

• For believers the possibility of trying to use the law as a means of justification is finished for ever

Romans 10:4 says, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.* I take the Greek word to mean ‘finish’, ‘termination’, ‘cessation’, ‘abrogation’. But special attention must be given to the phrase ‘for everyone who believes’. For **everyone who believes** Christ is the end of the useless attempts of the past at trying to be right with God by nationalistic respectability, by morality, by burdensome ritual, or anything of that nature. For the believer Christ is the end of anything like that. ‘End’ means ‘the end in the person’s outlook’. If righteousness is ‘without the law’¹, then **for believers** the possibility of trying to use the law as a means of justification is finished for ever.

¹ 3:21

Consider first the law

• The law did provide national prosperity and continuation in the land of Israel

Paul goes on to compare and contrast the Mosaic law and the gospel. **Consider first the law.** ⁵*For Moses writes concerning the righteousness that is of the law, that the person who does the things of the law shall live by them.* It is a mistake to treat Romans 10:5 as hypothetical. There is no hint in Leviticus that the law cannot be kept. It is only the tenth commandment that makes the law an impossible standard of spirituality – but ‘coveting’ is not mentioned in this part of Leviticus. ‘Live’ and ‘life’ in the law do not mean ‘eternal life’. Consider Leviticus 18:5. God said: ‘You shall not do anything like the deeds of the land of Canaan . . . ! In their statutes you shall not walk. You shall do my judgements, and you shall keep my statutes, so as to walk in them . . . And you shall keep my statutes and my judgements which when a man shall do them he shall live by them.’ This kind of teaching is everywhere in the Mosaic law¹. In Romans 2:10 and 7:10 Paul has referred to this already. Luke 10:28 is important also. It is quite clear that ‘life’ in these passages of the law is not the ‘eternal life’ of John’s Gospel. It is staying alive in this world. It is national prosperity and continuation in the land of Israel.

¹ see

Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:32–33; 8:1; 16:20; 22:7; 30:15–17; Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 18:9, 17, 19, 21; 20:11, 13, 21; 33:15–16, 19

• The law can give civic ‘life’ but it cannot give ‘eternal’ life

There is such a thing as civic righteousness but it is not the same as being justified by faith. Civic righteousness brings a certain kind of ‘life’. There were promises in the law. There would be stability in the land if parents were honoured, and so on. Civic righteousness is fulfillable by the unregenerate. The law can give civic ‘life’ but it cannot give ‘eternal’ life.

Now consider the gospel

• A different kind of righteousness

• A gift

• Incredibly easy to receive for those who allow God to be gracious to them

Now **consider the gospel.** Paul describes a quite different kind of righteousness, the kind that comes to anyone of any nationality who puts faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 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‘Nor should you say, “Who will descend into the abyss?” – that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. ⁸But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ – that is, the word of faith which we preach.* Salvation is a matter of being given a ‘righteousness that is by faith’. It is totally ‘without the law’ – except that the law pointed to it¹. We come to salvation by allowing God to be gracious to us. We must let grace be grace. We must receive a gift. It is so incredibly easy that people find it difficult to believe it can be so easy! It is unnecessary to climb to heaven. Paul talks as if ‘righteousness’ is a person. Righteousness speaks! It draws nigh to talk to us. It says: ‘You think it is some great endeavour in which you have to raise yourself up to heaven and drag salvation out of God as if it were some gigantic burden. Don’t say things like that in your heart!’ says salvation. ‘It is not as difficult as you think. Every difficult thing has already been done – by Jesus!’

¹ see 3:21

• *Paul expands the nearness of the gospel by quoting a passage about the nearness of the law*

If the law was so accessible how much more is the gospel

• *An 'if... then how much more' line of reasoning*

• *As near as our own hearts!*

The gospel is even easier than the law was said to be. Paul is describing the nearness and availability of the gospel but he is doing so in words taken from Deuteronomy that describe the nearness and availability of the law! Paul's words echo Deuteronomy 9:4 and 30:12–14. But Paul eliminates everything that refers to the Mosaic law! He changes the words 'Who shall cross for us to the far side of the sea' into 'Who will ascend into heaven?' Why does he do this? Those who wish to play down the difference between law and gospel rather like this quotation. Paul is expounding the nearness of the gospel but quotes a passage about the nearness of the law! So – the more legalistic expositors say – there cannot be so much difference between law and gospel! But such an interpretation is hopelessly astray. After all that Paul has said about the failure of the law and the accomplishment of Jesus in doing 'what the law could not do', it should no longer be necessary to make the point that the law is an incurable failure in Paul's eyes in the matter of giving salvation or spiritual growth. Actually, as several scholars have noticed, Paul eliminates from his allusion everything that refers to the Mosaic law!

What then is he doing? In Deuteronomy 9:4 the phrase 'Do not say in your heart' is addressed to people who are self-righteous and who might say, 'It is because of our own righteousness that God has given us the land of Israel.' Paul uses the words again to rebuke self-righteousness. In Deuteronomy 30:12–14 the point is that the law is so accessible! When God gave his law he came **down** to Mount Sinai; no one had to climb to heaven to find God. 'No one has to cross the ocean to some far-off land', said Moses¹. It does not take some lengthy pilgrimage to go to find God's law for Israel! It is right here for you to obey. The word of the law is readily available to you. You just have to speak it, so that it is well known throughout the land of Israel. And you have to 'cherish it in your hearts'. These words of Moses became almost proverbial ways of speaking of accessibility and ease. They were used by other people before Paul adapted them to make his own point. In the apocryphal book of Baruch we have the same kind of language in connection with wisdom²; and the Jewish writer Philo uses very similar words. Paul is using language that has become proverbial. If the law could be near at hand, how much more is the gospel easy and near at hand! It is unnecessary to descend to the place of the dead. Everything difficult has been done already. Salvation is a matter of believing and publicly acknowledging that one has believed in Jesus. How near to us is salvation? As near as our own hearts!

¹ Deuteronomy 30:13

² 3:29-30



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