



# ROMANS Part 90

Chapter 10:1-5

## Zeal without knowledge equals unbelief



Indeed, brethren, the delight of my heart and my petition to God for their sake is for salvation. 2 For I am testifying to them that they have a zeal of God, but not in accord with recognition. 3 For they, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, were not subjected to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the consummation of law for righteousness to everyone who is believing. 5 For Moses is writing of the righteousness which is of law, that a man who does the same shall be living in it.

Remind you that Romans chapters 9-11 are primarily about Israel. In these three chapters, Paul bleeds all over the page for his brethren according to flesh. Do you remember him at the beginning of chapter 9, in

the first five verses? His heart requires a tourniquet—

The truth am I telling in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifying together with me in holy spirit, That my sorrow is great, and intermittent pain is in my heart—for I myself wished to be anathema from Christ—for my brethren, my relatives according to the flesh, who are Israelites, whose is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the legislation and the divine service and the promises; whose are the fathers, and out of whom is the Christ according to the flesh, Who is over all, God be blessed for the cons. Amen!

Paul reins himself in here at the beginning of chapter ten, using a word containing the word “light,” namely, “delight.” He says, “the delight of my heart and my petition to God for their sake is for salvation.” Paul distances himself emotionally now because he’s about to sink his claws into Israel’s premier problem and lay bare the consequences thereof.

### ZEAL WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

**“For I am testifying to them that they have a zeal of God, but not in accord with recognition” (Romans 10:2).**

This is a killer accusation. I’m embarrassed for Israel, just reading it. The entire nation—except for the remnant—reminds me of contestants I have watched auditioning in the early rounds of *American Idol*. These people cannot sing, but no one has ever told them that. They grew up in households where they were the little darlings who could do no wrong. They were “special”—even if they spit in their soup. This generation, known as “Millennials,” got trophies just for waking up in the morning. In their weird world there were no winners and losers, but only children who tried really, really,

really hard and deserved awards for putting on their pants. Everyone was a winner, even if they lost. Everyone was smart, even if they were dumb. Thus, all truth was relative—which is another way of saying that there was no truth at all. Two plus two equaled five if that's what a Millennial wanted it to equal because one's opinion deserved to be heard and even believed and how dare anyone make another precious human being feel bad for calling his or her thoughts "mistaken."



So here come the Millennials, prancing onstage to audition before professional singers at early *American Idol* tryouts, convinced that they will be the world's next superstars. Yet what emerges from some of their mouths makes asthmatic tree frogs sound like Julie Andrews. The judges say, "You're terrible," and the poor little powder-puffs go away weeping and incredulous. Life is so unfair to them. The judges don't like them. *I worked so hard! The show is rigged!* No, but it is simply that, for the first time in your hyper-privileged lives, you're being judged on performance rather than effort. You have at last met the real world and the real world has regurgitated you. Here in Romans 10:2, Paul brings real world truth to Israel and Israel is found lacking. Israel ought to cry and run off the stage, but instead she seeks to kill Paul. Israel is just like *American Idol* contestants: it despises the messengers; it would impugn and even kill the righteous judge in order to save its own ugly face.

## WHAT A DRAG

A zeal of God evaporates into the air, and worse, if unaccompanied by recognition, that is, knowing. I knew a guy who used to drag a 100 pound cross through the streets, yelling at people to repent or be damned. The cross was on wheels, but the guy's mind was off the tracks. Yet what takes more zeal than dragging a cross on wheels through the streets and yelling at strangers? What takes more stupidity? Just how hard can God's eyes roll at this?

If anyone knew this game, it was Paul. No one out-zealed the former Pharisee. We all know this man's long

list of credentials as a premier law-keeper. In case any have forgotten, here are the very credentials, listed by the man himself in Philippians 3:4-7—

If any other one is presuming to have confidence in flesh, I rather: in circumcision the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in relation to law, a Pharisee, in relation to zeal, persecuting the ecclesia, in relation to the righteousness which is in law, becoming blameless.

Paul was so zealous to defend what he believed to be truth that, after ravaging Jerusalem, he bought tickets to distant cities to persecute whatever foolish people *there* followed Jesus. It was on just such a trek that Paul met the Simon Cowell of the celestial world: Jesus Christ. Jesus Cowell basically watched Saul's performance, said, "You stink," and set Saul off on the road to recognizing truth. It worked. Later, the apostle said concerning his former sweaty and presumptuous attainments: "But things which were gain to me, these I have deemed a forfeit because of Christ" (Philippians 3:8).



## RUNNING IN VAIN

You can run and run and run, but if you're running in the wrong direction it will amount to nothing except arriving at a strange, undesired location. Paul himself said in Galatians 2:1-2—

Thereupon, after the lapse of fourteen years, I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also along with me. Now I went up in accord with a revelation, and submitted to them the evangel which I am heralding among the nations, yet privately to those of repute, lest somehow I should be racing or ran for naught.

Paul needed and sought the approval of the twelve in Jerusalem if only to keep other Jews from killing him. A nod from the apostles would stay the hand of fratricide, so he courted them. Paul did things the right way, thinking things through. He later told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:5—

Now if anyone should be competing in the games also, he is not given a wreath if ever he should not be competing lawfully.

Competing is great—train to compete—but unless one follow the rules, one competes in vain. Paul stickled over details. He sweated the small stuff to get it right. To Paul, it didn't matter so much *that* you did something, but how you did it and what you aimed for. Flailing didn't count. Using a running and then a boxing analogy, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:26—"Now then, thus am I racing, not as dubious, thus am I boxing, not as punching the air." The boxing analogy is particularly apt. Swinging one's arms wildly may look impressive, but what is one swinging at? Paul was not one to carelessly aim and then flail at nothing. Action for its own sake is idleness. Action must have a goal. To attain that goal, action needs a method. Behind that method there must be a mind.

Zeal without knowledge (recognition) is a racehorse without a jockey. It's a body without a brain. It's running in the wrong direction, arriving at nowhere. Zeal without knowledge sets out for Righteousness, but ends up in Uselessness.

### MARBLE FACADES

**"For they, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, were not subjected to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).**

The word "righteousness" occurs three times in this passage. The overriding topic of Romans is righteousness and how to get it. The odd thing is that one does not get it by getting it, but by realizing one has it. How does one have it? By virtue of Another's work—and by believing what is written concerning that Other's work. Paul's word is perfect here: "recognition."

Along this line, the Jews are not an intuitive people. They think in straight lines. They think that the best way to get something is to strain the gizzard until one overtakes that thing. For all this straining after righteousness, Israel ends up with a ruptured gizzard—and no righteousness. Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, Israel misses

righteousness in a man sent by God epitomizing that very thing: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ *was* God's righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30). God purposely packaged this righteousness in a humble Jew-suit to see who would love the righteousness and who would love merely the outward appearance of it.

Jesus was a human trip-wire. On the other hand, many can't detect the death within a brilliant, ornate tomb.

### LEGENDS IN THEIR OWN MINDS

The religious contemporaries of Christ descended from the same stock that sought the ancient Saul for king because he stood "head and shoulders above the rest" (1 Samuel 9:2). Israel habitually and fatally judges according to flesh, and nothing else. They preen and pose in front of any reflective surface, then insist upon judging others by the same stupid standard. Thus, Israel cannot



see the righteousness of God in a man hanging naked upon a Roman stake. It is impossible for them. They cannot see the love there that dies for their own failings; they do not imagine that they *have* failings. Even in the shadow of the cross, the religious seek to establish their own righteousness, mocking the Christ pinned there, even as He writhes. They challenge Him: If He is truly God's Son, then He ought to extricate Himself. Talk about picking on the weak and disadvantaged. Yet it is only at such times that Religion finds courage. Even in the quiet, still mists of Gethsemane, Religion must bring along Roman soldiers and stout rope. Religion needs guns, swords, numbers, noise, rope. Truth has the right to remain silent, and exercises it. Truth can stand alone, and does.

The religious elite—and even the religious rabble—must *think* that they are right, never mind the complete absence of any godly correctness. Otherwise, sleep



flees them. When the rabble and elite of unspirituality step in dog poop (metaphorically speaking), they must accompany the error (prop it up, actually) with impressive displays of whatever the majority of humans find acceptable. (Size matters, as does beauty.) Thus clothed, error is lent legitimacy in human sight. Religion knows what makes people tick; it knows what fellow-preeners look for. These kinds must *establish* their own righteousness, and that of others, for righteousness, for these, does not inherently exist. Nothing that inherently exists needs *established*, you see. What does not inherently exist must be founded, grounded, gilded and set between pillars. Marble facades help. A ribbon-cutting ceremony adds much to the proceedings; *red* ribbon, specifically, furthers it along. How grand, too, if, at the cutting ceremony, one employs scissors the size of hedge trimmers.

#### A SWING AND A MISS

The root word of righteousness is “right.” The Pharisees were right, and Jesus was wrong. This much, they “knew.” And they were zealous about it. Never did such ignorance burn so many calories. They always had to be right, these people. They were legends in their own minds and could never bow to a lesser. In John chapter 9, Jesus healed a blind man. The Pharisees moaned in jealousy and cast the beneficiary of Jesus’ power from the temple. The happy man gave a little speech that the Jerusalem leadership hated—naturally. They thought that the man was trying to teach them. He *was* trying to teach them, actually. (It didn’t work.) He said to them, “No one can heal a blind man unless He’s from God. Have you ever heard of this happening?” For this little speech they said to him, “You are born in sin, and you are trying to teach *us*?” For this, they excommunicated him. They couldn’t stand up to such power clothed in such weakness. Excommunicating weakness containing righteousness is precisely what the Pharisees did for a living. At the cross, for example, they excommunicated Jesus Christ. They were thus insubject to the righteousness of God. Romans 3:21-23—

Yet now, apart from law, a righteousness of God is manifest (being attested by the law and the prophets), yet a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ’s faith, for all, and on all who are believing, for there is no distinction, for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.

Everyone sins except the Pharisees, of course. While they’re “not sinning,” they’re murdering their own Messiah. *Oops*. Seeking to establish one’s own righteousness is one colossal set of horse blinders.

#### IGNORANCE EQUALS UNBELIEF

The Jews are “ignorant of the righteousness of God,” and of these Paul says, “my petition to God for their sake is for salvation.” Clearly, ignorance derails belief. I have pointed out for years the deadliness of ignorance, and yet am reviled for it. I am just being mean, some people say. Why can’t I just understand that these poor unbelievers *mean* well? “They just don’t understand, Martin. Surely you will not condemn them for that.” I am asked to give these people a trophy for showing up, for putting on their pants. I am to congratulate them for swinging wildly at the air and wheeling around 100 pound crosses. I won’t do it.



So, yes, the rumors you have heard about me are true: I call out those who refuse to believe a single essential of Paul’s gospel as “unbelievers.” I am told in return—as I have just said—“Oh, Martin. They’re only *ignorant*.” This is said to me by those who strangely believe that not knowing a thing (ignorance) is to be considered synonymous with knowing it (recognition). To these same people, I am assuming, night is the same as day, wrong is the same as right, and Satan is the same as Christ (2 Corinthians 6:15). One must truly wonder.

Paul is not so loosily-goosily blind with the gospel given him by God. When Paul considers his brothers according to flesh, he rightly equates ignorance with unbelief. Ignorance is conially fatal. Any person ruled by logic rather



The religious are lost in the fog of their own effort.

than emotion sees it as blackly and whitely as Paul. To repeat myself:

Paul begins this section with, “Indeed, brethren, the delight of my heart and my petition to God for their sake is for [Israel’s] salvation.” If Paul’s petition to God is for the salvation of his brethren, then obviously his brethren are not saved. *Why* are they not saved? It is because they are “ignorant of the righteousness of God.” *Why* are they ignorant of the righteousness of God? It is because they are overly occupied “seeking to establish their own righteousness.” It’s a domino effect. Let’s consider these dominoes in reverse order:

#### **Israel:**

**Domino 1:** Seeking to establish its own righteousness

**Domino 2:** (equals) Ignorant of the righteousness of God

**Domino 3:** (equals) Unbelief

**Domino 4:** (equals) Not saved

It’s only four dominoes, I know, but they work as well as four-hundred. Every domino falls. Whoever seeks to establish one’s own righteousness, either by means of human free will, self-made works, or any other manifestation of human pride, cannot be said to be saved. This is the point of Paul’s passage. Such have not yet seen or tasted the righteousness of God. Eventually these will be saved, yes, of course—when their pride is finally knocked to smithereens—but

they’re not saved at present. The righteousness of God yet alludes them, being clouded by the fog of their own efforts. It shall not always be this way, for “God is the Savior of all humanity” (1 Timothy 4:10), but it is to be “each in his own class” (1 Corinthians 15:23), “the testimony in its own eras” (1 Timothy 2:6). Until then, let us not call “belief” what God and Paul clearly label otherwise.

**“For Christ is the consummation of law for righteousness to everyone who is believing. For Moses is writing of the righteousness which is of law, that a man who does the same shall be living in it” (Romans 10:4-5).**

Belief is the end of law. I am not speaking of just any belief, but belief in the completeness of the sacrifice of Christ for the sake of humanity; belief that He fulfilled all law and perfectly pleased God on our behalf. Moses said that, in order to attain righteousness by means of law, one had to do law. That’s nice, and true as it stands. Paul, however, breaks the news that following law is impossible for the flesh (Romans 8:3), and that there is no one righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). The solution? Putting one’s faith in a Man Who fulfilled law, and Who embodied righteousness: the Lord, Jesus Christ.

“Everyone who is believing on Him shall not be disgraced” (Romans 10:11). —**MZ**