

**Why Confess with One's Mouth?**  
**(Romans 10:9–13)**  
by George E. Meisinger

**Introduction**

Romans 1–8, and especially chapter 8, demonstrate that though all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:9–18, 23), yet those eternally saved through faith in Jesus Christ's redemptive work (3:21–26) are secure forever; nothing can separate them from the love of God (8:35–39).

This raises a question in light of what has happened to Israel. If God's salvation is forever, then what about God's Old Testament people, who seem to have been excluded from the plan of God? How can believers in the Church be confident that God will not reject them if, like Israel, they sufficiently provoke the Lord?

Paul addresses this question in Romans 9–11. In chapter 9, the apostle says the problem is not that God's word—His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has become of no effect, but that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6–7). God's promises and election are good only for “the children of the promise,” that is, Jewish believers (9:9–26), otherwise called “the remnant.” They “will be saved” at a future time (9:27–29). Accordingly, in spite of appearances, God has not rejected true Israel.

Chapter 10 reveals two reasons why God temporarily set aside national Israel. Only the first will be covered for the purpose of this exposition: God set aside Israel because the nation did not submit to His way to obtain righteousness (10:1–13). In spite of zeal for God, Israel functions apart from His will; they are ignorant of how one receives righteousness before God. For the nation to be saved in history (Phase 2),<sup>1</sup> Israel needs *both* Phase 1 and Phase 2 righteousness (10:1–4). That is, they require Phase 1 righteousness,<sup>2</sup> which a believer receives as a gift at the moment of personal faith in Jesus

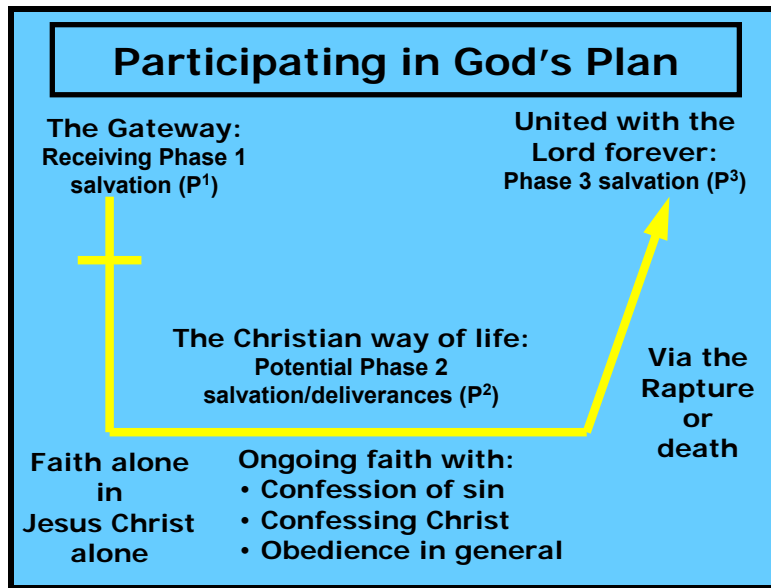
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<sup>1</sup> The terminology (Phase 1, Phase 2, & Phase 3) is employed to describe the *progression* of one's experience or Israel's experience with the Lord. From a progressive point of view, an individual or Israel enters the plan of God by faith at Phase 1. He then proceeds to live out his Christian experience (Phase 2) and ought to produce good works that God considers “righteousness” or righteous works. Finally, he is forever in heaven with the Lord at Phase 3.

<sup>2</sup> In this article, Phase 1 righteousness is used synonymously with eternal salvation. A complete picture of eternal salvation shows, however, that Phase 1 righteousness is one facet of salvation, which includes *all* that a new believer receives “in Christ.” When a believer has one facet of eternal salvation, e.g., eternal life or imputed righteousness, he has all facets. Chafer identified 33 facets that comprise what a believer possesses “in Christ.” See his summary in Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1971), 8:33–35.

Christ; and, then, they need Phase 2 righteousness, which a believer receives as he obeys the Lord (cf. Revelation 19:8; also 2:26). Possessing both kinds of righteousness leads to salvation in this life, i.e., to deliverance from life’s adversities. To impress upon his readers that Israel falls short of both types of righteousness, Paul quotes Moses (10:5–8). Phase 2 righteousness requires those who embrace the Law to live according to the Law (10:5). Moreover, to experience God’s deliverance (salvation) in Phase 2, two happenings must occur whether for Israel or the Church: (a) we must lose the notion that we need more truth and accept the fact that God’s truth is close at hand, not in some far distant place (10:6–7); and (b) we must look to the nearby Word for answers regarding Phase 1 and Phase 2 salvation (10:8).

The diagram below illustrates the abbreviations P<sup>1</sup>, P<sup>2</sup>, and P<sup>3</sup> as they occur in the following exposition.



**The Place of Heart and Mouth (10:9)**

What is the content of this word that is as close as our hearts and mouths? In summary, the means for salvation/deliverance is to confess and to believe, but Israel does neither. The apostle begins, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus” (10:9). By this he denotes that one declares or acknowledges something openly.<sup>3</sup> Parallel examples are Matthew 10:32, which states that one should “confess [Jesus] *before men*,” and 1 Timothy 6:12, which speaks

<sup>3</sup> BDAG, s.v. ὁμολογέω, #4.

of a good confession “in the *presence of many witnesses*.” Accordingly, believers must openly confess “the Lord Jesus,” or “[that] the Lord is Jesus.” This denotes *what* we must confess, or acknowledge. In effect, we must assert that Jesus Christ is God, sovereign over the circumstances from which we seek deliverance.<sup>4</sup> There are four reasons for seeing that acknowledgement of Christ’s deity is at issue:

1. The LXX (Greek Old Testament) uses “Lord” (κύριος) over 6000 times of deity.<sup>5</sup> This overwhelming usage in the Old Testament strongly influenced the way first-century Christians used the term: “Lord” usually denotes God.
2. Paul uses “Lord” (κύριος) in quotations from the Old Testament that signify deity (Yahweh) to indicate the deity of Jesus Christ (cf. 10:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2).
3. In 1 Corinthians 16:22, Paul prays to Christ, saying, “O Lord, come,” showing that he sees Christ as God, because one only prays to God.
4. He links the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, which shows their deity, for they share divine attributes (1:7; 8:35–39; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2).

These passages, along with many others, establish that “Lord” denotes deity. This does not rule out other semantic usages; however, one needs strong internal evidence to overthrow normal usage. Imposing a theological construct on the text is not acceptable. Consequently, to confess that Jesus is Lord is to affirm that He is God. We should ask, “To fulfill the apostle’s exhortation, how comprehensive must a believer’s understanding of Christ’s divine nature be?” Certainly one does not need a full-blown theological grasp of Christ’s deity. It is safe to say that to confess that Jesus *is* Lord,<sup>6</sup> or Jesus *as* Lord,<sup>7</sup> is to acknowledge that Christ is able to follow through on what He promises, protecting and caring for believers. One man put it this way: “We are asked to confess publicly that Jesus is God’s agent with claims to our obedience.”<sup>8</sup>

God promises that when we acknowledge Jesus Christ’s ability to manage troublesome circumstances in our lives, then He begins to work in our lives to

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<sup>4</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1979; repr., Edinburgh: Clark, 1981), 2:529.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> So the ESV, NET, NCV, NIV, and NRSV, Libronix Digital Library System 3.0c (Libronix Corporation, 2000–2006).

<sup>7</sup> So Darby, ASV, NASB95, and WuestNT, Libronix Digital Library System 3.0c (Libronix Corporation, 2000–2006).

<sup>8</sup> Steve Andrew, personal correspondence, March 7, 2007. He does not, however, interpret *kurios* as deity.

deliver us (P<sup>2</sup>). This is not to say that those who assert that Jesus is Lord will no longer have problems, but that in the midst of troubles He will work on their behalf.

But something else must exist in Christians' lives before God will deliver them from troubles. Paul says, "Believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead." "In your heart" clarifies that Paul does not mean merely reciting a creed or vainly mouthing words without understanding, but rather believing the right content. And when you believe this content—i.e., that God has raised Jesus from the dead—"you will be saved." The apostle does not speak of being saved eternally (P<sup>1</sup>) because *that*, as Romans 10:10 will show, happens on the basis of belief in the resurrected Christ for righteousness (cf. 3:20–26). In Romans, there are three usages of the concept of salvation:

*Nouns:*

- In **1:16** (1:15–17), the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, a salvation "from faith to faith," i.e., *from* the first act of faith that forever justifies one *to* the daily continuing exercise of faith by which "the just shall live" in this life. Thus, "salvation" includes both Phase 1 and Phase 2 salvation at the beginning of Romans.
- In **11:11**, salvation, having been removed from the Jews, "has come to the Gentiles." What the Jews lost is not the opportunity individually to go to heaven. They lost their national role in the plan of God. In contrast, the Lord saved the Gentiles in the sense that He has given them unique opportunity to become God's people—the body of Christ. Salvation in chapter 11 is to have been "grafted into" God's plan (cf. 11:17). This embraces Phase 2 deliverance *from* non-status in God's plan *to* a grafted-in status.
- In **13:11**, salvation is used of Phase 3 deliverance out of this life of mortality via resurrection into immortality.

*Verbs:*

- In **5:9–10**, to be saved is to be delivered from God's wrath in this life through the newness of life that God imparts to us. Thus, "to be saved" signifies deliverance in Phase 2.
- In **8:24**, we learn that we were saved in hope. That is, Phase 1 salvation has built into it the hope of Phase 3 salvation. Accordingly, when believers learn what God has done for them at both Phase 1 and 3, they have truth that can sustain them throughout Phase 2, the Christian way of life. Romans 8:25 adds that in Phase 2 "we eagerly wait for it [Phase 3, our entrance into heaven] with perseverance." Thus, "to be saved" is quite pregnant with meaning in chapter 8, including all three Phases of salvation.

- In **9:27**, to be saved is for Israel's faithful remnant to be delivered into their millennial blessings. This is a Phase 2 use of "saved."
- In **11:14**, to be saved is Phase 1 salvation that Paul labors to bring to pass among the Jews.
- In **11:26**, to be saved is Israel's restoration including both Phase 1 and Phase 2 notions.

Starting with **1:15–16**, Paul states that salvation is more than deliverance from hell. It is that, but it is also deliverance from temptation and adversities in this life and then, finally, deliverance from this life into heaven. The majority of uses of the words "save" and "salvation" speaks of God delivering from troubles in the here-and-now those Christians who confess Jesus as Lord. What we have thus far is that two things are required to receive God's deliverance:

Verse	Instruction	Instruction	Result
<b>10:9a</b>	Confess (with your mouth)		<b>You will be saved (P<sup>2</sup>)</b>
<b>10:9b</b>		Believe (in your heart)	
<b>10:10a</b>			
<b>10:10b</b>			

In case 10:9 leaves one confused about the difference between Phase 1 and Phase 2 salvation, the apostle expands the subject in the next four verses.

**Paul Shows What One Must Do to Be Saved (P<sup>2</sup>)  
(10:10–13)**

Romans 10:10<sup>9</sup> begins with *for*: “for with the heart one believes to righteousness.” This explains a differentiation between faith, which results in Phase 1 righteousness, and confession, which results in Phase 2 deliverance. The differentiation is further underscored by Paul first using “heart” with belief and then “mouth” with confession.

“With the heart one believes to righteousness” denoting that one believes in the resurrected Christ for righteousness, resulting in God’s imputation of righteousness to the believer’s account. Thus, we receive God’s Phase 1 righteousness by faith in the resurrected Christ.

Luther’s comment is fitting here: “Many want themselves to be regarded as righteous because they know much, read much, teach much, or because they attain to high honors or do great service in the Church. But all this belongs to civil righteousness, which [*for eternal salvation*] is rejected by God.”<sup>10</sup>

Romans 10:10 reveals that believing in the resurrected Christ for righteousness saves one for eternity. A man on a desert island who plucks a bottle out of the ocean with Romans 10 in it has a sufficient gospel able to save him forever.

The apostle continues, “And with the mouth confession is made to salvation.” No apostle says that along with faith, “confession” is something we must do to receive salvation from hell (P<sup>1</sup>). So what does Paul mean when he says we may confess “to salvation”? Note the chiasmic structure of 10:9–10:

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<sup>9</sup> René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century), 212–13, says, “Although Paul begins in v 9 by mentioning confession before belief, the conjunction *for* in 10:10 explains the correct logical sequence of occurrence, as v 14 explains the correct sequence that leads to a proper interpretation of the kind of salvation in view.”

<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 148.

Verse	Instruction	Instruction	Result
10:9a	Confess (with your mouth)		Will be saved (P <sup>2</sup> )
10:9b		Believe (in your heart)	
<b>“For” (γὰρ)</b>			
10:10a		Believe (in your heart)	Receive +R (P <sup>1</sup> )
<b>“But” (δὲ)</b>			
10:10b	Confess (with your mouth)		Be delivered (P <sup>2</sup> )

In 10:9, “saved” speaks of Phase 2 salvation. Yet verse 9 by itself, taken apart from verse 10, may seem to say that faith *plus* confession brings about Phase 1 salvation; that is, one must both believe and confess; faith by itself is inadequate.<sup>11</sup>

Verse 10, however, removes all doubt. The “for” (see above diagram) introduces the reason for what he has taught in 10:9 when he said, “believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead” (10:9b). Verse 10 shows he means that when one believes in his heart, one “believes to righteousness,” which is eternal salvation (P<sup>1</sup>). Then the “but” introduces a differentiation between Phase 1 and Phase 2 *salvation* with the latter signifying the deliverances God promises to those who confess that Jesus is Lord. We see then that we believe in the resurrected Christ for imputed righteousness (Phase 1 salvation) and we additionally confess for Phase 2 salvation.

The next verse attaches a promise: “For the scripture says, ‘whoever believes on him will not be put to shame’” (10:11), where “for” introduces a quotation from Isaiah 28:16, explaining why it is that those who confess are delivered and why those who believe in the resurrected Christ receive God’s righteousness. Plainly put, the promise is that “whoever believes will not be put to shame,” or suffer embarrassment and/or disappointment because what he has hoped in fails him. Accordingly, based on verses 9–10, shame is not

<sup>11</sup> Such a view would be obviously in disagreement with what the apostle teaches in chapters 3–5 on justification by faith alone.

the experience of one who believes in the resurrected Christ for imputed righteousness *and* confesses that Jesus is Lord.

Why this promise? Because the Lord “is rich toward all who call upon Him.” He lavishes His grace and care without respect of persons on any believer who seeks the Lord’s help (10:12). Who is this “Lord”? Jesus Christ (cf. 10:9)! He is the One to call upon! Ephesians 3:20 says that He is “able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,” first of all positionally, then experientially.

But what does calling on the Lord mean? What does it look like? “To call upon” is an ancient expression for praying or making an appeal to one’s god. The expression occurs 30 times in the New Testament. For example, in a courtroom context we see the following: In Acts 25:11, Paul, who is on trial, says, “I *appeal* to Caesar.” And in Acts 25:12 Festus replies, “*You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go*” (italics mine; cf. 25:21, 25; 26:32; 28:19). Thus, we learn that to appeal to another is to seek help from him.

In contexts dealing with the Lord and His people, we see the notion of appealing to or calling out to the Lord for help.

- a. Acts 7:59: “they stoned Stephen as *he was calling* on God and saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” This appears to merge Phase 2 and Phase 3 usages of appealing to Jesus Christ. Stephen was not asking for eternal salvation (P<sup>1</sup>).
- b. Acts 9:14 and 21 refer to *believers* who call on Christ’s name. These are Phase 2 usages.
- c. Acts 22:16: “having risen, be baptized, and *having called* on the name of the Lord, wash away your sins.” This is Phase 1 usage where individuals sought the Lord for eternal salvation, leading to forgiveness of sins.
- d. 1 Corinthians 1:2: “to the church which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified [Phase 1] in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” To call here is Phase 2 usage. Those already eternally saved sought the Lord for help in their daily troubles.
- e. 2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with *those who call* on the Lord out of a pure heart.” This too is Phase 2 usage.

The apostle summarizes: “for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13, quoting from Joel 2:32). Joel’s context speaks of events that take place “before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord



shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls” (Joel 2:31b–32).

Joel has Phase 2 deliverance in view, that is, deliverance from the terrible judgments on earth during Daniel’s 70th Week. Paul takes that and applies it to Christians in the Church dispensation. Every believer who calls “upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,” that is, delivered either out of his terrible and life-shattering circumstances or while in the midst of them. Either way, God promises to deliver believers *and* confessors who call upon the name of the Lord. They will not be disappointed.

**Summary**

Three things are required to experience God’s delivering hand on a day-to-day basis.

1. We must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, resulting in imputed righteousness (10:9b–10a). This is the starting point: *note that belief in the resurrected Christ for righteousness delivers the righteousness promised, thus securing heaven for the believer.* No one who possesses this righteousness will lose out on eternity with the Lord. Paul’s good news has the same result as John’s or Peter’s good news: heaven.

Verse	Instruction	Instruction	Result
10:9a	Confess (with your mouth)		Will be saved (P <sup>2</sup> )
10:9b		Believe (in your heart)	
“For” (γὰρ)			
10:10a		Believe (in your heart)	Receive +R (P <sup>1</sup> )
10:10b			

<b>Refocus on Phase 1</b>		
<b>Romans 10:9-10</b>		
		<i>Believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead (10:9b).</i>  (Point: One must possess P <sup>1</sup> salvation before P <sup>2</sup> deliverances)
	<i>For</i>	
<i>With the heart one believes unto righteousness (P<sup>1</sup>) (10:10a).</i>  Righteousness guarantees eternal salvation.		

2. Deliverance is for believers who acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, able to protect and care for His people (10:9a, 10b). This is what a Christian does, *not* what an unbeliever does.

Verse	Instruction	Instruction	Result
10:9a	Confess (with your mouth)		Will be saved (P <sup>2</sup> )
10:9b		Believe (in your heart)	
<b>“For” (γάρ)</b>			
10:10a		Believe (in your heart)	Receive +R (P <sup>1</sup> )
<b>“But” (δὲ)</b>			
10:10b	Confess (with your mouth)		Be delivered (P <sup>2</sup> )

<b>Refocus on Phase 2 Romans 10:9-10</b>		
<i>If you [a Christian] confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus ... you will be saved (P<sup>2</sup>) (10:9a, c)</i>		
	<i>For</i>	
		<i>With the mouth confession [by a Christian] is made unto deliverance (P<sup>2</sup>) (10:10b)</i>

The preceding two points presuppose that believers discern that the plan of God is not simply concerned with saving us at a point in the past or into heaven in the future, but also with salvation/deliverance from difficulties each day of our lives.

3. In addition, the Father promises that those who call upon the Lord will not be put to shame. Closet believers need not call!

<b>Understanding Romans 10:9-10</b>		
<i>If you [a believer] confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus . . . (10:9a)</i>	<i>and [if you] believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead [<i>thus receive righteousness</i>] . . . (10:9b)</i>	<i>You will be saved, that is, delivered (P<sup>2</sup>) (10:9c)</i>
<b>For</b>		
<i>With the heart one believes <i>unto righteousness</i> (10:10a), i.e., one believes in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ to receive the gift of imputed righteousness (cf. 3:21-22).</i>		
<b>But</b>		
<i>With the mouth confession is made <i>to salvation</i> (10:10b), i.e., one overtly confesses to receive God's gifts of deliverance from temptation and trials in this life.</i>		

## Conclusion<sup>12</sup>

### Engaging Objections

Interaction with others over this passage has raised objections and/or questions, which I will address in this concluding section.

Question #1: “Does God give the unbeliever the gospel? If so, which book does He use? If God sets aside one specific book to evangelize the unbeliever, why would God send a floating bottle to an unbeliever on a desert island containing Romans 10?”

The question presupposes that God has given Phase 1 salvation information in one book only and that, therefore, we should not expect to find it in other New Testament books. This is an extreme and impossible view to validate, as the Romans passage reveals. If one admits that other books of the Bible have within them information concerning eternal salvation, even though that is not the primary purpose of these books/epistles, then why would God not send an unbeliever on a desert island a non-Johannine salvation (P<sup>1</sup>) passage? It is easier to fit Romans 10 in that bottle than the Gospel of John.

Furthermore, slavish adherence to the written Gospel of John for doing the work of evangelism implies that the rest of the New Testament lacks power to win unbelievers to Christ. That is a bizarre notion. Actually, the primary, normative method of evangelism is verbal communication, where believers use their own words—informed by the whole counsel of God—to approach unbelievers. Even Romans 10 throws its light on the verbal preaching of the Word when it says, “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not *heard*? And how shall they *hear* without a *preacher*? And how shall they *preach* unless they are sent?” (10:14–15, italics mine). In addition, 10:17 says that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Observe that the apostle’s emphasis is on preaching and hearing. “The written word of God needs always to be uniquely contextualized—*without changing its essential content*—to communicate to the unique circumstances of individual unbelievers. Paul did this, e.g., in his speech to the Areopagus.”<sup>13</sup>

Question #2: “Your exegesis of Romans 10 states that one may believe in Jesus’ promise of righteousness as a means to heaven. Where in 10:10 is there a promise to unbelievers of righteousness as a means to heaven?”

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<sup>12</sup> Though it is not customary in journal articles, I will not mention individuals throughout the conclusion, so that the focus may be on content and not on personages.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew, personal correspondence, March 7, 2007. The content of the paragraph preceding this quotation was suggested by Andrew’s letter.

Another presupposition seems to be at work behind the question, i.e., that a book written to Christians does not have Phase 1 information for non-Christians. The presupposition is false because the apostle does in fact explain what an *unbeliever* may believe to receive righteousness before God: “If you . . . believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness.” From a different perspective, Romans 3 makes the same point. Absolutely no one with imputed righteousness will go to hell, only to heaven. Imputed righteousness is, therefore, a means to heaven. Anyone without imputed righteousness is not yet eternally saved, regardless of what else he has believed.

**Question #3:** “In your understanding of Romans 10, the content of belief is Christ’s resurrection. The unbeliever must believe in Christ’s resurrection, which results in receiving righteousness, i.e., becoming saved eternally. Does not this make Christ’s resurrection the means to heaven? If so, does everyone who believes in Christ’s resurrection go to heaven, even though he is not sure where he will end up when he dies?”

Let me first address the word “must.” My exposition does not imply “must” but “may.” Romans 10:9–10 indicates that an unbeliever may believe in the resurrected Christ, and if he does, God will impute righteousness in keeping with His veracity and immutability. And, yes, this does make personal faith in the resurrected Christ a (not “the”) means to heaven because everyone, without exception, possessing imputed righteousness will go to heaven.

This question touches on the issue of assurance. I suspect that there will be many people in heaven who died not sure where they would end up. Because of unsound teaching, they lost confidence that their place in heaven was secure. In fact, the apostle John gave us 1 John 5:11–13 to provide sound doctrine, thus enabling *believers* to shore up their assurance of eternal salvation. Nevertheless, in the same way that the Holy Spirit gives assurance (initially) to one who believes in Jesus Christ for eternal life, so the Holy Spirit gives assurance to everyone who believes in the resurrected Christ for righteousness.

John 16:8–11 indicates that one of the Spirit’s ministries to unbelievers is to convince (ἐλέγχω) them regarding the matter of righteousness. The Spirit *persuades*: He does not enable an individual merely to wonder or suppose that he has deficient righteousness before a holy God. On the other hand, He persuades a believer that imputed righteousness prepares him for heaven. Thus, at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, a believer will *know*<sup>14</sup> that he has

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<sup>14</sup> I derive the concept of “knowing” from the convincing ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8–11). Cf. Eph. 1:18, “the eyes of your understanding having been

righteousness or eternal life. Why? Because the Spirit works through the living and abiding Word (preached or written) to implant such confidence within the new believer. However, I would not contend that mere faith in the historical fact of Christ's resurrection is a means to heaven. The means according to Romans 10 is personal faith that the resurrected Christ will deliver on His promise of imputed righteousness. This is a very important distinction.

Question #4: "If Christ's resurrection is the means to righteousness, which equals 'eternally saved,' why were the eleven disciples (Thomas in particular) eternally saved, in spite of the fact that they initially refused to believe in Christ's resurrection?"

Observe first that the 12 apostles, including Thomas, were eternally saved *before* the death and resurrection of Christ. They did not have an historical resurrection event to put in the content/object of their faith any more than millions of believers prior to Christ's resurrection.

According to 1 Corinthians 15, there were Christians (washed, sanctified, justified, cf. 6:11) who denied the resurrection ("some among you," 15:12). Now, it is hardly conceivable that after Christ's resurrection, one would, on the one hand, believe in Jesus for eternal salvation but, on the other hand and at the same moment, reject that He rose from the dead. It is, however, possible for a believer to fall into rejecting the resurrection because of carnality that is stoked by rationalism, materialism, bad doctrine, etc. Nevertheless, as a believer, he possesses imputed righteousness and eternal life.

Question #5: "If a person understands that believing in Christ's resurrection is the means to righteousness, how does he then conceive of righteousness as the means to eternal salvation?"

This question seems to turn on the notion of "eternity" or "eternal." The idea of eternity is implicit in Romans 10. In many passages, though certainly not all, John's Gospel is explicit about eternal life. Romans 9 mentions "the eternally blessed God" (9:5) and since He promises imputed righteousness through faith in the resurrected Christ, it makes sense (even to an unbeliever) that God's promise is likewise eternal. Eternality is seen in 11:29: "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." These eternal gifts include imputed righteousness. Accordingly, eternity is implicit in Romans 10 for (a) nothing suggests that once God imputes righteousness, He will withdraw it, and (b) an immutable God gives the gift of righteousness, which is tantamount to eternal

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enlightened" (πεφωτισμένους). When the Spirit enlightens one's understanding, that individual does in fact *understand*. He knows; he is not left puzzling about the matter.

salvation (P<sup>1</sup>). This gift is prerequisite to calling on the name of the Lord for deliverance (P<sup>2</sup>) throughout one's Christian experience.

An unbeliever does not have to have a theological degree to put two and two together regarding this matter. Moreover, we should not underestimate the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit to enable an unbeliever to understand and believe Phase 1 content wherever he finds it in the Bible.

Question #6: "How will an unbeliever understand this passage as you have, when he does not have a theological background?"

Assuming that an unbeliever has only Romans 10, the answer is the same as the answer to question #5. As an unbeliever, one may look at 10:9–10 and see that if he believes in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, he will believe to righteousness. He would say to himself, "God promises that my faith is unto righteousness; I believe it, and so I have it. Over and out!" Furthermore, though it is true that many have become Christians by merely reading the Bible, e.g., a Gideon Bible in a motel room, this is not the norm. If someone does evangelism using Romans or Ephesians, he will inevitably use verbal explanation and/or exposition. The same is true of the Gospel of John. Finally, if the written Word is all one needs, why did God give the gift of evangelism? Does one with this gift merely hand the written Word to unbelievers and exhort them to read it?

#### **Additional comments**

As the following shows, some comments regarding Phase 1 doctrinal information are inexplicable, not to say contradictory. On the one hand, a man says approvingly, "I believe that Jesus paid for all my sins, so by grace He will let me in." This statement views Jesus' by-grace payment for sins as the means by which the believer is able to live forever with God in heaven."

Clearly, then, believing that Jesus paid for one's sins is a means by which one gets into heaven. Yet, on the other hand, the same individual says that one may be saved only by believing in Christ for eternal life. One cannot have it both ways. Either one is saved solely by faith in Christ resulting in eternal life, or one may also be saved by believing that Jesus paid for all one's sins. Accordingly, the means of eternal salvation is either solely faith regarding eternal life or also faith in Christ's payment for one's sins.

Sometimes one affirms the content of saving faith as follows: the idea of eternal life is the core, the central part that cannot be omitted; it is the irreducible minimum. Accordingly, one affirms that an unbeliever may believe in Christ for forgiveness, *but* along with his faith in Christ for forgiveness there must be at least an implicit sense of eternity, heaven, or some such notion. Without that sense or knowledge of eternity, the individual remains lost, bound for hell.

An example of the above supposition is that one may say, “I believe in Jesus for justification by faith alone, which *implies* that this believer will live with God forever.” Accordingly, believing in Jesus for justification by faith—coupled with an implicit sense of heaven—is what eternally saves a believer. Nevertheless, though this new believer is heaven-bound, some label this an unwise approach to evangelism. Why? Because, they contend, an *explicit* mention of eternal life must be present for a gospel presentation to be wise or skillful.

Is an explicit mention of eternal life necessary? Yes, they answer, because the Gospel of John is the only book targeting unbelievers and John contains a strong emphasis on eternal life.<sup>15</sup> In addition, they insinuate that the Gospel of John gives us a superior gospel that excludes, or at least makes substandard, what the other apostles say about imputed righteousness or forgiveness. This must be judged wrong-headed. Any gospel message rooted in biblical soteriological content (P<sup>1</sup>) offers a sufficient and wise gospel message that results in the eternal salvation of those who believe.

It is also a misuse of hermeneutics to embrace the Gospel of John’s slant on the gospel and then impose it on other apostolic writings. This emulates the erroneous hermeneutic used by Reformed theologians who superimpose God’s sovereignty on passages that speak of volition. For example, one may interpret Romans 10:9–10 but not permit the passage to stand on its own. Instead, one explicitly or implicitly imposes belief in eternal life on top of or beside belief in the resurrected Christ for imputed righteousness. Overlaying John’s thrust on Paul or Peter is misguided and certainly does not approach the gospel like a child would.

Yet, is it *wise* to include in our gospel presentation a statement, or at least an allusion, to heaven or eternity with God? Yes. At least on one occasion we see Paul mentioning such in his communication with Timothy (1 Timothy 1:15–16). But is explicitly mentioning “eternal life” an absolute, in contrast to wise? That is, *must* it always be made explicit before one can receive eternal life plus all a believer possesses “in Christ”? The answer is that no Scripture requires such—one only arrives at such a conclusion by specious extrapolation. This being the case, it is legalism to insist that presenting the gospel in terms of eternal life is the only way to go about evangelism. Here is a good place to apply Romans 14:6b, “Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.” Our attitude should be “live and let live.”

If one wants to use the Gospel of John to evangelize, we pray that God would bless him with many converts. His fruit will show the wisdom of his methodology. If one wants to use Romans 3 or 10, may God greatly bless his

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<sup>15</sup> The next CTS Journal will include an article that addresses the contention that John’s purpose was to evangelize unbelievers.



efforts, and his converts will show the wisdom of his methodology. If one wants to use a combination of *biblical* ways to present the gospel—all of which will be authoritative because all of Scripture is God-breathed—his fruit will show the wisdom of his approach. As a sidebar, however, God’s grace and the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit are such that sometimes one’s fruit is not because of methodology, but in spite of it!

There are those who label presenting the gospel in any way other than by making the issue of eternal life central “unfortunate.” *That* is an unfortunate remark. To say it is unfortunate that a person has been born again because he believed the gospel of imputed righteousness or forgiveness does not follow the example of angels, who rejoice when one is born again (Luke 15:10)! Angels do not observe one’s conversion and then make clucking noises about how a supposed unfortunate method was employed to lead one to Christ. An overemphasized adherence to using an eternal-life-only approach in evangelism, which intimates that other approaches are substandard, is surely ungracious, not to say arrogant. The fruit of different approaches over the centuries, because they too are biblical, belies such an attitude, and thank God that those thus saved will be in heaven forever.

Sometimes an attempt is made to relate Acts 16:31 to 1 Timothy 1:15–16. Why? To show that 1 Timothy explains more explicitly what Paul meant in Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ [*for eternal life*] and you will be saved.” This may very well be what Paul said, though Luke leaves the matter open. One may use a similar methodology or hermeneutic and relate Acts 16:31 to Romans 10. That is, the apostle said to the Philippian jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ [*for imputed righteousness*] and you will be saved.” Again, Luke did not include all Paul said; he summarized.

An exclusive approach to evangelism claims that when Paul addresses unbelievers or when he summarizes his gospel for believers, everlasting life is the core. It is a stretch, however, to draw the conclusion that because Paul mentioned eternal life in 1 Timothy 1, he always did. Why contend for such a position? Because, the exclusive crowd says, the Gospel of John makes eternal life prominent. One can argue convincingly, however, that Romans 3 and 10 make imputed righteousness, not everlasting life, the core. If one wants to include eternal life explicitly in the gospel of righteousness—no harm, no foul. But we should resist a temptation to make the mention of eternal life an absolute by which we judge other methods of evangelism good or bad, wise or ill-advised. To do so is bald-faced legalism with typical accompanying maltreatment, for the son of the bondwoman persecutes the son of the free woman.

What can we say of the contention that since the audiences in the epistles consist of believers, and John’s audience—at least in part—consists of unbelievers, we should understand the true gospel to include the notion of

everlasting life, making this the irreducible minimum? For example, some argue that Paul wrote Romans 10 and 1 Corinthians 15 to believers; thus, the apostle is reinforcing the message of everlasting life, not moving away from it. Paul, however, says nothing about eternal life in the key portions of those passages. Observe that anyone who argues this way superimposes the Gospel of John's message on Paul, rather than letting Paul speak for himself, by himself. Paul does not need the Apostle John's help any more than the Apostle John needs Paul's help to present a sufficient gospel message.

Finally, some talk about "a fuzzy core [referring to whatever is not in John's Gospel] and a clear Johannine core." The problem is the nature of the comparison. It is true that the Gospel of John's core is not fuzzy—meaning it is explicit—regarding faith in Christ for eternal life. On the other hand, as the exposition of Romans 10:9–10 in the preceding pages disclosed, Paul's core is about imputed righteousness. He is not fuzzy but clear that an unbeliever may be saved for eternity through faith in the resurrected Christ for imputed righteousness. Having said that, however, it may be that when the notion of eternal life is not made explicit, it may be implicit: one believes in the resurrected Christ for righteousness with an intuitive awareness that it grants him access to heaven forever.

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