

INTRODUCTION

You know America loves to take polls and surveys. It seems our nation’s leaders are more in tune with the polls and the surveys than they are in doing what is right and moral and just. Isn’t it interesting though that one recent survey determined 58% of Americans don’t believe the results of polls and surveys. I don’t know if you can believe that poll or survey either. In survey after survey after survey of Americans asked, “What’s the most important thing in life?” the number one answer is always, “How can I be happy?” You know worldly happiness is like a smoke bubble. It’s there for a moment...POP...and then it’s gone. It’s so hard to stay happy. Maybe you can relate to the person who prayed this prayer. He said, “Dear Lord. So far today I am doing pretty good. I haven’t lost my temper. I haven’t been grumpy, selfish or rude. But, in a few moments I am going to have to get out of bed and then I’m going to need your help for the rest of the day.” The number one most important question should not be “How can I be happy?” The utmost question in the mind of every person ought to be, “How can I be saved?” “How can I be saved?” In Romans 10, Paul tells us how to be saved. He tells us how not to be saved and how to be saved. Let’s look at the first 8 verses.

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 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. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ [to bring Christ down] or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ [to bring Christ up from the dead] 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...”

The title of this message today is “Religious, But Lost.” If you haven’t already figured it out, I believe very firmly it is possible for a person to be religious and still lost without Jesus Christ.

When I was a teenager I read a book, *How to Be a Christian Without Being Religious*. When I read that title, I thought, “Is that possible? Can you be a Christian without being religious? And, I am convinced that yes, it is very possible to be a Christian without being religious. It is also possible to be religious without being a Christian. Paul is writing about people here who were highly religious—his Jewish brothers and sisters. They had a zeal for God, but yet he said, “I am so burdened for them because they don’t know Jesus Christ.”

Let me tell you some things about religion this morning. There are three things religion can never do:

I. It is possible to be religious and not be saved

That’s what he is talking about there. He says, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” You know, that word *saved* has come under really a lot of attack lately. People say, “I don’t like that word, *saved*.” Many times it conjures in our minds some poorly dressed guy who has a bad complexion and garlic breath invading our personal space with a big, black Bible looking us right in the face saying, “Brother, are you *saved*?” We think it is only the territory of religious fanatics. But the word *saved* is a good Bible word, and we ought not to avoid it. In Acts, chapter 16, the Phillipian jailor as he was getting ready to take his own life said to Paul, “What must I do to be *saved*?” Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you can be *saved* and then your whole family can be *saved*. It’s the most important question you can ever ask. “How can I be *saved*?” It’s possible to be religious, but not be saved.

1. Universalism: Not everyone is saved

There are two terrible tragedies that are going around today in contemporary life. The first terrible tragedy is what I call “universalism”. Universalism teaches that basically everybody is automatically saved. That one day, God, in His goodness and his forgiveness is just going to say, “Well, forget about the blood atonement, forget about the cross, forget about Hell, forget about punishment and judgment—everybody just come on into heaven!” They think everybody is going to be saved. Universally, there is going to be salvation for everybody. That’s the tragedy, but here’s the truth. Not everyone is saved. You have to believe the Bible teaches that not everybody is saved. Why would Paul be praying for these Jewish brothers and sisters if everybody were saved. It would have been a useless prayer. No, not everybody is saved. In fact, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount made this distinction. He said, “There are two kinds of people and there are two different pathways of life.” Look what he said in Matthew, 7. He said, “Enter through the narrow gate for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction. And many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life and only a few find it.” Universalism is not true, and I am afraid it has given many people a false sense of hope and security. Jesus said there is a roadway that is an eight-lane super highway leading to destruction in Hell, and he said most of the people on earth are hell bound. They are going down that highway at breakneck speed. But there is another pathway and another gate leading to life eternal and there are only a few people who find it. If you claim to be a “universalist” you have to call Jesus Christ a liar because he said not *everybody* is saved.

Sometimes people think it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere in your belief, as long as you are a zealot in your faith. Well, that’s what Paul said about the Jews. He said, “They have a zeal for God.” Is that all it takes? How do you feel when you see Muslims bending down on their prayer cloths five times a day facing toward Mecca reciting prayers? You say, “Man, they are more zealous than I am.” When we were flying back from Tel Aviv a few weeks ago, there were about 20 or 30 orthodox Jews who three times on that flight went to the back of the airplane, faced back toward Jerusalem and stood there with their prayer books and prayed. Sometimes we look at that and we say, “Wow. They are more zealous than we are.” How do you feel when you see Jehovah’s Witnesses going through neighborhoods knocking on doors? You say, “Wow. They are more zealous than we are.” Listen, you can be zealous and you can be wrong. Zeal or sincerity is no mark of truth. I read recently that today in America there are over 500 registered “hate groups” and they are spreading over the Internet like wildfire. Did you know the people in these “hate groups” are zealous and they are sincere? Does that make them right?

No, they are wrong. It takes more than just zeal. So there are some people who are zealous in the belief that everybody is going to be *saved*, but that doesn't make it so.

2. Unconcern: We should be praying for the lost

Here's the second terrible tragedy. Not only the tragedy of Universalism. Number two is the tragedy of unconcern. If I were to ask those of you in this room, "All of you who believe the doctrine of universalism, raise your hand!" Now, I'm not going to ask you, but if I did, how many of you believe that one day everybody is going to go to heaven? Everybody is going to be saved? Raise your hand. I don't believe we would have too many hands raised. But, the truth is you and I, much of the time, live like closet universalists. Why? Because we are not sharing our faith. We are not burdened for lost people. We act like everybody is going to go to heaven anyway, and it's not true. The second terrible tragedy that is different from universalism is our attitude of unconcern for lost people. Here's the truth. We should be praying for the lost. We should be praying for the lost. What does Paul say in Romans 10? He said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." That word *prayer* there is the word *proseychi*, not the usual word for *prayer*. It means, I constantly am asking, I constantly am petitioning God. "God, save these people, save these people, save these people"

Are you praying for people to be saved? If you are not continually praying for people to be saved, you are no better than the universalists. You might as well say you are a closet universalist. Does it even bother you that not everybody is saved, or does it just give you a sense of complacency—at least I'm saved?

Ray Stedman was a pastor in California and he tells a true story about a man he knew who was a member of another church. He had heard that church fired their pastor and got another pastor. Ray Stedman was talking to a leader in that church and he said, "Well, I heard you fired your pastor and hired another one." The man said, "That's right. We did." He said, "Well, why did you fire your first pastor?" The man said, "Because he kept preaching that people without Jesus were going to Hell! So, we fired him." Ray said, "Well, what does your new pastor preach?" The man said, "Our new pastor preaches people without Jesus Christ are going to Hell and we love him!" Ray said, "What's the difference? They are preaching the same thing." The man said, "Here's the difference. When the first preacher preached that people without Jesus Christ were going to Hell, he seemed to be glad about it. When our current preacher preaches it, it breaks his heart."

Does it break your heart that there are people that you relate to every day that are without Christ? Can you do as much as Paul did and say, "It's my heart's desire and prayer to God for them to be saved"? Let me give you an assignment. Just go home and take a 3x5 index card and fold it over one time. On that card write down the names of 3, 4 or 5 people that as far as you know they don't know Jesus Christ. That's all you do right now. Just write it down. Write down the names on that card. Entitle the card, "Wanted for Jesus", and you have your own little personal "wanted" list. You don't show it to them. You don't show it to anybody except maybe a very trusted prayer partner. But, you take that 3x5 index card and put it in your wallet. You put it in your purse. You carry it with you in your pocket. You put it in your money clip so you see it several times during the day and when you see that list all you do is just pray for them. Pray for

them. Pray for them to be saved. How do you pray for the lost? You pray for whatever is standing between them and God to be removed whether it be sin, whether it be pride, whether it be arrogance or bad attitude. You just pray for it to be removed and you pray for the lost. Are you even praying for lost people to be saved? To me universalism is a terrible tragedy, but worse than that is unconcern on the part of Christians. You have to believe it's possible to be religious and not be saved.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND NOT HAVE RIGHTEOUSNESS

Paul says it's also possible to be religious and not have righteousness. Now, the word righteousness means to have right standing before God. To get to heaven you have to have righteousness. You will not get to heaven unless somehow, somewhere you have attained a position of righteousness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:20, "Unless your righteousness surpasses the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Have you got that down? Without righteousness you are not going to go to heaven. I've done this before. If I were to ask you how many of you have righteousness right now not many of you would acknowledge it. Here in this passage of scripture, specifically beginning in verses 3 and 4, Paul talks about righteousness. Look at verse 3. Paul says, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes by God, they sought to establish their own righteousness." He said, "There are two kinds of righteousness and there are two personal options you can choose when it comes to righteousness.

Two personal options:

1. I will be good and do good-God will see that I am religious

There are some people who believe God is making a list and he's checking it twice. He's going to find out who's naughty and nice. In the end for those nice people he's going to take a blue ribbon and say, "You've been so good. Here, you are so righteous." There are some people who believe that. They believe they can get to heaven by doing good works. That's what Paul is saying about his Jewish brothers. He said, "They think that by establishing their own righteousness they can accept being accepted by God."

It's amazing even in the current world what orthodox Jews are doing. Again, when we were in Jerusalem a few weeks ago, we were in a hotel called the Hotel Renaissance. In many of the hotels in Jerusalem on the Sabbath, which is sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, they have this thing called the Sabbath elevator. Do you know why? Because for an orthodox Jew to walk up to an elevator and push a button, or walk into an elevator and push a button would be work, and that is not allowed. So, all this Sabbath elevator does for that 24-hour period is slowly go from floor to floor and the doors automatically open. They stay open for a while and then automatically close, and then they go to the next floor, slowly open the doors and slowly close them. For 24 hours the Sabbath elevator just does that over and over again. Some in our group got on one of those elevators and we almost never found them. Did you know walking up to the front of this beautiful, modern hotel on the Sabbath they had disconnected the electric eye for the sliding glass door. Why? Because for an orthodox Jew to activate that electric eye would be to spark a fire and that's not allowed. So, on the Sabbath the electric eye was not even working.

The only way they could get into the hotel was through a revolving door and it was not automatic, you had to push it. Of course, orthodox Jews could not push it. They had to wait until somebody else came along and pushed it and they would get in behind them. That was the only way they could enter the hotel. You may think, "That is absolutely amazing to me!" They are so sincere. They are so zealous in their belief. You may say, "Well, you are really picking on our Jewish friends." I say, "No, I am just using that as a platform to pick on religious lost Baptists."

I guarantee you. You think that may be a little strange. I promise you there are a lot of Baptists on the church rolls of every Baptist church who think they are going to stand before God and hold up their church membership card. "I'm a member of Green Acres Baptist Church." Or, they're going to hold up their contribution giving record, or they're going to hold up their baptismal certificate, or they're going to hold up their attendance certificate in Sunday School and say, "Look at me, God. Look how good I've been." And God will say, "Good for you. You are righteous." It's not going to happen. Look at what the Bible says in Isaiah 64. God says all of us have become like one who is unclean. All our righteous acts are as filthy rags. Did you hear that? All the good things we do when God looks at them, they just look like dirty, filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

You know, Baptists are the busiest people on the face of the earth. We have meeting after meeting after meeting. I don't even know half the stuff that goes on in this church and I don't want to. Do you know why? We have so many activities we think that by our many meetings and our many activities sometimes, that makes us righteous. Maybe you've heard the little poem that says,

Mary had a little lamb,
It would have been a sheep
But became a Southern Baptist
And died from lack of sleep.

We go and go and go. We do and do and do. If there are any of you in this room who suspect for one moment that because you dressed up real nice and you came to church today, and you gave your money to God today that God's going to say, "Oh, you're a good little boy. I'm going to bring you into heaven." Friend, you are no better than the generation of Jews Paul was writing about. They are zealous for God and they try to establish their own righteousness. That's option number one.

Do you remember I said the number-one question on the streets of America is "How can I be happy?" When asked the question, "How can you go to heaven when you die?" The majority of Americans will answer, "Do good, and be good." Do you know what we do? We look around and we think God is going to grade on the curve. Seriously! We think God's going to grade on the curve and because we are better than most of the people, we are okay. We think the Charles Mansons and the Adolf Hitlers and the Jeffrey Dahmers have changed the level so low that we are way above that. Folks, it's not by works of righteousness we have done. It's according to his mercy that he has saved us. That's personal option number one.

Here's personal option number two when it comes to righteousness.

2. Admit our failure–believe in Jesus–God grants “righteousness” to us

God confers, he bestows and he grants righteousness to us. Then, it says there that Christ is the end of the law. My soul, I wish some people on the face of this planet would read that line. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness—for everyone who believes.

Could you imagine reading a book and stopping just a few pages before the book ends and going back and reading the book again and then stopping just before the end. Going back and re-reading it again. Or for those who don’t read, watching a video and getting to the most exciting part before the end and stopping it, rewinding it and watching it again and stopping it at the same place, never getting to the end. The law is finished and the sequel is wonderful. It is called grace. Christ is the end and you have to come to the point where you say, “I never will do good enough. I never will be good enough.” It’s only by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Now, the apostle Paul was the most religious fellow you could ever meet. He said, “I was of the tribe of Benjamin.” He said, “I was circumcised the eighth day. I was an Israelite of the Israelites.” He said, “When it came to Judaism, I was zealous.” He said, “Why, I even persecuted Christians.” But in one split second when he met Jesus Christ, he realized all of his righteousness mattered not at all and Jesus Christ was his righteousness. Later, he wrote this in Philippians 3:8,9 (one of my most favorite passages in the Bible) after Paul has just bragged about his Jewish pedigree, the things he used to trust for salvation, this is what he writes. “What is more? I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.” Folks, it’s either trying to *be* good or *do* good, or knowing Jesus. There are your options: “For whose sake I have lost all things.” What all things? All those good things about my past. He says, “I consider them.” Look at the next word carefully. He says, “I consider them “rubbish”. It’s the Greek word *skubala*, and I just won’t go into what that word really means. All I’ll say is that in seminary when some of the guys who were taking Greek were playing basketball and they missed a shot, they would say, *skubala*. It’s not a pretty word. It means *sewage*. Paul says, “All of these good works and good things that I have done” He said, “not only do I deny them, but now I consider them to be *skubala* that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.” The righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. All right. When you are in Christ. When you are found in Christ and the only way you can get in Christ is to have Christ in you by faith, God looks at you and he says, “Listen, you are now righteous!” It’s not your righteousness; it’s the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Everybody in this room is either standing in their sin trying to be righteous or you are standing in Christ and now you are declared righteous by God. That’s what Paul is saying. It is possible to be religious and not have righteousness.

III. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND NOT HAVE SAVING FAITH

He said, “It is possible to be religious and not have saving faith.” I didn’t say faith, because everybody exercises faith. Every time you mail a letter you are putting faith in the postal system. Whether or not that is well founded, that is what you are doing. Every time you dial a telephone number you are putting faith in the telephone system that the correct party is going to answer. So, we are not talking about faith in itself. We are talking about *saving* faith. If you will look in Romans 10, he talks about the righteousness that is by faith in verse 6. The righteousness that is

by faith. Then, in the last part of verse 8 he uses a phrase, the word of faith. It is not the normal word for faith, which is *logos*, it is the word *raima*, the *living word of faith*. He said you have to have this living word of faith if you want to be saved. Let me tell you something about this word of faith or true, saving faith. It doesn't demand miracles. True faith does not demand miracles. There is a movement today, if you watch television today you will see it and part of this movement is called “The Word of Faith Movement”. Taken right here from Romans, 10:8. And this word of faith movement says you have to see signs and wonder for God to really be real. If you haven't had your miracle yet, you're not right with God; you don't have enough faith. It's sometimes called, “The name it and claim it theology”. You name it, and you claim it. You can't name something and claim it, but when God names something, you can claim it but God has to name it before you claim it. Do you understand? There are a lot of people today going around saying, “Well, you have to see miracles happen for your faith to be real.”

1. Doesn't demand miracles

You know what Jesus said about that in Matthew 12:39? He said, “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.” He said, “But, the only sign you will be given is the sign of Jonah.” You say, “What in the world is the sign of Jonah? Is it the sign of a fish?” No. Then Jesus goes on and says in Matthew 12:40. He says, “As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so shall the son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Folks, the only miracle you need to believe is the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You say, “Pastor, do you believe in miracles?” Not only do I believe in miracles: I am one! I see miracles happen all the time, but it is not a requirement. That is what Paul is saying here. You don't have to ascend into heaven and say, “Let me see Christ.” You don't have to descend into the earth and say, “Let me see Christ.” It is by faith, not by seeing some kind of spooky, freaky things happen. There are people going from church to church after church, blown about by what the Bible says, “by every wind of doctrine,” looking for the latest religious fad, instead of exercising a true word of faith.

2. Isn't believing facts about God

The word of faith isn't believing facts about God. It is not believing facts about God. Somebody says, “Well, okay, pastor, you are really giving a hard time to religious people. I'm a religious person. I believe in God.” Well, friend, good for you! But, do you think for one moment that every person that simply believes that there is a God is going to be saved? Look at what James writes in James, chapter 2, verse 19. He says, “Do you believe there is one God?” He is being sarcastic. “Good! Even the demons believe that! And they shudder.” Do you know what he is saying here? He is saying some of the demons have more faith than some of you who claim to have faith. You say, “I believe there is a God somewhere. I believe he is powerful. I believe there is a heaven and there is a Hell. Folks, faith is not believing facts about God. It is not something that requires a miracle.

3. Is activated by your heart and your mouth

True faith is activated by two things. First of all it is activated by your heart, and then activated by your mouth. That's why Paul writes in verse 8, "The word is near you." Look at verse 9. "It is in your mouth and it is in your heart. That is, the word of faith." Now, folks, who is he quoting here? He is quoting Moses, who 3,600 years ago said, "Nobody can go to heaven by keeping the law." He says, "Salvation is by Grace, thru faith," and he says, "that word of faith" [he is quoting Moses] "this word of faith is near you, it is in your mouth, it is in your heart." But, do you know what the Jews did? They hardened their hearts and they gagged on it in their mouths. Do you know what your heart is? That's your inner person. I'm not talking about this beating organ; I am talking about the control center of your life. You must believe in your heart, and you must confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and you will be saved. Isn't that amazing? That salvation is so near. Moses said it! Moses said, "Salvation is so near to you!" You know, there still may be some of you in this room who are reaching out to something so far away trying to be good and do good, to act religious. Folks, salvation is right here! It is activated by faith in your heart and confession of your mouth.

I don't have much use for religion. I challenge you to really study what's happening over in Kosovo, Bosnia, Serbia; they call it an ethnic cleansing, but it is a religious war. Religion kills. Jesus gives life. Why are the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland killing each other for generations? That's religion, my friend. Religion kills. Jesus gives life. God said, "East Texas is full of religious people, but that does not mean they are saved." They get a good sense of satisfaction out of being religious. What's wrong with being religious? Nothing—as long as it does not become a substitute for knowing Jesus Christ. You can brush your hair and there is nothing wrong with brushing your hair, but if one day you decide you are going to let brushing your hair stand as a substitute for breathing, in just a few moments that harmless act of brushing your hair will kill you, because you substituted it for something that was totally necessary.

There is nothing wrong with being religious, but if you substitute it for having a relationship with Jesus Christ, it will send you to Hell. It is possible to be religious and be lost. You say, "Well, pastor, how can I be saved? How can I have righteousness? How can I exercise saving faith?" Turn from your sins; admit that you are a failure. You'll never do good. You'll never be good enough. Say, "Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I deserve death in Hell, but Jesus I place my faith in you and the act of sacrifice that you made on the cross. I believe God raised you from the dead, and now, Jesus, come into my life. I stand in your righteousness alone, and I make you the Lord, the boss of my life. Friend, when you do that, you change from being a religious person to a born again believer. I go back to the question, the most important question you will ever answer is, "Am I saved and how can I be saved?"

OUTLINE

IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RELIGIOUS AND:

I. NOT BE SAVED (1-2)

Two terrible tragedies:

1. Universalism: Not everyone is saved

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." *Matthew 7:13-14*

2. Unconcern: We should be praying for the lost

II. NOT HAVE RIGHTEOUSNESS (3-4)

Two personal options:

1. I will be good and do good—God will see that I am religious

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. *Isaiah 64:6*

2. Admit our failure—believe in Jesus—God grants "righteousness" to us

What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. *Philippians 3:8-9*

III. NOT HAVE SAVING FAITH (5-8)

"The word (rhema) of Faith:"

1. Doesn't demand miracles
2. Isn't believing facts about God

You believe there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. *James 2:19*

3. Is activated by your:

1. Heart and
2. Mouth



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes