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Romans

For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." Romans 10:5

Paul now describes the righteousness which is of the law. In doing so, he won't make up any new concept of it in order to make a claim against it. Instead, he will go to the law itself. Before looking at that, it would be good to understand the progression of what he is saying. This will establish why he is citing this. Notice the term "for" in the following verses and see how he builds upon each new thought -

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, 'The man who does those things shall live by them.'" Romans 10:1-5

"For" in verse 5, is explaining verse 3 (and which is built upon in verse 4). And so he says, "For Moses writes..." The law was received by Moses and within that law is a note concerning the necessity to follow the very same law in order to obtain "the righteousness which is of the law." And what is that note? It is Leviticus 18:5

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"You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord."

Or, as Paul paraphrases, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

God promised life to any who could keep the law. In fact, it was a guarantee of right-standing and a ticket to the fullness of His blessing if it could be done. But the fact is that no-one was, or even today is, capable of such a thing. More so, no one is capable of obeying even the first commandment perfectly. And with Jesus' words showing that intent is the same as execution (see Matthew 5:27, 28 for an example), we have utterly failed in any hopes of keeping any portion of the law.

The law shows that in order to be right with God, one must live in a right manner before God. And then the law turns around and shows that no one can live in a right manner before God. Because of this, blood sacrifices were needed as a form of grace to protect against the penalties of the very law they were described in. Something more was needed to be right before God, something apart from the law. This righteousness involves a Person, not a deed. This is what the law actually anticipated and it is found in Jesus.

Life application: God is looking for faith that He is fully capable of saving us apart from our efforts. If we add in our efforts feeling they are necessary for our salvation, we are lacking faith in His provision. Have faith; stand on Christ alone.

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 10:6

To contrast the preceding verse which spoke of actively doing deeds to attain the righteousness of the law, Paul begins with "But..." One would think that by showing a contrast, he would remove himself from the law and initiate a new

discourse apart from it; he doesn't. Instead, he goes right back to the very same law he just spoke of and he cites Deuteronomy 30:11-14 -

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it."

And so in 10:6, he cites a portion of this passage, "But the righteousness of faith..." Literally "of-faith righteousness." He has personified righteousness and then causes it to describe itself - "The righteousness of faith speaks this way." It is an ingenious way of showing us the source of righteousness.

Far too often, we look to the distant as better than the near. The saying "The grass grows greener on the other side of the fence" shows us this. From that springboard, we look at the more distant the fence, the greener the grass. When we look for wisdom, we don't do it in our own household, but a college far away. And even better, we assume that we can travel to the Far East and attain the enlightened wisdom of those cultures. We look to Japan for business acumen, to China for better Kung-Fu, and to Tibet for spiritual enlightenment - as if they were the answer to our own failing wisdom.

Even Christian missionaries use the "far-away" logic. "I must travel across the seas to make a convert." But one's mission field can be in their own neighborhood; in their own family. Likewise, the righteousness of faith is found right in the precepts of the law as fulfilled in Christ. Understanding this, Paul notes the way faith-based righteousness calls out, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven.'"

Moses gave Israel the law which was near to them. It was to them their righteousness and it was handed to them as a people. All they needed to do was live within its precepts. They didn't have to travel to foreign countries to find it,

they didn't need to search the heavens for it. Instead, it was right there for them to pursue. And the law they were given pointed directly to the coming work of Christ. In fact, the book of Hebrews clearly demonstrates that the fulfillment of the Mosaic and Levitical pictures are found in Him. He is the "greater than" of those types and pictures.

Now, with the fulfillment of those shadows clearly seen in the light of Christ - who came through Israel, there is much less need to "ascend into heaven. (that is, to bring Christ down from above.)" Such an attitude would be a denial of the incarnation. Christ has come down from above. To search for faith-righteousness in heaven after the coming of Christ would then be to deny what He has already accomplished.

Life application: Spiritual matters don't require removing oneself to distant lands, either for education or execution. Jesus Christ is available to all by simple faith and His mission field is the entire world. One can serve Him wherever they are and one can fellowship with Him anywhere and at any time. Such is the beauty of a personal, faith-based relationship with the Lord.

...or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). Romans 10:7

"Or" is tying this question to the previous one - "Who will ascend into heaven?" The corresponding verse in Deuteronomy 30 is verse 13. However, that says, "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'" Paul wasn't changing Scripture by changing the thought from going over the sea to descending into the abyss. The intent is the same, but the point of reference is different.

The Hebrew people were at Horeb in the dry wilderness and they did not have the knowledge of the risen Lord. Moses was using an example which they could clearly understand in order to speak the language of faith. Paul is using the

resurrection in the same way. The sea to the Hebrews was a great, impassable body; the death of man is being spoken of in this same manner.

However, as a connecting point between the two, the Greek word abysson is used for "abyss" by Paul. The same word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament when referring to the sea. For example, Job 41:31 uses abysson for "deep" when speaking about the great sea creature Leviathan. There it says this -

"He makes the deep boil like a pot;
He makes the sea like a pot of ointment."

The sea was perceived as the great deep in this way even at Moses' time. At the giving of the Law, the third commandment says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;..." Ex 20:4

The "water under the earth" is the sea. Passing over the sea then is comparable to descending into the abyss for all intents and purposes. And so Paul grasps this Old Testament similarity and uses the imagery to connect it with the work of Christ in the New when speaking of the seemingly impassible void of death. Searching for the commandment by a descent "into the abyss" then is explained "to bring Christ up from the dead."

We don't need to conduct such a search to find the knowledge God provides; it is obtainable in the work of Christ. He has descended into the abyss. To search for our faith-righteousness there, after His prevailing over it, would then be a denial of what has been fulfilled in Him. He has triumphed over it for us. As a resounding note of victory in this matter, Paul states this in 1 Corinthians 15:54-56 -

"'Death is swallowed up in victory.'

'O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?'

The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Life application: Who needs to die in order to find out what is on the other side? Not the faithful Christian! Christ has already gone there and the word tells us of our final outcome. Stand fast in your faith and trust in the work of Christ. In Him, death is swallowed up in victory.

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): Romans 10:8

Paul has been speaking of the righteousness of the law and how that is bestowed upon believers in Christ. To show that it is an easily accessible path, he has cited Moses from Deuteronomy 30. It isn't far away in heaven, nor is it to be found in the great abyss. Rather, the words of Moses show us that "The word is near you." It is something which is right here, right now, discernable, and readily accessible.

This is how Moses said it - "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." Deuteronomy 30:14

To show how near it is, he says it is "in your mouth." The sense of this is that just as we speak our language without difficulty, so are we aware of the message. If we sit at breakfast with an old friend and talk about the weather, we don't pull out a dictionary and a thesaurus in order to engage in conversation. Instead, what we speak is as natural as breathing. In the same manner, the righteousness of faith is this clear and this natural.

And he continues by saying, it is "in your heart." The heart from a biblical standpoint is often thought of as the seat of understanding rather than emotions

as we speak of it in modern times. One of many examples would be Proverbs 2:1, 2 -

"My son, if you receive my words,
And treasure my commands within you,
So that you incline your ear to wisdom,
And apply your heart to understanding;"

The sense of it is that the righteousness of faith is ingrained in the doctrine of Christ - His death, burial, and resurrection. If one has this knowledge, then they don't need to ascend to the heavens to find it; He has already come down from there. And they don't need to descend into the pit to find it; He has already risen from there. If one knows this, then they have the understanding in their heart. The mental knowledge should merely turn into the exercise of their faith. It is a step into God's revealed light. And thus the final purpose, for which the law was given, is found in His work; He is the end of the law. This isn't difficult to grasp, but is quite often ignored by those who continuously attempt to reinsert pet-favorite portions of the law into New Testament faith while ignoring countless other precepts found in the same law.

Paul then says, "that is..." He is not saying that what Moses spoke to the people at Horeb was the same message that was now available, but it has the same force and effect in the message. They had the law, it was spoken to them, lived by them, and available to them. They merely had to demonstrate faith in God's provision through the law. When Christ came as the fulfillment of the law, it became the provision of God for the people.

This nearness and understanding concerning Christ is "the word of faith which we preach." In essence, the message of the prophets and apostles concerning the work of Christ - His death, burial, and resurrection in fulfillment of the law - is the word of faith. This is what God asks us to believe and what restores us to Him, just as the law was God's provision of the past.

The term "word of faith" is used only here and could have one of the following possible intents. The first is that it is speaking of the foundation and the object of our faith. In other words, Jesus (His person and His work) is the reason for and the object of our faith. The second possibility is that it is speaking of the force behind, and the movement of, our faith. Stated plainly, "I have heard the message about Jesus and my faith-based response is to accept that message as true, calling on Him as Lord." The third is that both concepts are combined into one; it is an all-encompassing word of faith. No matter which, it is Jesus.

Unfortunately, in recent years the term "Word of Faith" has become synonymous with an aberrant form of doctrine. It teaches that by exercising faith, one can become wealthy, healthy, and prosperous. It is a distorted teaching of the gospel which certainly enriches the Word of Faith leaders, but which only waters down the message of Christ. Sound doctrine is abandoned in the pursuit of earthly gain. Be careful to not get caught up in this misdirected form of teaching.

Life application: Christ has come and His work is complete. The message is readily available to anyone who hears and believes. It is a message of faith, not works. Stand fast on the gospel message. What Jesus has done is fully sufficient to reconcile us to God the Father.