

ROMANS
Man's Responsibility? Faith!
Romans 10:1-11

by Dr. Jack L. Arnold

Perhaps you are saying, "I'm glad we are finished with Romans 9. All that teaching on sovereign election is tough to understand. Besides, I don't know if I'm ready to believe it." If you have responded this way, I can understand your feelings because I was once there myself. Even today, I must confess that God's sovereign purposes are hard for me to understand. I believe in sovereign election, but I do not understand it all. I accept the Word of God by faith.

This lesson deals with Romans 10, which is one of the strongest chapters in all the Bible on man's responsibility to believe in Jesus Christ. If you are confused on this point, you are in trouble, for it is very easy to understand that our salvation in Christ directly depends upon our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. We may not all agree on sovereign election, but we can agree that faith in Christ is absolutely necessary if one is to be saved.

REVIEW OF ROMANS 9

The vast majority of the nation of Israel never came to understand that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They were trusting their heritage, lineage to Abraham, and good works based on the Mosaic Law for their salvation. Christ had become a stumbling stone to them because they did not see the simplicity of the salvation process.

The basic theme of Romans 9 is the sovereignty of God and his electing grace. We saw how God set aside the nation of Israel to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and that only a small number of Jews today are among the elect remnant of God. By application, we understand from this chapter that not one of us would ever have become a Christian by himself; not one of us would have remotely dreamed of seeking God if it were not for the electing grace of God which sought after us first. The call of God awoke us out of the sleep of death, brought us to our awareness of our need, created a hunger in our heart, and set us to looking for God.

By contrast, when we come to chapter ten we have the matter of the responsibility and the moral freedom of man set forth. Arguments have gone on for centuries over this question, with a great deal of heat but very little light on the subject. Here, in the ninth and tenth chapters of Romans, Paul puts these two truths side by side.

I do not think we will ever begin to understand the workings of God in our world today until we acknowledge both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. God must call us before

we can possibly move toward him. Yet, if we do not respond in a responsible decision, we are to blame for not knowing him and for continuing in our lost condition.

Lest I be misunderstood, I believe that a man is a free, responsible, moral agent under the sovereignty of God, and that man must make a decision for Christ or he will never be saved. However, if he makes this decision, it is God's grace that enables him to do so. God's sovereign grace and man's free will may appear to be two irreconcilable truths to the human mind, but they are not so in God's mind.

If I were to ask you today, "Who is the greatest evangelist of our generation?" almost everyone would answer, "Billy Graham." Well, I would like to demonstrate that what I have been teaching in these messages on God's sovereignty in salvation is exactly what Billy Graham believes. Years ago, I clipped this out of the *Dallas Morning News* in Billy Graham's question and answer section:

Question: When I read the Bible, I find it difficult to reconcile the doctrine of "election" and "free will." Can you explain this please?

Answer: You have to make up your mind that there are some things in the Bible you cannot "reconcile," or "explain." Just because the Bible is concerned with the deep truths of God, we, with our limited, finite, understanding cannot fully penetrate them. All that we can do is humbly to accept what the Bible says and not try to be wise beyond what is revealed.

This is also true, for example, with regard to the mystery of God's being. It is quite impossible fully to explain the fact that God is both one and three — yet that is what the Bible says. All we can do is humbly to acknowledge the glory of God both in eternal Trinity and Unity.

So it is with free will and election. Both are truths revealed in the Bible, and we must accept them both. There can be no doubt that the gift of eternal life is offered in Christ to whomever believes in him (John 3:16), and so the Gospel must be preached to all.

But it is equally clear from the Bible that those who accept God's gift of salvation are numbered among his elect people. Of them the Lord says, "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16). The comfort of it all is this: in the end our salvation does not depend upon our works, but upon God's everlasting love and mercy in Christ at the Cross.

If you are confused about God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, you are not alone. But confusion is the first step in learning. Just use the pigeonhole technique — what you do not

understand, put in a pigeonhole, and keep studying and praying over the matter. In time God will give you light.¹ For now, practice the things you do understand.

Abraham Lincoln said, “It is not the things I don’t understand in the Bible that bother me, but the things I do understand and fail to apply to my life.”

MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY TO PRAY — Romans 10:1

“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” The passion of the apostle’s heart was that his Jewish brethren would turn to Jesus Christ. His concept of the sovereignty of God in salvation made Paul a man of intense prayer because he realized that if Israel were to be saved, God had to do it. A proper understanding of God’s sovereignty makes us more dependent upon him for results.

Paul prayed for the Jewish nation to be saved because he knew it was possible. Yet, he never saw the answer to this prayer in his lifetime.

George Mueller prayed all his life for the salvation of two loved ones, but never saw the answers to these prayers. The day Mueller died these two loved ones were still rejectors. It was at Mueller’s funeral that these two received Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. God’s ways are not our ways!

MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW — Romans 10:2-8

“For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” Israel was and is the most religious nation that ever existed. They have never been exceeded in religious zeal. Yet this nation was then and is now very far from God. It was not that the Jews did not know about Christ, for the whole Old Testament spoke of him, but rather that they lacked spiritual discernment. They were trying to work their way to heaven. They felt that by doing good works they would automatically be saved. They could not grasp that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Many people today belong to a church, have been baptized, confirmed, attend regularly, give of their monies, and do so to gain God’s favor. Yet, they know nothing of a real and dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. Many professing Christians are hung up on a works salvation and know nothing of the simplicity of real Christianity. They have zeal without knowledge of the grace way of salvation.

¹ For reading on this difficult subject, I suggest *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (InterVarsity Press, 1961) by J. I. Packer.

“For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.” Because they were trying to work their way to God, these Jews were ignorant of God’s righteousness. They failed to see that the only righteousness that God accepts is the righteousness of Jesus Christ which can only be realized by grace through faith.

The Jews had religion but not regeneration. They knew nothing of a heart relationship to God through Christ. This is the weakness of religion — man puts up a religious façade, a false front where there is no reality.

There are many professing Christians today who are ignorant of Christ’s righteousness. They have a superficial religion and seem to be content with making the outside appear right, even though inside things are completely wrong.

Roger Hull, president of the Mutual of New York Insurance Company, said to a large crowd of businessmen, “I am convinced the greatest problem that America faces today is that of the casual Christian.”

A popular solution to the casual or professing Christian set forth by many today is getting more involved in church work. Activity is tried as a remedy to turn a casual Christian into a concerned Christian. The idea is a full program — they are on this or that committee; they belong to one group or another; they are continually busy in a constant round of religious activity. But activity does not solve the problem. The answer is not a program but a person! The answer for making Christians Christian is Jesus Christ. It is not activity but receptivity, not effort but faith!

“But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach.” Paul’s point is that Christ cannot die and be resurrected again. He has already done that and provided a perfect and complete salvation for all those who will trust In him.

Paul had preached to the Jews that salvation was through faith in Christ alone. They knew it, but were blinded by a works system. In America today men hear daily that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ and are urged to trust him, but they refuse. Why? They are blinded, just like the Jews, because they are trusting in their good works rather than Christ for salvation.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY TO BELIEVE — Romans 10:9-11

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” This verse does not state two conditions for salvation: confession and faith. The thought seems to be that if we believe on Christ, the potential result will be our confession of him before men. To be a Christian one must see Christ as Lord (God) and Jesus (deliverer). He must accept the bodily resurrection of Christ from the dead. He must believe these things and confess them before men. This means speaking out to others our faith in Christ, not coming down an isle to stand before a group.

Faith is a matter of the heart as well as of the mind. It is possible to know all about Christ and not to know him personally. True salvation is a love relationship between the sinner and Christ.

This verse tells us that there are no secret believers in Christ. True Christians confess their faith in Jesus Christ to the world by their words. All may not do it the same way because we all have different backgrounds and personalities, but every true child of God desires to tell others of God's love in Christ Jesus.

Confession without belief is self-deception or hypocrisy, while trust without confession is cowardice.

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43).

While I was a pastor in California, I dealt with a young man of 36 about his personal need of Christ, but he loved the world and sin too much to come to Christ. He would avoid me whenever I got around him because I represented all that he did not outwardly want. One day I heard that he had been taken to the hospital with cirrhosis of the liver and was not expected to live — his excessive drinking had finally caught up with him. I immediately went to the hospital to visit him and talked once again about his need of Christ, but he still refused. The atmosphere in that room could have been cut with a knife, and he was glad to see me go. I came back the next day and the day after, and each day he seemed to be softening to the gospel as death was rapidly approaching. On the fifth day, I came into the room and asked him if he was ready to accept Christ, and he said that he was. He bowed his head and received the Lord Jesus. When his prayer was over, the first thing he did was call his wife into the room and tell her. Then he called his daughter in to tell her. He then called in all the family. In the next two days he witnessed to the doctors and the nurses and everybody that would listen to the good news about Christ. Finally he began to slip away into a coma. Just when we thought that he would never regain consciousness, he awoke from the coma and called out, “Aunt Helen!” Aunt Helen was a dear aunt he loved but

who had not yet heard his blessed testimony. Aunt Helen stepped to the bedside at his request, and he said to her, "Aunt helen, I have trusted Jesus. Isn't that all right!" Then he slipped away, never again to regain consciousness. A few hours later, he went home to be with Christ. This man who was such a rejector of Christ became a giant of a witness for several days after he found the Saviour. Why? Because every child of God through faith in Christ Jesus desires to speak out for Christ when he has found the answer to life.

"For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Salvation in Christ is open to all anywhere who will believe on Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Possibly you have never received Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour. May I urge you to receive him now?