

Being Ignorant of God’s Righteousness

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(This was originally an answer I had written on Quora.com, to a question about the meaning of Romans 10:1-4.)

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Romans 10

¹ Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

² For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.

WHAT does it mean to be “ignorant of God’s righteousness,” and “to establish my own righteousness”? Let’s first lay down some very clear Bible definitions of some of the terms.

What is Salvation?

Romans 10

¹ ...that they might be saved.

What is salvation? What are we to be saved from?

Matthew 1

²¹ And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall *save His people from their sins*.

Sin, then, is the thing that Israel (and all humanity) was to be saved from. But what is sin?

1 John 3

⁴ Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Of which Law is sin the transgression of?

Romans 7

⁷ I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, You shall not covet.

The Law and the Gospel

This is the Law of Ten Commandments, the only part of the Bible that God actually wrote with His finger. The tables of the law were placed in the Ark of the Covenant which was the throne whereupon the Shekinah glory dwelt in the Old Testament tabernacle. This was a picture of God's throne, for the earthly temple was an illustration of the heavenly. This symbolism revealed that the Law is the foundation of God's government.

Psalms 97 [RV]

² Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne.

The Law is "holy, just, and good" (*Romans 7:12*). And God is holy, just, and good. Therefore, the Law is also a transcript of His character. It defines His will. Of Christ it was prophesied:

Psalms 40

⁸ I delight to do your *will*, O my God: yea, your *law* is within my heart.

Isaiah 51

⁷ Harken unto me, you that *know righteousness*, the people *in whose heart is my law*.

The purpose of the Gospel is to put righteousness (the principles of the Law) within the heart, or the inner man. When God wrote it on the tables of stone, He was giving the people a picture of their own fallen condition: stony-hearted people, who did not

have spiritual life in them. They had a knowledge of His law, but only written on stony (unliving) hearts. God said of them,

Deuteronomy 5

²⁹ O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!

And this is the main purpose of the Gospel: to put within man “such a heart” that we will “keep all the commandments.” Righteousness is also called “life”:

Galatians 3

²¹ For if there had been a law given which could have *given life*, verily *righteousness* should have been by the law.

So, all humanity is in need of a spiritual heart transplant. The Law awakens them to their condition by showing them their sickness: that sin is polluting their thoughts and actions. It’s like the heart monitor that shows the heart defect.

The Law Leads to Christ

Here are a few more verses showing the role of the Law to awaken the sinner:

Romans 5

²⁰ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.

Romans 7

⁹ For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.

¹⁰ And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

Galatians 3

¹⁹ Wherefore then serves the law? It was added [spoken] because of transgressions.

Romans 3

¹⁹ Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Note the phrase “under the law” here. It is misinterpreted by the vast majority of professed Christians today. Here, the whole world is “under the law.” Not just the Jews, but the whole world; because to be “under the law” means to stand under its condemnation as a sinner. Remember this: to be “under the law” means to be a sinner, controlled by the power of sin.

The Law proclaims the righteousness of God, and thus shows us our sins, but it does not have the power to change us. The Law is given to show all mankind that they are sinners. This then, is to lead them to Christ, the one who can take away the sin, and give them life.

Galatians 3

²² But the scripture has concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

²³ But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

Here again we are informed that all are “under sin” which is equivalent to being “under the law.” The Law “shuts us up” or locks us in a prison, where we can find no escape from our sin or the condemnation of it, except through Christ. Paul spoke of that prison experience in:

Romans 7

²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

²⁴ O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

But there is a way of deliverance.

²⁵ I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Heart Transplant

How is it to be done? Sin is a twofold problem: the actions (fruit) and the power (root). Merely to forgive a man for the sins of the past, is like a court pardoning a man for any murders he may have committed in the past. It does not change the man, and he may well go out and murder again. God's justification must go deeper than this.

Romans 6

⁶ Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

⁷ For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Here is the spiritual heart transplant. "Our old man is crucified with Him." Now, Christ died on the cross, as our substitute. He paid the price of sin on our behalf. Therefore, we can give up our old man (the old spiritual nature) to be crucified, and He will take it away. When we confess sin, then, we must not just confess *what we have done*, but we must confess *what we are*: that there is a corrupted life in our hearts that needs cleansing:

1 John 1

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins [forgive us for past deeds], and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [remove the power of sin from the heart].

And this is what God wanted to do to the Israelites, even at Sinai. And it was reiterated again by the prophets:

Jeremiah 31

³¹ Behold, the days come, says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:

³² Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they broke, although I was a husband unto them, says the Lord:

³³ But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put my law in

their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Ezekiel 36

²⁶ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

²⁷ And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them.

The Old Covenant

But what was the other covenant mentioned in *Jeremiah 31:32*? In *Deuteronomy 9*, the tables of the law written on stone are called “the tables of the covenant.” When God spoke the Law on Sinai, the people, in their self-confidence, proclaimed that they would keep it:

Exodus 19

⁸ And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord has spoken **we will do**.

Deuteronomy 5

²⁷ [The people said,] Go near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto you; and **we will hear it, and do it**.

This was the “old” covenant: the promise of the people to obey the Law. But as we read earlier, God knew that they still had the stony heart in them, and could not obey it. And indeed, they failed shortly after, at the worship of the golden calf.

Now note, the fault was not the Law. It was the blindness of the people, who did not see the utter sinfulness of their own hearts, and their need of a Saviour. This is why, after speaking the Law, God wrote it on tables of stone, to first of all give them a picture of what they were, and secondly to give them time to understand their own sinfulness.

Romans 5

²⁰ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.

The Law was to expose sin, to make it more obvious. Whereas the people thought themselves to be quite good, the Law was to show them the hidden sin that they could not see,

Romans 7

¹³ ...that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

This was to help them to see their need of the righteousness that God wanted to implant in them. The “new heart” that He promised, was the same righteousness as written in the law, but this time, in a living form. It was to be put in them through the power of God, by the implantation of the life of Jesus, who formed a seed of perfect and sinless obedience, to give unto us.

Ephesians 4

²³ And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

²⁴ And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

It is “created in righteousness and true holiness” which means it brings the person into harmony with the law. Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth experienced this inner change, for it is testified of them:

Luke 1

⁶ And they were both *righteous before God, walking in all the commandments* and ordinances of the Lord blameless.

The End of the Law

Now, what happens to the Law written on stone, when the person has been renewed in their inner man?

Galatians 3

²⁴ Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵ But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The Law that condemned sin, finds nothing to condemn. It sees in us the life of Christ, and flowing from that are the...

Ephesians 2

¹⁰ ...good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

This is just what the Law was looking for, real righteousness. And so it witnesses to the good work done by the ministry of Christ, our High Priest.

Romans 3

²¹ But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being *witnessed by the law* and the prophets.

This righteousness is obtained “without the law” (or “apart from it”) because the law could not give life. It must come from Christ instead. But the Law recognizes it as real righteousness, and witnesses to it. This thought is repeated in one of the verses from *Romans 10*:

Romans 10

⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes.

Christ is the "end of the law" (or the “goal” or “aim”) because Christ is the One whom the Law pushes us towards. Once the Law has led us to Christ, its purpose is fulfilled. But if we stray from Christ into sin, we bring ourselves again “under the law” and it pushes us back to Christ again.

Galatians 2

¹⁸ For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

1 Timothy 1

⁸ But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;

⁹ Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers,

¹⁰ For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for men-stealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.

These verses in *1 Timothy* reiterate the purpose of the Law. If a man is “righteous,” that is, if he is obedient to the law from a renewed heart, then the Law has nothing to say to him. But if he falls into sin, then the Law ministers condemnation and wrath to him, to lead him back to Christ.

Ignorance of God’s Righteousness

Now, let’s come back to the main verse of the original text under consideration:

Romans 10

³ For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

The righteousness of God, begins with a new heart in place of the old. It changes the inner man. It brings the thoughts and impulses into harmony with God’s law. It means full submission to God’s plan to overcome sin, and not our own plan.

As applied to the Jewish people at Christ’s time, only some of them had this inner heart work. Nicodemus sought for it, although he was reluctant to admit that his whole religious life had been in vain up to that point! But eventually he accepted the truth.

But the vast majority followed their leaders, who personified the spirit that worked in them all. They wanted earthly glory, and security for the flesh. They wanted to be rulers over others, without ruling over their own inner sins. They established extra rules to make themselves look righteous, but these were just fig leaves covering the nakedness of the soul. We can see that when Christ was born, they ought to have been searching the prophecies to know the time, but they utterly missed it.

Those being spoken of in this verse did not understand how the heart was to be changed. No doubt they thought, as many professed Christians do today, that sin is just an action, and that all you need to do is ask for forgiveness for the deed. They didn’t un-

derstand the process of the new birth, and therefore, did not ask for the promised change, and therefore did not receive.

Matthew 7

⁸ Every one that asks, receives.

Personally, I have found many people who are very hazy on what the new birth is and how it is accomplished.

- Some think and teach that there is a tiger and a lamb nature fighting within the Christian. But this is not the “peace” that Paul spoke of in *Romans* 5:1.
- Or perhaps, as some professed Christians feel today, they thought they were saved by virtue of their “profession of faith.” They turned faith into a formula or an assertion of the will: “I believe that I’m saved by grace and therefore I am!” But if they don’t fulfill the conditions of the promise (confessing the actual nature of the sin, and giving it up for cleansing), it is not faith, but just a bold and reckless presumption.
- Other professed Christians have thrown out the Law entirely. They talk of “sin” but by refusing the Law as a “tutor” to lead to Christ, they don’t sense the depth of their sin, and therefore are not delivered from it.
- Some confuse the “law of sin and death” with the “law of God” and therefore cast contempt on God’s holy law.
- Some think that the “law of God” is a “yoke of bondage” not realizing that it is only sin that brings bondage, and that it is the “misuse of the Law” that leaves us in bondage to sin. This misuse of the Law is called trying to be “justified by the law.” *Galatians* 5:4. It means trying to change my own heart (or just my outward actions), instead of going to Christ. It means trying to do the work that only God can do.

All of these would constitute “being ignorant of God’s righteousness.”

The Jewish church fell into another snare: they thought that by virtue of their fleshly connection to Abraham, that the promises

automatically belonged to them. But any confidence in the flesh, is “being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and [therefore] going about to establish their own.”

Philippians 3

³ For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and *have no confidence in the flesh.*

An example is given in Abraham’s life with Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham’s attempt to bring forth the promised son. But Ishmael was “a wild man,” born of a servant woman. Now God promised that Abraham would have a son, but Abraham’s faith had to reach to believing that God could put life where there was death.

1. First, he had to see that he was really dead (and Sarah too), so far as producing children.
2. Then he had to admit that his own efforts to produce a son were not the promise. Thirteen years down the drain!...it was hard to accept.
3. Finally, he had to accept God’s righteousness: that God would produce the son in them.
4. And then he received the promise.

This all encompasses the ministry of the Law. Any “ignorance of God’s righteousness” will inevitably lead us to “establish our own righteousness.” We will make another standard, other than God’s, and call it “righteousness.” We might even call it “love” and think that we have got the real thing; but by refusing to receive the witness and ministry of the Law, we will establish a different kind of “love,” than God’s love. For with God, the principles of the Law, and real love, are identical.

Romans 13

⁸ Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law.

¹⁰ Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Galatians 5

¹⁴ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus came to the religious world of His day, and brought to them God's righteousness, in a living form. Some received it, many were moved by His actions and words, but in the end, very few recognized it. Their view of God's character, and their interpretations of the prophecies about the Messiah, what they expected from what they had been taught in their synagogues, was very different from what God presented, and they did not recognize it. They had received man's views of the Bible; their thoughts were that God would establish man's glory; they thought they were...

Revelation 3

¹⁷ ...rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, and knew not that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

And this is exactly the same message given to the last church before Christ comes, which is the time we are living in now.