

HOW TO BE SAVED

by Ray C. Stedman

**Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.
{Rom 10:1 NIV}**

I do not think there is any word in the Christian vocabulary that makes people feel more uncomfortable than the word "saved." People cringe when they hear it. Perhaps it conjures up visions of hot-eyed, zealous buttonholers -- usually with bad breath -- who walk up and grab you and say, "Brother, are you saved?" Or perhaps it raises visions of a tiny band of Christians at a street meeting in front of some saloon singing, "Give the winds a mighty voice, Jesus saves! Jesus saves!" Whatever the reason, I do know that people become bothered at this word.

I will never forget the startled look on the face of a man who came up to me in a movie theater. The seat beside me was vacant, and he said, "Is this seat saved?" I said, "No, but I am." He found a seat across the aisle. Somehow this word threatens all our religious complacency and angers the self-confident and the self-righteous alike.

And yet, when you turn to the Scriptures you find that this is an absolutely unavoidable word. Christians have to talk about men and women being saved because the fact is that men and women are lost. There is no escaping the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that the human race into which we are born is already a lost race. This is why the good news of John 3:16 is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish -- not perish -- but have everlasting life," {cf, John 3:16 KJV}.

We can never deal realistically with life until we face up to this fundamental fact: People are not waiting until they die to be lost -- they are already lost. It is the grace of God that reaches down and calls us out of that lostness and gives us an opportunity to come to Christ and be saved. Therefore "saved" is a perfectly legitimate word to use. It makes us uncomfortable only when we refuse to face the fact that men and women are lost. They are born into a perishing race in which their humanity is being put to improper uses and is gradually deteriorating and falling apart, and they are facing an eternity of separation from God. These are the facts as the Scriptures put it.

In Chapter 10 of Romans we find once again that the nation Israel is our model for understanding how God works. Paul is answering the question of why some who have little knowledge are saved while many who have much knowledge are not saved. Part of his answer was given in the ninth chapter, in which he explained that behind this strange mystery is the elective, sovereign choice of God. God chooses to call men to him -- but not all men. Paul has dealt at length with that subject in the ninth chapter. But now he turns to the other side. Now we are confronted with the fact of human responsibility. It is true that God draws men to him: it is also true that no one will come unless they respond to the appeal of God.

Now, to us, this is an apparent contradiction. That is why we call it a paradox, a seeming contradiction. We cannot resolve it because at this point we do not have enough knowledge. Chapter 9 has helped us greatly with that. We do not understand even a fraction of how God works, therefore human knowledge is too limited to resolve this apparent conflict. But both sides are true. God calls men by an elective decree that is irresistible, and yet they must respond by a choice of their will, which they are free to make or not, as it pleases them. Let's see how Paul introduces this other side of the picture and brings before us Israel's responsibility.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they disregarded the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. {Rom 10:1-3 NIV}

Probably the most outstanding thing about this paragraph is that despite Paul's profound conviction that God saves whomever he will by an irresistible, elective choice, nevertheless this does not stop Paul from praying and yearning over his kinsmen according to the flesh, the nation Israel. You see, prayer is not inconsistent with God's call. It is never right for us to say, "If God calls, there is nothing we can do about it. We might as well sit down, fold our hands, and do nothing." That response fails to see that the way God calls is through the preaching of the Word and the praying of Christians, the yearning of their hearts over those who are not yet saved. Therefore, that is part of God's program, and Paul exemplifies this beautifully for us here. We need to see the importance that prayer has in reaching people. Paul prayed for men. He writes in First Timothy 2:1-3, 8:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone -- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. {1 Tim 2:1-3 NIV}

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. {1 Tim 2:8 NIV}

Prayer is a great factor in that call. C. S. Lewis has said some very helpful things in this regard. Speaking of prayer, he says,

When we are praying about the result, say, of a battle or a medical consultation, the thought will often cross our minds that, if we only knew it, the event is already decided one way or the other. I believe this to be no good reason for ceasing our prayers. The event certainly has been decided. In a sense, it was decided before all the worlds. But one of the things taken into account in deciding it, and therefore one of the things that really causes it to happen, may be this very prayer that we are now offering. [He then adds:] Thus, shocking as it may sound, I conclude that we can at noon become part causes of an event occurring at ten o'clock.

That is, even our prayers after an event affect the event. Now that is strange to us, but I think it is true. We are up against a great mystery in the matter of prayer. Then C. S. Lewis adds,

There is no question whether an event has happened because of your prayer. When the event you prayed for occurs, your prayer has always contributed to it. When the opposite event occurs, your prayer has never been ignored; it has been considered and refused for your ultimate good and the good of the whole universe.

Those are deep matters, but perhaps that will help us. At least it is clear that Paul does not hesitate to pray, even though he knows God chooses whom he will.

The second emphasis in this paragraph is the zeal that Paul notes about Israel. "I bear testimony that Israel is zealous for God." And indeed they are. Perhaps the most noteworthy difference between an orthodox Jew and the average Gentile is right there. Jews take God seriously. Any of you who have seen *Fiddler On The Roof* or have read any of the writings of Chaim Potok, or other contemporary Jewish authors, know how true this is. The Jewish way of life is built around God. God is the most important element in all their thinking. They sacrifice anything and everything to the centrality of God in their national and community life.

This is in stark contrast to the average Gentile. Gentiles have religious feelings -- all men do. Gentiles think of God, but God is out of the periphery of Gentile life. I think we all demonstrate this. We are more casual about God. He isn't the center of life, as he is in Jewish thought and action. Paul takes note of this fact. It was true then; it is true today.

A Gallup poll taken recently discovered that 43% of Americans -- largely Gentiles -- said that their religious feelings really were of very little significance in their lives. And yet the thing that amazed Paul, and amazes us today, is that the casual Gentile, who is not necessarily looking for God, nevertheless finds him. At our Thanksgiving service we had two testimonies by people of Gentile background who found God suddenly intruding into their lives when they didn't expect him. They found peace and rest and joy even when they weren't looking for it. And yet the Jew, with all his zeal, with his consummate desire to discover and to know God, fails to find peace and forgiveness and is not reborn into joy and love.

Paul tells us why this is so. The reason is that the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness, and therefore they missed the gift of God, which is the righteousness of Christ, obtained without works. This is the reason why anyone, Jew or Gentile, who seeks to try to establish his own righteousness, is going to be in the same boat. This was the problem with the Jews. They were constantly trying their best to obey the Law of Moses. They were failing to do so, of course, but they were not willing to admit that they failed. Thus they kept hoping and seeking and believing that God was going to accept them, even though they did not obey the Law.

Now, there are many people like that today, both Jew and Gentile. In fact, to show you how true it is that Jews still think this way, I would like to quote a paragraph from a letter that a boy from this congregation with a Jewish background received recently from a rabbi, who wrote because he was troubled about the boy's faith in Christ:

The basic question about religion is how to elevate man, and bring him into closer relationship with God. [That is the rabbi's view of the purpose of religion. It is to elevate man, not to change him.] We believe that God revealed to us in the Torah [the Law of Moses] how he wants us to live, so that we can be in harmony with his divine purpose. Our role and religious purpose is to obey God's laws -- to love him and to obey him. We exercise our free will to proper intention and, through having done the good deeds [notice that, through having done the good deeds], are elevated so that it becomes progressively easier and more natural to continue to do good and to resist evil.

That is the Jewish view of how to be right before God -- simply keep trying until it becomes easier and easier, and finally you stand righteous before God. Paul says that is the problem. Anyone who seeks to come before God on that basis is doomed to failure. They cannot obey the Law. Paul goes on to show us why they can't and to reveal to us that the issue is always Jesus.

Listen to his words:

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. {Rom 10:4 NIV}

If your version, as mine, says "the law," I suggest you take a pencil and cross out the word "the." It is not "the law," as though it affected only the Mosaic Law, it is "law." Christ is the end of law -- any kind of law -- so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Of course this doesn't mean that Christ does away with law. He does away with law as far as bringing you to God is concerned; he makes a total end of it. And, as we have seen in this letter, the reason is clear. What was the purpose of law? Why, to make us aware of the fact that there is something wrong with us. If you don't have a standard to try to live up to, you have no idea that there is anything wrong with you. You think everything you do is natural, and therefore right. You hear this argument all the time today. Anything that is natural is right. That is because more and more today the Law is being set aside.

Now, the Law was given to make us realize that there are things that are wrong, that are destroying us. All the injury and death and darkness that come into our lives come because of the things that we are doing, the attitudes we have. We are producing the problem. We think it comes from everyone else, but law helps us to see that we are what is wrong. But once it has shown us that, what good is it? It can do no more.

At that point, unless we come to Christ, there is no way out. The Law cannot cure our evil; it can only show it to us. At that point, the Law becomes our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, as Paul puts it in Galatians 3:24. That is the end of the Law, that is its purpose. It has been fulfilled when it does that work and brings you to Jesus Christ. He can change you. He can give you new life. He can wipe out the old pattern of failures and all the hurt and agony and anguish that you have been going through and give you a wholly new heart. Therefore Christ is the end of law, that there may be righteousness to everyone who believes in him.

Now, Paul, in his logical way, is very careful to show us how this works. He quotes Moses to prove what the Law is for (Verse 5):

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things [the righteousness that is by the law] will live by them." {Rom 10:5 NIV}

Moses said that in Leviticus: "Here is the Law, the Ten Commandments. Anybody who does these things will live," {cf, Lev 18:5}. That is, God will bless him, fulfill his humanity, make him to enjoy all that God had for man in the beginning. It will all come if a man will simply obey these ten rules.

You know, when you read the Ten Commandments, they always seem so reasonable, they seem like such an easy thing to obey. This is the way people have always reacted to them. You say to yourself, "Why, this is not difficult. I can do that easily. All I have to do is just decide to do it, that's all!" But when you actually start to do it, you soon discover that there is a rebelliousness inside that sooner or later stops you from doing what you want to do. We have seen this all through Romans.

Therefore, the Law reveals the evil that is in your life. Moses said the Law was given to make people try to live this way. He said that he who did these things would live. Now Paul goes on to quote Moses again. He doesn't say that Moses said the next part, but he did. He sets the faith-way to God right next to the law-way (Verse 6):

But the righteousness that is by faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down), or "'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [The comments in parenthesis are Paul's.] But what does it say?

**"The word is near you;
it is in your mouth and in your heart";
that is the word of faith that we are proclaiming. {Rom 10:6-8 NIV}**

It may startle you to realize that Paul is saying here that Moses taught salvation by grace through faith just as much as Paul did. Moses knew that the Law would not work. Why, even as Moses was bringing it down from the mountaintop, the people at the bottom of the mountain had broken all ten of the commandments before they were given to them.

Moses knew that the people could not keep them, and therefore Moses also taught that God had provided another way by which people could be delivered when they failed to keep the Law. He saw clearly that God would lay the foundation for salvation in the incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus. That is why Paul quotes these words from Deuteronomy. Moses saw the coming of Christ down from heaven; he saw the resurrection, the raising of Jesus from the dead. Paul clearly indicates that all along God had this basis in mind for how people were to come to Christ.

Therefore, when the angels sang the song to the shepherds in the darkness of the night on the plains of Bethlehem, and the glory of the Lord broke out upon those humble shepherds out there in the fields and the angel said to them, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all men; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is Christ the Lord" {cf, Luke 2:10-11}, this was the historic fulfillment of the basis on which God had been saving people for centuries before this. Now it is being worked out in history -- but God had been saving people who saw beyond the Law to the work of Christ long before that.

And when the angels, in the brightness of the Easter sunrise, said to the woman at the tomb of Jesus, "Go and tell his disciples that he is risen, as he said" {cf, Matt 28:6-7}, that was the culmination of God's program to work out human redemption quite apart from any effort on man's part. Jesus had done it all. That is why Paul points out here that Moses understood that the way to lay hold of and personally appropriate the value of these incredible events was by believing the divine announcement with the whole man, with your whole being. That is why he adds,

**But what does it say?
"The word is near you;
it is in your mouth and in your heart";
that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: {Rom 10:8 NIV}**

The mouth is the outward man, the intellectual understanding of what has happened, expressed in words; the heart is the inner man, the will, the spirit deep within us understanding the basis on which God saves. And lest anyone miss it, Paul goes on with these clear words, Verse 9:

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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. {Rom 10:10-11 NIV}

Now I don't think it could be put any clearer than that. That is the clearest statement in the Word of God on how to be saved. It is very simple, isn't it? Paul makes it very simple. He says that it begins with the confession of the mouth that "Jesus is Lord."

Now, don't twist those words to mean that you have to stand up in public somewhere and announce that you believe Jesus is Lord before you are saved. Paul does not mean it that way, although it does not exclude that. He means that the mouth is the symbol of the conscious acknowledgment to ourselves of what we believe. It means that we have come to the place where we recognize that Jesus has the right to lordship in our lives. Up to this point we have been lord of our lives. Up to this point we have run our own affairs. We have decided we have the right to make our own decisions according to what we want. But there comes a time, as God's Spirit works in us, and we see the reality of life as God has made it to be, that we realize Jesus is Lord:

- He is Lord of our past, to forgive us our sins;
- He is Lord of our present, to dwell within us and to guide and direct and control every area of our life;
- He is Lord of our future, to lead us into glory at last.
- He is Lord of life, Lord of death, he is Lord over all things.

As Jesus himself said after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me, in heaven and on earth" {Matt 28:18 KJV} -- all power! He is in control of history. He is running all human events. He stands at the end of every path on which men go, and he is the ultimate one we all must reckon with. That is why Peter says in Acts 4:12:

"Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." {Acts 4:12 NIV}

You cannot read the book of Acts without recognizing that the basic creed of the early Christians was: "Jesus is Lord."

These are days when you hear a lot about mantras, words that you are supposed to repeat when you meditate. I suggest you adopt this as a mantra: Jesus is Lord. Say it again and again, wherever you are, to remind yourself of this great truth. When Peter stood up to speak on the day of Pentecost, this was his theme, "Jesus is Lord." And all the thousands of Jews listening to him could not deny what he pointed out -- that Jesus had lived a unique life, had been witnessed to by the prophets before him, had been raised from the dead in a most astonishing way, had died a most remarkable death, then had poured out supernatural signs from heaven, evidences they could not deny, and they had to recognize the fact above all facts, that Jesus was Lord -- whether they liked it or not. Therefore, the great question of all time is "What are you going to do with Jesus?"

Paul tells us here that Jesus is Lord, and if you have come to the place where you believe in your heart that he is risen and available, and you are ready to say to yourself, "Jesus is my Lord," then God acts. At that moment God does something. No man can do it, but God can. He begins to bring about all that is wrapped up in this word "saved." Your sins will be forgiven: God imparts to you a standing of righteous worth in his sight; he loves you; he gives you the Holy Spirit to live within you; he makes you a son in his family; he gives you an inheritance for eternity; you are joined to the body of Christ as members of the family of God; you are given Jesus himself to live within you, to be your power over evil -- over the world, the flesh, and the devil -- and you will live a life entirely different than you lived before. That is what happens when you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead.

I think it is very helpful to see that nowhere in all the Scriptures are men ever asked to believe in Jesus as Savior. They are asked to believe in him as Lord. When you believe in him as Lord, he becomes your Savior. But you don't accept Christ as a Savior -- you accept him as Lord, as the one who is in charge of all things, including you. When you come to that point, when you respond with the whole man, then God says the work of redemption is done. The miracle occurs.

"Well," someone says, "what if I'm not elect? What if all the time I've been wanting God and seeking God, and then it turns out I'm not chosen?" Anyone who talks that way -- and people do talk that way -- are indicating they have never understood what Paul is saying here. You see, if you believe in Christ, you have given proof that you are elect. As Jesus himself put it, "No man can come to me except my Father draw him," {John 6:44}. You can't believe in God until God has called you and drawn you. The very desire to believe is part of that drawing, therefore we needn't struggle over this apparent conflict.

What Scripture everywhere confronts us with is the necessity for every individual to settle the question, "Is Jesus Lord of your life? Is he your Lord? Have you enthroned him and acknowledged him where God has placed him, as king over all the earth, the Lord of glory, the one who is in charge of all things?" When you do, that is the moment when redemption begins to occur. Now, see how Paul confirms this in the verses that follow (Verses 11-13):

As the Scripture says, "He who believes in him will not be put to shame." [Here Paul quotes Isaiah. It is not on the basis of works, but on the basis of belief -- he who accepts what Christ does, who believes on him, will not be put to shame.] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile -- the same Lord is Lord of ail and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [That is the word of Joel the prophet.] {Rom 10:11-13 NIV}

These verses indicate that this is not something new with Paul, but it is something all the Scriptures have taught, both Old and New Testaments alike -- that faith is the way by which we lay hold of what God has to give us. It is never gained by earning it, or by trying to be good, or by the good outweighing the bad, but simply by acknowledging that Jesus Christ has done it all on our behalf.

Probably some of you here this morning have been coming to this church for weeks, and even years, and yet you have never come to the place where you have acknowledged Jesus as your Lord. You have been religious, but you are not saved, you have not been redeemed and changed. I am asking any who have never settled this, to say to the Lord, "Jesus, you are Lord, I accept you and receive you as my Lord because I believe you rose from the dead and you are available to me right now." That is the basis on which God says he will act.

"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." That is the way it happens. At this time of the year I always think of that beautiful little carol, *O Little Town of Bethlehem* . I love the third verse:

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

Some of you can be born again this morning, as we bow together in prayer, if you silently say these words:

"Jesus is Lord -- *my* Lord."

Ask him to enter your life as Lord, and at that moment, God says, his gift is given. John 1:12 tells us:

He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received

him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; {John 1:11-12 RSV}

So if this morning you asked him to come into your heart, and you received him as Lord, and you mean to allow him to be the controlling center of your life from here on, I can tell you on the authority of the Word of God, that you have been saved. God has begun already the new life that will change you from the inside out, and you will never again be the same person.

Prayer

Our Father, we give grateful thanks for these clear words from Paul. We know how he himself struggled and sought to establish his own righteousness, and tried hard, Lord, to be acceptable before you in his own strength, and he, too, failed, until there came that wonderful day on the Damascus road when he met Jesus and he was changed into a new creature in Christ. Lord, we thank you that simple but marvelous miracle has been occurring again and again throughout the centuries since. We pray that this morning there were some who opened their hearts to Jesus, made him Lord in their life, acknowledged his lordship, realized that he was the one who had died for them and had given himself on their behalf, and made possible the blessings of the glory of God in their life. Now we pray that we may serve you together. Through this joyful Christmas season may we remember that the purpose of his coming to the manger in Bethlehem and to the cross of Calvary is that we may be saved, and that no one should perish but should live eternally with you. We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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