

June 4, 2017

Galatians 3:1-9 / Luke 18:9-14 / Romans 10:1-4
Religious, Zealous and Sincere, But Still Not Saved

One of the common responses after hearing Paul speak about predestination and election, is to ask a question that goes something like this:

“If what you’ve said about these things is true – that God chooses to have mercy on certain people and hardens others (vv. 15, 17, 18, and 21-24) – then why do we bother doing evangelism, or why waste our time on missions?” / If God predestines people to be saved, why do we need to do anything?”

That’s a question I get asked all the time, whenever I preach, or teach, on this particular Gospel topic from Romans 8:28-9:33. Yet this is by no means the only place we find it! We also find it in Matt. 11:27 & 24:24 / Jn. 6:35-65 / Jn. 10:1-30 / Eph. 1:1-14 / various places in Acts (13:48, 16:13-15, 18:9-11) / II Tim. 2:10 / I Peter 1:1-2 / and others.

Yet, if that was your initial response at hearing these doctrines of grace, hopefully my message from last Sunday went a long way to help! In fact, hopefully, rather than making you question why we need to do evangelism or missions, it made you see why it’s so absolutely imperative that we tell people about Him!

For as Paul made clear from vv. 30-33, setting CHRIST and ALL HE DID before the eyes of people, is the means God has chosen to use, to harden the hearts of some, and soften the hearts of others. It all revolves around people’s response to Him! That was Paul’s point in 9:33 where he quoted Is. 8:14, and then followed it up with Is. 28:16.

Isaiah 8:14 speaks of the hardening effect Jesus can have on some people, as the *“stone that makes people stumble and the rock that makes them fall.”* And Isaiah 28:16 speaks of the softening effect He has in

bringing others to place their trust in Him, so as never to be ashamed. It all has to do with how they react to Jesus and the Gospel message.

And as we turn to the text, the **FIRST** thing we see from vv. 1-4, is that everything Paul has just shared in reference to predestination and election in no way diminishes his yearning to see his fellow Israelites saved! For despite the fact that he *knows* only some of his fellow Jews will be softened toward Jesus, while the vast majority would remain hardened – he still yearns for their salvation and prays toward that end (v. 1).

In fact, as we know from Acts 20-25, he didn't just desire it and pray for it, he also did all he could on his part to work toward that end, by going to Jerusalem, and sharing the Gospel in there, before some who were hardened toward Jesus stirred up opposition against him, managed to get him arrested for doing so, and were the impetus behind him being shipped off to Rome to stand trial.

You see, believing in election & predestination did nothing to quench the fire in Paul's soul to see his fellow Israelites saved! Even though he *knew* many were hardened against Christ (and would continue to be, opposing him at every turn) he still sought to bring them the message of Jesus. Because in the end, these two doctrines don't even really come into play when it comes to evangelism and missions.

After all, who the elect are, is not ours to know! That's all part of the "secret things" that belong to God alone. But HOW He has determined to save them, is not! That has been revealed & Scripture makes it clear it's by setting Jesus and the Good News about Him, before them!

You see, God has not only ordained that His elect be saved, He has also ordained the way they would come to partake of that salvation. And that is through the preaching of the Good News about Christ.

When Christ is preached many will fight, and resist, and mock the message – and continue to until the day they die. Even some of the elect will initially do that, or do it for quite some time. (I fought Christ with all my might for over a decade.) But over time those He has chosen will find themselves being irresistibly drawn to Him by the beauty of Christ and a growing desire to know Him.

You see, for Paul, just knowing that by his preaching Christ *SOME* would be saved, was enough! He didn't need to be convinced there was a potential for everyone to be saved in order to preach. Nor did he need to rid his mind of the truths of election and predestination. He simply needed to know what God has revealed – that by preaching Christ, and setting Christ before people, God would do the rest and bring His elect to faith.

At some point they *would* come! And for Paul, simply knowing *THAT* made it worth all the time, and prayers, and blood, and sweat, and tears!

In fact, Paul tells us that very thing in II Tim. 2:10, where he gives us the often overlooked motivation for his doing missions and evangelism. For there, after telling us he was willing to suffer even, *“to the point of being chained like a criminal,”* he goes on to say in v. 10: *“Therefore, I endure everything FOR THE SAKE OF THE ELECT, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”*

You see, like us Paul had no idea who the elect were, until they came to faith (which is, by the way, the only way to know who they are)! Fight and resist though they may (at certain points in their life), when God moves powerfully in their hearts, the elect will eventually come, in faith, to Christ – enabled by His grace (John 6:44).

And that truth is actually what gives us great CONFIDENCE in doing evangelism and missions! Those who know their Bibles know that the elect are out there! They are scattered among all the people's of the world (Rev. 7:9).

In fact, on one occasion, when Paul was discouraged, and about to give up and leave Corinth because of the persecution, God essentially told Paul that! One night in a vision, Christ said to Paul: *“Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, and do not be silent...”* And then, after saying he would protect him, he told him why it was that he was to stay: *“for I have many people in this city”* (Acts 18:9-11).

He didn't tell Paul who they were, but He told him they were there! And thus Paul stayed on for another year and ½ ! And when the “many” heard about Jesus through Paul's preaching, they did eventually come to Christ.

So, think of how this truth boosts one's confidence and resolve! Being ready to give up, and then being told by Jesus, “Don't stop! I have many people in this place.” They haven't responded yet, but they will if you keep at it!

And it was THEM, says Paul – NOT ALL PEOPLE, but GOD'S ELECT, and seeing them *“obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus,”* that drove him to press on through all kinds of trials and hardships and suffering.

“I endure EVERYTHING,” he says, *“for the sake of the ELECT, that THEY ALSO (those who haven't yet come to Christ) might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.”*

It's the same motivation I go to India with, or preach my monthly broadcast with. Do I expect all the people who listen to come to Christ? Not at all! Do I need to think that all CAN come? No!

Do I need to rid myself of the scriptural understanding that God has chosen and predestines certain people to salvation to keep my passion to reach the lost? NO! It fuels my passion and confidence! For I KNOW from the Scriptures, that God's “elect” are scattered among all the peoples of the earth. And when those people hear of Christ, through the

Gospel message, THEY WILL AT SOME POINT COME! Everyone won't, but they will. And so I preach!

In fact, my own goal in preaching is the same as Paul's. I do it all, *“for the sake of the ELECT, that THEY ALSO might obtain the salvation that is IN CHRIST JESUS, with eternal glory.”*

It's this doctrine of election that assures me that if I preach the Word long enough, and present Christ to enough people, some people WILL come – because GOD has ordained that HE WILL bring them in!

And it's NOT up to my persuasiveness, or techniques, or showmanship, or fancy gimmicks, or any of that stuff! I'm just one of many mouths through which God speaks, to bring His elect, *“to obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.”* Something God does through His Spirit, as His Word is preached.

Which brings us to the **SECOND** thing we can learn from this passage: That it's very possible for a person, or group of people, to be very earnest, and even zealous for God – but have that zeal be completely off-base. That it's possible to be totally sincere in what you believe about God, but be sincerely wrong.

In my travels I meet many people who are zealous for their religion, or their idols, or their gods, or their unknown higher power. Paul met people like that in Athens, and told them: *“Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are VERY RELIGIOUS. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship (and he means their idols) I even found one with this inscription: “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.”* (Acts 17:22-23)

And from there, he went on to preach Jesus to them. Because it isn't enough to simply be “very religious.” It's not sufficient to be zealous about what you believe. Because, the issue is not one's zeal, but what (or biblically speaking, who) they are zealous about!

Growing up in New England, where universalism is rampant, the typical response when evaluating anyone's beliefs (regardless of what they are, be it a cult, or a sect, or whatever) is typically this: *"It doesn't matter what they believe, as long as they're sincere."*

Unfortunately, Paul would disagree! Because he would say (as is stated in our passage for today) it's not one's earnestness or zeal for what they believe that saves them. It's faith in Jesus! God does not accept people simply because they're earnest or zealous about what they believe.

As one of my professors in seminary liked to point out: Hitler was extremely zealous for his cause and earnestly believed he was right. That's how he attracted so many followers. But his zeal and earnestness didn't make his beliefs, or what he did, acceptable. For as Paul points out here, you can be zealous with "a zeal not based in knowledge," and thus, very misled, very wrong and very lost.

So, of the Jews in his day Paul says in v. 2: *"They are zealous for God, but their zeal is NOT based in knowledge."* That is, they ARE very earnest and zealous, but they're zealous about the wrong thing!

Instead of being zealous about Christ, and the saving righteousness God gives as a gift to all who believe in Jesus, they were zealous about convincing people they must obey all the O.T. laws, and all the additional ones they added to it to be saved.

And it isn't just the Jews of Paul's day that had this mistaken zeal. We still see it today. People who are zealous, but for all the wrong things – even in the church. People who make it sound like they're zealous for God, when in reality, their zeal is in promoting certain political views at God's expense. And doing it all while rarely (if ever) speaking about the forgiving grace of Jesus, and the righteousness He offers as THE GIFT that saves all who will embrace Him by faith, and with Him, His saving righteousness.

There are people who are religious, and zealous, but for just about everything EXCEPT Jesus. People who will rarely, if ever, pull someone aside out of an earnest and prayer-saturated yearning to speak of Jesus and see them saved, yet will passionately reference God to in defending their right to bear arms. Like the bumper sticker I saw on a car a few weeks back, which said: *“I carry my gun in one hand, and my Bible in the other.”* Yup – can definitely picture Jesus doing that!

People who will talk in a generic sense about God, yet merely use Him as a platform for earnestly defending free-market enterprise, or to passionately pray He’ll favor their favorite sports team in the big game.

People who speak about *“God and country”* but keep the passionate emphasis on “country.”

People who mention God, or Jesus, in passing, but then come alive with passion and zeal when they start promoting all kinds of fads, and products, and programs, and diets, and money-making gimmicks. They’re zealous about those things, but rarely speak with anywhere near as much passion when it comes to our desperate need to trust in Jesus.

Like the Jews of Paul’s day, they do have zeal – and it often has a religious, or semi-Christian flavor to it. But it’s a zeal that LACKS the knowledge of what’s really the most important to God.

So, I plead with you, friends, if you’re going to take a passionate stand, and live your life zealously, please do it for what’s really important, Jesus.

Because 100 years from now – *should the Lord tarry* – there may not even be a United States of America (just as there’s no longer a country named Prussia, or The Belgian Congo, or German East Africa, or empires called the Roman Empire or the Ottoman Empire.

Just like the Federalists, or the Whigs, or the Free Soil Party, the terms Democrat and Republican (which get people so wound up) may be

terms that only historians refer to. And yes, 100 years from now, no one will really care (or remember) who won the 2015 World Series, or the 2017 Super Bowl.

But you know what? 100 years from now I can guarantee you (if Christ hasn't returned) people will still be talking about Jesus! All those other things, important as they seemed to some at the time (*countries, empires, clothing fads, sports teams & political parties*) have all disappeared. But Jesus is still preached.

Those other things proved irrelevant and outdated, but Jesus is still passionately proclaimed. Those who were zealous about Him did NOT waste their lives, their energies or their passion!

Which brings us to our **LAST** point: How it is that the Israelites were wrong, and thus in need of saving – despite their earnest zeal for God? I covered it last week – so I'll try not to be too repetitive, but as we saw then, and as we see again today, it was a matter of their incorrect, distorted, and misguided understanding of the purpose of God's law.

Instead of allowing it to do its God-intended work of showing them they were sinners in need of a Savior, and thus guiding them to Christ (as God intended), they persisted (even contrary to reason) to teach that obedience to the Law is the way one earns their salvation.

God gave it with the intention that it would drive them to see they couldn't ever obey it sufficiently, and, thus, cause them to see their need for the righteousness that comes from Him as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

It was MEANT to show them their need to depend on God, His grace, and His righteousness – so that **HE** might get all the glory in salvation!

But they didn't get it! It's like a drill Sargent in the army, who gives his recruits a task that's absolutely impossible to carry out on their own.

Like carrying a 2500 lb / 50 foot telephone pole / 500 yards!

Not to be mean, or contrary, or nasty – but because He wants to teach them the need to work together as a group, and depend on each other.

He's NOT proud of the recruit who refuses to admit he can't do it, he gets irritated that he's so slow to catch on! Because the whole purpose of the exercise is to show him he can't possibly do it alone / and thus needs to seek the help of others! It's NOT a trick challenge where he hopes the man will continue trying to do what he could never possibly do!

No! Twenty-five men, spaced 2 feet apart, and thus carrying 100 lbs each of the weight, can easily do it.

The men the drill Sargent is the most pleased with, are the ones who figure that out the quickest and enlist the help of others! And the same is true with God and His Law.

It was MEANT to show us we couldn't possibly obey it as He demands, so that we'd seek Christ, look to Him in faith, and depend of His grace – NOT foolishly keep on trying to offer God our pitifully inadequate attempts to drag that 2500 lb telephone pole called the Law, 500 yards, by ourselves!

That's what Paul means when he says "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes"! He doesn't mean the law has been done away with. Or that God now wants Christians to ignore it as a guide to right moral living.

He means that Christ was the goal of the law and fulfiller of the law. *"This remarkable passage," says Calvin, "declares that the law in all its parts has reference to Christ..."*

It points to Christ! It was meant to lead us to seek, and then trust, in Christ!

And if it does mean “*end*” in the “*do away with*” sense, it simply means that Christ is definitively the “*end*” to ever being able to even suggest that our obedience to the law can save us! NO! The saving work of Jesus has brought to an end (once and for all) the silly and irrational suggestion that a sinner could save himself by his attempts to obey the law!

For its purpose, as Paul has pointed out, was to lead us to Christ – the ONLY ONE who has ever perfectly obeyed and fulfilled it. And by perfectly obeying and fulfilling it, He can now offer Himself as the righteousness God accepts, to all who will believe.

Not to all who work for it, but all who believe! Not to all who will try to obey it perfectly, but all who will believe! It’s not by effort, it’s by faith! It doesn’t come to the one who slaves, but the one who trusts! Because righteousness doesn’t come through the law, it comes through Christ!

Like those military men given that impossible task, God does not want us to keep on trying to do the impossible! He wants us to admit we can’t do it, and believe in the One He sent to help us – Christ!

Do it now, my friends, if you have not. For only Christ saves. And when you discover THAT (as the Bible teaches in John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and other passages) it will enflame your zeal to make Him known!

If you believe all roads lead to God, or that there are other paths to salvation, you will lose all zeal to speak of Christ! In fact, there’s no reason to even speak about Jesus if everyone’s path leads to heaven! Paul prays for the salvation of his Jewish brethren, because their path – *the path of works* – would not save them. Nor will yours, unless it leads to Jesus, God’s appointed and only means for saving all who will believe.