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Clarified by Its
Dispensational Context



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- 9 that 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.
- 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
- 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”
- 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.”

Romans 10:9-13 (NKJV)

Romans 10:9-13 are some of the most well-known and frequently referenced verses from the Bible. Unfortunately, they are also some of the most misunderstood and misapplied. While the Bible repeatedly and clearly states that the sole condition to be saved from hell to heaven is faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, it is all too common to read gospel tracts or hear evangelists, pastors, and Bible teachers citing Romans 10:9-10 and 10:13 to explicitly claim or imply that eternal life is conditioned on faith plus some form of religious works. One popular approach to evangelism is known as the “Romans Road” where an evangelist stays within the epistle of Romans to show lost people the way to be eternally saved. Romans 10:9-10 and/or 10:13 are normally the final stop on this “road.” This method of evangelism usually starts off well by showing people from Romans their need for salvation and God’s provision through Jesus Christ. The steps in the “Romans Road” usually proceed as follows from the bad news of one’s lost condition to the good news of Christ’s work to provide eternal life.

1. Romans 3:10-12, 23 are used to show the lost that they are sinners and unrighteous before God.
2. Romans 6:23a is used to show that the lost are separated from God because He is righteous and they are unrighteous.

3. Romans 5:6-8 are used to show that God loves unworthy sinners and Jesus in grace died in their place.
4. Romans 6:23b is used to show that eternal life is a gift from God, not an earned reward.

At this point, the evangelist usually jumps to Romans 10 for the last stop on the “Romans Road.” Without any reference to the context, verses 9-10 or verse 13, or some combination thereof, are often cited in an effort to show the lost how they may receive salvation—by believing in Jesus Christ *plus* one or more of the following:

- confessing Christ publicly,
- making Jesus the Lord of one’s life,
- praying the sinner’s prayer,
- calling upon the Lord (asking God) for salvation.

Are Romans 10:9-10 and 13 really requiring such responses to be eternally saved? Is this how these verses were intended to be used? Are these verses teaching that faith alone in Jesus Christ is not enough to be eternally saved or that these additional activities are just part of genuine “heart faith” versus mere “head faith”?

To answer these vital questions, we must first consider the context of these verses, which is always the key to correctly interpreting and applying the Bible. The *intermediate* context of this passage within the epistle of Romans covers chapters 9, 10, and 11, and it concerns the nation of Israel. The *immediate* context consists of the verses shortly before and after 10:9-13, and it also applies primarily to Israel. Both the intermediate and immediate contexts show clearly that Paul in Romans 10:9-13 is first describing the condition for individual Israelites to be justified (declared righteous) in God’s sight through faith in Jesus Christ, with this faith being reflected by one’s verbal confession. Secondly, these verses have as their contextual backdrop

in Romans 9 and 11 Israel's collective salvation at the time of Christ's second coming to the earth when the nation calls upon His name for physical deliverance. Thus, Romans 10:9-13 in its context focuses on *one* particular group of people—*Israelites*. The passage also deals with *two kinds of salvation*—first, individual justification in the present, and secondarily, national deliverance in the future. There are also *two conditions* in the passage for these two kinds of salvation—first, believing in Jesus Christ for individual justification, then calling on His name for national, physical salvation.

Broader Context of Romans 9–11: God's Righteousness Relative to National Israel

Before examining the text of Romans 10:9-13 in greater detail to clarify what this passage *is* teaching versus what it *is not* teaching, it is essential to know how these verses relate to the theme of the entire epistle. When reading Romans, one concept continually leaps off the page. In the original Greek text of Romans, a particular root word (*dik-*) occurs 63 times in its noun, adjective, and verb forms and is translated “righteousness” or “justification” (*dikaiosynē*), “righteous” or “just” (*dikaios*), or “justify” (*dikaiozō*). Therefore, it is generally agreed among students of the Bible that the theme of Romans is the righteousness of God—the righteousness that God *has* or *is* in His character, the righteousness that man *lacks* by nature in contrast to God, and the righteousness that God *graciously provides* through Christ to those who believe in Him. Romans shows how God's righteousness is revealed in a variety of ways, as observed in the following general outline of the book.

Romans: The Righteousness of God Revealed

- ... through His Just **Condemnation** of All Mankind (1:18–3:20)
- ... through His **Justification** of All Believers (3:21–5:21)
- ... through His **Sanctification** of Spiritual Believers (6:1–8:13)
- ... through His **Glorification** of All Believers (8:14–39)

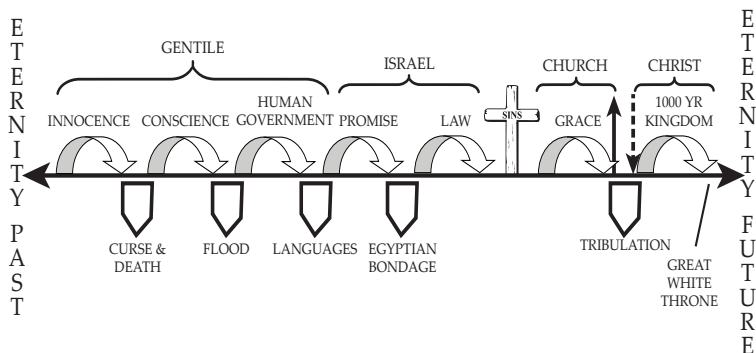
... through **Israel** (9:1–11:36)
... through the **Church** (12:1–16:23)

Though all mankind is worthy of God's just condemnation or judgment because of our sin and His holy, righteous character (1:18–3:20), God is also loving and gracious, and consequently He provides all three phases or tenses of spiritual salvation to believers by His amazing grace. This includes salvation from the penalty of sin at the point of justification (3:21–5:21); salvation from the power of sin throughout the process of sanctification in Christians' lives (6:1–8:13); and one day, whether by death or rapture, salvation from the very presence of sin at glorification (8:14-39). By the end of Romans 8, the apostle Paul has concluded the most thorough overview of salvation in all his epistles, taking 8 chapters to detail salvation past, present, and future for all individuals who believe in Jesus Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles. But Romans 9 marks a significant shift in the epistle towards Israel. In chapters 9–11, Paul focuses on the question of how God's righteousness is revealed in His dealings with the nation of Israel—Paul's fellow Jews. Then, in chapters 12–16, Paul concludes the epistle by addressing a number of practical needs relative to the church, which is comprised of all believers in Jesus Christ, whether ethnic Jews or Gentiles from the last 2000 years.

Many people approach the Bible with the false assumption that God is done with His nationally chosen people Israel because the majority of Jews have rejected the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in unbelief. Many people wrongly conclude that God has replaced Israel with the church, so that Israel has no future as a nation in the plan of God. This unbiblical conclusion held by many professing Christians down through the centuries has obscured the meaning of Romans 9–11 and even beclouded the correct interpretation of 10:9-13. The human writer of Romans, the apostle Paul, made a critical distinction in 1 Corinthians 10:32 between three groups of people: "Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God." Ethnically

speaking, all people are either Jews or Gentiles by natural birth. If one is not born a Jew, he or she is automatically a Gentile. But when a person believes in Jesus Christ for salvation during the course of the church age, that person becomes a member of Christ's body the church and united to Him and to one another, having the same position, standing, and blessings in Christ, regardless of whether one is ethnically a Jew or Gentile (Eph. 3:6). Thus, Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ from the days of the early church in the book of Acts until the Rapture constitute one body in Christ, just as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one spirit." Whenever someone believes in Christ for the first time at any point throughout the church age, the Holy Spirit takes that person and baptizes him or her into Jesus Christ. The Spirit's baptizing ministry and the positional union of believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ is completely unique to the church age. One can search the entire Old Testament and never find mention of the baptism by the Holy Spirit into Christ, until the New Testament, where this occurred at the beginning of the church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

7 DISPENSATIONS



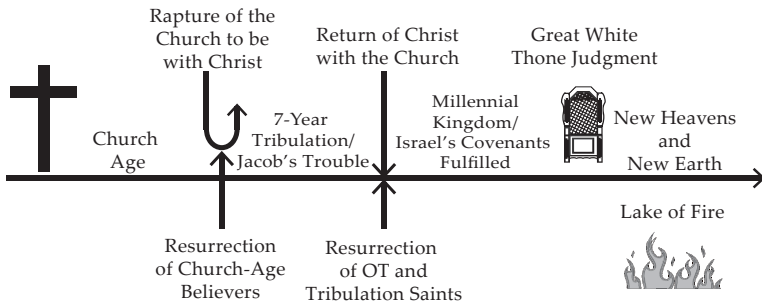
This also means that Israel is viewed as distinct in God's eyes from the church. God has dealt differently with Israel in the past than He has with the church in the present. He has distinct plans for each people group. This distinction between Israel and the church and God's separate programs for each is a hallmark of dispensationalism. The word translated "dispensation" comes from the Greek words *oikonomos* or *oikonomia*, which are compound words from *oikos* ("house") and *nomos/nomia* ("rule" or "law"). When used in the New Testament, these terms refer to a stewardship, administration, or divine economy. One esteemed theologian has concisely defined a dispensation as "a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's purpose."¹ Another says it is "a particular way of God administering His rule over the world as He progressively works out His purpose for world history."²

The dispensational distinction between Israel and the church allows us to recognize God's working with different people groups at different times in history to fulfill His sovereign purposes and to see how Paul can be writing an epistle to Gentile Christians (Rom. 1:13; 11:13) while addressing in Romans 9–11 God's plan for Israel as a nation, separately from the church. In roughly 2000 B.C., God elected Israel as a nation to serve as His representatives to the rest of the world (Gen. 12:1-3; Rom. 9:1-5). This explains why He strategically placed them at the geographical navel of the world (Ezek. 5:5; 38:12). But when the vast majority of Israelites rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah at His first coming in the first century A.D., God paused His program of using Israel as His primary representatives to the world and switched to achieving this purpose through the church for the next 2000 years. Though God changed His dispensational dealings from Israel to the church, He never cancelled His past covenants with Israel or His pro-

1. Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 28.

2. Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 30.

phetic promises to the nation. As a result, He will resume His work through Israel after the church age concludes with the rapture of the church to heaven. Then, He will turn again to Israel during the unprecedented period of conflict on the earth known as the 7-year tribulation (Matt. 24:21-22) or “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), which is Daniel’s 70th week for his people Israel (Dan. 9:24-27). This period of testing and tribulation will also be known as the judgment phase of the “Day of the Lord” (Isa. 2:12; Joel 2:11, 31; 3:14; Mal. 4:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2), which spans the 7 years of tribulation, until the Messiah, Jesus Christ, returns to set up His everlasting kingdom and fulfill all His promises to Israel as a nation (Dan. 7:13-14, 27; Rev. 19–22).



Recognizing the dispensational distinction between Israel and the church, and God’s separate plan and program for each, helps us to understand the flow of Romans 9–11. All of Romans 9–11 deals with Israel, but each chapter has a unique emphasis relative to Israel and the overall theme of Romans as seen below.

- The righteousness of God in His **past election** of Israel (Romans 9)
- The righteousness of God despite Israel’s **present rejection** of Christ (Romans 10)
- The righteousness of God in Israel’s **future restoration** (Romans 11)

By the time Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans in approximately A.D. 57, the Roman church had changed in complexion from being mostly Jewish to mostly Gentile. With fewer and fewer Jews believing the gospel, this naturally raised several important theological questions. If the Jews really are God's chosen people, then why does God seem to be working now primarily through saved Gentiles who comprise the majority of the church? Have God's plans for the nation of Israel failed? Is He done with Israel? Has He replaced Israel with the church? All of these questions are answered thoroughly in Romans 9–11, where God's righteousness is explained by the fact that He will uphold His Word to the nation Israel despite its present state of unbelief (Rom. 9:1-6, 14). In Romans 9:6, Paul writes, "But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." The phrase "has taken no effect" (*ek-piptō*) could be translated "has fallen out." Here, Paul is saying that the Word of God never goes forth from God's mouth only to fall to the ground unfulfilled so that His covenants and promises to Israel in the past may be broken. The declaration that God's Word has not fallen to the ground but will certainly still come to pass is a familiar expression and word picture found throughout the Old and New Testaments (Josh. 21:45; 23:14; 1 Sam. 3:19; 1 Kings 8:56; 2 Kings 10:10; Mark 13:31). Could God, who is faithful, who chose Israel and made unconditional promises to the nation, be unrighteous and err by unconditionally choosing Israel in the first place only to later utterly reject the nation forever because of its sin and unbelief?

If God was perfectly righteous in the past when He chose Israel, is He at fault and unrighteous now that Israel is unusable to accomplish His purposes, being in a state of unbelief, so that it appears His past promises and purposes are going unfulfilled? God forbid! Romans 9–11 was written to show, first of all, that Israel's present unbelief and failure is not God's fault or choice but Israel's. God is still righteous in His character because He has extended His arms to Israel "all day long" (10:21) to offer His near and available gift of imputed righteousness

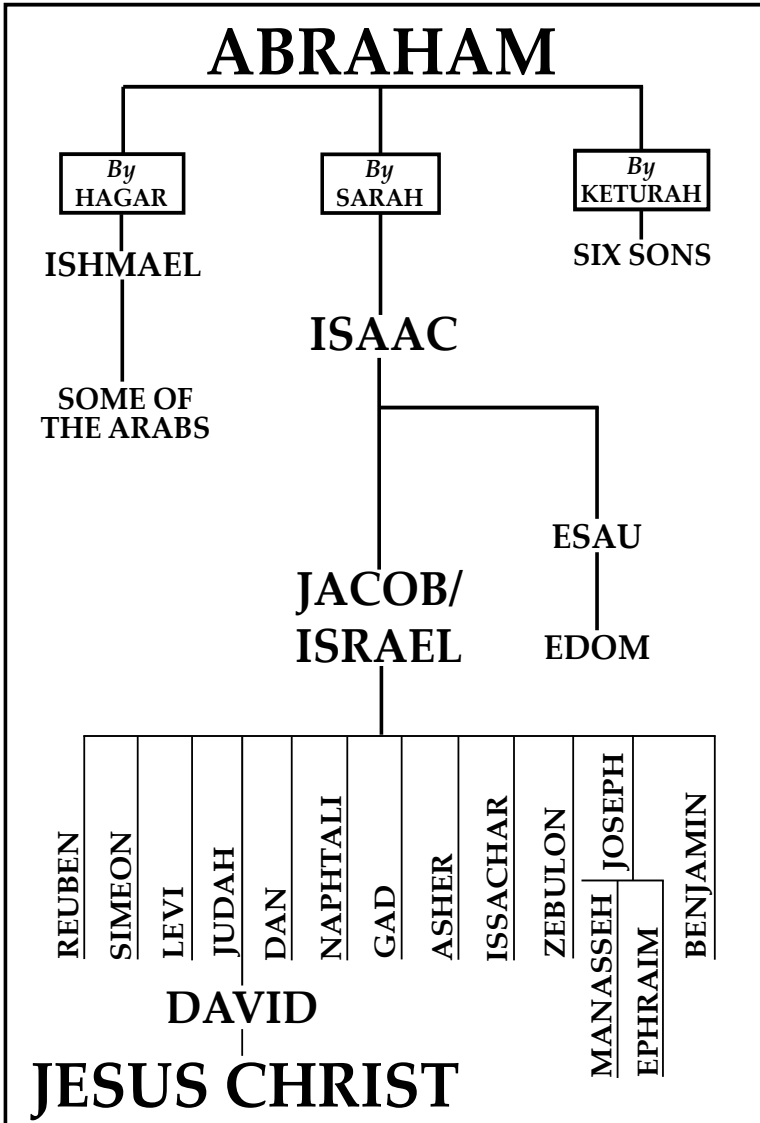
through faith in Christ (10:6-17), despite Israel choosing of its own volition to trust in its own works-righteousness based on law keeping rather than trust in the righteousness provided by Christ (9:30–10:5). Second, Romans 9–11 was written to show that Israel being set aside by the Lord was only partial, not total, since God still has a remnant of believing Jews like Paul, who are proof that God is not done with Israelites, who are descendants from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whom God will still work (Rom. 11). Third, the purpose of chapters 9–11 is to show that Israel being set aside in the sovereign plan of God is only temporary, not final, since all God’s covenants and promises toward Israel will yet be fulfilled.

Unfortunately, those who reject this dispensational perspective of Romans 9–11 take the references to the election of Israelites in these chapters and misapply them to individuals in the church today. Covenant theology denies the distinction between Israel and the church, teaching falsely that the church was in the Old Testament and that the church today is the new Israel, thus obliterating any future for Israel as a nation. One non-dispensational Calvinist author, James White, writes regarding Romans 9: “Two truths immediately come to our attention: first, God determined who was, and who was not, a child of promise. This is all God’s work. Secondly, *Paul is speaking of the salvation of individuals*. . . . But the key is this: Paul is *not* talking about nations and he *is* talking about God’s sovereign election in salvation, for it was God’s right and freedom to limit His promises to the *children of promise*, and not to anyone else.”³

There are several reasons why White’s conclusion cannot be correct that the election of Romans 9 is referring to the individual election of believers in the church to eternal salvation rather than to Israel’s national election to serve as God’s representatives to the rest of the world. First, in chapters 1–8, Paul already thoroughly covered the doctrine of individual salvation from sin for Jews and Gentiles in all three phases of justifica-

3. James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000), 207 (emphasis original).

tion, sanctification, and glorification. Why would he wait until chapter 9 to develop the doctrine of individual election to salvation? Such a doctrine seems out of place in the flow of the book, especially when chapters 9–11 are not about both Jews and Gentiles being elected but the focus is on Israel.



Second, the focus and terminology of Romans 9–11 are different from Romans 1–8. In chapters 1–8, Paul uses the word “Jew/Jews” 9 times, while never using the more distinctively national term “Israel/ite.” But abruptly by contrast in chapters 9–11 he uses “Israel/ite” 14 times. This sudden shift in terminology seems intentional to highlight the national character of Jews as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel (Gen. 32:28).

Third, in Romans 9–11, corporate rather than individual terminology abounds through the use of terms such as Israel/ite (14x), nation (2x), people (6x), Jew/Jewish (2x), and Gentiles/Greek (8x). And even when the names of individuals occur, in each instance they are consistently names of representatives of nations or larger people groups (8x). For instance, the references in Romans 9:7-19 are not just to Old Testament individuals but specifically to those who were the progenitors of nations. Romans 9:7-12 refers to Israel’s patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as Israel’s matriarchs Sarah and Rebecca (Gen. 12–50). Similarly, when Esau is referenced in Romans 9:12-13, it is because he was the father of the nation of Edom (cf. Gen. 25:23; Mal. 1:1-5), the perennial adversary of Israel. As proof that Romans 9 is addressing the progenitors of nations rather than those individually chosen for heaven or hell, compare the statement about Jacob and Esau in Rebecca’s womb in Genesis 25:23 to its reference in Romans 9:10-12.

And the Lord said to her: “Two **nations** are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.” (Genesis 25:23)

And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” (Romans 9:10-12)

Even when Moses and Pharaoh are referenced in Romans 9:16-17, it is because they were national representatives of Israel and Egypt (Exod. 9:13-18; 33:19). While Moses was neither a progenitor of Israel nor its king, he was its singular prophetic leader and primary representative who interceded for the nation before God to preserve its existence following Israel's rebellion at Mt. Sinai. Similarly, Pharaoh was the representative for the entire nation of Egypt. Even in the Potter and clay illustration in Romans 9:19-21, the allusion is to national Judah or Israel in the original context of the analogy drawn from Jeremiah 18:1-11.

A fourth reason why Romans 9–11 is dealing with Israel's election as a nation to a special place of service as God's corporate representatives to bless the world (9:4-5; 11:15-24) rather than to individual salvation is because of the contrasting statements in Romans 11:28: "Concerning the **gospel** they are **enemies** for your sake, but concerning the **election** they are **beloved** for the sake of the fathers." Note the contrasting, parallel statements here. Just as *enemies* are set in contrast with *beloved*, so the *gospel* is contrasted with *election*. The "election" repeatedly mentioned in Romans 9–11 refers to God's unconditional covenant with the patriarchs Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:4-8), Isaac (Gen. 17:19), and Jacob (Exod. 2:24; Lev. 26:42) for Israel to be His chosen nation to represent Him to the world and to bless it. Think of it. If the "gospel" is about spiritual salvation from hell to heaven by God's grace apart from works (and it most certainly is), then it is set in contrast to "election"! In the doctrine of election espoused by Calvinism, unconditional "election" of individuals to eternal salvation is very much a "gospel" issue! Therefore, the election in Romans 9–11 cannot be to individual spiritual salvation but to Israel's national role of service as God's representatives. Presently, Israel is not fulfilling this role in God's olive tree plan (Rom. 11:16-24), but it will be restored to this position and role when the nation collectively believes in Christ before His return to Earth at the end of the Tribulation (Rom. 11:25-27).

These four reasons provide sufficient grounds on which to conclude that the focus of Romans 9–11 is the nation of Israel rather than the individual salvation of Gentiles in the church. But at this point some may raise the objection that individuals and their salvation are still at issue in Romans 9–11, as one leading non-dispensational Calvinist argues:

I know that some interpreters say that Romans 9 has nothing to do with the election of *individuals* to their *eternal* destinies, but only deals with corporate peoples in their historical roles. I think this is a mistake mainly because it simply does not come to terms with the problems Paul is addressing in the chapter. You can see this for yourself by reading the first five verses of Romans 9. When Paul says in Romans 9:6, “But it is not as though the word of God has failed,” what is clear is that something has made it look as though God’s promises have fallen. What is that?

The answer is given in verses 2 and 3. Paul says, “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” The deepest issue Paul is addressing is not why Israel as a nation has this or that historical role, but that individuals *within Israel* are accursed and *cut off from Christ*. In other words, *individual eternal* destinies are indeed at stake.⁴

A few points should be kept in mind in response to Piper’s argument. First, if Paul was addressing the prospect that “the word of God has taken no effect” or “failed” (9:6) simply because his fellow Israelites were unbelievers and therefore not eternally saved, then how is this materially different from most of Israel’s prior history when the nation has often been in rebellion and unbelief toward God and therefore not justified and eternally

4. John Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God’s Grace* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 54-55 (emphasis original).

saved? Why should this suddenly surprise Paul now? Thus, Paul is not addressing the prospect of God's Word failing simply because his fellow Jews are lost, presumably because they were not individually elected for salvation according to Piper. Rather, Paul is addressing the question of how God's Word will be fulfilled concerning all that God had planned and announced for Israel in the Old Testament if the nation is comprised of unbelievers whom God cannot use and in fact must judge, especially in light of their recent rejection of the Messiah.

Second, Paul was admittedly grieved over Israel's unbelief in Jesus as the Christ to the point that he even wished for the impossible (Rom. 8:38-39)—that he himself could be cut off from Christ so that his fellow Israelites could be saved in exchange. So, Paul certainly had the eternal, spiritual salvation of Israelites in mind in Romans 9–11. But in Piper's quote, he skips from 9:1-3 to 9:6 to make his point, leaving out the list of privileges in verses 4-5 that Israel was entrusted with as God's representative channel of blessing to the world: “who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen” (Rom. 9:4-5).

The very revelation of God's Word may be added to this list of privileges that Israel was entrusted with as God's channel of blessing to the world. In Romans 3, Paul states that the profit and advantage of being a Jew is “Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (3:2). Concerning the nation of Israel, the saying applies, “To whom much is given, much will be required.” Thus, Paul in Romans 9–11 is answering the dilemma of how Israel could fulfill its high calling if most in the nation were unbelievers and facing God's judgment.

By the year A.D. 57 when Romans was written, Paul witnessed more Gentiles in the church believing in Israel's Messiah than Israel itself. In addition, these Gentile believers were actively serving the Lord by the power of the Spirit as the gospel spread throughout the empire and churches were planted and

established, while the nation of Israel sat on the sidelines as spectators, even as critics and persecutors of the work God was doing through the small band of Jewish apostles and an increasingly Gentile church. By A.D. 57, Israel's national judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Romans was just a little over a decade away (A.D. 70). Therefore, in Romans 9, Paul was not dealing with the prospect of God's Word failing because not all Israelites were individually elected to eternal salvation through faith in the Messiah. Rather, in Romans 9, Paul answered the potential objection that God's Word failed and God was not righteous after all because His unilateral promises and covenants to Israel, as well as His revealed purposes for the nation, all seemed to be in jeopardy of unfulfillment because of Israel's corporate unbelief. How could God use Israel to serve His purposes if it stubbornly refused to believe Him?

All of this leads to another important question and qualification regarding the context of Romans 10:9-13. If individual, spiritual salvation is not Paul's main point in Romans 9-11, then why are references to it sprinkled throughout these three chapters (9:27; 10:1, 9-10; 11:11, 14, 26)? The answer is simple yet vital to understanding Romans 10:9-13. Romans 9-11 is consistent with the rest of Scripture in showing that Israel's election as a nation doesn't make every Jew eternally saved; it only pertains to Israel's role of privileged service as natural branches in God's plan to reveal Himself to mankind and bless the world. This is why Paul wrote earlier in Romans: "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God" (2:28-29). The Israelites of whom Paul wrote in Romans 9-11 were God's nationally chosen people by physical birth and descent, even if they were unbelievers, but they would not inherit and ultimately receive the fulfillment of their covenant promises unless they individually and corporately believed in Jesus Christ and were born again and justified. Only saved, believing Jews will enter

the kingdom of God according to Jesus: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

**Immediate Context of Romans 9:30–10:17:
God’s Imputed Righteousness to Individual Believing Jews**

In the more immediate context of the verses before and after Romans 10:9-13, the subject is still primarily Israel but with a transition in emphasis from Israel’s election by God in the past (Rom. 9:1-29) to Israel’s rejection of Christ in the present (Rom. 9:30–10:21). In most of Romans 9, Paul defended God’s righteous, unconditional election of Israel to be His chosen nation despite its willful unbelief. Then, at the end of chapter 9 and into chapter 10 before verses 9-13, Paul defends God’s righteousness and faithfulness once again by showing that Israel’s present state of unbelief was not due to God’s rejection of His people but because of their choice to reject Jesus Christ in unbelief. The reason Israel largely rejected Christ was because it sought to establish its own righteousness through works of law-keeping rather than receive the gift of God’s imputed righteousness by grace through faith in Christ apart from works. Paul expounds on this in Romans 9:30–10:5:

- 30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;
- 31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.
- 32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.
- 33 As it is written: “Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

- 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.
- 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.
- 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
- 5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

Romans 10:5 succinctly summarizes the salvation philosophy of unbelieving Israel previously stated in 9:30-33 and 10:3. Instead of the righteousness from God that justifies and is obtained by faith apart from works as stated in verse 4, which is the true way to be eternally saved, verse 5 sets forth the principle of righteousness by law-keeping: "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'" Here in Romans 10:5, Paul quotes from Leviticus 18:5 to show that works-righteousness is based on law-keeping and the principle that if you can truly keep the Law, then you will live. This is not the only place Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 to make the same point. Galatians 3:6-12 sets forth two approaches to being justified or declared righteous before God. There is Abraham's "faith" approach (Gal. 3:6-9) versus the Galatian legalizers' "works of the law" approach (Gal. 3:10). The problem with the attempt to be justified or declared righteous before God by law-keeping is that someone must keep the Law perfectly to be justified in God's sight since God is perfectly righteous. But no one is perfectly righteous in God's sight, and therefore all are condemned (Rom. 1:18-3:20), including those seeking to be justified by works of the law. This explains why Galatians 3:10 goes on to say that those who attempt justification by "works of the law" are not

only not righteous in God's eyes but they are actually under a *curse* because in order to be eternally saved one must "continue in all things which are written in the book of the Law, to do them" and this is humanly impossible. James says, "He who keeps the whole law yet stumbles in one point is guilty of all" (James 2:10). In Galatians 3:11-12, Paul concludes his contrast between the "faith" approach to justification and the "works of the law" approach by quoting Habakkuk 2:4 to support justification by faith alone and Leviticus 18:5 to show the futility of justification by works:

11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith."

12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

This is significant because Paul makes the same point in Romans 10:3-5 about the right and wrong way to be justified before God that he makes in Galatians 3:6-12. Clearly, the point of Romans 10:1-5 is Israel's unjustified standing before God because they trusted in their own works and righteousness rather than Christ's. Thus, Romans 10:5 and the verses following are not dealing with the practical sanctification of believers who are Christians, as some commentators are claiming today.

How the Righteousness of Faith Speaks

In Romans 10:6-8, Paul continues the same dualistic contrast between righteousness by works and the righteousness received through faith. The righteousness which is of faith does not come from attempting to do what is humanly impossible but simply through believing what God has already done in Christ.

6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*)

- 7 or, ““Who will descend into the abyss?”” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
- 8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach).

In Romans 10:6-8, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. This was a passage many Jews of Paul’s day would have known well since it follows on the heels of the premiere passage on God’s land covenant with Israel in Deuteronomy 30:1-10. So, in Romans 10, Paul applies Deuteronomy 30:11-14 analogously to faith in Christ to further his point about the salvation of imputed righteousness by faith not being hard or too distant but rather something as near as Israel’s hearts and mouths. Thus, God made salvation readily available to the unbelieving Jewish nation of Paul’s day. In its original context, Deuteronomy 30:11-14 was spoken by Moses to tell Israel they did not need to ascend into heaven or go down into the abyss to know and do the will of God because it was already revealed to them and as near as their hearts and mouths. Earlier in the same book, in Judaism’s famous Shema passage of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Moses instructed every Israelite to have the word of God in their hearts and mouths (Deut. 6:6-7). Paul in Romans 10:6-10 applies this same principle to Jews of his generation, saying that saving gospel truth about Christ was near to them too—as near as their hearts and mouths. Now, they just needed to believe it.

Much of the difficulty people have with interpreting Romans 10:9-10 comes from reading and interpreting these verses apart from their preceding context. The reason that the mouth speaking and heart believing are mentioned in 10:9-10 is because Paul has just used the mouth and heart comparison in 10:6-7, drawn from Deuteronomy 30:11-14. In Romans 10:6-7, Paul says that one who has the righteousness of faith speaks in a certain way. A Jew who already believes in Jesus Christ would not say to “bring Christ down” from heaven (v. 6) or “to bring Christ up from the dead” (v. 7). A believer is one who already

has faith in Christ. Therefore, a believer doesn't think he must still "do" these things because he knows the work of salvation has already been "done"! Christ already came down from heaven at the Incarnation as deity (God in the flesh). This reference in verse 6 about not needing to bring Christ down from heaven before believing parallels Paul's subsequent statement about confessing with the mouth that "Jesus is Lord" in verse 9.

Incarnation and Deity

Romans 10:6: But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will **ascend** into **heaven**?' " (that is, to bring **Christ down from above**)

Romans 10:9a: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is **Lord**" (NIV)

Likewise, according to verse 7, the righteousness of faith does not say, "Who will descend into the abyss? That is, to bring Christ up from the dead" because the Jewish believer already knows that Christ has risen from the dead. There is no need to bring Him up from the grave, for the work of His sacrificial death and bodily resurrection is already complete. The reference in verse 7 about not needing to bring Christ up from the dead parallels the other half of verse 9 where Paul speaks of believing in one's heart that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Death and Resurrection

Romans 10:6-7: But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring **Christ up from the dead**).

Romans 10:9a: That 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. (NIV)

So, what is the main point of these crucial verses of Romans 10:6-8 that precede the key verses of Romans 10:9-10? The message of faith in Christ that brings imputed righteousness was as near and available to the unbelieving Jews as their mouth and heart (10:8; Deut. 30:14). Man has an innate, prideful, and sinful tendency to look for a work he can do to merit righteousness before God, such as being a public witness for Christ with one's mouth or exchanging service for salvation by making Christ the practical Lord or Master over one's life. This may be the primary reason Romans 10:9-10 is so frequently misinterpreted and misused. The other reason is because these verses are usually ripped from their context and quoted in complete isolation from the larger context of Romans 9–11 and the preceding flow of thought in Romans 9:30–10:8. From the immediate context, we see that Paul's choice of words about confessing with the mouth in 10:9-10 is driven largely by his analogous application of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to what the righteousness of faith sounds like. Therefore, the words "speak" (Rom. 10:6), "say" (v. 6), "word" (v. 8), "mouth" (v. 8), "preach" (v. 8), and "heart" (v. 6, v. 8) all influence the way Paul uniquely relates the confession of the mouth with salvation (v. 9) and the belief in the heart with imputed righteousness (v. 10). A comparison of these bolded words in each verse makes this clear.

- 6 But the **righteousness of faith speaks** in this way, "Do not **say** in your **heart**, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*)
7 or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
- 8 But what does it **say**? "The **word** is near you, in your **mouth** and in your **heart**" (that is, the **word of faith** which we **preach**).
- 9 that if you **confess** [*homologeō*] with your **mouth** the Lord Jesus and **believe** in your **heart** that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.
- 10 For with the **heart** one **believes** unto righteousness, and with the **mouth confession** [*homologeō*] is made unto salvation.

In verses 9-10, Paul continues using the terms “mouth” and “heart” to explain that a person’s faith in Jesus as the risen Lord is reflected in the confession of that person’s mouth. The word “confess” or “confession” is *homologeō* in Greek. In many contexts, this word simply means to agree with, admit, or acknowledge that something is true, such as 2 Corinthians 9:13 about agreement with the gospel, or in 1 John 1:9 when we as believers agree with God that we have sinned, or in 1 John 4:2, 15 and 2 John 7 when we agree that Jesus is the Son of God who came in the flesh. Confessions of Faith have a long history in Protestant Christendom (e.g., Lutherans – Augsburg Confession; Presbyterians – Westminster Confession; Baptists – 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, etc.). These “confessions” have been just another way of saying, “This is what we believe to be true.” This is the same sense in which Paul uses the word *homologeō* in Romans 10. Therefore, the confession of the mouth in verses 9-10 is not a second condition to be justified before God but is merely how belief in Jesus is expressed by one who is righteous through faith and not by works. Remember, verses 6-8 set forth how a person *speaks* who is *righteous* before God through *faith*.

Romans 10:9 is simply saying that if Paul’s fellow Israelites were truly righteous through faith and not by works, the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus Christ would speak in such a way that what comes out of the mouth would agree with what is believed in the heart. Thus, the confession of the mouth in Romans 10:6-10 is essentially the same point Jesus made in Matthew 12:34-37 that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks and reveals what a person believes in his or her heart.

34 Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

35 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.

36 But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.

37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

How could Jesus base people's justification or condemnation upon their words? Shouldn't He do so based on their faith or lack of faith? He can do so because of the principle that out of the heart the mouth speaks, reflecting either the faith or unbelief that is in each person's heart. In the context immediately preceding Matthew 12:34-37, the Pharisees denied that Jesus was the Messiah or "Son of David" (v. 23). They expressed their unbelief saying, "This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons" (v. 24). By contrast, in Romans 10:9, when one confesses with the mouth that "Jesus is Lord," this is a mirror reflection of the belief in the heart that Jesus is truly Lord because He rose from the dead (Acts 2:32-36; 10:36, 42; 17:31). Technically, it would not be accurate to say that the confession and belief in Romans 10:9-10 are "synonymous" or "identical" as some commentators have expressed since speaking and believing are technically two separate acts. But confession of Christ is the consistent, harmonious reflection of faith in Him, just as a picture is an accurate reflection or representation of the real object that was photographed.

Essential Content to Believe for Justification-Salvation

Romans 10:9-10 also states essential gospel content pertaining to what a person must believe about Christ to be justified. These verses show that one must agree with God that Jesus is Lord and that He is risen from the dead. This is gospel truth that must be believed by all, especially Israel in Paul's day, to first be eternally saved and even to be physically saved from destruction as one calls on the Lord in faith. The Gospels provide evidence (Mark 2:7; John 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33; 19:7) that

the Jews of Jesus and Paul's generation particularly resisted the truth that Jesus was God-incarnate. Though God had never become incarnate until Christ, the Jews should have known from the Old Testament that this was possible because of the many theophanies recorded in its pages. But Jesus' resurrection validated not only His death as truly sacrificial and propitious for sin but also His identity as the one true God of Israel (Acts 2:32-36; Rom. 1:3-4).

At this point, some may ask, how do we know that "Lord" in Romans 10:9 speaks of Christ's deity? The word "Lord" in verse 9 is *kyrios* in Greek. The Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates the Hebrew name for Israel's God, *Yahweh*, thousands of times with the Greek word *kyrios*—the same Greek word applied to Jesus in Romans 10:9. Additionally, the anarthrous structure (lacking the definite article) of the phrase "Lord Jesus" (*kyrion Iēsoun*) in verse 9 most likely should not be translated "confess with your mouth *the Lord Jesus*" (KJV, NKJV) but "confess with your mouth *that Jesus is Lord*" (NIV, ESV) or as in the use of the anarthrous *par excellence* "confess with your mouth *that Jesus is the Lord.*"⁵ Additionally, in the same context, Romans 10:13 refers to Jesus as "Lord" (*kyrios*), and verse 13 is a direct quotation from Joel 2:32 where "Lord" in Hebrew is *Yahweh*. Romans 10:9-13 clearly teaches that Jesus is Israel's Lord and God! But doesn't Romans 10:13 teach that the lost must not only believe in Christ but also pray, verbally call upon, or confess Him to be eternally saved? That is what many claim.

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

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."

5. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 187-88.

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?

Verses 12, 13, and 14 each mention calling on the Lord. From these verses, many wrongly conclude that it is not enough to believe in Jesus Christ for eternal salvation, you must also pray to receive Him. However, the order of believing first and then calling afterwards is very significant in verse 14 because it clarifies that only a believer is in a position to call upon the Lord. Throughout the Bible, calling on the Lord or on His name is an action that characterizes believers, not unbelievers (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Peter 1:17). Only believers have a pre-existing relationship with the Lord through faith in which they can cry out to Him in prayer for His intervention and deliverance in the midst of various trying circumstances. This calling is available to all believers, whether they are Jews or Gentiles.

The repeated emphasis of verses 11-13 is on “whoever” and “all”—on the idea that God invites all people to believe in Christ and then afterwards call on His name regardless of their identity as Jews or Gentiles. In this sense, the truth about salvation in Romans 10:9-13 applies to everyone today, not just Israel, though Israel is the focus of the context. The broad invitation of “whoever” and “all” in verses 11-13 is probably the reason Paul chose to loosely paraphrase Isaiah 28:16 and 49:23 in Romans 10:11 and to quote Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13. Paul was not shifting his focus in Romans 10 from Israel back to the Gentiles. Rather, he was simply making a point about the wideness of God’s mercy so that Israel in its present state of unbelief was without excuse and God was justified by His beckoning, inviting posture toward an obstinate nation who had every privilege imaginable and every opportunity to come to Him but still turned away. This focus on Israel is apparent from the context of the verses after 10:9-13, namely, 10:18-21, where the words “Israel” and “nation” are each mentioned twice: “But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: ‘Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their

words to the ends of the world.’ But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’ But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’ But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people’ (10:18-21).

Meaning of “Saved” and “Salvation”

This leads to another critical question regarding the correct interpretation of Romans 10:9-13. To what do the words “saved” (10:1, 9, 13) and “salvation” (10:10) refer in this passage? Some say eternal salvation (regeneration, justification, reconciliation), while others say temporal, physical deliverance. The noun “salvation” and verb “save” are used throughout Scripture in either sense, depending on the context. In Romans, the verb “save” (*sōzō*) and noun “salvation” (*sōtēria*) are used for the believer’s past spiritual, eternal salvation, that includes regeneration, justification, and reconciliation (Rom. 1:16-17; 5:18; 8:24; 11:11, 14-15) and for the believer’s future salvation of glorification (5:9-10; 13:11).

However, it is critical to note that both *before* (9:27) and *after* (11:14, 26) the words “saved” and “salvation” occur in 10:1, 9-10, and 13, Paul uses them to refer to the physical, national deliverance of justified Israelites. In Romans 9:27, Paul quotes Isaiah 10:22-23 to speak of “the remnant” of Israel being “saved” on “that day” (Isa. 10:20). The reference in Romans 9:27 to “that day” is to a specific, well-known day among Israelites—the eschatological Day of the Lord. Since the “remnant” of believing Israelites is also an important theme that re-emerges in Romans 11, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul has this same type of national, physical salvation in mind in Romans 10:1, 9-10, and 13, at least in the background as he is hinting at the direction in which he is leading the reader where in Romans 11:26, Jesus Christ, “the Deliverer” (*ho*

rhuomenos), will return and “all Israel will be saved [sōzō]” both spiritually and physically.

This type of deliverance for Israel is a major theme of both the Old and New Testaments (Isa. 35:3-4; 63:1-6; Jer. 30:4-11; 46:27-28; Joel 2:30-32; 3:1-2, 9-16; Zech. 8:13; 9:10-16; 12:1-10; 14:1-9; Matt. 24:13, 21-22; Rev. 16:13-16). Zechariah 13:8-9 is an important parallel passage to Romans 9:27 and 10:13. It also describes the remnant of Israel calling on the name of the Lord and being delivered at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns:

- 8 “It shall come to pass in all the land,” says the LORD, “that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but **one-third shall be left** in it:
9 I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. **They will call on My name**, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My people’; and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’”

Romans 10:13 is also a direct quotation of Joel 2:32, which in its Old Testament context refers to the physical deliverance of Israel as the repentant, believing nation calls upon the Lord in the time of the Great Tribulation. Since Paul lived with the expectation of the imminent rapture of the church (Phil. 3:20; 1 Thess. 4:15-17), he must have also expected the return of Christ to Earth relatively soon thereafter to rescue Israel from national destruction and to deliver justified, believing Israelites into the kingdom (2 Tim. 4:1). Thus, in Romans 10, he surely would have desired Jews of his own generation to be saved first of all in the sense of being justified before God through faith in Jesus Christ but also saved in the sense of being physically delivered into the promised earthly kingdom of God, which from Paul's perspective could have been just a few short years away. Jews (and Gentiles for that matter) must first believe that Jesus is risen from the dead in order to acknowledge through

confession that He is Lord (Rom. 10:9-10) and then to “call” upon Him for deliverance. Thus, Romans 10:9-13 is not teaching two conditions to be saved from hell or be justified in God’s sight, namely, believe, reflected in confession, and then to call. Instead, this passage is teaching that there is only one condition (believe) for justification or imputed righteousness, and there is a subsequent condition (call) for Israelites to be physically saved/delivered into the kingdom at the end of the Tribulation when Christ returns (Rom. 11:26).

Romans 10:9-13 Is Not Requiring Public Confession for Eternal Salvation

Having explained what Romans 10:9-13 *is* teaching, now lets clarify what it is *not* teaching. First, this passage does not say that a person must confess Christ publicly to be saved from hell. Pastors and evangelists often appeal to these verses as the basis for public invitations to come forward during an altar call. They claim that the lost cannot be eternally saved unless they publicly identify with Jesus Christ. However, there is nothing in the text or context of Romans 10:9-13 that necessitates that the confessing or calling is done publicly before other people, though that is often the case. Furthermore, if public confession or identification with Christ were necessary to be justified, then eternal salvation would clearly be requiring a good work on our part, and the Bible is clear that we are justified by God’s grace apart from our works (Rom. 4:4-6; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). In fact, this works-righteousness was the very problem of the Jews that Paul was correcting in Romans 9:30–10:5! He would certainly not add a work as a requirement only a few verses later! Throughout Romans the condition to be eternally saved is simply a matter of believing in Jesus Christ, plus nothing (1:16-17; 3:22, 25-28, 30-31; 4:2-8; 5:1; etc.). In addition, to make public confession of Christ a condition for eternal life would also mean that people who are mute or unable to walk forward at an altar call cannot be saved. Lastly, other passages

of Scripture, like John 12:42-43, show that some people who believed in Christ did not confess Him before men out of fear of persecution.

John 12:42-43: 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; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Romans 10:9-13 Is Not Requiring the Sinner’s Prayer for Eternal Salvation

Some see the reference in Romans 10:9 to confessing with the mouth or calling on the Lord in verse 13 and they assume these verses are requiring prayer for eternal salvation. If this were true, eternal life would again be conditioned on a work. Furthermore, praying and believing are not synonymous since prayer can be done without faith in Jesus Christ. A very helpful and highly recommended booklet that addresses this is *7 Reasons NOT to Ask Jesus into Your Heart*.⁶ Some people require a particular prayer popularly known as the “Sinner’s Prayer.” In this prayer, the supplicant confesses that he is a sinner and asks God to save him. While agreeing with God that we are sinners is necessary to believe in Christ as one’s Savior from sin for eternal life, no passage of Scripture requires the lost to express this in prayer. When Romans 10:9 uses the word “confess,” this is not referring to the confession of sin via prayer but simply to agreement with God that Jesus is Lord. The fact that Romans 10:9-13 never mentions the word “sin” should be evidence enough that these verses are not requiring the “Sinner’s Prayer,” nor any prayer for that matter to be eternally saved.

6. Dennis M. Rokser, *7 Reasons NOT to Ask Jesus into Your Heart: Answering the Question: “What Must I Do to Be Saved?”* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2014).

Romans 10:9-13 Is Not Requiring “Heart Faith” vs. “Head Faith” for Eternal Salvation

A third erroneous interpretation of Romans 10:9-13 is that this passage is teaching you must have a special kind of faith—a *heart* faith versus a *head* faith to be saved from hell. Many people have used the reference to belief in the heart (v. 9, “if you believe in your *heart* that God has raised Jesus from the dead, you will be saved”) to write tracts like “18 Inches to Salvation” (the distance between head and heart) or to make false distinctions like this Twitter statement by one popular health and wealth prosperity preacher:



Joel Osteen ✓

@JoelOsteen

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Faith is not in your head. Faith is in your heart. Sometimes you have to turn your mind off and listen to your heart.

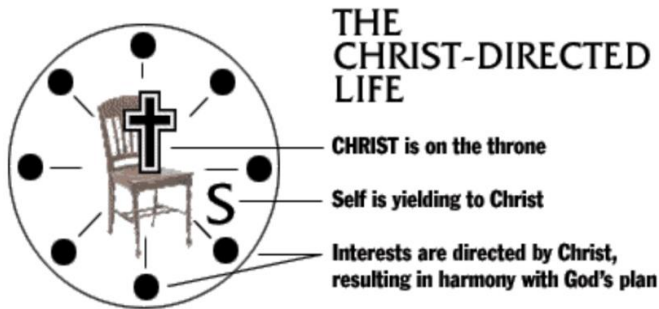
7:15 PM - 2 Oct 2014

This comment creates a false dichotomy between the head and the heart. Biblically, the head and heart are frequently used interchangeably in reference to the inner person (Jer. 17:10; Dan. 2:28-30; Heb. 8:10). For example, Job 38:36 says, “Who has put wisdom in the *mind*? Or who has given understanding to the *heart*?” Psalm 73:21 also says, “Thus my *heart* was grieved, and I was vexed in my *mind*.” These are examples of a common feature of Hebrew poetry called Synonymous Parallelism where the same truth is repeated or rephrased in similar language. If the Lord wanted to distinguish the heart and mind, He would contrast them using Antithetic Parallelism. Beside the fact that Scripture doesn’t distinguish between heart faith and head faith, how would we ever really know whether we’ve believed something only in our head but not our heart? If you believe the gospel facts that Christ died for your sins and rose

from the dead and you've relied on His finished work for your eternal salvation rather than your own works, must you now *feel* a certain way about the gospel in order to truly believe it in your heart? This common error undermines the assurance of salvation by injecting an emotional element of subjectivity into the sole condition of faith in Christ for eternal salvation.

Romans 10:9-13 Is Not Requiring Lordship Salvation

A fourth common false interpretation of Romans 10:9-13 claims this passage is teaching you must make Christ *Lord of your life* to be saved from hell. Based on the fact that the word "Lord" appears in verses 9 and 13, many assume this means the lost must submit to the Lordship or Mastery of Christ in their lives as a condition for eternal life. This view was depicted for decades in the popular tract titled "Four Spiritual Laws" published by Campus Crusade for Christ in which the lost are told they must put Jesus on throne of their life to be saved.



Many proponents of Lordship Salvation appeal to Romans 10:9 to support their false gospel of works, including John MacArthur who writes:

“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom. 10:9). Advise them [the lost] to *count the cost* thoughtfully. Salvation

is absolutely free. So is joining the army. You don't have to buy your way in. Everything you will need is provided. But there is a sense in which following Christ—like joining the army—*will cost you dearly*. It can *cost freedom, family, friends, autonomy, and possibly even your life*. The job of the evangelist like that of the army recruiter—is to tell potential inductees the full story. That is exactly why Jesus' message was often *so full of hard demands*.⁷

This misinterpretation has serious problems. Romans 10:9 and its context imply nothing about a “cost” or “hard demands” to be eternally saved. In fact, such a view violates the whole context of Romans 9:30–10:8 where unsaved Jews were already making salvation hard rather than simply believing in Christ and His finished work for their imputed righteousness. Furthermore, how does a confession of faith that Jesus is the Lord (*Kyrios/Yahweh*) somehow morph into a condition for holy living? Confession that something is true is not necessarily the same things as sanctified living or sacrificial service. Jesus is truly the “Lord” God and thus He possesses all divine attributes (Col. 2:9), including sovereignty. But as the Lord God, Jesus is also infinitely righteous. Does this mean we must live a righteous life to be justified? As God, He is also holy, loving, patient, and good. Does this mean that unless we are holy, loving, patient, and good in practice we will be eternally lost? This leads right back to a works-gospel. By contrast, grace-oriented theologian Charles Ryrie correctly concludes:

When Paul wrote of the gospel to the Romans, he said that it concerned God's Son, Jesus Christ. . . . He did not add anything about Christ's sovereign control over the lives of those who accept Him as the essential part of the gospel. . . . The same emphasis is seen in Romans 10:9: “That if you confess with your

7. John MacArthur, *Faith Works* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 204 (emphasis added).

mouth Jesus as Lord . . . you shall be saved.” *It is the confession of Jesus as God and thus faith in the God-Man that saves from sin.*⁸

Romans 10:9-13 Is Not about Practical Sanctification from God’s Wrath

Finally, Romans 10:9-13 is *not* teaching that Christians must be saved from the wrath of God upon their earthly lives by publicly confessing Christ or witnessing for Him. This recent, unusual interpretation of Romans 10 is held almost exclusively by some proponents of Free Grace theology who rightly oppose Lordship Salvation but who unfortunately lack a biblical emphasis on practical sanctification by God’s grace and the believer’s position in Christ. One teacher summarizes this view saying:

In the Book of Romans, salvation is to the believer, telling the believer *how the believer can be saved from God’s wrath here and now*. God hates iniquity. And God judges those who suppress His truth, and that includes the believer. We find that in the Book of Romans *in order to escape God’s wrath, you must believe and you must confess Christ*. You must be a confessing, honest Christian who is walking in the light in order to be one who escapes God’s wrath. *Believing in Jesus in Romans is not enough to escape the wrath of God in this life.*⁹

There are a few key reasons why this interpretation of Romans 10:9-13 is not accurate. First, the context of Romans 10 isn’t about the salvation of Christians in their practical sanctification or escaping God’s wrath upon them. Rather, the context focuses upon unbelieving Israelites who are in need of first-tense salvation, namely, the imputed righteousness of God that comes with justifi-

8. Charles C. Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 183-84 (emphasis added).

9. Robert N. Wilkin, *Why the Romans Road Ends in a Cul de Sac*, Grace Evangelical Society Conference, March 1, 2006 (emphasis added).

cation. Then, Romans 10 infers the physical deliverance of believing Israel from national destruction at the end of the tribulation at Christ's second coming. Second, practical sanctification by God's grace was thoroughly addressed by Paul in Romans 6–8. He is not returning to that subject in Romans 10. Third, God's wrath abides upon unbelievers, not believers (John 3:36; Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 5:9)—not even on carnal believers who may experience divine discipline as a matter of God's love (Heb. 12:5-11), which is quite different from the condemnation associated with God's wrath. Romans, in fact, promises the believer exemption from God's because of Christ's death for us: "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 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" (Rom. 5:9-10).

Conclusion

Having carefully considered Romans 10:9-13 in its context to understand what it *is* teaching versus what it *is not* teaching, I trust you can see the value of always interpreting Scripture in light of its context. This will lead to correct interpretation of God's Word in which passages do not contradict one another but are harmoniously consistent. If you have used one or more of the preceding misinterpretations I ask you to conscientiously consider whether you have mixed faith with works to be justified and if perhaps you have not relied on Christ alone for your eternal salvation. "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Rom. 4:4-5). If you already believe in justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, I also trust that you will be able to apply this portion of God's Word more confidently and accurately in your own teaching and witness for Christ and that you will preach the gospel of God's amazing grace apart from human works in such a way that the spotlight will continually shine upon Jesus Christ and His finished work!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas L. Stegall has served as an associate pastor at Duluth Bible Church from 2012 to the present. From 1999-2011 Tom was the pastor-teacher of Word of Grace Bible Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He also presently serves as the administrator of, and instructor in, the Grace Institute of Bible Studies and director of Grace Gospel Press. He is a graduate of the University of Minnesota, Duluth, Moody Bible Institute, Grace Institute of Biblical Studies, and Grace Biblical Seminary (Th.M., Th.D.).

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. or we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Corinthians 4:3-7)

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

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Grace Gospel Press
201 W. St. Andrews Street
Duluth, MN 55803

Phone

(218) 724-5914

E-mail & Web

gracegospelpress@gmail.com
www.gracegospelpress.org

A Clarification of Romans 10:9-13

9 That 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. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." 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."

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