

Why You Don't Have to "Go to Church"

Romans 9:22-10:4

Romans (no. 26 in the series)

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This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!

Prayer

So, Lord Jesus, I pray that we could see you enthroned on the tree, on the arch of the covenant, on the judgement seat of the living God. And now Lord, I pray that you would cause us to preach, so we would see you in your word. And Father, this is a message that could be easily misunderstood and could also be easily mis-spoken, so Lord Jesus, I ask for your spirit to mediate you—the Word—to us. Amen.

Message

It was December of 1978, when thanks to Alan Parsons, I finally got up enough courage to ask Susan Coleman out on a date and then we went on thousands of dates—movies, dinners, hikes, picnics, you name it. It's hard to describe how enamored I was with her, and how utterly thrilled I was when she began to at least seem to be attracted to me. At first it was all about her outrageous 17-year-old-hotness but over the next five and a half years she became my best friend and I fell in love with her heart.

I couldn't keep my hands off of her and she couldn't keep her hands off of me, but we waited until the night of May 28th, 1983, to consummate our marriage. We waited, but we definitely didn't wait to kiss, and kiss, and kiss, at Red Rocks, in movie theaters, in front of the TV, for hours and hours and hours. About 500 people attended our Wedding. my Dad officiated. They all listened as I gave everything I have, and everything I am, to Susan.

That night we honeymooned at the Christiana Lodge in Vail, and it was epic. In the morning we went down to breakfast and sat in a romantic little corner. My bride said, "Peter there's something I need to ask you." That surprised me, but I said, "Well ask me anything honey." She said, "You're mine, right?" I said, "Yes, I am." She asked, "You're mine. The ring is mine. Everything you have is mine, right?" I said, "Yes."

"Wonderful" she responded. "So, do I still have to kiss you? I mean do I have to, like, be intimate with you? Do I have to go on anymore dates with you, hang out with you, act like

I'm nuts about you? Do I have to kiss you, since everything you have, is mine already? Do I have to love you?" And it was then, that I realized, that she never did, and I realized that if I said "Yes, you do have to love me." she never would. So, all I could say was "No, you don't have to love me." For only then, was it possible that she could only then could the harlot become the bride.

Well, of course, that last part never happened; if it had my heart would've broken in two and nothing would've been able to stop the bleeding. It never happened, and yet of course, it did happen, and does happen all the time, not to me, but to Jesus.

Sometimes people who call themselves "Christians" will say something like this to me: "Well, if 'as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive;' if, as you say, 'all things are yours, you are Christ's and Christ is Gods;' If Jesus is thoroughly successful at 'seeking and saving the lost and all are called to the great banquet, and all is forgiven, and 'it is finished.'" If all of that is true, why would I be good? Why would I pray? Why would I go to church? Why would I love God, if I don't have to love God?"

It's then that I quietly think, this person doesn't know God—perhaps knows a little about God—but must not know God; they've obviously never actually been to church, only church buildings; I doubt they've ever actually prayed to God. And how could they be good when they don't even know who he is? And then, if they say to me: "So tell me pastor, do I have to get baptized, do I have to take communion, do I have to obey the law, do I have to love God?" What am I supposed to say to them? If I say "Yes, you have to love God. It's the law." Will they love God? Can they love God? And if I say "No, you don't have to love God." Well, then, I would simply be stating what is painfully and obviously true, at least in this world, correct?

A whole lot of folks and even a whole lot of me, doesn't love God. So, obviously, we don't "have to love God," at least not in this world. And yet, Paul is going to tell usⁱ, and of course Jesus has already told us: "You will love God... and you will love your neighbor, as yourself." But how is that going to happen? Well, not by works of the law. That's more than a law; that's a prophecy: "You will love the Lord your God."ⁱⁱ

In Roman 9:18 we learned that God has free will; "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills and hardens whomever he wills," wrote Paul. If Paul is right and God—beside whom there is no other, who is I am that I am, the Creator of all things, including your will—has free will...ⁱⁱⁱ If God has free will, then no one else could have a truly free will, unless maybe God himself freely wills to give his will to them somehow.

That's Romans 9:18, and then in Romans 9:22, Paul wrote

Romans 9:22-23:

What if God, desiring [*thelo*: willing] to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of Mercy, which he has prepared beforehand?"

A Vessel of Mercy is a vessel of *Hesed* (in Hebrew). That's Free Love, Relentless Love, Steadfast Love, Faithful Love, or Covenant Love. God is Love. And, God has Free Will. "God is the one who loves in freedom," to quote Karl Barth.^{iv} If a Vessel of Mercy is a vessel filled with free love, perhaps a Vessel of Wrath is a vessel devoid of free love. Harlotry is the attempt to buy and sell Love and so Love is not free. And Hosea was commanded to marry a harlot.

Romans 9:25:

As indeed he [God] says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" [That must be a vessel of wrath filled with Mercy—that's free Love.]

As we mentioned last week, Hosea was commanded by God to "take to [himself] a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land [of Israel] commits whoredom."^v Imagine how that felt for Hosea. He's commanded by God to take a harlot to himself and to love her. But a thousand times in a thousand ways she must've said to him, "But now that I've got the ring, and all you have is also mine, do I have to kiss you, do I have to be intimate with you, do I have to love you? What's in it for me?" For that's what harlotry is, transactional love, that isn't love, for it isn't free. Actually, it's been crucified.

A prostitute doesn't love the man, she loves his money. And most men don't love prostitutes—and if they do, they usually cannot have her heart; they can only have her body, and that only for a time and a fee. But Hosea is commanded to marry and love Gomer, because God has married and does love the People of Israel.

So, when Gomer says, "Do I have to love you?" What is Hosea to do? Well, Hosea sets her free—NOT free to love, NOT free to choose the Good, for she doesn't know what love is or who the Good is. She's free to sell herself to another man. She's free to sin, which is bondage. And she does. But then, Hosea is commanded to buy her back, for God will buy Israel back. God says that he will bring her [Israel] into the wilderness and romance her. In the valley of trouble, he will make a door of hope. And there she will call him "my husband" and Israel will "know the Lord."^{vi}

Hosea ends with one of Paul's favorite quotations, Hosea 13:15: "I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol (also translated "hell"); I shall redeem them from Death. Oh, Death where are your plagues? Oh, Sheol where is your sting?"

Romans. 9:27:

And Isaiah cries out...

Paul writes "and" because what Isaiah "cries out" is exactly what Hosea must have cried out. Right after God tells Hosea that his children, named "No Mercy" and "Not my people," represent Israel and Judah, Hosea 1:10, God says, "Yet Israel will be as the sand of the sea."

And right after God informs Isaiah that he's going to preach Israel down to a remnant and then a stump that is a seed, God says, Isaiah 10:22, "though Israel will be as the sand of the sea."

It's like God is taunting them with hope, so that Hosea and Isaiah would cry out: "So what about your promise to Abraham that his seed will be like the sand of the sea? How is that possible? If all of them are vessels of wrath, how will they all become vessels of mercy?"

Romans 9:26

And in the very place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," there they will be called "sons of the living God." ²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay." ²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted, "If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring [*sperma*: "sperm," or more literally, "a Sperm," or "the Sperm," according to Paul in Galatians: the eternal indestructible seed, the Free Will of God wrapped in a little bundle of flesh: Jesus] [If God had not left us the Seed] we would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah." ³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles [heathen scum bags] who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is ~~by~~ [*ek*: of, from, out of] faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

And now Paul isn't just talking about the man Israel, but the people of Israel, that was once a nation named Israel, but was the institution of Israel in Paul's day; it was literally his "church." The word translated as "church" in English is the Greek word "*ekklessia*," which is also translated "assembly," so in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the assembly of Israel, is the *ekklessia* of Israel, that is the church of Israel. And even in the New Testament, (Acts 7:38) Israel is referred to as "the church," although modern translations usually translate it as "assembly" or "congregation"—which leads to all sort of theological confusion and possibly World War III.^{vii}

But for right now, I hope you can just sense Paul's Anguish. He had been a prince in his institutional church and having encountered Christ on the road to Damascus, he had come to realize that Christ was truly the fulfillment of all the hopes and longings of his people. But when he preached Christ in his Church and explained how this was all biblically true, he had been met with violent ridicule and wrath. And yet, that wasn't foreign to Paul, for he had been his church. It certainly wasn't foreign to Jesus. "He came to his own people and his own people received him not."^{viii} They had talked about him for a thousand years and didn't know him when he arrived. And knowing him is life, eternal life.^{ix}

People will sometimes say "Jesus warned about hell more than anyone." And that's true, if you define hell as "Hades, Sheol" or "Gehenna." Paul never even mentions "hell," but Paul wrote to gentiles—the unchurched. Jesus is the only one who directly warns people about "hell." It happens 18 times, and every time, he's warning his church—Israel. He even says,

"On that day many will say 'Lord, Lord, did we not do many mighty works in your name? And I will declare to them I never 'knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"^x A few verses later, Jesus marvels at the faith of a Roman Centurion, saying "with no one in Israel (my church) have I found such faith." Next verse: He says to those that followed "many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while sons of the kingdom will be thrown in outer darkness where men weep and gnash their teeth."^{xi}

He didn't "know them" and yet he knew they were "sons of the kingdom." What does Jesus not know? He doesn't know what doesn't actually exist, and that's the self that you think you have created: The Vessel of Wrath. And what does he know? The selves that he has created: sons and daughters of God our Father. The vessel of wrath must be destroyed, in order to liberate the vessel of Mercy, that is a son or a daughter, otherwise, they'll never join the party.

Well, you see: this troubled Paul, and hasn't it troubled you? Haven't you ever wondered: "How can 'Christians look so little like Christ, and non-Christians seem so Christian?" "How can church folks love so little, and some heathens seem to love so much?" "And not only look like Jesus and act like Jesus, but think like Jesus?"^{xii}

I've always been amazed at the stories I hear from the mission field. Andrew Trawick has a great story about talking to a village elder in Mozambique, who said to him—I've always thought that:

1. There must be a creator and that he is a good.
2. Because he made us as he did, he must've made us to know him.
3. How could I approach him who is good, when I have done evil?

No one has ever been able to tell me this. You see, he already knew, better than most of us know, and Andrew had the privilege of sharing the name: Jesus.^{xiii}

My old friend, George Hussney, would share stories about entire Moslem villages having the same dream, on the same night, all about Jesus and then all putting their trust in Jesus in the morning.

A few months ago, I shared about Billy Graham and the Buddhist monk who wept tears of joy when Billy Graham gave him a bible, for he said, "I've always known this man, and as you were speaking, I heard him say, 'that's my name, that's my name, that's my name.'"

Nancy Coen tells a wonderful story about preaching to some remote tribe in some remote jungle, when an old man in a loin cloth started dancing wildly around the crowd gathered to listen. Worried, she prayed something like, "Lord what's up with that guy?" And she heard the Lord say something like "He's my friend and he's glad you're talking about me." And then she said, "He knows you?" And she heard the Lord say, "Yes, he knows me better than you."

Hopefully you realize that these ideas aren't unbiblical, but highly biblical. Abraham actually tithed to the priest king of Salem named Melchizedek, which means "King of Righteousness,"

who had just offered him communion. And this was thousands of years before there was anyone you could call “Christian” and hundreds of years before anyone you could call a Jew.

But you see, it’s not just weird stories from the Bible and the mission field. I used to worry that Susan was a heathen: she didn’t grow up in the church, and never read the Bible, but soon realized that God would literally quote the Bible to her in her heart, she’d tell me and I’d say, “That’s in the Bible.” It was freaky and it’s cheating—how could she know Jesus better than me?

I recently read one of Eckhardt Tolle’s books, and thought, “How could this book be so profoundly Christian? He’s talking just like Jesus.

I’ll watch movies and TV and think, they’re talking about Jesus, and probably don’t know they’re talking about Jesus, but they obviously love Jesus. And yet, they’d never step foot in a church, probably because the church is boycotting their movie and we don’t remind them of Jesus.

And check this out: The shock is not just that Israel doesn’t hear, and the church doesn’t hear, sometimes it seems as if God is actively destroying both. It was only about fifteen years after Paul wrote to the Romans, that the Empire of Rome destroyed the temple, which was the visible manifestation of Israel, the church, and then, sent the Jews, once again, into exile while they obliterated Jerusalem. And it’s not simply that it happened, but that Jesus said it would happen, and in some crazy way he was responsible—and of course he was, for as Paul has been telling us: He is the Free Will of God; he’s responsible for everything!

And now, I need to say, that I think I’m supposed to talk about something of which I have not wanted to talk, for fear that it will sound like I’m justifying my own failures and maybe I am. Eighteen and a half years ago, my friend Faith, who is a counselor and was part of my congregation at the time, had an extended prophetic dream about me. I think she actually had one every year for three years on the same date until my church blew up. It’s important to not believe every weird thing people tell you in the name of God, but I trusted faith, and so I’ve pondered these words for almost 19 years.

At the time our church, Lookout Mountain Community Church, had just moved into an amazing new facility on the side of I-70, and church attendance had gone from about 1300 to over 3000 on Christmas and Easter. And it was a great church with wonderful programs, great people, and I was preaching many of the same sermons that I still preach. I think we were supposed to build the building and at the time I was thinking, “We’re set for a reformation, to the glory of God’s Grace, in Christ Jesus.” And Faith had this dream, that I’ll abbreviate tremendously.^{xiv}

In the dream, I’m talking with friends at a train station, when a man in a mother of pearl suite, who must be Jesus in his body—the true church, the Pearl. He bought a ticket and asked me to leave my friends and join him on the train. I think it may have been a train of thought.

Then the scene changed, and Faith saw us standing on the desert floor with thousands of people gathered round... expectantly waiting. In the distance on a cliff, Old Jerusalem appeared shimmering in the sun, and then to its left Lookout Mountain Community Church also appeared.

And then, black balls... started falling from the heavens and begin to destroy Old Jerusalem and then destroy our new church building, and then they started falling upon the desert floor. People could see them coming and easily step aside, but I saw one coming and wouldn't move.

Some men pick up my dead body—but not physically dead body—and carried it up the cliff. She wrote “old Jerusalem is crumbling, LMCC church building is crumbling, but the hearts of the people, the church, is not. The man in the white luminous suit is there showing his delight in all that is unfolding.” I think some of you were some of those that carried my body. Three years after that dream, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church told me that all I had to do was to publicly confess that there was a group of people that couldn't be saved, and that God did not want to save and I could then remain a pastor in good standing with my fellow pastors, standing back in the train station, I would suppose. I saw it coming, but I didn't move, because I couldn't move, because for me, I would've been denying “Yahweh is Salvation;” Jesus. And I was literally black balled. And yet, the black balls fell from heaven, so who's to blame? Only the man in the mother of pearl suit, I would suppose.

We started the Sanctuary, 30 miles from the old location, and many thought we'd become an even more mega mega-church. I believe that God really wanted us to do this thing we call “the Sanctuary,” but before long about three different people approached me and said, “Peter I was praying and God wants you to know, this will get small before it gets big.” I hated that, and I've often wondered “how small?” and “if it ever does get big, will I be around to see it?” Then, on several occasions my wife came to me and said, “Peter, Jesus wants you to know that you can't build the Sanctuary.” How's that for encouragement?

I remember as a child, at some revival meeting, the preacher quoted God in Isaiah 6, saying “whom will I send?” I remember praying “You can send me.” I wasn't aware that God was calling Isaiah to Preach Israel down to a remnant and then a stump that was only one seed—the Promised Seed.^{xv} Around that time another friend said, “Peter, the Lord wants you to know, that for now, the Sanctuary is to only be about worship.” At first, I thought maybe that was singing, but now I believe he was talking about focus—no bells and whistles, no amazing programs, just focus on me—what I show you about me: Jesus, the Promised Seed.’ And don't misunderstand, God has done some amazing things through the Sanctuary—conferences, videos, websites—but they weren't me, and every time I've come up with a plan, it's crumbled before my eyes.^{xvi}

Thirteen years ago, at a conference in Michigan, sitting next to Susan, and listening to the leader talk about Moses, and how God humbled him, before he had him lead people out of Egypt... into the desert... I was just really angry--you could even call it “wrath.” I was angry at God, when Susan grabbed a piece of paper and just started writing; she was dictating—it doesn't happen to me, but it happens to her. She was getting words from The Lord. This is what she wrote. I have it framed and in my office:

Peter, you are my heart. [blank space, as if I was to fill in the blank with the name of whomever I felt had slandered me]. (They) cannot take away from you, who you are, who I have made you.

See I think that's what we were preaching on last week: They cannot take away who it is that God has made me: the vessel of Mercy. But they can take away who it is that I have made myself: my false self, my old man, my ego—the vessel of wrath.

Now that you know who you are, I am calling you to walk in freedom, to free people, to be who you are supposed to be. Totally stripped of all, God has been allowed to cloth you. I will show you the way to go, my heart.

As your pastor, I'm embarrassed to read that to you, because I feel like I so often don't know which way to go and I so often don't feel free. But I'm supposed to free you. I think that must mean help free you of yourself as we've been preaching on. But it's not only yourself, your old self, maybe it's our old self. So many times, I've prayed, "Jesus, I'm supposed to free people, from what?" And then, sarcastically prayed, "Well, I am freeing them from church." But in recent years, I've wondered if he's answering "Yes, exactly."

I asked Susan to pray with me on Thursday. She didn't know what I was thinking or the title of this sermon. I prayed; Jesus I think maybe you want me to talk about what I'm so embarrassed to talk about. Amen. Then Susan said, I just heard him say "I want you to set my people free." So, listen up, "You don't have to go to church." And now let me preach to myself, "Peter, you don't have to go to church."

You know when my kids were little, we'd make them do chores, kiss their grandma, eat dinner with us, and give us gifts on holidays. But there came a day, with each of my kids, that I had to find a way to say, "No, Jon, you don't have to get me a Father's Day present. No, Elizabeth, you don't have to come home for dinner. No, Becky, you don't have to give me a kiss if you don't want to. No, Coleman, you don't have to mow the lawn." But you know, I had such a great Father's Day last Sunday. It was busy. I had to preach and do a funeral, but my kids each found ways to give me gifts or a call, Elizabeth threw a 15-minute party for me between my other obligations. And at the end of the day, I thought "This was the Best Father's Day ever!" Not because of the gifts but because what I've always wanted most is for my children to want Me...and that is clearly what I got.

So, why don't we have to go to church? It's so that we could want to go to church. And now let me clarify: Church is not a building, or a bunch of programs, or a system of government, or a sermon, band, or prayer meeting. Church is not a 501c3 non-profit organization called "The Sanctuary Denver" That might be around for a few more months or hundreds of years, and it doesn't really matter, because it's not the church. Church, the *ekklesia*, is at least 2 people called together in worship (even over the internet) And you can only worship if you want to worship, and when we actually worship (and it can take millions of forms), the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. In the Revelation, John hears the New Creation and it's "every creature" worshipping the One on the Throne. So, I could say it this way:

- "You don't have to go to church... so that you would want to go to church." And
- "You don't have to go to Heaven... so that you would want to go to Heaven."
- "No one can go to heaven unless they want to go to heaven."
- "If you don't want to go to heaven, Heaven will burn like hell."

And yet, if you hear this as a threat, you'll never want to go to heaven. And if you think of heaven as anything other than Jesus, you don't even know what it is.

In just a few chapters, Paul is going to write, "We must all stand before the judgment seat of God"^{xvii} which he also calls "the Judgment seat of Christ."^{xviii} And I think this is the Judgment: You will see the Heart of God, displayed in Christ Jesus our Lord, standing on the throne, and he will ask: "Do you want me? Do you like me?" All sorts of strange people will say, "I've loved you all my life but didn't know your name. So YES, YES, YES, *Yeshua*, Jesus!" And some who knew his name may say, "My pastor said you would be different the second time around so, no, I don't think I like you at all." Paul told Timothy that the crown of righteousness is for all "who have loved his appearing."^{xix} He doesn't change the 2nd time around. The judgment is Jesus: "Do you love me; Do you want me; Do you trust me?" To put it in theological lingo, "Do you have faith?"

For thousands of years the institutional church has come up with things you can do in order to get faith. And foremost among those things is to, "Go to church and do what we tell you to do. For if you do these things, you'll go to heaven, because God loves you. And if you don't do these things, you'll be endlessly tortured in hell, because you don't love God, and so, he doesn't love you."

But that doesn't make you want God; it makes you secretly hate God, while pretending to love God—it makes you self-righteous, and a hypocrite. So, like the Pharisees, we don't make believers, we make those that "are twice the children of hell [*Gehenna*]," to use Jesus's words, "as we ourselves."^{xx} And so maybe it's not such a bad thing, that right now, in the United States of America where the church has exercised so much power and control like all the other principalities and powers of this world. Maybe it's not such a bad thing that the institutional "church" is crumbling.^{xxi}

Maybe God is saying "Y'all don't have to go to church, and you never actually could go to church, as long as you thought you had to go to church. I've called you to be the church, and you can't be the church if you don't want to be the church, my beloved." So how do we want what God wants? How do we Love God in Freedom, the way he loves us in freedom? How do we fall in love with God? How do we have faith?

Romans 9:30

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles (the unchurched, non-Christians) who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by [ek: of, from, out of] faith;³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law [remember that's knowledge of Good and evil taken from a tree in order to make yourself in the image of God, to make yourself right] that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by [ek: of, from, out of]^{xxii} faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,³³ as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in [epi: on] him will not be put to shame."

In just that little verse, Paul pulls together all these Old Testament pictures and ideas and identifies the stone: it's Jesus. In Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a stone cut by no human hand that falls to earth like the black balls in Faith's dream; it destroys the kingdoms of this world and then grows into a kingdom that fills the whole earth.^{xxiii} Isaiah calls the stone a stone of offense and rock of Stumbling.^{xxiv} The name: "Jesus" means "God is Salvation." And there is no greater stumbling stone for the religious spirit and no greater offense to the human ego, than this stone. For "God is Salvation" means that you are not your own salvation; Jesus is the death of me-sus.

The Psalmist writes that the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.^{xxv} Israel rejected Jesus, and the temple was destroyed, and then the temple is rebuilt by God upon Jesus. When we build to obtain Salvation—we build The Tower Babel; we build an institutional vessel of wrath—The Whore of Babylon. But when God builds us upon Salvation—the New Jerusalem comes down and the living breathing body of Christ rises from the dead: the vessel of Mercy—His Body, His Bride.^{xxvi} Jesus, the stumbling stone, and corner stone, is also the foundation stone, not only of the temple on Mt. Zion but of all creation for all time.^{xxvii} Jesus is the Word of "I am that I am." You cannot exist in the manifest presence of your Creator, if at the same time you believe you are your own creation, which is exactly what the human ego believes, what the vessel of wrath believes, and what self-righteousness is.

Romans 10:1-2:

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them (my church, Israel) is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Isn't that insane? No one in all the world knew as much about God as Israel. As Paul just told us in 9:4 "to them belongs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises." They got all his stuff! No one knows as much about God as the Church, but that doesn't mean that the church knows God. No one knows as much about me as Kaiser Permanente, The CIA, and Google—they have all my blood work, health records, police records, spending records, and every email ever written—they know all about me and none of them know me, not like my bride knows me, and I know her. Hallelujah!

Romans 10:3-4:

For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end [*telos*: not simply the end, but the completion, the fulfillment] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes [literally: "to all the trusting"].

That's why Jesus lifted his head and cried "*tetelesthai* (from *telos*), it is finished." The law is fulfilled; humanity will Love in the image of God. Christ is the end of law. Paul didn't actually include the article "the," because he's not just talking about the Mosaic Law; he's talking about all knowledge of Good and evil, taken, dispensed, marketed, and used to make ourselves in the image of God, to make ourselves right, or to justify ourselves. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes [literally "to all the trusting"].



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

And now you see, we're back at the tree in the garden of the Sanctuary of our Soul and asking the question, "Where does trust (faith) come from?" And "Who is that man on the tree?" That's our Helper, that's our Husband, that's the Righteousness of God. So, how do we make ourselves righteous? WE DON'T!!!! And when we try, we crucify the Righteousness of God,

- just like Israel crucified the Christ in order to be the Christ,
- just like Gomer the harlot crucified the heart of Isaiah,
- just like Susan would've crucified me if she would've asked me "Do I still have to kiss you? What do I have to do to get your stuff? How can I use you, so I'm not dependent on you, and don't have to be with you?"

We don't make ourselves righteous, but God will make us righteous with himself, when we submit to God's righteousness, which is Jesus our bridegroom and even that decision is implanted in us as a seed. And then, he will build us into his church and it will all feel like worship,^{xxviii} not because we have to but because we want to; because we're pregnant with faith hope and love.

I'm not much of a reader, but I think my favorite piece of literature is "The Myth of the Grand Inquisitor" in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In the myth, told by one character to another character, Jesus returns to earth during the Spanish Inquisition, and he hasn't changed (the way he does in American Pop Fiction); he's just the same: he heals the sick, touches lepers, forgives sinners, and loves the outcasts but he refuses to turn tricks, to do signs and wonders for the religious establishment. The Grand Inquisitor finds him and throws him in prison, and for twelve pages, the old priest rails at Jesus for having interfered with the work of the church.

- He rails at Jesus for increasing man's freedom rather than taking it away.
- He's angry that Jesus doesn't say "you have to," but dies that we would want to.
- He longs for the law, when men were "led like cattle," and he hates the presence of the Christ that draws us to himself like a lover.

He sentences Jesus to burn at the stake and then yearns for a response, no matter how painful and terrifying but Jesus refuses to say a word. He is the free will of God. "Instead," writes Dostoevsky, "He suddenly goes over to the old man and kisses him gently on his old, bloodless lips. And that is His only answer. The old man is startled and shudders. The corners of his lips seem to quiver slightly. He walks to the door, opens it, and says to Him, 'Go now, and do not come back, ever. You must never, never come again!' The prisoner leaves. 'And what of the old man?' asks the listener. The kiss glows in his heart."^{xxix}

Communion

On the night that the great bride groom was betrayed, by his bride, he took bread and broke it saying, this is my body given to you. And in the same manner, after supper and after having given thanks, he took the cup saying, this cup is the covenant in my blood, drink of it, all of you.

This is the kiss; this is the revelation of Love. You know a kiss isn't just lips, right? This isn't just bread and wine, it's the revelation of Love. When you let him kiss you, you are submitting to the Righteousness of God. And only then, because his Word has already found a place in your heart and impregnated you with faith, hope and Love. And nothing is as powerful as faith, hope and Love—the Free Will of God.

And so, in the words of Paul, in this way, all Israel will be saved. And in this way all humanity, (all Adam), will be made alive. You don't have to let him kiss you and you don't have to go to heaven. But one day you will because nothing is more powerful than his kiss. That's not a threat. That's a promise called the GOSPEL.

Benediction

And so, Lord Jesus, I think we're saying we like you and thank you for—even though we complain about this quite a lot, I know I do—thank you for freely choosing to be yourself. Amen.

In place of a benediction, I want to say this: thank you, or I want to say thank you to Jesus in you. I think this a lot and don't often find the opportunity to say it but let me say it now, thank you. And that's because I believe that you don't come to church because you have to, because you think that by coming to church you'll save your butt from hell and get a ticket into heaven, or by coming to church you'll get God to bless your business, or make your children obey, or heal your back, even though he might just do that—he likes to surprise us. Thank you that I believe you come to church because you like Jesus. And, you know, he said, if you've seen me, you've seen the father. You come to church because you like your Creator, because you make his day—Father's Day. He makes you and you make his day. So, maybe I can say, on behalf of him, thank you. In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel. Amen.

Endnotes

ⁱⁱ Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10

ⁱⁱ This is a fascinating discussion, but we think God's law is a human law that can be disobeyed, but God's law is the Creator's law—more like gravity. So, if we think we can and do disobey God's Law, it implies that we are only dreaming—dreaming that we are not his creation. This would mean that sin, which we like to think of as "free-will," is actually bondage to an illusion. And true obedience is waking to reality, which is agreeing with your own creation, for you are the free will of God; you are the body of Christ.

ⁱⁱⁱ If God has free will, how could anyone else have free will, for if anyone else disagreed with God, their will would necessarily be subject to God's will, or God would have to will to subject his will to their will, which would be like willing himself away and all things with him.

^{iv} God is Love and his will is Love and so he loves to love and will always freely choose to love because he loves to be Love, that is himself. God is at least a trinity of relentless, free, sacrificial, ecstatic Love.

^v Hosea 1:2

^{vi} Hosea 2:14-20

^{vii} And in Galatians Paul references the church as the "Israel of God." "For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. (Galatians 6:15-16)"

^{viii} John 1:11

^{ix} John 17:3

^x Matthew 7:23

^{xi} Matthew 8:10-12

^{xii} I used to worry about Susan, she hadn't attended church before we started dating, she didn't know her Bible, and I wondered if she prayed.

Then over the years, she'd just tell me stuff that she said Jesus told her, and sometimes it would be right out of the Bible and she didn't know it.

^{xiii} Our old friend Phil Eyster met a girl in the Philippines whose Father hated Christians and forbid his daughter from even speaking the name. As her father was changing channels on the TV, she heard a man say "There was no room in the Inn for Jesus." Then she walked outside, looked at the stars and said there's room in my heart for you.

^{xiv} **Dream: February 28, 2004**

The dream begins on the platform of a train station. It has the feel of being back in time as the train station is filled with people. The station is getting much use. I am observing Peter Hiatt talking to several men that he knows. They are laughing and having a good time, enjoying one another's company. From the right approaches a handsome man dressed in suit and hat that resembles something from the forties, early fifties. Wide brimmed hat, double-breasted suit. The color is what stands out. It is a luminescent mother of pearl, color. He is luminous and separate from everyone else at the train station.

This man approaches Peter, and it is someone that Peter had known at Fuller Seminary, and says to Peter, "Will you come with me on the train?" Peter responds, "No, I can't go with you." Peter is polite and considerate about it but he can't go because he is too busy and has things that must get done and a schedule to keep.

The man in the luminous suit leaves and returns back to Peter. Peter looks and turns toward him as the man says to Peter, "I bought your ticket will you come?" Peter is moved by this and leaves his friends and walks the station platform to get onto the train with this man.

SCENE CHANGES: I am once again apart of and observing what unfolds. The man in the luminous suit, Peter, people from LMCC and now hundreds of thousands of people are on the desert floor that stretches for miles, in the Middle East. Before us are high Middle Eastern cliffs. We are looking up to the top of these cliffs. I look to the left of me and to the right of me and there is a sea of people with more and more coming. The man in the suit is quiet but keeps his eyes fixed upon Peter. The atmosphere is joyous, excited. Peter is alive and full of energy. We are all waiting. No one is worried about or asking about what we are waiting for. No one knows what is coming but we are all unified and full of joy to be together.

Suddenly all eyes turn to look to the top of the high cliffs. To the right on these cliffs appears the image of Old Jerusalem. As soon as it appears everyone knows what it is you can see the towers, walls, and feel that it is old Jerusalem. It has the appearance of what a mirage would look like. It's wavy like heat waves but it is absolutely clear at the same time. Everyone is moved to see it. Then to the left the image of LMCC church appears. Again in a mirage like form yet, full-sized, and clearly defined. The people look up and all see LMCC on the left and old Jerusalem on the right.

Just as all eyes are fixed a black ball out of the sky falls and hits old Jerusalem. People gasp as we see a wall crash down. Then there is another and another and another. Black balls from the heavens are crashing down. The sound is deafening. Every time one hits the explosions shake the desert floor and shakes each person to the core. Some fall down, others hold onto

each other. No one panics but we are all experiencing something that no one has ever experienced before and some fear is there amidst the courage and confidence.

The black balls from heaven begin to hit LMCC and the church begins to show signs of bombing. It is then that the balls start to fall upon the desert floor. The people do not scatter and realize that if they jump aside they can miss the hits. Peter is unmovable. He does not jump from one side or the other. He stands fixed, firm, unmovable, eyes closed, head lifted toward heaven. The man in the luminous suit stands before Peter with his eyes fixed on him.

It is then that a ball hits Peter. He collapses to the ground. He appears dead yet he is not really dead. Again, no one is afraid, no one panics. It is at this point that some men, many men, seem to know what to do. They pick up Peter's limp body and hold him over their heads and begin to move toward the cliffs. At this point in the dream a staircase of white unfolds from the top of the cliffs to the bottom of the desert floor. It is lined on either side with people who have come here. It is clear that Peter's dead, and yet not physically dead body, must be taken to the top. The black balls continue to fall from the sky but no one is afraid. The old Jerusalem is crumbling, LMCC church building is crumbling, but the hearts of the people, the church is not. As Peter's body is carried to the staircase hope flows through the masses of people. The man in the White luminous suit is there showing his delight in all that is unfolding.

I awoke.

^{xv} Isaiah 6:8-13. Years later, someone said to me, "The Lord heard you when you answered saying 'send me.'" I remember saying "Lord I want to be a geologist, but I'd even be willing to be a pastor if that's what you want." I must've been about eight.

^{xvi} People will say: *We need to do this, and that, and the other thing, to get people to come to church*—and I totally want everyone to come to church—but I don't want people to think they have to come to church for this that and the other thing.

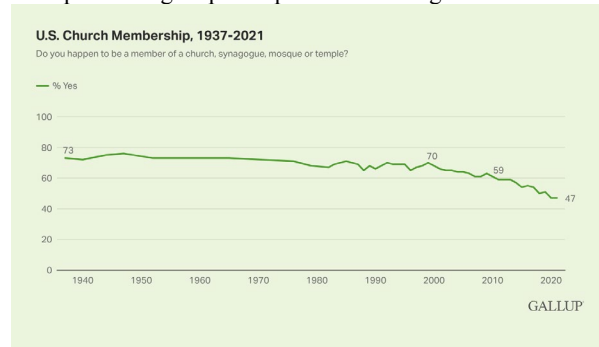
^{xvii} Romans 14:10

^{xviii} 2 Corinthians 5:10

^{xix} 2nd Timothy 4:8

^{xx} Matthew 23:15

^{xxi} <https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx>



^{xxii} For Bible nerds: It's interesting to watch how translators will translate prepositions. "Ek" is normally translated "of, from," or "out of," but can be translated "by." The translator picks the least literal translation for, apparently, it seems most obvious to the translator that "faith" is a means to obtain "righteousness." But if we follow Paul's argument throughout Romans, faith (which is the promised seed, and even Jesus) is not a means to some other end called righteousness; faith is righteousness (which is also the promised seed, Jesus). In which case, the literal translation expresses Paul's theology stated at the start of the letter: "The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith" (Romans 1:17). Faith is a miracle implanted in us that grows into this thing we normally call "righteousness," which is the manifestation of the life of Christ in us. But if we take the less literal (and more "sensible to human flesh") approach, faith becomes a dead thing, a tool we employ to obtain a possession called righteousness, with which we can purchase "salvation"... or whatever.

^{xxiii} Daniel 1:31-35

^{xxiv} Isaiah 8:14

^{xxv} Psalm 118:22

^{xxvi} If you try to be righteous in order to be saved, you don't build the kingdom of heaven, you dig the pit of hell. But when you believe your saved, you will be righteous, and Jesus will build his church on you.

^{xxvii} There are many different ways to say this.

He doesn't love because we first loved him; We love because he first loved us.

He doesn't save because of our free will; we can only be free because we are saved.

Salvation is not built on our free will; Salvation is the foundation of our free will; Free Will is God's Will in communion with our will in the throne room of the heart.

Jesus is the free will of God; Jesus is the stumbling stone; Jesus is the foundation stone of reality—anything built on anything else is just an illusion, a bad dream.

^{xxviii} The Greeks had a legend that Amphion built Thebes with the music of his lute, which was so melodious that the stones danced into walls and houses voluntarily. I think that's the way that the New Jerusalem is built.

^{xxix} Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Brothers Karamazov (A Bantom Classic Paperback, 1970), p.316