

A Leg Out From Legalism

A Study of Romans 10:9-15

Introduction:

I would like to spice things up around here by unveiling a scandal. There's nothing quite like a good scandal to make things interesting.

Here's the scandal: From the Scriptures, I intend to prove that believing in Jesus is not enough to be saved. You heard me right. Yes, this is the Grace Line Conference and, yes, the premise of my talk is that faith alone in Christ alone is not enough for salvation.

Romans 10:9-15 is my text.

I. Over and over again, this passage presents a consistent formula for salvation.

A. It appears first in ► Verse 9. It says,

NKJ Romans 10:9 . . . 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.

► There is a kind of formula here of the form, A plus B yields C. It goes like this. If you ► confess with your

mouth—A, and you ► believe in your heart—B, then ► C will happen—you will be saved. Believing is not enough to be saved; confessing the Lord Jesus is also required.

I want to be clear that confession here is not the disclosing of sin so that you can receive forgiveness. Confessing the Lord Jesus is an open, public identification with Christ. It's coming out of the closet and saying, "Jesus is my Lord." I'll talk more about this later.

- B. The same formula appears again in ► Verse 10, only with the two terms reversed. It says,

NKJ Romans 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

One ► believes with the heart. Then one ► makes confession with the mouth. And believing and confessing ► yield salvation.

- C. The ► formula appears yet again in Verses 11-13. ► Verse 11 says,

NKJ Romans 10:11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

There's the ► believing. That's what you do with your heart. Then, ► Verses 12-13 continue by explaining what you do with your mouth. Only instead of saying confess the Lord, it says to ► call on the Lord. It ► says,

NKJ Romans 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. ► 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

It seems evident from the structure of this passage that to “confess” and to “call on” are essentially the same idea—they both appear to be something you do with your mouth. And once again, the formula ► yields salvation.

- D. The formula appears finally a fourth time in ► Verses 14-15. Here, we're presented with an extended progression leading to salvation, including things that happen before believing. The progression is unfolded in the reverse order in which it actually happens. Beginning in ► Verse 14, it says,

NKJ Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a

preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

Here's the extended progression: A person is ► sent to tell the good news about Jesus. Then, that person ► preaches the good news. (By the way, preaching here is not limited to the kind of thing I'm doing right now; it is the general proclamation of good news that anyone can do.) Then, as a result of preaching, another person ► hears the good news. Then, the one who hears ► believes in Jesus. Then, the one who believes ► calls on Jesus. Then, by implication, the one who calls on Jesus is ► saved. Same basic formula. We just find out a little more about what happens before belief.

- E. So, ► inasmuch as Paul has taken pains to repeat this formula four times in our text, it seems pretty clear that believing in Jesus is not enough to be saved; confessing or calling on the Lord is also required.
- II. I used to think that maybe believing and confessing mean basically the same thing and that they are not separate steps. Not any more.
- A. You see, ► Verses 14-15 seem to invalidate this idea. Remember, a number of sequential, distinct steps are presented leading to salvation. In order to ► preach, someone needs to be sent, but sending is not the same as preaching. In order to ► hear, someone needs to preach,

but preaching is not the same as hearing. In order to ► believe, someone needs to hear, but hearing is not the same as believing. In order to ► call on the Lord, someone needs to believe, but believing is not the same as calling upon the Lord. By the logic of the sequence, it seems that believing and calling cannot mean the same thing.

Furthermore, this sequence does not suggest that calling is an inevitable result of believing. After all, working backward in the sequence, believing is certainly not an inevitable result of hearing. And, as any preacher will tell you, hearing is not an evitable result of preaching.

- B. ► Other Scriptures corroborate that believing in Jesus and confessing Him are two different things and that one can truly believe in Jesus but not confess Him. For example, ► John 12:42 says,

NKJ John 12:42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue

Here we have some Jewish rulers who believed in Jesus, but did not confess Him. So believing and confessing are not the same thing, and one can believe but not confess.

And so we're left with the idea that believing in Jesus is not enough to be saved; we need to confess Him as Lord.

- C. It's ► not surprising that people have used Romans 10:9 to support the idea that one must surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. For example, John MacArthur describes our text, Romans 10:9, as one of "the two clearest statements on the way of salvation in all of Scripture . . ." He goes on to say that, "both emphasize Jesus' lordship."¹

I agree that Romans 10:9 emphasizes Jesus' lordship. And I agree that it is a clear statement on the way of salvation. But I suspect I don't agree with the kind of salvation that is in view. Let me explain.

- III. Any time we encounter the word, "saved" in the Bible, we need to ask ourselves the question, ► "saved from what?" In the Bible, there are people saved from hell. There are also people saved from enemies, saved from physical harm, saved from illness, and saved from the damaging consequences of sin in this life. These are all forms of salvation in the Bible.

The key question we must ask in Romans 10 is this: What kind of salvation is the author, Paul talking about?

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According To Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, "Follow Me"?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 28.

- A. Let me back up just a little and try to explain the relationship between eternal life and salvation in the Bible.
1. Let ► this arrow represent eternal life. Eternal life or everlasting life is being adopted in God’s forever family.
 - a. According to the Gospel of John, eternal life has a ► beginning. It begins when you ► believe in Jesus. Through faith in Jesus, you are immediately and permanently adopted into God’s forever family. Receiving eternal life happens at a specific point in time, at the moment you believe. In John 6:47, Jesus says,

NKJ John 6:47 “Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.”
 - b. Eternal life is also ongoing. It’s something that every believer has right now. While eternal life is a gift received at a point in time, ► living the eternal life is a process of following Jesus. As the believer follows the Lord and grows in his dependence on God, he experiences this eternal life more and more abundantly. In John 10:10, Jesus says,

NKJ John 10:10 “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.”

- c. Eternal life continues even after we ► die physically. When ► believers die, we go to the presence of the Lord, and there, we will experience this eternal life more abundantly than we can imagine!
2. How does ► salvation relate to eternal life?
 - a. Well, the moment you believe, the moment you receive eternal life, ► God saves you once and for all from the penalty of sin. God saves you from hell. He forgives you and adopts you as His child; you are no longer condemned as a spiritual orphan. The big theological word for being saved from the penalty of sin is justification. God justifies you. ► That means He declares you righteous.
 - b. As you live out this eternal life by following Jesus, ► God also saves you from the power of sin as you, moment by moment, decide to surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Unlike being saved from the penalty of sin, which happens at a point in time and cannot

be lost, being saved from the power of sin is a life-long process in which the believer can experience gain or loss, depending on whether or not you trust and obey God.

As you trust and obey God, you can be saved from a lot of trouble that sin causes. You can be saved from bondage to compulsive sin. You can be saved from your enemies. Your physical life can even be saved. These are all ways in which God saves us from the power of sin if we'll follow Him. So, eternal life can be viewed as the gift that keeps on saving. The big theological word for being saved from the power of sin is sanctification. God sanctifies us.

- c. Finally, after this life on earth, ► God ultimately saves the believer from the very presence of sin in heaven. There will be no more sin when we are with the Lord, only the enjoyment of the Lord and His rewards for us. The big theological word for this is glorification. God will glorify us.

- B. Now, let's reconsider our text in Romans 10. What kind of salvation is being discussed? I want to show you that Romans 10 is talking about believers being saved from

the power of sin, not just the penalty of it. Let me try to back this up.

1. First of all, Romans 10 actually indicates that those who believe in Jesus are already saved from the penalty of sin. Let's look back at ► Romans 10:10 once again. It says,

NKJ Romans 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

This says that when you ► believe in your heart, it is “unto righteousness.” This means that believing results in righteousness. I like the way the New American Standard Bible translates this. It says,

NAU Romans 10:10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness

...

What does this mean? It means that when you ► believe, God declares you righteous. Remember, saying that God declares you righteous is the same thing as saying that ► God justifies you. That's the same thing as saying God ► saves you from the penalty of sin. That's the same thing as saying ► God gives you eternal life.

2. Let's keep going. Given that simply believing results in being saved from the penalty of sin, the confession of Verse 10 must lead to a ► different kind of salvation. Most logically, then, the salvation mentioned in Romans 10 is the salvation or deliverance of a believer from ► the power of sin in this life as he confesses or calls on the name of the Lord.

And we can reconcile this with our ► earlier diagram of eternal life. When you ► believe in Jesus in your heart, you are justified, declared righteous, saved from the penalty of sin. Then, as you ► follow Him by confessing Him to others, God saves you from the power of sin.

3. This makes perfect sense in light of the way Paul uses the verb, “save” in the book of Romans. It may be surprising to you to know that in Romans, the term “saved” is not Paul’s favorite word to describe being saved from the penalty of sin. Instead, he most often uses the verb, “save” to describe being saved from the power of sin. In contrast, he likes to use the term, “justified” to describe being saved from the penalty of sin.

The first occurrence of the verb, “save” in the book of Romans comes in Romans 5:9. This is significant because up until Chapter 5, Paul focuses

on justification or being declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus. For example, in ► Romans 3:28, he says,

NKJ Romans 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Similarly, in ► Romans 5:1, he says,

NKJ Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

In building the case that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, Paul does not use the verb, “save” at all. (The noun “salvation” is used once in 1:16, but not in building the case for justification.)

Then, after Paul makes his case for justification by faith, he makes a transition in ► Romans 5:9, and this is the first time Paul uses the verb, “save.” He says,

NKJ Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

It's easy to blow right by this verse without noticing a significant change in the tense of the verbs. Let me give you a little grammar test. It's easy. You don't need to know Greek.

Here's the first question: Is the term, ► “having now been justified” in the past, present, or future tense? It's past. It's a done deal. Paul is saying that the believing readers to whom he is writing have been justified by faith.

Here's the second question: Is the term, ► “shall be saved” past, present, or future? It's future. Paul is saying that the believing readers will be saved. Will be saved from what? They will be saved from the power of sin in this life if they follow God fully.

The same kind of contrast is presented in the very next verse, ► Verse 10. Paul says,

NKJ Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Paul is saying that we believers have been reconciled to God through Christ's death—past tense. And we *will be* saved by His life—future

tense. We were saved from the penalty of sin by Christ's death the moment we believed in Him; we will be saved from the power of sin by Christ's life in us as we follow Him.

4. So, is believing in Jesus enough to be saved? Yes and no. Yes, it's enough to be saved from the penalty of sin. But no, it's not enough to be saved from the power of sin; obedience, including confessing and calling on the Lord are required. And that's the main point of our text in Romans 10.

IV. ► But what exactly does it mean for a believer to confess the Lord or to call on Him? What does that look like?

Some take the confessing or calling in our text to be the prayer of the proverbial sinner asking God for salvation from hell. I'm afraid the well-known evangelistic tool, the Roman Road to salvation, takes it this way. But the Roman Road has a pot hole.

We've already seen that the salvation in our text is not salvation from hell. And a biblical study of confessing or calling on the Lord reveals that it is not the sinner's prayer for Christ to forgive him and come into his heart.

Confessing the Lord Jesus is an ► open, public identification with Christ. It's a believer—a person who is already eternally saved from hell—coming out of the closet and saying, "Jesus is

my Lord.” It’s taking a stand—a stand that only a believer can take. When we do that, God takes care of us. He saves us from the power of sin. Our enemy the devil is defeated.

Let me show you that confessing and calling on the Lord involves believers taking a public stand for Jesus. And I want to show this from Paul’s perspective.

- A. You may know that before Paul believed in Jesus, He was a Jew who actively persecuted Christians. In fact, Paul was probably a witness to the stoning of the first recorded Christian martyr, Stephen. Paul saw Stephen take a stand for Jesus by calling on the name of the Lord.
- ▶ Acts 7:59 says,

NKJ Acts 7:59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Stephen publicly called on the name of the Lord. He took a public stand for Jesus.

- B. ▶ After the Lord appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul believed. And right after he believed, the Lord spoke to a Christian man named Ananias, telling him to go to Paul. Ananias was reluctant, knowing that Paul persecuted all believers who took a stand for Jesus. In fact, Ananias said this to God about Paul as recorded in ▶ Acts 9:14:

NKJ Acts 9:14 “And here he [Paul] has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.”

You see Paul was authorized to arrest any believer who publicly called on the name of the Lord—anyone who took a public stand for Jesus.

- C. ► After Ananias met with Paul, he encouraged Paul to take a stand for Jesus. Paul recounts the words of Ananias to him in ► Acts 22:16. Ananias said,

NKJ Acts 22:16 “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”

You see, baptism is a way of publicly calling on the name of the Lord—a way of taking a public stand for Jesus.

- D. ► Years later, in writing to his young protégé, Timothy, Paul encourages his brother in Christ. He says in ► 1 Timothy 6:12,

NKJ 1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Here, Paul is encouraging Timothy to experience eternal life to the fullest, to “lay hold on eternal life,” having taken a stand for Jesus, confessing Christ to people who need Him.

- E. ► Later in a second letter to Timothy, Paul explains how God saved him when he stood up for Jesus. Paul is writing from a Roman prison. In ► 2 Timothy 4:16, Paul says,

NKJ 2 Timothy 4:16 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

Paul was on trial for his faith in Jesus. It seems that when Paul was given an initial hearing before the Roman authorities, some fellow believers deserted him. But the Lord didn't. The Lord saved him. Paul explains this, beginning in ► Verse 17. He says,

NKJ 2 Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me [He saved me! He saved me from discouragement. He saved me from weakness!], so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion [He saved me! He saved me from destruction!]. ► 18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me*

for His heavenly kingdom [He will continue to save me!]. **To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!**

- F. ► And so, back in our text in Romans 10, Paul is encouraging you and me, as believers, to take a stand for Jesus, to tell people the gospel—the good news that, by His death and resurrection for our sins, Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him for it. When we do, God will take care of us. He’ll deliver us from the power of sin. And we will experience eternal life to the fullest.

The last part of ► Romans 10:15 fits this encouragement well:

NKJ Romans 10:15b As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”

- V. When ► Fred asked me to give a talk today, he said he wanted me to talk about the dangers of legalism. But I haven’t used the word, “legalism” one time. How does this relate?

Legalism involves adding conditions to receiving eternal life that don’t belong. Legalism says simple faith in Jesus is not enough to be saved from hell. Legalism adds conditions to the gospel, like confessing Jesus as Lord.

And legalism has legs. The legs are some biblical texts that seem to suggest that getting to heaven requires something more than simple faith in Jesus Christ as the Giver of eternal life. Romans 10:9-15 has long been one of those legs. A big leg.

And so, my goal this morning is to simply take one leg out from legalism.

And this is not just hair-splitting for theological pinheads. This is an enormously important and practical issue that plays out every day on the front lines of spiritual battle.

Let me give you an example. Seems like every year at this conference, I end up telling a story about something that's happened in our Life Group, a small group from our church that meets in our home. Here's another story.

A woman darkened the door of our church for the very first time less than three months ago. My wife and I invited her to be a part of our Life Group. Turns out the woman knows nothing about the Bible. A coworker gave her a Bible for Christmas—the first Bible she's ever owned—and suggested she try out Moon Valley.

The woman attended our Life Group several times. And she was full of honest questions. “Is that really in the Bible?” “What does this verse mean?” “Why do you believe that?”

Then just a few weeks ago, she came right out and asked the big question in front of the whole group: “Please forgive my ignorance. I don’t know anything about the Bible. But what is a Christian, and how do you become one?”

Now this is not a question you get every day. And the rest of us sitting in the living room sensed immediately the gravity of moment. How do you answer the question?

I invited someone else to give an answer. I said, “Does anyone want to take a crack at answering the question?” No one did. They all looked at me. One said, “You’re the pastor.”

I said, “Jesus Christ died and rose again to pay for our sin—the sin that has alienated us from God. On the basis of that payment, Christ alone offers the free gift of eternal life to all who will simply believe Him for it. And so, a Christian is person who has believed in Jesus for eternal life.”

She smiled broadly and said, “That’s it. Believe in Jesus?” I said, “Yup. That’s it. Believe in Jesus.”

Just this week, she reflected on that night. She told me that, at the end of the evening, she sat in her car and wept for fifteen minutes. She said, “I was overcome. For the first time, I knew it was true. And I felt new. It was so very simple and I had so many lights turn on in my head and things just seemed to fall into place. Wow it’s just that easy. I wish I had asked that question long ago.”

And so, having believed in her heart, my friend is saved from the penalty of sin. She's going to heaven.

Just yesterday, I asked for her permission to share her story. She said, "How sweet of you to want to. Sure." And so, having believed in her heart unto righteousness, she's now beginning to confess with her mouth.