldly prophesied that God would be found by those who did not seek Him (Isaiah 65:1, quoted in Romans 10:20). Isaiah's description of the Gentiles matches St. Paul's description in Romans 9:30: the Gentiles did not seek God, and yet after hearing the Gospel, they humbly submitted themselves to Him.

In contrast to the Gentiles, who until the work of the Apostles had little opportunity to learn about God beyond studying nature, Israel had full opportunity to learn about God and the righteousness of faith that He demands. St. Paul, after quoting Isaiah 65:1 about the Gentiles, now quotes Isaiah 65:2 about Israel: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Romans 10:21). Those Jews who rejected Christianity therefore could not plead ignorance, for God had spoken to them throughout their history.