

Believe and Confess: Does the Bible teach a Two-Step Way to Salvation?

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom 10:9-10)¹

What happens if a person only trusts Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and never tells anyone? Are they only half saved or not saved at all? Will they still go to heaven when they die? Does the reception of salvation really involve two parts or maybe even three: faith in Christ, public confession of that faith, and submission to Christ's Lordship?² Many have learned a method of gospel presentation called "The Roman Road" which included Rom 10:9-10 as the key verse for how to be saved. Based on that verse many have been taught that a person must not only *believe* in Jesus, but also must publically *confess* their faith or they are not saved.³ And some also add that this confession specifically emphasizes submission to the authority or Lordship of Jesus.

Aside from the question of the necessity of public confession, a second popular teaching seeks support from this verse in making a distinction between a "head" belief and a "heart" belief. According to this view, a person must not only understand and affirm the gospel intellectually, a *head* belief, but in addition must have a *heart* belief, usually understood to be a commitment to Christ or something equivalent.

Three common views are taught regarding the meaning of this verse. The first, already mentioned, understands Paul to be stating two conditions essential for salvation: faith plus confession. Confession, in this understanding, is a public admission of faith in Christ, as supported by the use of "mouth." The weakness of this view is that no other statement about salvation in the New Testament combines faith in Christ with a public profession of faith. Everywhere else the emphasis is on faith alone. The Gospel of John, which most agree was written for the primary purpose of expressing the gospel (John 20:30-31), uses the word "faith" approximately 98 times, but never mentions "confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord."

A second interpretation is that "believing in your heart" and "confessing with the mouth" are roughly synonymous phrases.⁴ A variation on this view suggests that the verse merely

¹ All Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says, 'Follow Me'?* rev and exp ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 34.

³ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Rom* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1947), 341. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Rom* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 290. William Barclay, *The Letter to the Rom*, revised ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 139. James Montgomery Boice, *Rom 9-11* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 3:1209. "These are the two conditions of salvation." F. Godet, *Commentary to the Epistle to the Rom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 383.

⁴ Livingston Blauvelt Jr., "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" 39–41; Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great Salvation* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989), 70–73; Everett F. Harrison, "Matthew," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank

emphasizes the importance of believing in Jesus' deity. The weakness of this view is that it dilutes the meaning of confession by making it a synonym with "belief." In addition, the contrast between "heart" and "mouth" is not a synonymous parallelism, but indicates two distinct locations for each action. Belief is in the heart, confession is with the mouth.

A third view attempts the solution that "genuine" faith will eventually result in public confession. In other words, if a person is saved, then they will eventually and inevitably confess Jesus as Lord. However, this is the reverse of what the text says, which is, "if you confess, you will be saved." A second weakness with this view is that the verse does not actually say or even imply that this act of confession is some eventual or inevitable result.

To get to the meaning of this verse we need to investigate several things: what this confession entails, the meaning of "Jesus is Lord," what belief is, if belief is different from confession with the mouth, what justification describes, what "saved" means, and the connection between saved and justified (are they synonyms or two different events?).

To answer these questions we must first understand the context. Then we will investigate the meaning of these key terms Paul uses, and finally we will evaluate the structure of the verse. Each of these elements will contribute vital information for interpreting the passage.

Context: What is Paul Talking About in Romans 9–11?

Context is one of the most significant aspects of any interpretation, biblical, conversational, or otherwise. If we wrongly identify the general topic of a conversation or written document, then we will often misunderstand individual statements within the conversation or document. I am a huge fan of crime dramas and murder mysteries. Many similarities exist between investigating a crime and investigating the meaning of a passage of Scripture. At the beginning of the criminal investigation, the detective must begin accumulating information about the victim (background, family, associates), as well as analyzing the scene of the crime and discovering the reason the victim was at that location. At this early stage the detective begins to formulate scenarios that might account for all of the facts of the case. In a captivating drama, the initial evidence will usually point to one apparent explanation for the crime and one person of interest. But then comes the twist, a hidden fact surfaces that dramatically alters the understanding of the crime or the victim or the suspect. As the information about the context expands, the interpretation of the crime is transformed. This is often the case with the interpretation of biblical texts. What might appear to be the meaning of a text from an initial reading may be radically altered once the context is correctly identified. Might this be the case with Rom 10:9-10?

The Context of Romans

The context of these two verses involves a part of the apostle Paul's focus on God's plan for Israel in Rom 9–11. But this section also lies within Paul's overall discussion in Rom 1–12, which in turn, lies within the context of his epistle to the Romans.

E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 112; J. Ronald Blue, "Go, Missions," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (October-December 1984): 347-49.

For the purposes of this paper, only a brief summary of Romans 1-12 will be described. Paul's introduction establishes the focus of the epistle on the righteousness of God. The central verse stating Paul's purpose is Rom 1:16-17, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it [the gospel, v. 1:16] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." Throughout the epistle Paul explains how the righteousness of God is vindicated in His relations with the human race.

Paul begins by showing that both pagan and moral Gentiles, as well as Jews, have violated God's righteous standard (Rom 1:18-3:20). The subsequent section describes how unrighteous humans can be declared righteous (justified) by faith alone in Christ alone (Rom 3:21-5:21). Having concluded his discussion on how to be justified, Paul then moves on to declaring how the now justified believer should live a life demonstrating experiential righteousness (Rom 6:1-8:39). At which point Paul then addresses the question of how God will vindicate His righteousness in relation to Israel that is currently in a spiritual state of unrighteousness, having rejected Jesus as their Messiah (Rom 9:1-11:36).

The Israel Connection

A major question that must be resolved within the scope of Rom 9–11, is whether Paul is talking about individual personal salvation of Jewish people from eternal condemnation or the final physical salvation or deliverance of the Jewish people prior to the establishment of His kingdom in the future. Among those who hold to a Reformed or Lordship view of the gospel, the former view is taken, but those who hold to a consistent grace view of the gospel take the latter view. To determine which is correct we must understand how Paul uses the word groups for righteousness and justification, salvation and deliverance, and faith and belief within the epistle to the Romans. Before analyzing those words though, we must first determine from the context whether Paul is focusing on individuals or a corporate entity.

Corporate or Individual?

By "corporate entity," we mean Israel as a national or ethnic whole, in contrast to speaking of individuals within the group. The focus is on God's plan for Israel as an entity. Now that the new entity of the Church has come into existence, has God forgotten or replaced Israel, or will He remain faithful to His covenant promises to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, known collectively as Israel? There are nine compelling reasons that *Israel* should be understood to refer to the corporate whole rather than individuals.

First, God's promises are made to the corporate whole, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom *as a people* belong "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God" (Rom 9:4-5). Second, the election of God or the choice of God (Rom 9:11) is not for individual salvation, but God's choice of the nation through whom He would accomplish His divine purposes in human history. Third, the choice of Jacob and Esau (9:13) was not for their personal individual salvation, but for the destinies of their descendants *as national people groups*. God's choice of Jacob over Esau clearly viewed them as *nations* not as individuals:

“And the Lord said to her [Rebekah], Two *nations* are in your womb, and two *peoples* from within you shall be divided...” (Gen 25:23, emphasis added).

Fourth, throughout Rom 9-11, Paul uses corporate terminology, i.e., “Israel,” “My people,” “the children of Israel,” rather than terms related to individuals. Fifth, in the same way he uses the term Gentiles to describe God’s plan for that entity, without reference to individual destinies. Sixth, Paul uses these corporate terms to generalize about God’s plan for the whole group, though clearly individuals within each group do not conform to the statements. For example, in Rom 9:30, Paul generalizes that the “Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness have attained it” in contrast to the statement “that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness.” Not all Gentiles pursued righteousness and not all Jews pursued a law-based righteousness. These statements generally describe what was true of each group. Paul is dealing with these entities as corporate groups not in terms of individuals.

Seventh, as Paul continues into chapter 11 he still uses terms related to corporate Israel. He asks, “has God rejected *His people*” (Rom 11:1) and answers, “God has not rejected *His people*” (Rom 11:2). Eighth, the plural pronouns, i.e., “they” in Rom 11:11-12, continue to refer to the corporate entity of Israel, as in Rom 11:23ff. And finally, a ninth reason, in his conclusion Paul speaks of “all Israel being saved” (Rom 11:26). From these observations, we learn that Paul’s focus is on God’s plan for national, ethnic Israel, in contrast to God’s plan for individual Jews.

Israel’s Future Deliverance

The last thing to emphasize from context is the importance of two verses that Paul quotes in this section which orient us to the time in which this “salvation” occurs. Following Rom 10:9-10, Paul quotes from Joel 2:32 in Rom 10:13, “For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” As will be confirmed in the study of the words for salvation, this quote from Joel 2:32 is not about being saved from the eternal penalty of sin. *Yhwh* speaks to Israel in Joel 2:32 about end time events during the day of the Lord. God promises “that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The Hebrew word translated “saved” is not the expected *yashah*, but *malat*, which means to save or rescue from a disaster. The LXX translates the Hebrew with the Greek verb *anasozo*, which also has this same connotation.⁵ Paul’s use of *sozo* in this verse clearly means a physical deliverance not salvation from the eternal penalty of sin.

Messianic Deliverance

Romans 10:14 foreshadows what Paul states at the conclusion of Roman 11 that Israel will be saved, i.e, rescued at the end of the Tribulation by the return of Christ as the Deliverer. Here he refers to Jesus not as *Yeshua* who will save His people from their sins, but as the Rescuer, using the verb *rhuomai*, again emphasizing a deliverance or rescue from a national calamity, not personal justification before God.

⁵ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 73.

In the Old Testament, especially in the prophets, the writers foretell of a day when God's eternal covenant with Abraham will be fulfilled. At that time, the promises of the Land Covenant, Davidic Covenant, and New Covenant will also be fulfilled. This occurs when the nation repents, receives forgiveness for their national sin of rejection of Jesus as Messiah, and calls on the name of the Lord. At that time God will rescue them (save them) from impending annihilation, destroy their enemies, restore them from international exile. Israel will finally possess all of the land God promised to Abraham, the David theocracy will be reestablished, and the Messianic Kingdom will be established. This national deliverance and restoration is frequently referred to in the Old Testament as being "saved." In light of Paul's use of various Old Testament quotations and terms, it is most likely that "salvation" in Rom 9-11 does not describe personal justification, but a future, national Messianic rescue and deliverance of corporate Israel.

Paul develops this Messianic salvation beginning with Rom 9:27-29. In Rom 9:27 Paul, quoting from the LXX of Isaiah 10:22 states a remnant "will be saved" a reference to physical deliverance of a minority of Israel whom God would deliver from the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. The Hebrew text though speaks only of this remnant that would be returned. Thus the translators of the LXX used "saved" to describe the return of the remnant of Israel from exile, not personal salvation from eternal condemnation. This forms the backdrop for understanding Paul's use of "saved," in Rom 10:1, a reference to their future deliverance as described in Jer 31:7-8, which describes that future national deliverance with the word "saved." In the last reference to salvation in this section, Rom 11:26, Paul is again quoting from the Old Testament with reference to Israel's national deliverance in the future.

Through the prophets, *Yhwh* promised that He would one day bring a full "salvation" to Israel (Isa 25:9; 43:5; Jer 31:7; 46:27; Zech 8:7). At that future time, Israel will call upon the name of the Lord and will be delivered (Joel 2:32, quoted in Rom 10:13). Thus we see that Rom 10:9-10 uses the word "saved" in a context which supports the meaning of a national deliverance for Israel at the end of days.

In twelve verses of chapter 10, which immediately surround the verses under investigation, Paul quotes from twelve different Old Testament passages.⁶ The only verses in chapter ten that are not Old Testament citations are verses 1-4, 9-10, 12, 14, 17. Only nine of the twenty-one verses in the chapter are not Old Testament citations. This clearly shows that Rom 10:9-10 must be understood in light of Paul's discussion of Israel's future deliverance and not in terms of individual justification.

Contextually, we first learn that Paul uses justification to refer to the doctrine of the individual's deliverance from the eternal penalty of sin. In Romans, "salvation" usually refers to either the ongoing spiritual life after salvation, the end of the salvation process, or physical deliverance, but never as a synonym for justification. Thus, it is unlikely that Rom 10:9-10 addresses salvation from eternal damnation when it uses the word "saved." Second, we learn that the focus of Rom

⁶ Rom 10:5 quotes Lev 18:5; Rom 10:6-8 quotes Deut 30:12-14; Rom 10:11 quotes Isa 28:16; Rom 10:13 quotes Joel 2:32; 10:15 quotes Isa 52:7; Rom 10:16 quotes Isa 53:1; Rom 10:18 quotes Psalm 19:4; Rom 10:19 quotes Deut 32:21; Rom 10:20 quotes Isa 65:1; Rom 10:21 quotes Isa 65:2.

9–11 is on God’s plan for Israel as a corporate entity, not God’s plan for individual justification. Third, we learn that Rom 10:9-10 must be interpreted in light of the use of twelve surrounding quotes from the Old Testament, which in turn focus not on individual Jewish justification, but God’s final deliverance of the nation in fulfillment of His promises in the Old Testament. Context alone makes it doubtful that this is a verse related to personal justification.

Salvation and Righteousness in Romans

Understanding Salvation in Romans

What does “salvation” mean? From what are we *saved* in Romans? In contemporary Christian jargon, the term “saved” is primarily understood to mean saved from the penalty of eternal condemnation for sin. However, in much of the New Testament both the verb “saved” and the noun “salvation” do not convey this meaning. The Greek verb *sozo*, can mean “to heal, to rescue or deliver from calamitous circumstances.”⁷ Although this word is sometimes used for deliverance from eternal condemnation and entering heaven, this only occurs 43% of the time in the New Testament.⁸ In the other instances “saved” refers to experiential sanctification, glorification, deliverance from natural disasters or dangers, healing from illness, and deliverance from God’s future end-time judgment.

The Bible speaks of three tenses or phases of salvation. At phase one, we are saved from the eternal penalty of sin, justification salvation (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). During phase two we are saved from the power of sin, experiential sanctification (Rom 5:9-10; Phil 2:12; 1 Tim 4:16). And in phase three we are saved from the presence of sin, glorification salvation (Rom 13:11). A fourth way Paul uses “salvation” in Romans is to describe the future Messianic deliverance of Israel at the end of the Tribulation. In Romans, Paul never uses “saved” as a synonym for justification. So the meaning here must relate to one of the other senses of salvation—experiential sanctification or glorification or to God’s future physical rescue of Israel during the final judgments of the Tribulation.

Righteousness

A second key word group Paul uses in Romans describes righteousness (*dikaiosune*). This word is used with two important and distinct meanings. The first is the meaning of imputed righteousness, the basis for “justification” (*dikaiosis*) or justified (*dikaioo*). Justification is the term Paul uses in Romans to express what happens at the moment of faith alone in Christ alone. When a person trusts in Christ, at that instant, God the Father judicially imputes to the believer the perfect righteousness of Christ. Simultaneously, God, on the basis of the believer’s possession of Christ’s perfect righteousness judicially declares him to be “righteous” or “not guilty.” Justification describes a forensic event that transpires in relation to the justice of God. When the justice of God sees our possession of Christ’s righteousness He declares us righteous. At that instant, the believer is saved from the eternal penalty of sin. Nothing more is required to enter heaven than to be justified by God’s grace (Rev. 3:20, 5:2; cf., Gal 2:16). In the early part

⁷ *BDAG*, 982.

⁸ Joseph Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 394.

of Romans, righteousness frequently refers to this imputed or positional righteousness (Rom 3:21-22; 4:3, 5-6, 9, 11, 13, 22; 5:17, 21).

“Righteousness” not only describes the judicial possession of Christ’s perfect righteousness from the instant of salvation, designated by theologians as imputed righteousness, it also describes righteous living after salvation, called experiential or ethical righteousness. After Paul concludes his discussion of justification in Rom 5, he then begins to instruct about living a righteous life after justification. Righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is used only of experiential righteousness in Roman 6-8 (Rom 6:13, 16, 18-20; 8:20). Now the important question to answer is, since Paul has left behind his discussion of justification in chapter 5, and uses righteousness only for experiential righteousness in chapters 6-8, what meaning does righteousness convey in chapters 9-11?

In Rom 9-11 righteousness (*dikaosune*) is used thirteen times in the Greek.⁹ These uses fall between Rom 9:28 and Rom 10:10, the immediate context of our passage. Therefore, it is quite important to interpret these uses accurately. In a cursory reading of the passage it might seem obvious that these verses are all describing imputed righteousness, and thus Paul is discussing phase one, justification salvation. However, further reflection will show that this is not the case.

In Rom 9:30 Paul argues that the Gentiles did not pursue righteousness. To understand this we must go back to his first mention of Gentiles and righteousness in Rom 1:18-32, where Paul emphasizes that Gentiles suppressed the truth in unrighteousness and pursued moral degeneracy. So the righteousness under discussion was an experiential righteousness, not an imputed righteousness. Thus, the righteousness mentioned in Rom 9:30 must also be experiential righteousness, rather than imputed righteousness.

In contrast, the Jews pursued a law leading to righteousness (9:31). While it is true that Jews sought righteousness through the works of the Law, Paul emphatically and repeatedly declares the law could never lead to positional or forensic righteousness (Gal 2:16).¹⁰ This means that imputed righteousness could not be his meaning here because the Law was never a means of personal justification. The Law was given to Israel as a rule of life for those who were already justified.¹¹ As Paul continues his explanation in chapter 10 related to the availability of the Law to the Israelites, it must be remembered that in the Old Testament context the issue was never justification, but their fullness of life in the land on the basis of obedience to the Torah. This becomes clear in Rom 10:5 “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall *live* by them” (emphasis added). The context of the original statement in Lev 18:5 is not talking about gaining eternal life and avoiding eternal

⁹ The NA27 text has *dikaosune* 11x (two of which are textually uncertain); the Majority Text has 13 uses.

¹⁰ Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 168, “The Jews, in contrast to the Gentiles pursued a “law of righteousness.” The word “pursued: (Gr *diōkō*) means “run after” and is quite strong (BDAG, 254). It is normally associated with the ethical righteousness that believers should pursue such as hospitality (Rom 12:13), mutual peace (Rom. 14:19; 1 Pet 3:11; Heb 12:14), holiness, love (1 Cor 14:1), doing good (1 Thess 5:15), and righteousness (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). The “law of righteousness” is the law of ethical behavior.

¹¹ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Messianic Bible Study Collection*, vol. 182 (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1983), 31.

condemnation, but explaining the condition for enjoying the richness of life in the promised land is obedience to the Law.

At the end of the Torah, two key passages explain that if Israel obeys the Law they will enjoy blessing in the land (Lev 26:11-13; Deut 28:1-14) and that disobedience will lead to suffering and death (Lev 26:14-45; Deut 28:15-68). Neither passage is addressing eternal life or eternal death, but the experience of a rich life or death-like existence in the present time. The Law, or Torah, was not a means of justification for Israel, but if obeyed by faith, it was the means of spiritual growth, i.e., experiential sanctification. “Life” in Deuteronomy is the common term for the experience of God’s blessing on Israel in the promised land (Deut 4:1; 5:32-33; 8:1; 16:20; 30:6, 15-20). Moses does not use the term “life” to refer to a future eternal life.

What we have learned is that the first nine uses of *dikaisune* in Rom 9:30-10:5 refer to ethical or experiential righteousness, not imputed or justification righteousness. As Paul continues, he is still speaking of experiential or sanctifying righteousness in Roman 10:8. The quote from Deut 30:11-14 begins, “This commandment which I give you this day...” The commandment Moses was giving them that day was not related to initial, personal salvation, but related to the ongoing experiential righteousness and experiential sanctification of the nation. In Deuteronomy Moses was instructing the nation as they were about to enter the promised land on how they should live in the promised land. Moses’ conclusion challenges: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.” Again, neither Moses in the original statement, nor Paul in the context of Rom 10 is focusing on eternal life and eternal death, but sanctification or experiential righteousness.

Moses’ challenge to the believers of his generation was that they not ignore the Word of God which had come to them in both verbal and written form. He emphasized the close proximity of God’s word by saying “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” When Moses spoke those words, he was addressing the original audience regarding their experiential righteousness. The contention of this paper is that throughout Rom 9–11, Paul is focusing not on personal, individual regeneration of Jewish believers, but the ultimate and final Messianic deliverance that comes at the end of the Tribulation, at the time the Messiah returns to rescue Israel from otherwise certain annihilation. The condition for this rescue is that corporately Israel must repent, i.e., change their mind from the previous national rejection of Jesus as Messiah that resulted in national judgment and dispersal from the land in AD 70, and call upon Him to rescue them from end-time judgment.

The requirement of Deut 30 for Israel to enjoy the blessings of the land promise was not based on solely on personal regeneration, but national obedience to God beyond individual salvation. By turning to a path of obedience, Israel would produce experiential or ethical righteousness. It is that ethical righteousness that becomes the basis for the national Messianic rescue. That our verse speaks of ethical righteousness will become clear when we examine the use of righteousness in the passage.

What Does it Mean to “Confess with the Mouth?”

“Mouth” and “heart” stand out as a second set of key terms in Rom 10:9-10. But like “saved” and “righteousness,” these words must also be understood in light of their use within the context. “Mouth” and “heart” are first mentioned in Rom 10:8 where Paul is loosely quoting from Deut 30:14. Beginning in Rom 10:5, Paul weaves together a loose paraphrase of verses in the Torah from Lev 18:5 and Deut 30. In Deut 30:11ff. Moses challenges his listeners to a life of obedience to Torah. He anticipates possible objections that might center around the idea that the Law was just too spiritual for them to comprehend, or too difficult to understand, or too challenging to obey. Moses answers these objections by stating that the Law was not located in heaven or beyond the sea. In fact, he states that because God’s recorded revelation of the Law was so near to the Israelites that they were familiar with its *mitzva ’ot*, the commandments. The Law was so close that they discussed it, the Law was “in their mouths.” And the Law was so close that they knew it, it was “in their hearts.”

“Mouth” is a figure of speech used to describe what is produced by the mouth—conversation and confession. Heart was also a figure of speech. In the Bible, the word heart rarely referred to the literal organ in the chest that pumps blood through the body. The word is often used as an idiom for the center of a person’s internal life and most often for the thinking part of the soul (Psalm 73:21; 1 Sam 2:35; Jer 17:10; Psalm 7:9; Rev 2:23), the intellectual faculty of the soul that understands the revelation of God. So believing with the heart is not talking about a different kind of faith or one that is more committed to the authority of Christ, but is simply indicating that belief is a function of the mind.¹²

For our purposes of understanding Rom 10:9-10, the use of mouth and heart in Rom 10:8 shows that the actions of the mouth and heart are contextually two different actions from two different locations. Moses proclaimed that because of the Torah’s proximity, his generation was responsible for applying the Law to produce experiential righteousness to be blessed by God in the promised land.

This statement is used by Paul to confirm that his readers were in a similar position to the Jews of Moses’ time. They, too, knew the Law and knew about its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. By knowing this, they too could also produce experiential righteousness. And in a way similar to God’s deliverance of Jews from calamity so God would also deliver Gentiles from the judgment of His present wrath¹³, a term used to refer to God’s judgment on the human race either throughout history (Rom 1:18) or during the end time judgments of the Tribulation.

¹² J. B. Hixson, “What is Saving Faith,” in J.B. Hixson, Rick Whitmire, and Roy B. Zuck, ed., *Freely By His Grace: Classical Free Grace Theology* (Duluth: Grace Gospel Press, 2012), 139-193; Gordon H. Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith*, (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1983), 28-59.

¹³ “Wrath” is used in Romans as God’s present judgment on man for rebellion against Him (Rom 1:18, 3:5, 4:15) and eventually culminating in the time of future judgment of the Tribulation culminating in the Tribulation judgments (Rom 2:5). Thus wrath is not a reference to the future punishment of the Lake of Fire, but the divine judgment of God on the human race in time.

Confession is sometimes private, as in 1 John 1:9, but most often the word means a public admission or acknowledgment of something (Matt 7:23, 10:32; John 1:20; Acts 24:14; Rom 14:11; Phil 2:11; James 5:16.). Therefore confession *with the mouth* then is related here to something that is verbally articulated, not simply a synonym for an internal intellectual activity. This is further clarified when Paul immediately goes on to write three times of those who “call” on the Lord (Rom 10:12-14). Verse 14a is the most helpful for clarifying the passage: “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This is a quote from Joel 2:32 that places this calling on the Lord for deliverance during the time of the great and awesome day of the Lord (Joel 2:31) that takes place just prior to the return of the nation from the diaspora to their historic national homeland, the focus of Deut 30. Again this reinforces the idea that Paul is not speaking of individual justification in any of these verses, but the future deliverance of Israel by God in the end times.

The verbal act of calling results in salvation just as confession results in salvation in verse 10. The three rhetorical questions Paul asks following this statement are most enlightening. If we look at these verses in reverse order a clear progression is revealed: a proclamation is made, the people hear, some of the people believe, those who believe then call on the name of the Lord for deliverance. Belief in the ability of Jesus as Messiah to deliver the nation precedes calling upon Him to deliver.

“Calling on the name of the Lord” is a frequent phrase in the Old Testament. An investigation of this phrase reveals that this most often describes a time when people or a person is under stress or adversity and cries out to God for deliverance (Psalm 14:4; 18:3; 50:15; 79:6; 141:1; 145:18).

This phrase fits the context of the Old Testament quotations. The quotes from Deut 30:11-14 focus on the requirement of the nation to have experiential righteousness to enter the land. This presupposes individual justification and also includes personal, ethical righteousness or sanctification. Only when the nation has corporately recognized Jesus as Messiah will they call upon the name of the Lord to rescue them from certain destruction at the end of the Tribulation. Therefore, contextually, it seems best to view both the righteousness and the salvation as related to end time deliverance of the nation. This is confirmed by the structure of the passage.

Confessing Jesus as Lord

There are basically two views. The first is the view advocated by Lordship salvation, which is that Lord here identifies Jesus as the sovereign master of the universe. According to this view, this is an admission that Jesus is the master of one’s life so that one can be eternally saved. Our study so far has shown that this is not the meaning of saved in this passage.

The second view is that “Lord,” *kurios*, is a restatement of the deity of Jesus; the emphasis is not on Jesus as the sovereign ruler over one’s life, but that Jesus is indeed fully divine. When understood within the context of the Joel 2:32 quote, this makes more sense contextually. At the first advent, Israel *as a people* rejected the claims of Jesus as Messiah and as God. Jesus announced judgment on the Temple stating that He would not return until they said, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matt 23:37-39).

Following this statement, our Lord departed the Temple and crossed to the Mount of Olives. There his disciples asked, “when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt 24:3). As part of His answer, Jesus warned of the many horrific events during the first half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Matt 24: 4-14) and especially of the great desecration of the Temple, the “abomination of desolation,” predicted by Daniel. At the time that occurs, Jesus warned those in Judea to flee to the mountains.

Let me suggest that of those who obey Jesus’ command to flee to the mountains, the majority would do so because they have already trusted in Him as Savior who died as their substitute. Individually, they would already be justified. As a result a remnant composed of justified Jews will flee to the hills to survive the last half of the Tribulation. Old Testament prophecies suggest that they find shelter in Edom, specifically in Bozrah (Jer 49:13-14; Isa 34:6; 63:1-3). From there, the leadership of Israel, representing the nation in the same way as the scribes and Pharisees of the first century, will cry out to Jesus to come deliver them. Their calling upon the name of the Lord will be a public confession of their national sin (Lev 26:40-42) and acknowledgement of their corporate recognition of Jesus as Lord and their Savior (Zech 12:10). Then He will then come to rescue them from certain destruction (Rom 11:26-27) and lead them in victory against the armies of the antichrist in Jerusalem where He will judge them and destroy them (Joel 3:2, 12).

The Structure of Romans 10:9-10

These two verses are structured as a chiasm, a literary device that reminds the reader of the left side of an X shape, which is the letter Chi in the Greek alphabet. In a chiasm, the statements in the center are often the focal point. This structuring is used by a writer to focus the reader’s attention on a statement much as a painter will use light on his canvas to draw the observer’s attention to the focal point of a painting.

Rom 10:9-10

- | | |
|----|---|
| A | because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and |
| A’ | believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. |
| B’ | For with the heart one believes and is justified, and |
| B | with the mouth one confesses and is saved. |

In this structure we see that A and B are synonymous, both concern confession with the mouth. In the A statement the confession is that “Jesus is Lord,” a simple reference to Jesus as fully divine. This is what Israel failed to recognize at the first advent, they rejected Jesus’ deity and sought to stone Him for blasphemy. The B statement declares that a verbal admission that Jesus is *Yhwh* will result in Israel being delivered.

The middle two statements are also parallel. Both statements begin with believing in the heart. In the first statement the result is salvation. In the second, the result is not “justified” as the ESV translates, but should be translated “resulting in righteous” as the KJV, NKJV, NASB95, NET,

LEB all translate. The ESV and NIV appear to be interpreting the word based on their assumptions about the meaning of the text, rather than translating it. In the Greek the word is our familiar *dikaiosune*, “justice, equitableness, fairness, righteousness, a state or quality of righteousness.” As such the word could refer to either positional, forensic righteousness or experiential righteousness. To translate this noun as the verb, “is justified” is to commit the error of interpretation rather than simple translation.

Conclusion

Though this passage appears at first to be talking about conditions for individual justification salvation, our analysis of the passage shows that this is not the topic of this chapter, or section in Romans at all. Paul is instead talking about God’s faithfulness to His promises to Israel in the Old Testament and how they will eventually be fulfilled.

The context shows Paul’s use of righteousness (*dikaiosune*) expresses experiential righteousness. The chiasmic structure of Rom 10:9-10 shows further that righteousness in this verse also expresses experiential righteousness since it is parallel to “saved” that is clearly a reference to Messianic salvation, not individual justification.

According to these verses, in order to be saved (contextually meaning to be delivered from a physical catastrophe), Israel will need to respond to Jesus’ claim to be the God-Man Messiah. As a nation, they must reverse course and publically admit Jesus is the Sovereign God and then they will be delivered. Rom 10:9-10 is not talking about personal justification, but emphasizes the final rescue of national Israel on the basis of their recognition of the deity of Christ and His substitutionary atonement for their sin. Paul states this as a universal principle to show that in the same way that confession of Jesus as God and trusting Him leads to the national deliverance of Israel, so this same trust in Jesus by all, including Gentiles, can lead to their deliverance from God’s wrath, divine judgment in time, as well.