



Text: Romans 9:30 – 10:13¹

Series: Right Living – God’s Righteousness Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 14: Is Jesus Your Lord or Your Favourite?

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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

In ancient and modern times, Christians have often faced the challenge of denying Christ. In the early years of persecution by the Romans, Christians would have to choose between worshipping at the shrine of the emperor or maintaining their belief that “Jesus is Lord.” In communist countries, our brothers and sisters were often required to deny Christ to gain access to jobs or education. In many countries today, the choice is between death and “Jesus is Lord.”

In Canada, it’s unlikely that anyone is going to appear on your doorstep or break into our church gathering and drag us off into jail or into the streets, demanding that we curse God or die. The danger for us is much more subtle, but still very real.

We live in a culture where our greatest danger is denying Christ by default.

Some years ago, Ruth and I were involved in a Bible education program in the local schools in the community in which we lived, together with Christians from many different churches in our town. An editorial appeared in the local newspaper which suggested that our program was weakened by the fact that it did not include instruction in the other major world religions. However, the writer went to say that among the many religious options available, she felt that she had to confess that “Christianity is my favourite.”

“Christianity is my favourite....”

Like Rocky Road ice cream is my favourite ice cream. O, many of the 32 plus flavours that Baskin Robbins sell are fine – but my preference is for Rocky Road. The others are good, too, but my favourite is Rocky Road.

Like the Montreal Canadians are my favourite hockey team. O, there are other teams that are worthy of your support, but my own, personal, individual preference is the Montreal Canadians.

Like blue is my favourite colour...

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Like fall is my favourite season...

Is Jesus just our “favourite” god? Is the Bible just our “favourite” religious text?
Is the faith about Jesus, the Christian faith, just our “favourite” religion?

Jesus Christ does not ask us to choose him as our “favourite.” Jesus is exclusive. He’s the “one and only” One.

Jesus said...

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

The early Christians understood how exclusive Jesus’ claims were. They said...

“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

“There is no other name under heaven...”

In the passage we read a few minutes ago, Paul repeats this claim that Jesus is the one and only God, the one and only way to God, the only One who is worthy of worship when he condensed the declaration of the Christian faith into these simple words...

“Jesus is Lord” Romans 10:9

“Lord” in Paul’s language means supreme, master, ruler. In fact, it means all that God is! In his letter to believers in the city of Philippi Paul shows us just how high and holy the word “Lord” is in his vocabulary. Speaking about Jesus, Paul wrote...

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:9-11

To put Jesus on a par with any other religious leader and to equate the faith that is built on Jesus with any other religious system it **to deny Christ by default.**

Let me repeat that:

To put Jesus on a par with any other religious leader and to equate the faith that is built on Jesus with any other religious system is to deny Christ by default.



Biblical Christianity is not one among many valid religious options for those who want to know and experience God – Jesus’ way is the only way to God!

You might say: “But if I think like this, won’t I become a narrow-minded, intolerant bigot who thinks he or she knows it all?”

Well, not necessarily. You might ... **if you forget to take into account** some of the things Paul outlines for us in the passage we’re thinking about this morning. In this section of his letter to the Romans, Paul gives us a model for relating to people of other faiths without denying Jesus by default.

Paul’s primary focus in this section relates to his own response to the rejection of the Gospel message about Jesus by his own Jewish people. But the attitudes, behaviours and truths he applies to them can be applied to many other faiths we encounter in our world today.

The question I want us to answer this morning is this: how can I be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ in today’s “smorgasbord” world of religion? How can we be committed to the supremacy of Jesus and also retain a gracious spirit in our relationships with people of other faiths? In other words, **how can I avoid denying Christ by default?** I’ve gleaned four principles from Paul’s letter that I want to share with you this morning.

First of all...

A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ approaches faith encounters with a sense of wonder – the wonder of his or her own salvation

Paul wrote...

“What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.” Romans 9:30-31

You and I are “gentiles” to whom the righteousness of God has come by faith. Paul’s point is that God found us more than we pursued him. The message of God’s grace in Christ found me – I didn’t go turning over the rocks looking for salvation – it dropped into my lap!

Many of you here this morning were found by God long before you gave much of a thought to searching for Him.

Paul told us earlier in his letter to the Romans...



“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.” Romans 3:11

If God’s grace didn’t find us, we never would have found Him. Our religious seeking leads us down all kinds of false trails into the arms of all kinds of false comforts

I love the words of the English poet, Francis Thompson, who spoke of God’s Holy Spirit seeking us as if he were “the hound of heaven. Thompson wrote...

**I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat -- and a voice beat
More instant than the Feet --
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."**

http://www.cs.drexel.edu/~gbrandal/Illum_html/hound.html

Thompson runs away from God’s grace until finally exhausted, broken, without any further avenues of escape, God reaches to him and invites him home with the words...

“Rise, clasp my hand, and come”

Captured by God’s grace! What wonder!

Every time we come into a faith encounter with someone who does not know Christ we need to remember that salvation was not our big idea – it’s all about God’s grace finding us.

It humbles us

It inspires gratitude in our hearts
It keeps us from arrogance.

Remember that God pursued you until you took his hand and trust him to do the same with the unbelieving person with whom you are relating.



Second...

A faithful disciple of the Lord approaches faith encounters with a heart of intercession

Paul wrote...

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” Romans 10:1

Paul’s “heart’s desire” reveals the heart of an intercessor, a prayer warrior. It’s the same heart that beat in the chest of Moses when he interceded for Israel with God at Mount Sinai.

Last week we touched on the story of rebellion of Israel at Mount Sinai. As Moses comes down from the mount after receiving the commandments from God, he sees the people engaged in pagan, immoral worship around a golden idol. God says to Moses that he will wipe out this rebellious people and begin again with the children of Moses but Moses intercedes for Israel...

“Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written.” Exodus 32:31-32

Paul shared the same heart for his people who rejected Jesus...

“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.” Romans 9:2-3

We need to present every faith encounter to the Lord in prayer
... asking for their salvation
... asking for love to love them in Jesus’ name
... asking for wisdom to correct their misunderstandings of God’s truth
... asking for grace to deal gently with them and give grace-filled answers

We need to remember that the goal of our encounters is not to “win the argument” but to see God moving in their lives, drawing them toward Jesus.

Third...

A faithful disciple approaches faith encounters with both ears open

“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” Romans 10:2



I'm going to spend a little more time on this principle because it's one on which we can easily be confused.

With one ear, we should be listening for the work of God's grace in their lives.

Paul said of his fellow Jews who rejected Jesus: "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God...."

God has built a hunger for himself into his creation. The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us that God...

"has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end." Ecclesiastes 3:11

There is a longing for something more, for something eternal and lasting but the presence of sin in our hearts keeps us from knowing the God for whom our hearts truly yearn. Paul referred to that yearning when he spoke in the city of Athens to the philosophers of his day. He had walked the streets of the city and had seen the many temples and symbols of religion. He said to them...

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you." Acts 17:22-23

Paul goes on to tell the Athenians that God has ordered the natural world with specific purpose that it might inspire people to "seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him." (Acts 17:27)

The Athenian philosophers had an impulse that told them that there was a spiritual dimension to life, but with all their intellect and all their searching, they had not found God.

I want you to notice that in both Romans and Acts, Paul recognizes the spiritual, religious impulse in the lives of unsaved people. He acknowledges that they have longings which are unfulfilled because those impulses have not found Jesus but he gives credit where credit is due.

Ajith Fernando, the leader of Youth For Christ in Sri Lanka, in his book Jesus and the World Religions, tells of a friend of his who converted to Christianity from Hinduism.

Fernando acknowledges that he learned a lot from his friend in the area of devotion and reverence. His friend's Hindu background played a role in shaping his Christian prayer life in a positive way that was completely consistent with



Biblical truth. But his prayer life changed dramatically, too. No longer was prayer a means of gaining salvation. Because of his faith in Christ, prayer was now an expression of his relationship with God.

Fernando wrote...

“Into his relationship with God he brought a meditative, devotional reverence that he had acquired from his Hindu background. [Before his conversion] This reverence had expressed itself in ways that were contrary to the Gospel. But the reverence itself was a good feature. We could say that it had its roots in God’s general revelation and therefore, we could learn from it.”

Tony Malik was an Indian Christian I met in Bible school. Tony had been saved out of Hinduism (his family was from the Brahmin class, the priestly class), but his upbringing still influenced his Christian life.

One day Tony pointed out to me the wonderful complexity of the human hand. He had been considering the ways in which the fingers of his hand closed together; the way the thumb worked with the fingers; how the creases of his hand helped the hand to function. As Tony directed my thinking toward the complexity of my hand, he pointed out how it all displayed the incredible wisdom of God in his work as Creator. A Hindu meditative perspective on seeing God in everything had opened Tony to the truth that the psalmist proclaimed when he wrote...

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

In our encounters with other faiths we can give credit where credit is due...

Muslims can be commended for the reverence with which they treat the Koran – they never carry it below their waist or put it on the floor. They challenge me to treat the Bible in a way that reflects what I say I believe it to be – the very Word of God.

Mormons can be commended for their passion for the family.

Jehovah’s Witnesses can be commended for their zeal in door-to-door evangelism.

Native spiritualists can be commended for their reverence for the Creator.

But as Paul would also say, these are to be commended but they lack the most important thing – a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Their reverence, their passion and their zeal is, as Paul wrote, “not according to knowledge.”



Ravi Zacharias, one of the best contemporary Christian writers and speakers on the subject of presenting Christ to other faith groups, has said:

“If you can make any religion look idiotic, chances are you haven’t understood that religion ... The old Indian proverb holds true: Once you’re cut off a person’s nose, there’s no point giving him a rose to smell. We tend to think being kind and listening to the opposition implies we have sacrificed the message.” It doesn’t. We simply need to listen for God’s work of grace and then lead them to know Him through faith in Jesus Christ.

That leads us to **the other ear** we need to have open. **Our ear should also be open to “listen for what’s missin”**”

“they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” Romans 10:2

One of the dominant religious philosophies that you will encounter today is called...

Syncretism

Syncretism is the idea that truth is found in combining the good points of all religions. It’s wedded to the idea that all religions are basically the same. How many times have you heard someone say, “We all worship the same god, don’t we?” That’s a popular expression of syncretism.

Syncretism says:

- **All religions are the same at the centre, we only differ on peripheral matters.**
- **Let’s live in harmony with each other, learning from each because we’re all headed in the same direction, to the same place, worshipping the same god.**

But...

Biblical Christianity says:

- **We’re similar in peripheral areas, but at the core we’re very different.**
- **The core of Christianity is Jesus Christ** – other faiths revolve around a different centre
- **We can live in harmony with other faiths because faith must be unforced, not because we are the same**

A year or so ago a Muslim group sponsored an inter-faith symposium here in town. I was very interested to note how the representatives of the other faiths commented on the similarity of their religious practices: their prayer practices and worship rituals had commonalities. But I was glad to note that the Christian speaker, our own Wayne Keillor, concentrated on the “who” that made all the



difference. Wayne's talk focused on Jesus as our way to God because it's crucial that we understand that...

The key issue for Christianity is not what you do but Who you know

Paul pointed to the key fact that his Jewish people, for all their religious activity and zeal, had missed the knowledge of Jesus.

While I was still living in Toronto I was walking through a park and came upon a Christian music group who had been giving a concert. They had been playing Gospel music and had had a good response to their music. After one of their sets of music, one of the group members had noticed a couple who were obviously enjoying the music and so he engaged them in conversation.

"What did you think of the music?" he asked. "Great, we really enjoyed it," they responded very enthusiastically. "What do you think of Jesus?" he continued. "Well," they answered, "that's the problem – the music was great, but this Jesus stuff is too much."

As Paul would put it, these people had...

"stumbled over the stumbling stone." Romans 9:32

If you don't believe in him, he is a "stumbling stone." If you want to get to God you just can't get around him. You'll keep tripping over him, slamming into him, running up against him.

But if you believe in him, Jesus becomes

"a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 1 Peter 2:6

Jesus becomes a highway, a road, which leads you to God. He becomes a foundation that will not be shaken; he becomes a cornerstone on which eternity is built in your life.

Jesus is either a "stumbling stone" or "a cornerstone" – which is he for you?

Paul's prayer for these people who were zealous for God was that they be saved; they were zealous for God, but still lost in their sin because they had rejected Jesus, the one and only way to the Father.

Finally...



A faithful disciple approaches faith encounters with the confidence that everybody needs Jesus

“For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:12-13

Let me first warn you that regardless of who gracious you might choose to be, those you speak to might very well not take the message of salvation in Christ alone in a gracious spirit. The idea that there is only one way of salvation runs counter to the spirit of syncretism that is dominant in our day.

Presenting the Biblical truth that Jesus is the only way to God will be attacked at fanatical, dangerous, intolerant, bigoted, narrow-minded, presumptuous, self-righteous, ignorant...

When we present the Biblical truth in a spiritually sensitive way following the Spirit's leading, we will still be criticized and attacked. When that happens, remember Jesus' words...

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Matthew 5:11-12

One of the things that makes me very sad is hearing people who should be representatives of God's truth undersell or misrepresent the Gospel in order to avoid being maligned for the sake of the Gospel. , But the reality is that unless we take a firm grip on God's truth that “the same Lord is Lord of all,” each one of us is capable of denying Christ by default.

We need to understand three things about Jesus' Lordship.

First...

Jesus' Lordship is universal – He is Lord of all.

Some people want to suggest that his Lordship only extends to cultures where the Christian faith is dominant. But according to God's Word...

It doesn't matter where you were born – in India, or Germany or Canada or Saudi Arabia – Jesus is Lord of all.

It doesn't matter what faith you were raised in – Hinduism, Protestantism, Judaism or Islam – Jesus is Lord of all.

Second...



Jesus' Lordship is exclusive – the same Lord is Lord of all

There are no other Lords who stand with him – there is only one. He is not just “my favourite” Lord – there are no other real options.

The Apostle Peter declared it this way...

“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:11-12

Jesus is either the capstone of our lives or the stumbling stone on our path. He is either the cornerstone on whom we build our lives or he is the rock that causes people to fall.

Third...

Jesus' Lordship must become personal ... “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Jesus' salvation doesn't come automatically to anyone – we need to submit ourselves to his Lordship and ask him, call on him, for forgiveness and salvation.

Have you called on Him? Have you surrendered your life to his control? Have you told him that you are sorry for your sin and asked him to forgive you? If you call on Jesus God's promise of God is that you “will be saved.

[Christianity Explored slide]

If you still have questions about what it means to “call on the name of the Lord” I want to invite you to join me, **beginning on Oct 15, for a ten week study in the Gospel of Mark.** It's a study called **Christianity Explored** and over the ten weeks of our study we're going to answer three crucial questions about Jesus. **First**, who is Jesus? **Second**, why did he come? **Third**, what does it mean to follow Him? **Your personal answers** to those three questions will determine whether Jesus is your stumbling stone or cornerstone.

Being faithful disciples of Jesus today requires that some important perspectives be deeply rooted in our lives.

Do you have **a sense of wonder** about your own salvation? Do you recognize that it's all of God's grace – that he sought and found you?

Charles Wesley wrote...

And can it be that I should gain



**An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

Charles Gabriel wrote...

**I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene
And wonder how he could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.**

Wonder, wonder, wonder!

Do you have **an intercessor's heart** for those who don't know Jesus?

Can you give **credit where credit** is due to those who don't know Christ, all the while realizing that they desperately **need to come to know Him** as Saviour?

Are you committed to **the universal, exclusive and personal Lordship** of Jesus Christ?

Let's pray.

Communion Songs:

- And Can It Be?
- My Saviour's Love

Benediction