

In Your Mouth and In Your Heart

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction and Background

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of three speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness. The three speeches are as follows:
 - i. **Speech No. 1: Deuteronomy 1-4**
 - ii. **Speech No. 2: Deuteronomy 5-26** (twenty-two chapters; about 25 lessons in this series)
 1. This section covers the specific laws and regulations.
 - iii. **Speech No. 3: Deuteronomy 27-34** (the last eight chapters of the book)
 1. Final wrap-up, including warnings and blessings, depending on whether the Israelites obey or disobey what has just been handed down.
 2. The death of Moses and the handoff of leadership to Joshua.
- b. From **Deuteronomy 28-29**, we learned from Moses:
 - i. What will happen if they obey the Lord and follow the Law given through Moses (abundant blessings of every type).
 - ii. What will happen if they turn away from the Lord and refuse to follow His Laws (unimaginable curses, defeat, slavery, famine, etc.).
 - iii. What will happen if all the Israelites *except one* person/family/tribe follow the Lord and keep His Laws.
 1. An aspect of God's character revealed: His *justice*.
- c. In **Deuteronomy 30:1-10** (the immediate prior lesson), we encountered:
 - i. Another important aspect of God's character is revealed: His *mercy*.
 - ii. After the people stray from the Lord's commands and face discipline, when they turn back to Him and repent, He will be happy to forgive and restore them.

- d. In this lesson, we will look at just four verses. This passage includes a phrase from Moses that will appear again in the New Testament. It is used by Paul in a famous passage that many evangelical Protestants have taken out of context in presenting the gospel to unbelievers.
 - i. If we understand what Moses meant here, it can help expose a common misuse of this passage by many Christians today, which has served to water down the gospel message to so many today.

II. The Message is Not Obscure nor Far Away

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**.
 - i. In **Deuteronomy 30:11**, it says in the OSB, “this commandment is not ‘*too burdensome*’ for them, nor is it ‘*far off*’”.
 - 1. In other translations of the LXX, the first term has been rendered, “*not excessive*” (LES, NETS)
 - 2. In modern translations based on the Masoretic Text, I have seen that first term translated “not too hard for you” (ESV) or “not too mysterious for you” (NKJV).
 - ii. The idea I get is that this command, just given by Moses, is not too hard to understand or implement. It is not obscure. You don’t need to go far away to Jerusalem, to the Himalayas, to heaven, across the sea, to understand and to do it. This is simple, and ‘right there’, within reach for all of us.
- b. **Question:** Does the passage in **Deuteronomy 30:12-14** about it not being “beyond the sea” nor “up in heaven” that one needs to go there to find it, but rather it is “very near you... in your mouth and in your heart”, remind you of anything in the New Testament?
 - i. **Answer:** Read **Romans 10:5-13**.
 - 1. “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).
 - 2. “But what does it say? ‘*The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart*’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be

saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

3. “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.’” (**Romans 10:5–13**, NKJV)
- ii. It seems to me that what Paul is saying here is that, as in the farewell address of Moses, the Jews don’t need to go anywhere special to find the answer. It has already been delivered to them. It is right in front of them, available to all of them everywhere, and understandable.
 1. In this passage, Paul is not trying to explain how a person ‘gets saved’ and becomes a Christian.
 - a. Remember that he is writing to people who are already Christians, in Rome. The Christians he is writing to are in a church he did not plant and has not yet visited.
 2. Instead, Paul is explaining why his own nation, the Jews (as a group), are lost, and what they need to do in order to become God’s people again.
 3. This goes back to Martin Luther’s claim in the 1500’s that **Romans** is the most important book in the New Testament, and that in it we will find the essence of ‘the gospel of salvation’.
 - a. This misreading of the purpose of Paul’s letter to the **Romans** is nonsense. Paul was writing this letter to an existing church, *to people who were already Christians*. He was not writing this letter to explain to them what an unbeliever needs to do to become a Christian!
 - c. About the so-called ‘Romans Road’, a plan that many evangelicals use when trying to bring others to faith.
 - i. Many conservative Anabaptist-type churches, when they want to get involved in local evangelism, tend to adopt the methods and tracts that come from Evangelical Protestants. As a result, they pick up the popular ‘Romans Road’ type tracts and assume that this is a good way to spread the gospel to unbelievers.
 - ii. The ‘Romans Road’ is a chain study that tries to present ‘the gospel’ by cherry-picking different passages from **Romans**. It typically begins in **Romans 3** with the point that we are all sinners, and concludes in

Romans 10:9. According to this approach, the steps involved are as follows:

1. See that we are all sinners,
 2. Believe in Jesus' atoning death for our sins, and
 3. Desire to receive God's free gift of salvation, and then...
 4. "*Believe in your heart* that Jesus is Lord, and *confess with your mouth* that God raised Him from the dead" ...and they will be saved! (**Romans 10:9**)
 - a. Therefore, being saved, according to this plan, is just a matter of one's heart and mouth. Nothing else (such as changing what we do, repenting of sins of the flesh) is involved. That is the full and complete picture, to many evangelicals. That is all one needs to know in order to be saved!
 - b. The 'Romans Road' is extremely easy for the person being 'converted' to follow. It is also easy to teach other Christians how to 'share their faith' with this approach.
 - i. The sinner's response is reduced to saying a prayer expressing faith in Jesus, and asking for forgiveness.
 - ii. One thing that should give pause is that we have *no example of anyone in the Bible actually saying a prayer like that* and becoming a Christian in any way that resembles this. It is a recent innovation, developing mostly within the past 200 years.
- iii. **Question:** Can you see any problems with this simple 'Romans Road' approach?
1. There is no mention of the kingdom of God.
 - a. Jesus had said, "And this *gospel of the kingdom* will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (**Matthew 24:14**, NKJV)
 - b. In the last verse of **Acts 28**, when Paul finally arrives in Rome, he is "*preaching the kingdom of God*" to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles.
 2. There is no mention of repentance being necessary.

- a. Jesus said that unless we repent (turn away from our sins), we will perish. (**Luke 13:4**)
- b. When Paul described the commission Jesus personally gave him to preach the gospel to the lost, he said:
 - i. [Jesus had told Paul] “I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to *turn them from darkness to light*, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’
 - ii. Paul further explained to King Agrippa, “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should *repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.*” (**Acts 26:17–20**, NKJV)
 1. According to Paul, this is the message that Jesus had directed him to preach to unbelievers. This message is certainly not the “Romans Road” plan of salvation!
3. There is nothing about obedience to Jesus in the ‘Romans Road’ way. Just accepting a free gift. No consideration of what it means to call Jesus ‘Lord’. If we grasp its significance, *it means He is our master. We must follow His commands. We must obey Him!*
 - a. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (**Matthew 7:21**, NKJV)
4. There is no appreciation for what it means to “call on the name of the Lord” for salvation (**Romans 10:13**).
 - a. This is quoting a passage from **Joel 2-3**.
 - b. Peter begins with that passage from Joel when he preaches to the Jews in Jerusalem at Pentecost, in **Acts 2**. It concludes, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”.

- i. After preaching the resurrection of Jesus to the assembled Jews, who are cut to the heart and ask what they should do, Peter replies:
 1. “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (**Acts 2:38–39**, NKJV)
- ii. Consider also how Paul himself (the *author* of **Romans 10:9**) “called on the name of the Lord” for salvation. He retells the story of his own conversion, when Ananias said to him:
 1. “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and *wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*” (**Acts 22:16**, NKJV)
- iii. Paul says we will only be raised with Christ if we die with Him (to die to sin and be buried with Him in baptism).
 1. “...How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For *if we have been united together in the likeness of His death*, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,” (**Romans 6:2–5**, NKJV)
 2. Baptism, according to Paul, is participating in the death and burial of Jesus. If we want to be raised with Jesus, we need to die (to sin) and be buried (in baptism) with Him!

3. Ironically, the Romans Road gospel presentation skips over this passage!
5. **Suggestion:** If you want to find out how someone has their sins washed away, look at a book where the gospel is being preached to unbelievers who are initially coming to faith (**Acts**) rather than a letter written to a church full of people who are already Christians, where Paul is in **Romans 1-11**, focused on Gentile vs. Jew issues. Given what we see in **Acts**, a solid presentation of the gospel message to unbelievers should include:
 - a. Preaching the message of *the kingdom of God* (not just personal salvation).
 - b. Preaching that we must turn to God in repentance, renouncing Satan, and turning away from our sins.
 - c. Preaching the real meaning of confessing Jesus as our Lord (we must obey Him).
 - d. Preaching that we must “call on the name of the Lord” *as Peter instructed, and as Paul himself did.*
 - i. We must die with Christ (to our sins) and be buried with Him (in baptism) if we want to be raised with Him!
- iv. **Question:** So *what did* Paul mean when he quoted from **Deuteronomy 30:12-14**, that the word is “not in heaven above...nor beyond the sea” but that it is actually “near you”, and “in your mouth and in your heart”? (**Romans 10:6-8**)
 1. **My Understanding:** The message of the kingdom is simple, close, and easy to understand. Anyone can access it, *anywhere*. You don’t have to make a trip to heaven or some other faraway place. You can even access this inside your own home!
 2. Consider how Cornelius (**Acts 10**) and the Philippian jailer (**Acts 16**) became Christians in their own homes. Also recall that the Ethiopian eunuch (**Acts 8**) came to faith while in his own chariot, riding through the desert.
 3. However, in all cases, it took someone being sent to them to preach the message and explain the word to them. Paul makes the same point in the remainder of **Romans 10**.

- a. While anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, first they have to believe.
- b. In order for them to believe, they must *first hear the message*.
- c. In order for them to hear, *someone must be sent*.
 - i. That is where we come in!
 - ii. While the message of salvation is not obscure or distant, and can be received anywhere, it depends on us Christians spreading the message. That does not happen by itself!
- v. **Challenge for Us:** Study to become equipped, and then spread the message.
 1. Be bold. Bring it to all, that they might be saved.
 2. Take this responsibility personally!
 3. Restore the message to what was preached by the apostles in the beginning, as we see in the book of **Acts**.
 4. Do not settle for presenting a watered-down modern 'gospel' that cherry-picks verses from **Romans** and takes **Romans 10:9** out of context.
 5. Instead, let us call people to become true disciples of Jesus. Preach the message of the kingdom of God. Call people to repent from their sins, reject Satan, be baptized, and make Jesus their Lord...by not only their words, but their actions as well.