

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Self-Righteousness Rejected, Romans 10

Date preached: June 17, 2018

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message

**BACKGROUND:** Israel was God’s chosen people. God chose to reveal himself to them through his Word. He called them into a faith-based relationship with himself. He delivered them from their enemies. He gave them a Law—a way to follow him and to turn from their sins to receive forgiveness.

But, now at the time of ultimate fulfillment in the Person of Jesus Christ—Paul makes a distinction between self-righteousness and true righteousness. We throw this word “righteousness” around a lot. But, what does it mean? I’ve heard it described as a “right relationship with God.” “Righteous” means acting in accord with divine or moral law; free from guilt or sin. So, the pronouncement comes from something on the outside—something beyond the realm of humanity.

And, in a word study, the word “righteous” actually comes from a Greek work meaning a judicial verdict or “approval from God.” It is a status. Righteousness is God’s approval of us.

In Genesis, God counted Abraham righteous because he believed God. Because of his faith, God approved Abraham.

The Israelites seemed “righteous” on the outside because they followed the Law but their righteousness was rejected. If God did not approve of them, they could not be righteous. But, those who are righteous by faith are accepted. What is the difference? Why were the Israelites accepted but those on the outside—the Gentiles—who believed, accepted?

Paul continues to write in Romans about how much he wants his people—the Israelites to be saved. But, with his first-hand experience, he knows several hindrances to the Israelites true salvation.

There are two points to my message today:

1. The self-righteous might appear righteous.
2. The self-righteous miss the point.

## **First, THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS MIGHT APPEAR RIGHTEOUS.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 10:1-22 “<sup>1</sup>*Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.* <sup>2</sup>*For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.* <sup>3</sup>*Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.* <sup>4</sup>*Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”*

**EXPLANATION:** Paul writes about several characteristics of the Jews’ faith. First, it was zealous. Second, it took initiative. Third, it ultimately lacked submission.

**APPLICATION:** It might be a scary thought to some of us that someone with zeal and initiative in their faith might be rejected by God.

**FURTHER EXPLANATION:** Here we see the Israelites were zealous. In other words, they showed great passion for God and for things relating to God. They were religious. They sincerely tried to keep the Law. But, Paul says their zeal was not based on true knowledge of God.

**APPLICATION:** The Israelites were also jealous. Look at your own zeal and passion. Americans are zealous people. It is popular to have passion and to live for a cause. But, be careful. Is the passion you have to help others or to do religious things thereby forming your identity? Does your outward religion make you feel right with God? If you are getting your righteousness from anything apart from your faith in Christ Jesus, you are like these Israelites—establishing your own Law for yourself.

**EXPLANATION:** The Israelites also took initiative. But, here is where the problem lies: They did not know God’s righteousness. Their attempts at righteousness came from their flesh—their pride in life—rather than from their faith—what God requires.

**APPLICATION:** Sometimes, when we don't know what God wants, we do our own thing. I firmly believe "religious activity" can become an idol. It is difficult for many people to grasp this, but anything we do to try to make ourselves right with God, apart from his grace, is not really beneficial in our relationship with God.

**EXPLANATION:** Because of their own initiative in making themselves righteous, the Israelites were actually rebellious against God. They did not submit their hearts to him.

They established their own righteousness. Although cloaked in zeal and good deeds, they were rebels to God's Law—fulfilled in Jesus Christ. They could not accept the Word of God in Jesus Christ—repent and believe in the Good News—the Word—the Son of God—has come to live among men through Jesus Christ.

**APPLICATION:** Even though someone might be outwardly moral and kind, they might not be submitting to God's requirements. Even though we might have a "good" appearance on the outside, what is in our hearts? Are our hearts fully submitting to God?

Think back on Micah 6:8

**SCRIPTURE:** Micah 6:8 <sup>8</sup>*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

**SCRIPTURE:** Proverbs 14:12 <sup>12</sup>*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*

**EXPLANATION:** Walking according to your own standards—making yourself righteous in the way you think—will only lead to death. Paul—having studied the Old Testament scriptures—knew the Law. And, he was writing about the Jews—who knew the Law too. But, he wrote that in their self-righteousness and strict commitment to the Law, they missed the entire point of the Law.

**ILLUSTRATION:** It would be like a person keeping the speed limit but driving recklessly. The purpose of the speed limit is safety but if a person is driving recklessly but proud that they're keeping the speed limit then they're missing the

point of the law. The self-righteous might appear righteous and they might fool themselves and they might fool other people but they will not fool God.

## **Second, THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS MISS THE POINT.**

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 10:5-12 <sup>5</sup> *Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”* <sup>6</sup> *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)* <sup>7</sup> *“or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).* <sup>8</sup> *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:* <sup>9</sup> *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.* <sup>10</sup> *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.* <sup>11</sup> *As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”* <sup>12</sup> *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,* <sup>13</sup> *for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

**EXPLANATION:** In Romans 10, Paul first referenced the Old Testament. He did this to demonstrate who Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

**SCRIPTURE:** Leviticus 18: 5 <sup>5</sup> *“The person who does these things will live by them.”*

**EXPLANATION:** This scripture explains one who succeeds in achieving righteousness through the Law will live. But, as we know, no human could completely keep the Law. The Law pointed to the fact that none of us could completely fulfill God’s requirements for us. We need faith in God. We need faith in Jesus who can forgive us.

Paul goes on to reference more Old Testament scripture the Jews would probably be familiar with. Listen to these two scriptures so you hear the similarities.

**SCRIPTURE:** Romans 10:6-8 <sup>6</sup> *“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)* <sup>7</sup> *“or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the*

dead).<sup>8</sup> *But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,”*

**EXPLANATION:** Romans 10, Paul is quoting Deuteronomy 30:12-14. Here we find God’s intention for the Law.

**SCRIPTURE:** Deuteronomy 30:12-14 *“<sup>11</sup> Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. <sup>12</sup> It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, “Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” <sup>13</sup> Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, “Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?” <sup>14</sup> No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”*

**EXPLANATION:** The Law of Moses was not outside of people’s reach, because God provided it. And likewise, in Romans 10, Paul gives the great update to the scripture: Faith is not out of your reach because he explained it. It was not something about which you have to ask—*who will go to a long distance to get it for Us?* God has provided it for us.

**APPLICATION:** The gospel message is not out of our reach. God came to us in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The self-righteous thought they had to do something to achieve salvation. They thought they were righteous because of the things they had done in keeping the Law. And likewise today, the self-righteous think they have to do something to attain it. But, Jesus preached the good news—repent and believe. Turn from your sins and trust in God for the forgiveness of your sins.

**BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION:** The self-righteousness spoken about in Romans 10 reminds me of Jesus’ parable of the rich young ruler.

The rich young ruler asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus told him to keep all the commandments. He thought he had kept them all, and indeed Jesus told him he had, but that wasn’t the point. Jesus wanted his heart. He said, “Sell all you have and give it to the poor.” But, the rich man went away sad because he had a lot of stuff he wasn’t willing to give up.

**EXPLANATION:** You see—the rich young ruler had self-righteousness. He knew he had kept all the Laws. But, this wasn't enough for approval from God. Jesus wanted all of the man's heart.

The rich young ruler wanted a Savior, but not a Lord. When you repent of sin and believe, your belief must include both. When you trust Jesus as Savior you also trust him as Lord. It is not possible to trust Jesus as Savior but not as boss. If you believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead you will be saved. It's clear and then he goes on to say there's no Jew no Gentile. It was as if Paul was telling people okay I've heard enough, quite these silly divisions between those of you who say you are God's people and pointing your finger at those who say you are not God's people because whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

**CONCLUSION:** Romans 10 is the great equalizer that puts all people in the same category sinners, unrighteous, unable to attain the righteousness of God on our own but hope in Christ. And so when God looks out of heaven and he looks at those people those of us who are saved he does not see our sin. What does he see? He sees the substitute Jesus who is righteous. Well I tell you that are absolutely revolutionary; it is a life changer if you can accept the truth of the scripture.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at [www.thbc.com](http://www.thbc.com). Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn  
Thanks to Nancy Claire Smith and Aleah Pope for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn  
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church  
Nashville, Tennessee  
USA