

WHY SINCERITY CAN'T SAVE
ROMANS 10:1-13

BIG IDEA: SINCERITY CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR

Romans 10:1-13 *Brothers, [Christian brothers] my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites [lit. "them"—"the Israelites" is not in the Greek] is that they may be saved.* ² *For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.* ³ *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.* ⁴ **[For]** *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.* ⁵ **[For]** *Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."* 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) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).* ⁸ *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: 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. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

INTRODUCTION:

- A. We all love Mark Twain for Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. The unfortunate news is that he was no friend of Christianity.
 - B. Listen to this passage from his book, *Letters from the Earth: In each generation, for hundreds and hundreds of generations, a billion would die and all go to perdition except perhaps ten thousand out of the billion. The ten thousand would have to come from the little body of Christians, and only one in the hundred of that little body would stand any chance. None of them at all except such Roman Catholics as should have the luck to have a priest handy to sandpaper their souls at the last gasp, and here and there a Presbyterian. No others savable. All the others damned. By the millions.*¹
 - C. Mark Twain wasn't the only person to get all upset about millions of people who either don't believe in Christ, or maybe never even hear about Him.
 - D. What are we to make of that? **Why is it that sincerity can't save?**
- I. **LET'S GET BEYOND THE THEORETICAL**
- Verse 1a, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."**
- A. How Much Do I Really Care?
"I will open Africa to the Gospel or die trying." – Rowland Bingham (the longest surviving of the 3 original founders of Sudan Interior Mission. He died in Africa of a heart attack.)
 1. If we address this question purely on an intellectual plane, we completely miss the point. It is an intellectual question that merits our best thinking. It is **also** a volitional question that demands our hearts and indeed our very lives.
 2. This is not just a theological curiosity to be debated in comfortable parlors. I'm reminded of the early church father that was asked by a young theolog what God was doing in eternity past before He created the world. The old master replied, *"Creating hell for fools who ask impertinent questions."*
 3. So as I ask this question, I want to make sure that I'm not just being an impertinent questioner. I need to think clearly and I need to do something heroic about all these people who have never heard.
 4. That's why verse 1 here is such an important preamble: *"My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved."* Did Paul really care? Look at the record:

¹ Mark Twain, *Letters from the Earth* (NY: Harper and Row, 1938), 43.

- *He had been in prison*
 - *He had been flogged*
 - *He had been exposed to death again and again*
 - *He had beaten*
 - *He had stoned*
 - *He had been shipwrecked*
 - *He had labored and toiled and gone without sleep*
 - *He had been cold and naked (II Corinthians 11:23-29)*
5. When Billy Graham's wife, Ruth, was the mother of a prodigal, she wrote this little prayer/poem: *If I could stand aside and see him walking through Those Splendor'd Gates thrown wide, instead of me – If I could yield my place to this, my boy, the tears on my upturned face would be of joy!*
6. Is that bad theology? If you really love Jesus with all your heart, how could you even think of giving up heaven for the sake of someone else? I probably would dismiss this as bad theology except for one little verse in the Bible that says exactly the same thing: **Romans 9:3**, *For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.* OK, I give; Ruth Bell Graham's theology is better than mine. She really cares.
7. **Dr. James Kennedy** puts it: *If God would dip all pastors in hell for a fraction for a second and then yank them up by their shirttails - as they're standing there smoldering and their clothes and skin are full of black soot, and their shoes are half melted off, I think their commitment to the Great Commission would substantially increase.*
- B. How Much Do I Pray?
- Verse 1b, My prayer** to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.
"I used to think that prayer should have the first place and teaching the second. I now feel it would be truer to give prayer the first, second, and third places, and teaching the fourth." – **James O. Fraser** (China)
1. I think we pray about the things that are really important to us.
- Even atheists pray when something is really important to them. *Newsweek* magazine reported that 13% of Americans are atheists or agnostics. That's not surprising but here's what is: *One in five of them admits to praying daily.* (John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997, 030302)
 - Alcoholics are taught to pray. Alcoholic writer, **Anne Lamott**, says she has two favorite prayers: *"Thank you, thank you, thank you"* and *"Help me, help me, help me."*²
2. How does one pray for the people of the world who don't know Jesus? Now that's a good question. Do you feel as fragmented as I do?
- Slavery in Sudan
 - Persecuted church in China
 - Genocide in India
 - Unresponsiveness in Algeria
 - Letters in my mailbox: Please pray and send money to...
 - World Vision
 - World Concern
 - World Relief
 - World Link
 - Stop the world, I want to get off!!!
 - What does one do in an age of information overload?
 - Pick at least one missionary family. Sign up for their prayer letter and pray for them regularly. Grab a letter from the display in the lobby and get started today.

² Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2000), 86.

- Pick at least one country or people group. Pray for them regularly.
 - Get a book like Operation World and pray through the world in a year
3. **Howard Hendricks**, *You may not take prayer seriously, but God does.*
 4. Remember the words of **Chesty Puller**, a remarkable Marine officer in Korea? *“The enemy in front, enemy behind, enemy on both flanks. Good! They’ll never get away this time.”*³

II. LET’S GET OUR THEOLOGY OF SALVATION STRAIGHT

A. Misguided Zealousness Is Actually Disobedience. **Romans 10:2-4**, *For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is **not based on knowledge**.*³ *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did **not submit** to God's righteousness.*⁴ **[For]Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.**

1. illustration: Original owner-builder who sold partly-built house to my friend—who had to tear it down to the foundation and start over.
 - Here was a zealous owner-builder
 - But he lacked builder knowledge
 - And he did not submit to the country Building Department.
2. Examples of misguided zealousness:
 - Mormon missionaries
 - *Missionary work in The Church of Jesus Christ is funded by each individual missionary. They receive no payment for their 18 months to two years of service.*
 - *Typically, the Church’s missionaries work six days a week and have one day off for housekeeping and other activities. A missionary’s day begins at 6:30 a.m. for personal study and preparation. The day is then usually spent teaching and giving community service, ending around 10.30 p.m.*⁴
 - Filipino men who get crucified

Telco firm, Coke sponsor Filipino crucifixion festival
It really is the real thing
By Joe Fay
Posted in Bootnotes, 21st March 2008 06:02 GMT
Filipino phone outfit Smart Telecommunications and Coca Cola will be soaking up the goodwill today as key sponsors of a mass Good Friday crucifixion in the Philippines.
The City of San Fernando’s annual Good Friday re-enactment of Christ’s Passion is set to include not one, not three, but 23 real live crucifixions, as eager penitents seek to emulate Jesus by being nailed to crosses. Other slightly less committed penitents will restrict themselves to a thorough scourging.
*Church and civil authorities actually frown on the practice, but the citizens can’t seem to get enough. So, the local government has decided to go with the flow, and restrict itself to ensuring the nails are sterilised and that all the crucifixeers have a tetanus shot.*⁵
 - Jews:
 - **Barrett:** *No nation had given itself to God with such devoted and courageous zeal as Israel.*
 - **Calvin:** *It is better, as Augustine says, to limp in the right way than to run with all our might out of the way.*

³ Chuck Swindoll. “Daring the Risk of Reach,” *Insights* (Summer 1983), 6.

⁴ <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/news-releases-stories/mormon-youth-put-careers-and-education-on-hold-to-serve-as-missionaries>. Accessed 040509.

⁵ http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/03/21/good_friday/ Accessed 040509

3. Christ is the end of the Law; in the sense of being the fulfillment of the Law. But here He is also the end of the Law, in the sense of it being conceived as a way to attain righteousness.
- B. Salvation by “Doing” Is the Great Lie. **Romans 10:5-7**, *Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."* 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) [as if we had to accomplish Christ's incarnation. God already did it for us!]"* ⁷ *or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [as if we had to accomplish Christ's resurrection. God already did it for us!]*
1. There is the broad way that leads to destruction. **Matthew 7:13** *For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.*
 - **Verse 5, [For] Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."** --Quote from **Leviticus 18:5**
 - **Meaning #1:** The Jews didn't take the Law seriously enough or they would have realized that they were sinners and needed a Savior.
 - **Meaning #2:** The Law truly pointed people to Christ.
 - Take both as true here (per Leon Morris)**
 2. There is the narrow way that leads to everlasting life. **Matthew 7:14** *But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*
 - **Verse 6, ad sensum quotation from Deuteronomy 30:11-13, Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?"**
- C. Salvation's Terms Are Not Obscure. **Romans 10:8-12**, *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: 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. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him...*
1. The Gospel is as close as your mouth.
 - What could be easier than saying you believe in Jesus? **Jesus is Lord.**
 - **This is confession of the deity of Jesus.**
 - Quoting **Deuteronomy 30:14**, *No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it..*
 2. The Gospel is as close as your heart.
 - What could be easier than believing in Jesus in your heart?
 3. The Gospel has a life-time money-back warranty
 - **Verse 11**, *As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* Quoting from **Isaiah 28:16** *So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."*
 4. The Gospel knows no ethnic or national boundaries.
 - **Verse 12**, *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—[for] the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him...*

III. LET'S FACE THE CENTRAL SALVATION FACTS

Verse 13, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Quoting from **Joel 2:32** And everyone **who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved**; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

A. God Is the Great Pursuer

- **C. S. Lewis**, *I never had the experience of looking for God. It was the other way round; he was the hunter and I was the deer. He stalked me,...took unerring aim, and fired.* (in *Christian Reflections*)
- What was this prey that God was stalking? **Lewis** confesses, *For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.*⁶
- It's a good thing that God cares for sinners. We aren't all that lovable!

B. God Is the Great Celebrator

- Let's say you decided to throw a party for all your friends. You spend weeks making the plans. You mail a hundred invitations. You hire a caterer. You budget a thousand dollars. You wake up tingling on the day of the party. You are so looking forward to entertaining all your friends. The hour arrives. People start ringing the doorbell: all 5 of them. You keep looking out the window but after an hour you resign yourself. Most of your friends aren't going to show up. If you could wave a magic wand and make all your friends suddenly materialize at your party, you would do it. You want them there. You feel so bad that they aren't there. But there's nothing you can do about it.
- God is planning a party. It's called the "marriage supper of the Lamb." He has sent invitations to billions of people. But so far, only a very small number have sent in their RSVP's. God feels so bad. He really wants them all to come. If He could wave a magic wand and make them all come, I think He would. And if anybody could wave a magic wand, I would think it would be God, don't you?! Soak your soul in these Bible statements about the caring heart of God:
 - **Luke 13:34**, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were **not willing!**"*
 - **Matthew 18:14**, *your Father in heaven is **not willing** that any of these little ones should be lost*
 - **II Peter 3:9**, *[God] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to **perish**, but everyone to come to repentance.*
 - **John 3:16**, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not **perish** but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*
 - **Matthew 22:2**, *"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' 5 "But they paid no attention and went off-- one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them.*
 - Jesus told that parable about the world.
 - 10/40 Window is another way to look at the spiritual need of the world: The area of the world between latitudes 10 degrees and 40 degrees north of the equator covering North Africa, Middle East and Asia. The window has in view most of the world's areas of greatest physical and spiritual need,

⁶ Quoted in Os Guinness. *Long Journey Home* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press), 176.

most of the world's least-reached peoples and most of the governments that oppose Christianity. (Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, 652)

7. Back to your imaginary party. If you had spent a \$1000 on your party and only 15 people showed up, you would feel really bummed out about all that money you wasted. What do you do with food for 85 people who didn't show up? Throw it out? Give it to some charitable organization?
8. God certainly did more than spend money on His party. He sent His Son to be a blood sacrifice for the sins of the world! How do you think **He** feels that so many people are ignoring His party invitation?!
9. Certainly God does not wish to waste the sacrifice of His Son. He wants to save as many sinners as possible. The price Jesus paid is infinite, so certainly every human being **could** be saved. Why wouldn't they all be saved?! It can't be because God is unwilling!

C. But Human Hearts Must Be Open, Too

1. This gets us into a huge and frustrating subject: The sovereignty of God vs. the free will of man. It gets us into the doctrine of "Election." I consider "election" to be the most unpopular doctrine of the Bible among Christians. Here's the deal:
 - ❑ The Bible says that people are so lost in their sin, that they don't have the sense or the inclination to come to Jesus on their own.
 - **Romans 3:11**, *there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.*
 - ❑ The only way anybody gets saved is if God has chosen on His own initiative to save them.
 - **John 6:44**, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*
 - **John 6:65**, *no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."*
 - ❑ Those chosen ones? He causes them to believe in Jesus and they are saved.
 - **Romans 8:30**, *those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*
2. On the other hand, the Bible says that every human being is held accountable for what he decides about Jesus. How can someone be held morally accountable for something He has no ability to do?
 - ❑ The Bible doesn't say, *Whosoever is elect may come*. It says, *Whosoever will may come*.
 - ❑ Why would Jesus tell His church to go into all the world and preach the Gospel if it wouldn't make any difference? But it does make a difference!
 - **Ezekiel 3:18**, *When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.*
 - **II Corinthians 5:20**, *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: **Be reconciled** to God.*
 - **II Corinthians 5:11**, *Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men*
 - **Acts 20:26**, *Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Why would Paul have been guilty of blood-guilt if he had not preached to these people of Ephesus? If the inclusivists are right, the Ephesians could have gotten saved on their own without Paul just by living up to the spiritual light they had.*

3. Well, how does all this fit together: The sovereign choice of God to elect those who will be saved and the moral responsibility of people to believe. It seems contradictory. That's why theologians call this a paradox. It doesn't make sense to us. Whenever I try to explain this to people I feel like Papa Tevye in **Fiddler on the Roof**. He's telling about their Jewish traditions. He says, *You may ask, "How did this tradition get started?" I'll tell you. I dunno.*
4. *"Send some more messengers, and give the Aucas, instead of fierce hearts, soft hearts. Stick their hearts, Lord, as with a lance. They struck our friends, but You can stick them with Your Word, so that they will listen, and believe."* (A **Quichua** Indian's prayer for a neighboring tribe who killed 5 missionaries in 1956)
5. Here's what they must believe: **Romans 10:9**, *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. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

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