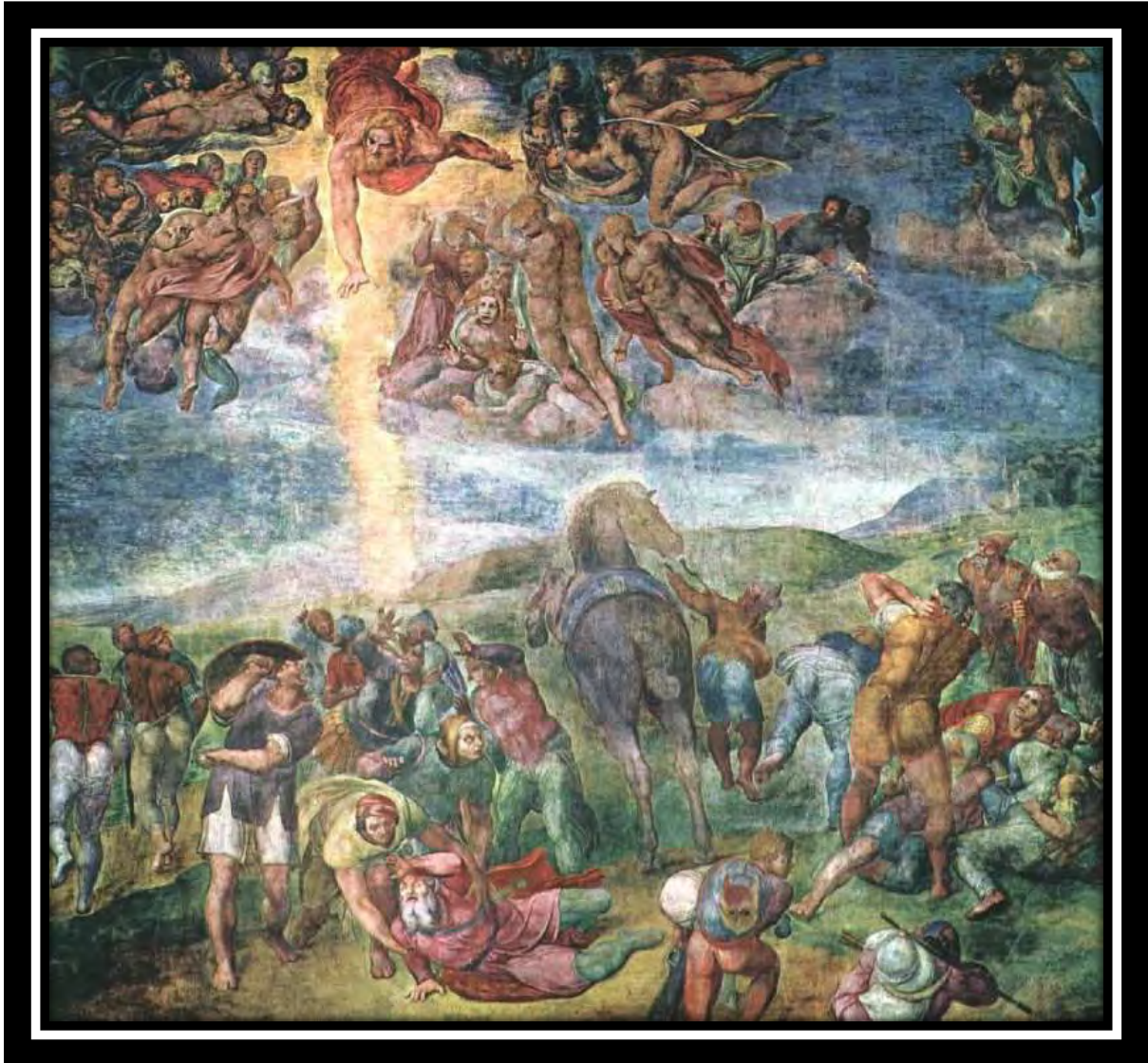


# ROMANS—WEEK 9

## SPREADING THE GOSPEL



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

## The cover image is the Conversion of Saul by Michelangelo Buonarroti

The gospel spreads through the preaching of the word. Unfortunately, some people miss out. They seek righteousness through works. That doesn't work.

Most heartbreakingly to Paul, this especially applies to Israel, though it was clearly prophesied.

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1 Romans 9:30–10:4 (NKJV)

*What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written:*

*“Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense,  
And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”*

*Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

This is about “white hat syndrome.” The Jews were so sure that they’re the good guys that they didn’t pay attention. The result is that they missed the point, even stumbled over it.

Notice the connection between pride and salvation by works. Paul notes that, “*Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness,*” didn’t succeed *because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law.* The problem with righteousness by works is that you can claim credit for it.

Conversely, the *Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith.*

You can’t claim credit for *the righteousness of faith.* That’s humbling.

That’s God’s design.

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Since we understand that righteousness is by faith, white hat syndrome isn’t a problem for Christians, right?

Fat chance. This is a struggle for every one of us and is one of the biggest impediments to spreading the gospel. Non-believers are right when they complain about Christians having a “holier than thou” attitude. You have this problem. I have this problem. We all have this problem.

The problem is that sin is so nutzo that even when we’re being humble, we can take pride in our humility. So even when we recognize our struggle with white hat syndrome, and battle against it, we see ourselves as superior to those who don’t. We put on that white hat.

One of the weirdest and ugliest things about sin is that we’re at our worst when we’re right. The law is true and good. The Jews were right in that.

Unfortunately, they knew they were right.

2 Romans 10:5–9 (ESV)

*For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on 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 abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 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.*

The beauty of this passage is that it shows that getting into heaven isn’t about trying to get into heaven. If you claim Jesus as Lord, then he’s your savior. You do not have to understand how all this works.

This is critical. The thief on the cross didn’t understand the plan of redemption. All he knew was that Jesus was coming into His kingdom and that His crucifixion wasn’t going to stop that.

*One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” — Luke 23:39-43 (ESV)*

But there’s another important consideration. In Romans 10:9, the words, “Jesus is Lord” can be taken two different ways — “Jesus is the Lord,” or, “Jesus is my Lord.”

The first is obvious. The world was created through Jesus and he is the Lord of his own creation. This is good to know, but it isn’t saving faith.

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! — James 2:19 (ESV)*

“Jesus is Lord” should be understood as, “Jesus is my Lord.” This is the key to life. All the rest of Christian doctrine is worth studying—and will help you to be a more effective servant of your Lord—but the lordship of Jesus Christ is the essence of Christianity. If sin is rebellion against God, then declaring Jesus as Lord is the opposite.

It’s the first step on the long road to recovery.

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The number one thing a servant of the Lord must do is pray for direction. What does He want you to do? Does He want you to grow in some way? Does a great task lie ahead? Discipleship is first listening.

Jesus is a loving boss, but He may call you to more action than you think you’re ready for. Ask Him for strength. Recommit to his Lordship and ask Him to make you a better servant.

And beware, it may take a while to be sure about His answer. Sometimes it helps to have a friend to bounce things off of—especially if you’re unsure or afraid of what you’re being called to.

3 Romans 10:10–13 (NKJV)

*For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”*

This passage teaches a curious doctrine. It’s not enough just to believe; you have to tell somebody.

And just to be sure, it’s in there twice — “*with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,*” and, “*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*”

Don’t worry; this doesn’t contradict salvation by faith alone. It’s just saying that there’s a step you have to take to complete the process. It’s standard church doctrine that a new believer must make a public confession of faith. But why?

*Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. — 1 Corinthians 12:3 (NKJV)*

OK, it’s a litmus test. That explains why we want to hear a public confession of faith from new believers, but why does God require one?

We don’t know. Sure, it’s easy to think up reasonable explanations for why God requires a public confession of faith. “A public confession of faith begins the process of acting on your faith.” “It teaches boldness and practices not being ashamed of the gospel.”

These are fine, but none of them is the official answer. The truth is that we aren’t given an undisputed answer as to why God designed a public confession into the plan of salvation. Still, these “reasonable explanations” can be comforting. They help resolve nagging doubts. We see that this requirement makes sense; we just don’t know all the details behind it.

That’s an important part of being a Christian. Our understanding of all things theological is going to be pretty shallow (this side of eternity anyway). We need an occasional reminder to knock us off our high horse and remind us that we’re not experts.

We should always strive to understand the things of God. Thus will our failures remind us of our limitations and keep us humble.

That humility is the path to real understanding.

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God’s ways, which include things like hurricanes, are higher than our ways and we aren’t going to understand all of them. He is LORD. We are not.

God could have created any universe He wanted to. He chose to create this one. Praise Him for that.

4 Romans 10:14–21 (NKJV)

*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:*

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,  
Who bring glad tidings of good things!”*

Publicly confessing Christ is just the start. Christians should be involved in spreading the gospel to people who desperately need it.

The art of the gospel is a wondrous thing. While there were many confirming miracles at the beginning, the plan now is to convey the gospel through the simple efforts of an amazingly flawed bunch of people—us.

God could have used lots of Hollywood style special effects to make spreading the gospel simple. With the right miracles, I could convince anyone.

Except that I couldn't. Moses had all the special effects and Pharaoh didn't budge.

*Now the magicians so worked with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not. So there were lice on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, just as the LORD had said. — Exodus 8:18–19 (NKJV)*

Instead, God chose people like us to spread his gospel—using good old shoe leather and a big dose of the Holy Spirit.

Frankly, the Hollywood method would be boring. This is much more glorious.

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The gospel is not a spectator sport. You have to get in the game.

But don't think you have to be a knock-on-doors evangelist to contribute; every church job supports the team. What are your gifts and talents? When you start applying your skills to tasks in the church, wondrous things happen.

One of the keys to how I got started writing was mowing the church lawn. It gave me lots of time to think while I was prevented from writing anything down. That forced me to organize my thoughts more thoroughly. I kept editing and refining until the grass was all cut.

That's typical of the artistic way that God works. We are clay and being molded by the potter can be thrilling. The best part is looking back and connecting the dots over a long time span.

Then you see how the potter has molded you—to His glory.

5 Romans 10:16–21 (NKJV)

*But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

*But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed:*

*“Their sound has gone out to all the earth,  
And their words to the ends of the world.”*

*But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says:*

*“I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation,  
I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.”*

*But Isaiah is very bold and says:*

*“I was found by those who did not seek Me;  
I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.”*

*But to Israel he says:*

*“All day long I have stretched out My hands  
To a disobedient and contrary people.”*

Paul has just finished noting how beautiful are the feet that bring good news (the gospel). Just one problem—Israel rejected the good news. As we saw earlier in verses 9:1–3 and 10:1–4, this drives Paul to write laments.

But this time he takes a different approach. Paul uses Isaiah 53:1, Psalm 19:4, Deuteronomy 32:21, Isaiah 65:1, and Isaiah 65:2 to show that everything happened in exact accordance with God’s divine plan.

As bad as things are, it’s comforting to know that all is as it’s supposed to be.

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This principle applies to many aspects of life. For example, it’s not unusual to return from the dentist in great pain. It’s even normal to be prescribed narcotic pain killers for that pain.

Now imagine how you’d feel about that pain if you hadn’t just been to the dentist—if it just cropped up out of the blue. Same pain, yet now it’s unbearable. The unexpected and unexplained nature of the pain makes it worse.

When you know things are under control, you can relax. That’s where Paul’s going with this passage. It reads like he’s writing out a therapy exercise.

This concept also applies to the many warnings, throughout the New Testament, of persecution. The suffering is more bearable when you know that it doesn’t mean something’s gone wrong with the plan.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How can Christians stay humble?
2. What's new or different in your calling recently?
3. How did you make your public confession?
4. Has a job or assignment ever taught you things you didn't expect?
5. Were you ever comforted in pain?

*Items for prayer:*