

Romans 9:30-10:31 - The two world religions

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 March 2026

Preacher: Steve Palframan

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. So the reading is going to be from Romans chapter 9, verse 30, through to chapter 10, verse 1 to 23, I believe it's 21.

! Okay. Right.

They stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.

Brothers and sisters, 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 of God, and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

[1 : 28] Christ is the culmination of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law.

The person 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?

That is to bring Christ down. Or who will descend into the deep? That is to bring Christ up from the dead. But what it does say, but what does it say?

The word is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. That is the message concerning faith that we proclaim. If you declare with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified. And it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As scripture says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.

[2 : 45] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How then can you call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one in whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.

For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message? Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message. And the message is heard through the word about Christ.

But I asked, did they not hear? Of course they did. Their voice has gone out into the earth.

[3 : 56] Their words to the ends of the world. Again I asked, did Israel not understand? First Moses said, I will make you envious by those who are not a nation.

I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding. And Isaiah boldly says, I was found by those who did not seek me.

I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me. But concerning Israel, he says, all day long I have held out my hand to a disobedient and obstinate people.

May God continue to bless his word. Well thank you Sharon for reading for us. It was a long reading. And so we're very grateful to you for reading for us.

Do keep that passage open. I know that every preacher says that as he starts. But I really mean it. Yeah? So, and maybe others do too. But really do keep that passage open. Because I'm going to put a couple of slides up with some of the text.

[5 : 03] But most of it is just in the Bible for you. So you can follow along there. Let's pray. And ask for the Lord's help. Let's pray. Father, we do want to pray and ask for your help this morning.

We're conscious both of our own weakness. But also our neediness. We long to hear your voice. We long to know what you're like.

What you say. What you want from us. And so, Lord, we pray that by your spirit, through your word, you might speak to us this morning. For our good and for your glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Now, it's great to have a lot of visitors in the room. And in a way, you have come into what essentially is part two of a sermon that we started last Sunday from Romans chapter 9.

But it is entirely possible that those who were here with us last week have no idea what it was that we said last week. So, by way of reminder, for those who have forgotten, and for those of you who are visiting here, cast your eyes back to chapter 9, verse 3.

[6 : 09] This is the issue that Paul is dealing with in Romans at this stage. He says, and this will come up on the screen. For I wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, or better, kindred, the people of Israel.

Here's the issue, right? So, Paul knows theologically that the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is for Jews first. This is what he said at the beginning of his letter.

The Jews are the nation of the Old Testament. They are the ones who had the promises that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus is their Messiah, if you like.

He's from their ethnic group with their cultural heritage. He's followed in their history. But despite that, as Paul knows that about Christ, he then sees that actually not that many of his fellow Jews are following Christ.

Not in Rome and not in his ministry. And in chapter 9, verse 3, that troubles him. He wishes it wasn't the case. And in chapter 10, verse 1, which we read a few moments ago, it is still troubling him.

[7 : 20] Brothers and sisters, he says, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. Now, this, I think, presents us with a challenge.

What you are encountering here is the truth that Romans is not written directly to West Kilburn Baptist Church. Romans is written at a specific time in history with a particular set of questions behind it.

I would imagine that for most of us, I mean, you can see this here, can't you? You imagine that for most of us, when we hear the word Israel, we don't think so much of a theologically defined group of people whose inheritance is from the Old Testament.

In lots of ways, that group, as Paul describes it here, has been dispersed around the world. It doesn't really exist in the same way as Paul encountered it. Instead, when you and I hear the word Israel, we think of a nation state that's currently bombing Iran and Lebanon.

But that's not who Paul is talking about here. It's not really what he means. So you and I have a translation challenge this morning. Translating what Paul says about the Old Testament Israelites responding to their Messiah, who they largely rejected, and translating that into our situation today.

[8 : 41] Now, this is possible. In fact, this is how the whole Bible works, right? This is what the Bible does. It is written by particular people in a point in history, and yet what they're writing are eternal truths about who God is and what it means to follow him.

And so what we need to do this morning is listen to Paul's answer to the question about Old Testament Israel, and see how that translates to questions that we are all asking.

And we saw that in part last week. We might not be wondering why the church in Rome in AD 55 wasn't flooded with Jewish converts. But we do wonder, don't we, why our cousin or our son or our brother or our daughter or our sister, who came to church as a child, who knew their Bible so well, now wants absolutely nothing to do with Jesus.

Why is that? Why is it that our friend who seemed so interested in listening to my testimony at work is now hostile? Why is it that some random people just seem to walk into church and become Christians and others who hear the truth for years and years and years never really bother?

Now part one of the answer to that question was Romans chapter 9, which we saw last week, which is that because God is sovereign, God chooses to have mercy on whom he wants to have mercy and hardens whom he wants to harden, chapter 9, verse 18.

[10 : 07] In other words, you shouldn't look at the unbelief of first century Israel or the unbelief of our friends and family and conclude, oh, that must be because God's too weak or too distant. Rather, we found God is free to do as God chooses to do.

That was last week. If you want to know more about that, you need to listen to last week's sermon. This time we move on. Part two of the answer. And let me show you first the mistake that everyone makes.

This is part one of the answer. The mistake that everyone makes. Part one of part two of the answer. That's confusing, isn't it? This is the first point. The mistake that everyone makes. Now, before we zoom out and think more generally about our situation, let's close in on what Paul is saying about Israel. Look down at verse 30. What then shall we say?

That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith. But the people of Israel who pursued the law as the way of righteousness have not attained their goal.

[11:07] Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. Here then is the big mistake that Paul's Israel are making.

And notice it's not a lack of earnestness. It's not a lack of desire. Here, the Israelites are in what he calls hot pursuit of righteousness. And it's not a bad goal either.

Righteousness is a good thing. Rather, their mistake is what? Well, they are seeking righteousness by works and not by faith. That's their mistake.

That's the mistake that everyone makes. Look at it carefully. See it in verse 31. The Israelites have been committed to what they call the law as a way of righteousness. Literally there, it is committed to law righteousness.

That is, they are committed to obeying the rules as a means of establishing righteousness before God. And in doing that, then, end of verse 31, the people of Israel have not attained their goal, is how it's put it.

[12:11] Literally there, it is they have not obtained the law. It's confusing, isn't it? But what they've tried to do is they've tried to obey the law with law righteousness, but have then missed the goal of the law.

In other words, they've sought to keep all the instructions, but they have not arrived at the destination that the law was pointing to. It's like they've put perfect righteousness or home with God into the spiritual sat-nav, right?

And the correct route has come up on the screen in their car, but they've gone the wrong way. And they've driven in the opposite direction. And the sat-nav of the law is saying, make a U-turn, make a U-turn, proceed to the route, proceed to the route.

And they're just ignoring it. And they never arrive. And they do that while the Gentiles, in verse 30, literally the nations, that is everyone who is not belonging to Israel, they haven't even bothered putting anything in the sat-nav.

They didn't pursue righteousness, but they've obtained it. How come? They've made it home with God by faith. Now, perhaps this seems a bit harsh.

[13:26] You know, a group of people earnestly seeking to make it home to God, but never arriving, while those who weren't earnestly seeking did arrive. Well, there's a reason, isn't there? Verse 32 to 33.

It's because the Jews have stumbled over the stumbling stone. They've tripped up where everyone trips up, which is that they thought salvation was arrived at by works and not by faith.

Look down at verse 33. See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. And the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.

Paul here is paraphrasing two passages from Isaiah to make his point. And notice that the stone is really a hymn. And this is their mistake, then, isn't it? They think that they can achieve in their own works what really the Messiah could only achieve for them.

So they don't believe in him, the rock, Jesus, and instead they trip over him because they think that it's their own works. They're offended by his offer of salvation.

[14:31] Don't you tell me that you can give to me what I can earn. I'm going to earn it in my works. And so they fail to believe in him. Go back to the spiritual sat-nav illustration for a moment.

It's like they put this home with God in, and the sat-nav system, listen, you are unable on your own to arrive at that destination. You are incapable of driving home with God.

You will not possibly be able to make it. What you need to do is move into the passenger seat, and I will send someone to take the wheel for you. And the Israelites go, no way, I love driving.

I love driving. And so they never arrive. Chapter 10, verse 2 describes it like this. Zealous, ignorant, self-belief has led them to disaster.

Because, verse 4, the reality is that Christ is the culmination, or literally the end of the law. But they never got there because they're too offended by his claim that they could never get there in their

own strength.

[15:59] Now that's the specifics, right? That's how Paul engages with this question about why are there not so many Jews in the church in Rome? Now zoom out with me for a moment, and I think you can see the bigger implications of this for us.

In essence, what Paul is saying here in these opening verses is telling us that basically there are two religions in the world, okay? There are two religions that all people in the world, without exception, live by.

And it's not Islam or Christianity. It's not Hinduism or Buddhism. It's not even secularism versus mysticism or something. No, the two religions in the world are these. Works and faith.

That's it. Those are the two ways to live. All of us in our quest for purpose, for meaning, for salvation, for righteousness, if we want to use that language of the Israelites, all of us, without exception, fall into one of these two categories.

Either we think we do it in our strength, or we think we have to trust in a saviour who alone can do it in his strength. Now undoubtedly, not everybody talks in the same way.

[17:07] We don't all have the same categories or the same beliefs. But ultimately, it doesn't really matter. Because the essential distinction is whether you believe life is measured in the terms of your own achievements.

Be they religious achievements, academic achievements, financial achievements, sporting achievements, family achievements, whatever it is, works. Or you believe that life is about confidence in a saviour who is not you, but who has come to do what you could not do.

And salvation comes from being credited with his achievements by faith. And this is the big trap.

This is the stumbling stone. Because by nature, all of us, without exception, are works-based religion people.

All of us. All of us, by nature, are offended at the idea that we need a saviour. We naturally want to drive the car and rely on our works. It's so important to see this.

It might not be as obvious as you first think. Because on the surface of it, the actions of the works-based believer and the faith believer look the same. Both of these groups of people might deeply care about morality.

[18:17] They might really be concerned about the life that they live. They might really be concerned to be a good person and to be kind to those around them. They might really make massive sacrifices as well.

They might make massive sacrifices of time or money or energy. They might both be really zealous as well. It's not even that those of faith worship and those of works don't.

Both these groups might be worshippers. In fact, there's a sense in which we're all worshippers of something or someone. In fact, you might find these two groups of people in the same building, in the same meeting, singing the same songs.

The distinction is not on the outside. It's in the heart. It's whether we think we are driving the car or whether we've handed the wheel to Jesus.

It's whether we're self-reliant or Christ-reliant. So let me ask you a question this morning. Perhaps I can put it this way. What religion are you? What religion are you?

[19:23] Oh, you might say, well, I'm a Christian. I'm in church. My parents were Christians. I tried to follow the teachings of the Bible. I sing the songs. I share the supper. I've even done that thing which nobody does, which is scan the QR code in the back of the notice sheet to give money.

Right? Nobody does that. I'm sure of it. Well, that might be true, but it's not that simple. The distinction is not between those who make an effort and those who don't. Really, the question is, are you relying on your own efforts?

Be they Christian-sounding efforts or be they some other religious-sounding efforts or even some secular-sounding efforts? Are you relying on those or are you relying on Christ?

Because it cannot be both. To quote someone I heard this week, they said in the New Christianity Explored course, they say this, you cannot hold on to your own efforts and your own treasures and embrace Christ at the same time.

You can't do both those things. It's either self-reliance or Christ-reliance. Now, perhaps this morning you're thinking, wow, we're raging against self-reliance.

[20:34] Right? That's all very well, but you need to know about me that my life is in tatters. Right? I have zero self-confidence. I have zero self-reliance. I'm a total failure.

I never achieved at school. I don't have a great job. My family relationships are a mess. I can't seem to hold it together. It's a wonder I'm even here. If that's you this morning, let me say to you, you're very welcome to be here.

It's great you're here. Because there's a truth in that, that actually, if that's how you feel, you're not far from salvation. Because it is impossible to move from faith in our works to faith in Christ without realizing how broken and bankrupt and weak we are.

The biggest barrier to you becoming a Christian this morning is probably your illusion of strength. Not that you know you're weak.

If you think this morning that you're smashing life, that you have no weakness, no moral guilt, no fear before a holy God before whom all of us will one day stand, then the truth is you've tripped up over the stumbling stone.

[21 : 40] But if you know that you're a mess, if you know that your guilt before God is impossible to hide, that you have no hope of saving yourself, well, perhaps then this morning you might see that Christ specializes in people like you.

People like me. It's those who will admit they need him who will find him. Okay, so that's the first thing, the mistake that everyone makes, self-reliance.

Secondly, the message we all need to hear. Now again, let's kind of come back to Rome and to the detail of the passage here and to Paul's question. Remember, Paul is thinking about the Israelites of his day, why the Old Testament people didn't accept Christ as their Savior in large numbers.

And it's because they've stumbled over Jesus' grace. They think it's works, works of the law, not faith in Jesus that matters. And the next part of the question then is, well, what do I do, says Paul? Do I just throw my hands up in the air and go, oh, this is just utterly hopeless, right?

What is the point? Well, no, he thinks there is something to do. So notice how he starts, verse 5. Moses, he says. Ah, everybody in the Old Testament, they love Moses.

[22 : 49] And Paul's point here is that Moses himself described these two ways to live. Moses, he says, describes works and faith. And notice what he says. This is not my idea, this is an idea of the Bible, says Paul.

Self-reliance has been diagnosed long ago. So Moses said that if you want righteousness by obedience, then you have to live by them. Verse 5. The person who does these things will live by them.

Moses is saying, listen, if you want law righteousness, if you want works religion, you're going to have to obey every law in every way, in every aspect, in every moment.

Impossible. Absolutely impossible for us. So instead, Moses also describes righteousness by faith. Look at verse 6. The solution, righteousness by faith, is actually not that difficult, he says.

It's not locked away in heaven. You don't have to go up and get it. It's not locked away in the deep, so you have to die to find it. Instead, verse 8, the answer is near you. It's in your mouth and in your heart.

[23 : 49] That is the message concerning faith that we proclaim. In fact, the solution is so close, it's so simple, you can summarize it in three words. Verse 9. Jesus is Lord.

That's it. Jesus, the man of Nazareth, is God in flesh. The Lord. Yahweh of the Old Testament. In human flesh.

Sent to save. He alone is the rightful ruler of our lives and our world. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He died for sin and rose victorious. And all you have to do, all anyone has to do, is believe in their heart and confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord risen from the dead and they will be saved.

Says Moses. Says Paul. So verse 11, look down at it. As scripture says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.

But there's no difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Remarkable, isn't it?

[24 : 57] In a world of unbelief. In a world in which Paul is deeply concerned about the unbelief of his Jewish brothers and sisters. What's the solution? A message. A message that Moses writes.

A message that Paul speaks. A message so simple a child can understand it. The message is, Jesus is Lord. But they cannot say it unless they've heard about it.

So verse 14. How then can they call on the one that they've not believed in? And how can they believe in the one in whom they've not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Now that doesn't mean that everyone who hears will believe. Verse 16 tells you that. The Israelites have been hearing about the promise of Jesus for centuries.

In fact, they heard wherever they were in the world, according to verse 18. But still we speak, we share, we preach. Because, and this is the key to all this, chapter 10, verse 17.

[25 : 59] Look down at it. Faith comes from hearing the message. And the message is heard through the word about Christ. Now, just for our last time this morning, let's jump beyond Rome and to London and have a think about what this means for us.

We live, we've heard, in this world of two religions. It's either works, faith in ourselves, or it's faith in Christ. Those are the two options. All of us are in one of those two categories.

And faith in Christ here is not complicated. It's not difficult to explain. It's not rocket science, right? It doesn't involve complex religious rituals or activities.

You don't have to go on a pilgrimage. You don't have to fast. You don't have to say a special prayer. It's saying Jesus is Lord and believing it and believing in his resurrection.

That's it. That's faith. But notice that that faith is not something that you and I can generate by ourselves. Keep your eyes on chapter 10, verse 17. Notice it does not say this, does it?

[27 : 03] It doesn't say, consequently, faith comes by human effort. People make this mistake all the time. Listen up, because this is really important. Faith is not the golden work, right?

It's not as if, okay, Steve, I understand, right? You're saying it's not by works. It's by faith. So I'll forget works and I'll really try hard to be a person of faith. That's what I'm going to try hard to do. I'm going to put all my efforts into believing. Belief is the work. Faith is the work. And you think, well, if I try really hard, then maybe that will be okay.

Listen, if you think like that, you haven't understood. Faith does not come by trying really hard to believe. Faith comes by hearing. And hearing not about you, not about what you should do, but hearing about what Christ has done.

In other words, faith is what God gives you as you listen to the news and the stories about what Jesus has done and who he is. Faith is the work, if you like, that God performs in you as you hear the message about Jesus.

[28 : 16] Perhaps you can imagine it like this. This doesn't kind of work perfectly, but it might help, right? Imagine it like this. Imagine you're trying to counsel a man whose marriage is on the rocks. He comes to see you and he sits down with you over coffee or whatever it is.

And he says, listen, my marriage is a terrible mess. I wonder if you can help me. He says, well, just tell me what's going on at home. What's it like? He says, I cannot begin to tell you how much I do. I do all the cleaning. I do all the cooking. I do the laundry. I earn the money. I buy the food. I take the kids to the park.

And yet still, for some mysterious reason that I don't understand, my wife is cold towards me. I don't have the marriage that I was hoping for. What do you say to him?

Well, I think you probably say something like this. Listen, friends. Anyone could do those things for your wife. You could even say, listen, I know your wife.

[29 : 15] I know your wife is rich enough to pay for someone to do all those things for her. What your wife wants from you is not you to do jobs for her.

What she wants is for you to love her. She wants you to give yourself up for her. She wants you to treasure her. And now in that point in the conversation, what are you going to do to persuade that guy to do that, to move towards his wife in love like that?

Well, you have to accept there's nothing you can do, is there? You don't have access to his heart, to change his heart towards his wife. But what would begin to do that work in his heart? Well, you describe to him, don't you?

Just think about what your wife is like. She's beautiful, isn't she? What brought you first together? Can't you remember? Can you not think about what you first found attractive?

Can you not remember how you felt when you first met, when you first embraced? Now, in a sense, that's it here. Faith in Christ is not a work that we do for him.

[30 : 22] It's more a movement of our heart towards him in love. And that movement of our heart towards Christ in love comes as we hear about how beautiful and how brilliant and how wonderful he is.

And the Spirit takes that message about Jesus' love and glory and kindness and generosity. And he exposes us to it.

So that as we hear the gospel, we fall in loving faith with Jesus. So we hear, don't we, that God loves us.

And because we're incapable of saving ourselves, he comes into the world in the person of the Son. He lived the life that we failed to live. He died the death that we deserve, that we might be forgiven. And we hear that, and by the Spirit we say, that's my Lord.

That's my Savior. He died for me. He rose again in victory, and I will rise in him in victory. He ascended into heaven, and he's returning in power.

[31 : 33] It's his achievements. He was morally perfect. And it's those achievements which now mark my life, secure my future, seal my glory.

I'm not destroyed by my sin or my weakness. They show me I need Jesus, and Jesus loves me, and I love him. So let me speak to you if you're a Christian this morning.

You and I, if we're Christians this morning, we should feel, like Paul, troubled by the unbelief in the world. It should cause a sadness that our church is not bursting at the seams this morning.

If you're sat here, maybe you've been a member of this church or of Redeemer Queen's Park for a long time, right, before our church has merged together last year. And maybe you just think, well, there are more people here than there were in our church last year.

So that's all right then, isn't it? Let me say to you, if you think like that, you need your pulse taking, your spiritual pulse taking. We live here in probably the most unreached quarter of London.

[32 : 38] We worship Jesus in earshot of tens of thousands of people who are lost, of people who are trying to earn their way to heaven by their own religious efforts.

We're surrounded by people who think that they can provide all the life that they want, or live in the belief that there's nothing beyond the grave. We're surrounded by people every day who are running headlong to judgment, trusting in themselves.

And there is a simple message that all of them need to hear, because it's the only hope. You don't need a degree in theology to understand it.

You don't need to know Greek or Hebrew to speak it. The message is Jesus is Lord and he died and rose. And Christian, this morning, there is not a person that you meet who doesn't need to hear that. And you don't know whether God will save them.

You don't know how they will respond and you don't know whether their instant response to you is going to be their forever response to the message. You don't know whether God will open their heart or harden it.

[33 : 39] So what do you do? You keep speaking. Not about yourself. Not about how being a Christian can make you a better person. Not about how science has disproved the Bible. None of those are the gospel.

Jesus is the gospel. It's his beauty that will win them. So you keep speaking about him. We as a church keep preaching about him so that God by his spirit might reveal to people his beauty and his wonder.

That people might fall into faith in Christ like lovers fall in love. Because they see, don't they, not simply that Jesus is kind of reliable for salvation. But he is desirable above all things to save them. What about you if you're not a Christian this morning? It's so great that you're here this morning. You're so welcome. And listen, I don't have a philosophy for you. I don't even have a list of things for you to do.

You know, if you wanted a list of things to do, you should have gone to the mosque next door. They would have given you one. I don't have for you a new diet, a new dress code, a new religious calendar. Instead, what I have for you is a message.

[34 : 42] It's a message about a man called Jesus. Jesus, who is God in flesh. And he died for your sin. And he rose again victoriously.

And everyone, that everyone includes you this morning. Whoever you are, wherever you're from, whatever your background. Everyone who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved.

Praise him. Let's pray together. Let's just take a moment of quiet and maybe we can respond in our own hearts as we have heard God's words.

Amen. Heavenly Father, thank you that by your spirit you've shown us the beauty of Jesus. Thank you that he's our Lord, our Savior. Thank you that it's his works, not ours, that have achieved salvation for us. Thank you that as we go forward in life and death, our confidence is not in ourselves, but in him.

[36 : 16] And we say this morning, we want to turn from our own works, our own religious efforts or moral efforts. And we turn to Jesus. And we say we love him.

And we put all our faith and hope in him alone. In his name we pray. Amen.

Thank you.