

Most of us are taught, from the time that we are very young, that if we want anything good in this life, then we have to work hard for it. If you want to be a doctor, then you need to work hard throughout school to get good grades to get into another school to get good grades to get into another school and into a residency and to pass exams in order to eventually be called “Doctor” and treat patients. If you want to have a fruitful garden, then you have to till the best area, put in the right fertilizer, plant, and weed and water and remove pests and weed and water and remove pests until after several months you start getting in healthy crops of tomatoes. If you want to be the best basketball player on the team, then you need to show up early for practice, stay late practicing free throws, sprint your hardest during suicide runs, and lift and run and practice shots during the off season. Hard work pays off, or so we are taught.

So, what does that mean when it comes to our faith? If we want to know that we are truly saved, that is, that God has forgiven us for our sins and we have secured our space in heaven, do we have to work hard, memorize the most Scripture, go on the most mission trips, and curse the least?

In the book of Romans, Paul was addressing a church in the middle of a heated debate between earning salvation by means of hard work or being given salvation by means of faith. And so he writes this letter to the church, trying to answer the question of salvation while navigating the long history of the Israelite or Jewish people, who saw hard work through the law as the best way to follow God, and the Gentile or Roman people who were new to the faith, had not put in the same hard work, and in the eyes of their Jewish counterparts, were not worthy of salvation. Paul, being a Jew himself and formerly a Pharisee, one of the most hard working classes of Jewish people, makes the astounding claim at the end of chapter 9 that the Gentiles, though they had not been following God’s law, were being made righteous because they had faith in Jesus, while the Jews, who had attempted to rigorously follow the law, though whether or not that actually happened is up for debate, had not believed in Jesus and therefore were not considered righteous, even though they tried really hard to live right. This is what he says in 9:30-32: “Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God’s standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path.”

One commentary on Romans stated: “The contemporary reality-the Gentiles finding the prize even though they are not in the race, while the Jews have not reached the finish line even though they have run hard-is a fulfillment of God’s word.” (Toews) The Israelite/Jewish focus on earning salvation through following the law brings to my mind a mouse running on an exercise wheel; he can be trying really hard and running really fast, but no matter what effort he puts forward he will be unable to get anywhere because the wheel was not made to move forward. In that same way, Paul is making the point that although the law has a purpose as a guide for living according to God’s will, it does not have the purpose of earning its followers righteousness or salvation. Salvation cannot be earned; it can only be given as a free gift from Jesus because of his death and resurrection on behalf of us and our sins.

In order to receive that free gift, several steps must be taken. These aren't works; rather, they are indicators of our willingness to publically and internally acknowledge who Jesus is and to submit ourselves to his lordship in our lives. Paul gives these steps in Romans 10:9-10":

"if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. "

Let's take a few moments to break these steps down.

## 1) Steps to Salvation

### a. Confess with your lips

- i. Paul states that salvation begins with the public confession that Jesus is Lord of our lives. What does that mean? God has gifted each of us, at birth, with the choice of taking the driver's seat in what we say, think, do, who we will be, and how we will live. This was not how God designed the world to be; when things were perfect, in the beginning, before the first sin separated us from God, humans were in perfect relationship with God because they allowed Him to take the driver's seat of their lives. But once they decided that they were no longer content being passengers and took control, they quickly steered into sin and death. And so, God gave all of us a choice whether or not we would live our lives for ourselves or live them for God. If we live for ourselves, then we choose to live in sin, which only leads to death and separation from God. Paul tells the church very clearly in these verses that the first step to salvation is to confess to ourselves and others that we are willingly giving control of our lives over to Jesus, to make him Lord of what we say, think, do, who we will be, and how we will live.
- ii. What can we learn about faith and salvation from this step? **First** of all, faith is not something that just happens in the mind. True faith which leads to salvation must be exercised in the body by confession with the mouths.
- iii. **Secondly**, our willingness to confess Jesus as Lord has to include our willingness to be public with our change in heart. For historical Mennonites, this meant a public confession before the church to faith in Jesus and then baptism before other believers as a sign of this confession.

### b. Believe in your Heart

- i. Paul then states that the second step of faith leading to salvation is that we must believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. What does this mean?
- ii. First, it means that the faith which we publically confess must dwell within, in our hearts. In biblical times, the heart was the center of the

person; it encapsulated their essence and soul. To believe something in your heart mean that it became a core part of your DNA, that which makes you YOU. Paul calls us to believe that God had raised Jesus from the dead; this is the climactic act of Jesus' story, which tells us that He was not just a man, not just a good teacher, but that He was special, set apart, the Son of the living God. When we believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, we are saying that this is at the very core of our being. So what can we learn about faith and salvation from this second step?

- iii. Faith that leads to salvation doesn't just engage the body, through confession; it also engages the soul, through deep, internal, unshakable belief. Because of this, faith that leads to salvation is a whole person experience, mind and body, heart and soul, internal and external.

**Transition:** So, faith is confession and belief, body and soul, public and private. But here's where the challenge comes in. Because even though we are talking about salvation in terms of steps, steps implies a linear order, as in "first complete step A" and "then complete step B." But the reality of what Paul is telling us to do is much different. Instead of sequential steps, confession and belief are meant to WORK TOGETHER.

c. Confession and Belief MUST Work Together

- i. Why is this true? Why must they work together in order to be fully effective? Because without both being present in our faith, then either one by itself powerless.
- ii. Consider what confession without belief could mean. We can say anything, but if we don't believe it, then it is just merely empty words. I could say: "Aliens exist!" "Michigan has a good football team!" "I'm great at basketball." I may be able to say it, but just because I say it doesn't make it true for me. In order for our words of confession to have any meaning or carry the weight of salvation, we have to believe what we are saying is true. Salvation is not a magic password; confession is an external admission of what is real in our hearts.
- iii. Consider also what belief without confession could mean. It means that although we might truly believe, down to the depths of our souls, that Jesus is the Son of God, we aren't willing to make him Lord of our lives to the world around us. This could be because we are ashamed, or because we aren't ready to fully give up control. But to everyone else around us, we are still in the driver's seat. Jesus makes it very clear that confession is an important part of salvation. He says in Matthew 10:32-33: "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven."

**Transition:** So, Paul lays out the steps of faith towards salvation, which are meant to work together, in order that we receive the free gift of salvation from God by being fully devoted and

committed to Him, body and soul, mind and heart, in and out. Paul gives this great news in vv. 12-13: <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Everyone, no matter ethnicity, place of birth, race, color, creed, religious or non-religious background, now has access to that free gift of salvation, as long as he or she confesses and believes. But then, he asks an important question, for those of us who have received salvation, about those who haven’t:

<sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? <sup>15</sup> And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?

And so he quotes the prophet Isaiah, giving a charge to the saved: share the good news with others!

“As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

- 2) The World Needs Proclaimers! The world needs people who have outwardly confessed the good news they believe in their hearts: Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, who was raised from the dead in order to save us from our sins.
  - i. So, what does it mean for us to bring the good news? It means confession and proclamation. It means living like Jesus to the neighbors around us, in such a way that they recognize that our actions and our words are different, that we aren’t in the driver’s seat, that something else is going on.
  - ii. And is this the job of just the preachers and evangelists and extroverted? Unfortunately for some, no it is not. We have all been “sent” to proclaim the good news. Now, we may do this in different ways. For some, it might be sharing a plate of cookies with the next door neighbor and asking them about their life story and then sharing our faith story. For others, it might be inviting the owner of a local Mediterranean restaurant to church. For some still, it might mean taking children or grandchildren to story time at the local library and getting to know the other parents in the community, developing relationships, and then sharing the gospel through that relationship. Just as there are millions of believers across the world, there are millions of ways to share the good news.

Transition: And so, the question I want us all to be asking ourselves as we close out our worship service this morning and move into Sunday school time and our weeks is this: Who am I? Who am I that Paul is addressing in this passage?

- 3) Who am I?
  - a. The Unhearing: Have I never or just recently heard this good news, but really don’t know what to think of it yet, whether or not I should take any next steps?

- b. Doer (Jew): Do I lived as if I need to earn my salvation by doing good things for God and living the right way, but not recognizing it as God's free gift to me? Am I a mouse running on a wheel, trying so hard but never getting anywhere?
  - c. Believer but not Confessor: Do I believe in my heart that Jesus is Lord, but am I unwilling, unready, or unable to make it a part of my public life, to confess before my family, my friends and neighbors, my community, that I am giving over control of my life to Jesus?
  - d. Proclaimer but not Believer: Have I just given lip service to Christianity, saying I believe some things to please my parents, my wife or husband, or just to fit in, but I haven't made faith in Jesus the center of my being?
  - e. Proclaimer: Am I the one with the beautiful feet, who believes, confesses, and proclaims with my words and my life that Jesus is Lord and salvation is real, possible, and here?
- Who am I? Who are you? Who will we be together?