

IT'S ALL ABOUT GOD'S PLAN

Romans 10:1-4, 8-18; 11:28-32

We have often observed that there is some truth in Ben Franklin's quip about nothing being certain except death and taxes. Most of us have also experienced the truth of Robert Burns' observation that the best laid plans of "mice and men" often run into snags. Some would conclude that we probably don't need to plan ahead. I have even heard some say that we inhibit the leading of the Holy Spirit in a church if we make plans. I think that some might conclude that, by planning ahead, we are adopting the way of the world and we are not operating in the spirit.

I'm of the opinion that when it comes to such things that we should take our cue from observing how God operates. Does God have a plan or plans? Of course He does, and we talk about them. One of His plans is known as the Plan of Salvation. We also tell people that God has a plan for their lives. We know that God has a plan for the descendants of Abraham. This plan is different for those who descended from Isaac from those who descended from Ishmael. God has a plan for the wicked. You get the idea that God is a planner.

Since God is omnipotent, then His plans always work out. We might conclude that if we want our plans to work, then we should design them so that they are in agreement with His plans. Even if we do this, then we need to be careful to make sure that we fully understand His plans and get the big picture. If we don't have the bigger (overall) picture, then we can wind up doing part of the job really well and not realize how to integrate what we are doing into the larger scheme of things. This was essentially what was happening with the Jews. They were given the law and there were some who were extremely zealous to keep the "letter of the law" and saw this as the ultimate goal. They failed to realize that the law was to lead them to something better and, consequently, they spent their energies in embellishing the law. It is somewhat like a person who was given a treasure that is in a room with a lock on the door. The key to the door was all rusty and needed some work on it before it could be used to open the lock. So work began on cleaning up the key and it was somewhat difficult to do and the effort stopped for a while. Every now and then, he might do some work on the key, but eventually he died and his son was given the key. The pattern repeated and several generations passed until the key became the focus of attention and the treasure in the locked room was ignored. The key was polished and gold plated and encrusted with jewels and handed down from one generation to the next with great pomp and ceremony but they totally missed the purpose of the key which was to unlock the door.

In chapters 9-11 of his letter to the church at Rome, Paul focused on God's plan for the Israelites and how that plan was impacted by the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As you know, some believed but most of these descendants of Abraham did not accept the truth of the gospel. Paul taught that this rejection by the majority of the Israelite was the result of a temporary blindness to the truth and that, eventually, many would believe and would experience God's salvation. Even though Paul's main mission was to the Gentile world, he was very much concerned about his fellow countrymen and he prayed for them.

Pray for Others - 10:1-4

¹ Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for *their* salvation. ² For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³ For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Romans 10:1-4 (NASB95)

God had dealt with the children of Israel and had given them instructions regarding their

relationship to Himself and to others. The Ten Commandments were the basic rudiments of relationships. The Israelites added many refinements to the basics but did little more than to add "style" to these basic rudiments of relationships. They practiced the rules and put all the refinements into place because they thought this was what was pleasing to God. They were devoted to God; but, as Paul pointed out "not based on true knowledge." It was as if they had been polishing and gold plating the key but had not discovered the lock on the door to the room that contained the treasure.

The end or goal of the Law is to bring us to Jesus so we can be participants in His righteousness. It is Christ Who lifts us from the earthly plane to the heavenly plane. By placing our trust (belief) in Jesus we place ourselves in His provision and care – we walk in His way. This is comparable to actually using the key to open the door to discover the treasure.

At the end of Chapter nine, Paul used a picture of people in a race. Some (the Gentiles) did not even realize they were in a race and others (the Israelites) were running hard but were confused about what defined the finish line. Paul observed that the Gentiles wound up at the correct finish line by faith and the Israelites were so convinced that their idea of what constituted victory was correct that they missed the real prize for running the race. Paul carried this analogy over into Chapter ten. The zeal that Paul wrote about them having alluded to the fact that they were "in the race and running hard." The problem was that they were "running" to a destination of having a righteousness that came from keeping the law and were completely ignoring the righteous that is imputed by faith.

In the New Bible Commentary, D. A. Carson sums up the situation as

The Jews' preoccupation with the law is again the underlying problem, as Paul implies in v 4. For they have failed to understand that Christ is himself the 'culmination' of the law. Paul uses the word *telos*, which some translate 'end' (NIV; RSV) and others 'goal'. In keeping with the race imagery of the passage, however, the word probably contains elements of both these translations. Christ, Paul is saying, has all along been the goal to which the law has been pointing; and, since that goal has now been attained—Christ has come—the pursuit of the law should now be at an end. This verse stands along with Matt. 5:17 (Christ came to fulfill the Law), as a key expression of a dominant NT theme: the culmination or 'fulfillment' of the old covenant law and all its institutions in Jesus the Messiah. With that culmination comes also God's intention to offer righteousness to anyone who believes, Gentile as well as Jew.

That last sentence in Carson's commentary gives us insight as to what God's plan is all about. The part we (as those who are in Christ) have is that we are to share God's plan with others.

Tell Others - 10:8-13

⁸ But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³ for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED." Romans 10:8-13 (NASB95)

If we can't ever do enough to be deserving and we will never have the power to effect a resurrection, then how can we attain to the righteousness that we see in Christ? In other words, how can we be saved since we are without merit and without power? This is an age-old question; however, there is an age-old answer! God's Plan of Salvation has always been "Trust and Obey." Adam knew it and blew it. Noah knew it and built an ark to the saving of his family from the flood. Abraham knew it and down through the ages, the roll call of the faithful gives testimony to this truth.

In verse 8, Paul quoted a phrase from Moses' address to the Israelite before they entered

the Promised Land. Moses told them in Deuteronomy 30:11 that what was expected of them was not too difficult nor out of their reach. He went on to say (in 30:14) that "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it." In other words, they knew what God expected of them so well that they could tell it to others. They knew that what God expected was the right thing – they could agree with it. The failure was in the follow-through or the obedience to do to what they knew. The same situation was in play with the Jews after the coming of Christ and after the gospel message had been proclaimed. They had heard it so many times they could tell others and they could agree with the message if they would have had an open mind.

Notice that Paul sees at least two parts to the whole. In verse 10, we see justification as a result of belief or faith. What must we believe? As verse 9 indicates, "God raised Jesus from the dead." This is a summary and conclusion of all that God did for us in Jesus Christ in His taking on our sin, paying the price to redeem us and then gaining victory over death and the grave as demonstrated by His resurrection. Jesus is the Provision by which we are placed in right relationship to God. To believe this truth "in our hearts" means that in every part of "who we are" this truth is assimilated and becomes an integral part of us. The second part of the whole of salvation that Paul mentions is confession. What must we confess? Again, verse 9 tells us. "Jesus is Lord." Just as "God raised Jesus from the dead" is a part of the whole truth of what God did for us in Christ; I believe "confess with the mouth" is only a part of the "expression" of the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. In other words, we do need to say it, **but just saying it is not all there is to it.** (Some may think, "Well, you must really mean it when you say it." There is more to it than just saying it and really meaning it!) The Lordship of Jesus Christ must be expressed (confessed) in every word, thought, and deed. This is the essence of obedience. So, then salvation results from faith which leads to justification and confession of Jesus as Lord, or simply "trust and obey." (Notice that this is in agreement with what Paul wrote in Romans 8:14 regarding the fact that those who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Being led by the Spirit is how we confess the Lordship of Christ in our lives.)

This salvation is available to Jews and Gentiles. Paul quoted Old Testament Scripture from Isaiah 28:16 that tells us **anyone** who puts their trust in the "Chief Cornerstone" will not be confused or ashamed. Salvation works the same for Jews and Gentiles since it is the same Lord Who is over all. Our access to God's provision is to simply ask.

Send and Go to Others - 10:14-18

¹⁴ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!" ¹⁶ However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" ¹⁷ So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. ¹⁸ But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD." Romans 10:15-18 (NASB95)

This set of verses has traditionally been taught as a motivation for Christians to be involved in carrying out the Great Commission. If we have called upon the name of the Lord and come into His salvation then we will share with others the love that God has given to us. The most loving thing we can do for others is to introduce them to our Heavenly Father. Since believing is a requirement, then it is very important that people hear the message from God's word. People cannot believe in something they have never heard about. Not all who hear will believe, but our responsibility is to be sure they have heard.

The original intent that Paul had in writing these verses was to show, beyond any doubt,

that the responsibility for Israel not accepting the good news of God's salvation belongs to them. In verses 14-15 and 17-18 all the requirements to communicate the message of salvation are presented. Israel had heard, because many preachers had been sent to them. The failure came about because they did not "heed" the information that was "preached" to them and would not believe.

The way the Jews acted was as if they had never heard the message. This response is the basis for Paul's hypothetical question in the first part of verse 18. How could they not have heard when the gospel message had been declared all over that area of the world? Paul could have repeated what he said in the first chapter of Romans about the Gentiles who refused to heed what they could see from the world around them about God: they are without excuse. If that conclusion was true two thousand years ago, then it is even more true today regarding practically everyone in the world. The word has gone out. The availability of the internet and mass media reaches practically everyone. The problem is not so much in the sending and proclaiming as it is in the heeding and believing.

Throughout chapters 9-11 Paul focused on the situation with the Israelites and their rejection of the Messiah. This rejection was associated with spiritual blindness. Israel's rejection of God's truth had been going on since they came out of Egypt. This blindness was more like being insensitive to light or like having a callus on your skin that causes insensitivity to feeling or being touched. How do you get a callus? The growth of a callus is a natural reaction to abrasion on the skin's surface. If we ignore the abrasion, then a layer builds up that is dull to pain. The same thing happens to us in the nonphysical part of our being. If we ignore the sense of guilt or conviction when we do something wrong, then we find it is easier to commit the same error the next time and the guilt or conviction is easier to ignore. So we can develop callousness, dullness, or blindness to what is happening. Some translations call this "hardness" but it is not the same kind of "hardness" that (for example) Pharaoh had which was more akin to stubbornness.

Paul used an olive tree to paint a picture of what had happened in God's plan of salvation since the call of Abraham. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the root stock of the olive tree and the Jews were natural branches on the tree. Those who would not believe in God's provision of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ were broken off the tree because of this unbelief. Those who were not of the original stock of Abraham (that is the Gentiles) who accepted God's salvation through faith in Christ were then grafted into the tree. Paul made a special point to note that the unbelieving Jews were NOT broken out so that the believing Gentiles could be grafted in; they were broken out because of unbelief. The believing Gentiles were NOT grafted in because the unbelieving Jews were broken out; they were grafted in because they DID believe. It is all about faith and not about whether you are Jew or Gentile.

Paul pointed to a time when the partial and temporary "blindness" would come to an end and they ("all Israel") would be saved. You have probably experienced a situation where you may have been in training and upon hearing an explanation of how something works, it just did not make a lot of sense. You may find yourself saying, "I just don't see that." That may go on for some time period and then, it is as if a light comes on and you finally "get it." I think this is what Paul is writing about with regard to the people of Israel finally being able to see the light or to "get it."

Does this mean that each and every descendant of Jacob alive at that time will be saved? Some people believe that is the case. If you question them on that, the standard reply would go something like, "when does all not mean all?" The answer to that question is "most of the time."

The Greek word translated “all” is *pas*. It can be used “individually” or “collectively.” A collective use of this word is found in one of the accounts of John the Baptist:

“then went all Judea, and were baptized of him in Jordan.” Was all Judea, or all Jerusalem, baptized in Jordan? The words "world" and "all" are used in some seven or eight senses in Scripture, and it is very rarely the "all" means all persons, taken individually. The words are generally used to signify that Christ has redeemed some of all sorts — some Jews, some Gentiles, some rich, some poor, and has not restricted His redemption to either Jew or Gentile ... (C.H. Spurgeon from a sermon on Particular Redemption)

The key to putting the “all” of verse 26 into proper perspective is found in verse 23 where we see, “and they also, if they continue not in their unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.” Notice that the requirement is “continue NOT in their UNbelief.” Salvation will still be by grace through faith.

Paul presented a summary of what all this amounts to starting in verse 28. The point is that salvation is for all (Jew or Gentile) who believe.

Include All Others - 11:28-32

²⁸From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of *God's* choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. ³²For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. Romans 11:28-32 (NASB95)

I found parts of this passage difficult to understand as it is written in most translations. It seems that the message contains the idea that the reason we (Gentiles) were able to be saved was because the Jews were unbelieving. This idea sounds similar to the false reasoning that some had (in Paul’s day) that the unbelieving Jews had been broken out so that the believing Gentiles could be grafted in. (See Roman 11:19)

Let’s take these verses individually and figure out what Paul was saying. For example, verse 28 is simply telling us that the opinion that most evangelicals have of the nation of Israel is that they are still God’s chosen people but they (Jews) are strongly opposed to the gospel message. This is exactly what Paul was saying. From the Christian’s viewpoint, the Israelites are against (enemies of) the gospel message. It is unlawful in Israel to proselyte a Jew. Christians can share their faith with Arabs but not Jews. Again, from the viewpoint of evangelical Christians, we strongly support them (Israel) because they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Verse 29 is simply telling us that God is faithful to His promises. The covenant He made with Abraham and reaffirmed to Isaac, and to Jacob is still in effect.

Verse 30 seems to touch on the question raised earlier regarding our access to God’s mercy being tied to Israel’s unbelief. This impression is created by the translation of the Greek word “*touton*” as “through” rather than “these.” This word appears 69 times in the Greek text and is translated “these” or “these things” 59 times. Adding to this impression is the addition of the plural possessive pronoun “their” before the word unbelief. This word is not in the Greek text. If we make these changes, then verse 30 simply says that “when we were in our unbelief, God was merciful to us in these unbeliefs.”

Verse 31, then follows quite naturally, that “God is going to show the same kind of mercy to those of Israel that He show to us.”

Verse 32 is straightforward in telling us that since ALL (individually) are disobedient, then all need God’s mercy.