

ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH
GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY & MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY – Chapters 9-11

LESSON 35 – RELIGIOUS AND ZEALOUS BUT LOST – Romans 10:1-4

In Romans chapter nine we looked at the sovereignty of God. Now here in chapter ten we are going to focus on the responsibility of mankind. As chapter ten begins, Paul is still talking about the Jews’ and their need to be saved. Israel is really an example of many people we see in our day. There are lots of people who are religious and spend a great deal of time and energy in a direction that...in the end...doesn’t please God. Paul’s ultimate goal was to win as many people as possible to Christ.

Paul’s Intercession for the Lost

In these few short verses, Paul is going to pour out his heart about the condition of the lost...specifically his fellow Jews. He knew that most of Israel had rejected the Messiah and God’s plan for them but he refused to give up on trying to win them to Christ. Three times in chapters 9-11 we find Paul expressing his deep love for Israel and his desire for them to be saved.

Paul is a great example of a teacher of doctrine and theology but he is also a great example of what it means to have a great burden for the lost. Unfortunately, it seems this burden is missing in our day. Most Christians today have either lost sight or ignored altogether the fact that people without a relationship with Christ are going to die in their lost condition and end up in hell.

Paul’s Identification with the Lost

So having stated his love for these unsaved people, Paul then says he can testify about their condition. How? Because he was in that same condition before meeting Jesus on the Damascus road.

Listen to what Paul wrote in Philippians 3:4-6, “If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.”

Circumcised on the eighth day – This was exactly what God commanded Abraham to do back in Genesis 17. This was the outward sign that Paul was part of the covenant people of God.

Of the people of Israel – Paul wasn’t a converted Jew from a Gentile background...he was born a Jew.

Of the tribe of Benjamin – Israel’s first king...Saul...was of the tribe of Benjamin. To be from this same tribe was to truly be an Israelite.

A Hebrew of Hebrews – This meant that Paul was unequalled as a Hebrew. Judaism was his whole life. Parents, home, language, religion and customs...there was nothing about Paul’s life that wasn’t Hebrew.

A Pharisee – The Pharisees were considered the most legalistic and conservative group among the Jews and Paul identified himself as one.

Zealous persecutor of the church – Because the Pharisees believed that followers of Christ were heretics, they did everything they could to wipe them out. Paul wrote many times about his efforts to persecute Christians.

Faultless before the law – Paul isn't talking about being sinless here, he's talking about the fact that he followed all the statutes and ordinances of Judaism meticulously. There was nothing the Law required that he had not done. If he sinned, then he did what the Law said to do for atonement.

After listing all of these qualifications and accomplishments, Paul goes on to tell us how that all these things meant nothing once he met Jesus. Churches today are full of people who are zealous for religion. They get baptized, join the church, give money, serve on committees, do good works in the community and think they're going to heaven because of their religious resume. Paul reminds us that without that saving relationship with Christ, all the things mean nothing.

One writer said, "It is better to limp in the right direction than to run with all your might in the wrong direction."

Paul's Indictment of the Lost

Paul's compassionate understanding didn't stop him from confronting his fellow Jews with the Gospel. Paul challenged them because of their ignorance. God does not excuse ignorance. To have great zeal without the right knowledge was a proven path for Israel...a path leading to destruction. The theme of Israel acting with disregard to God's will runs throughout the Old Testament.

One of the saddest things to see is people totally dedicated to religion but who don't know God. This has nothing to do with intelligence and everything to do with having a personal relationship with God and having a heart that wants to know and do His will.

Not only were the Jews ignorant but they were trying to establish their own righteousness. They were so zealous because they thought their good works and self-righteousness would get them approval from God.

There is nothing wrong with hard work and self-sacrifice for God as long as it is done with the right knowledge. What knowledge? The knowledge that none of our works can save us...only He can do that.

In verse 3 Paul says, "They did not submit to God's righteousness." They were too busy trying to compete with each other to see who could be the most righteous. They never understood their need to submit to God's righteousness instead.

Paul's Invitation to the Lost

Paul's last words here in this section of Romans 10 is an invitation for everyone to believe in Jesus and be saved. Jesus did in His perfect life on earth what mankind could never do...keep the Law. There is nothing wrong with the Law. In fact, Scripture tells us it is just and holy and good. The problem is with sinful human beings because we have no ability to keep God's holy law.

So Jesus came to do what we could never do and that is to satisfy the requirements of the law in order to win righteousness for all of us who would receive His free gift instead of trying to earn it on our own.