

HAS GOD PROVED HIMSELF?

By SCOTT GRANT

Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins, in his bestseller *The God Delusion*, attempts to demonstrate that belief in a supreme being defies the evidence. God, he is convinced, does not exist. Many people in our world agree with him. Most people in our world, even if they believe in the existence of God, don't believe that the gospel, which proclaims that Jesus is Lord, proves much of anything. Many people, perhaps even Dawkins himself, say they would gladly believe in God if he just proved himself.

Has God proved himself? The Apostle Paul thinks so, and he makes a case for God's faithfulness in Romans 9:30-10:21.

In Romans 9:30-10:21, Paul continues telling the story of Israel, which he began in Romans 9:6. Whereas the previous passage featured the chapters of Israel's story leading up to the time of Christ, this passage features the chapter after his arrival. We learn from this passage why Israel as a whole rejected the gospel. Paul explains the reasons for Israel's unbelief in order to address them and defend the gospel. Israel's unbelief, it turns out, parallels unbelief in any culture, including ours. By considering Israel's story, then, we find out what we, as believers in the gospel, are up against and how we might respond.

Romans 9:30-10:21:

^{9:30}What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just as it is written,

“BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE,

AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

^{10:1}Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. ²For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. ³For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

⁵For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness. ⁶But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), ⁷or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” ⁸But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, ⁹that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in

salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

¹⁴How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?

¹⁵How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

¹⁶However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

¹⁸But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; “THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.”

¹⁹But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, “I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU.”

²⁰And Isaiah is very bold and says,

“I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.”

²¹But as for Israel He says, “ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”

Why Israel stumbled

Paul explains how it came to be that more Gentiles were included as God’s people while most Jews were cast away. Most Gentiles were not interested in righteousness—that is, membership in the people with whom God partnered. They wanted nothing to do with the God of Israel. Nevertheless, they became members when they believed the gospel, the announcement that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, is the risen Lord of the world. Therefore, their membership is defined by faith.¹

As a whole, Israel was interested in membership, but its obsession with nationalism prevented it from recognizing its Messiah. As he approached Jerusalem, Jesus pronounced God’s judgment on it because it had not recognized the time of its “visitation,” the coming of the Messiah in fulfillment of God’s promises (Luke 19:44). Israel adhered to the Mosaic Law, and the works it called for, as a sign of national privilege. God, however, gave the law as part of his partnership, or covenant, with Israel in order to provoke and increase sin in Israel, the nation that represented the world, so that sin could be gathered at the cross and defeated by Christ (Romans 5:20-21). Jesus Christ, therefore, is the goal and fulfillment of the law. To adhere to the law, as if it defined membership status even after the coming of Christ, is to reject God. If Christ fulfills the law, one must believe the gospel to “arrive” at the law by participating in its fulfillment and “attaining” to membership status.²

Pursuing membership based on the law, Israelites stumbled and did not arrive at faith in Christ. The “stumbling stone” that the prophet Isaiah spoke of turns out to be Christ.³ Christ opened up membership in God’s people to Gentiles apart from keeping the Mosaic Law. This was offensive to Jews who thought of membership in national terms

and would accept Gentiles, if they accepted them at all, only if they too embraced works of the law, beginning with circumcision. From the standpoint of most Jews, who thought of themselves as bearing the burden of the law, Paul's gospel made it too easy for Gentiles.⁴

The goal of the law

Paul, who prays that his Jewish brothers would be saved from sin and death by embracing the gospel, explains their need for salvation. Like Paul before meeting Christ, the Jews are zealous for God's honor to the extent that many of them have propagated violence in his name, particularly in an effort to keep Israel pure from Gentile influence. Nevertheless, they remained ignorant of God's righteousness: his faithfulness to his partnership with Israel that culminated in the coming of the Messiah to rescue the world from sin and death. They did not submit to God's saving purposes because they were "seeking to establish their own" righteousness—membership that was confined to Jews and defined by adherence to the Mosaic Law, which only the Jews received.⁵

The goal of the law, however, is Christ.⁶ Indeed, the Messiah is the goal of the entire Jewish story, of which the law is a part. If the goal of the law was to increase sin in Israel so that Christ could defeat it, the goal of the Jewish story was to suffer for the world that the world might be saved. In going to the cross, the place where sin was concentrated, Christ suffered for the world and fulfilled the vocation of Israel. The story has reached its goal: Membership in God's people—righteousness—is now for "everyone who believes" the gospel of Jesus Christ, not simply for Jews. Jews' treatment of the law confined membership to them. God's treatment of the law in Christ opened up membership to all. The law achieved its goal.

In verses 5-8, Paul sees this way of understanding membership as being advanced by Moses in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Paul is not saying that Moses advocated two ways of righteousness, one in Leviticus based on the law and another in Deuteronomy based on faith. No, Moses envisioned the covenant life he prescribed in Leviticus as being fulfilled in Deuteronomy. He envisioned the law being fulfilled through a new partnership—a new covenant—that God would make with his disobedient people after sending them into exile.

Paul sees the new covenant as having been fulfilled in the gospel, which features the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.⁷ Paul has already alluded to the new covenant promised in Deuteronomy 30, in which the work of Christ paves the way for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of people and bring about a new obedience to God (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:14-15, 28-29; 8:2-4).

Apart from the work of God, the covenant life Moses prescribes in Leviticus may seem out of reach, as if one would have to ascend into heaven or descend into the abyss to sustain it. But Moses says in Deuteronomy that covenant obedience "is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach" (Deuteronomy 30:11). God, in the new covenant, has done the impossible, which means two things: 1) No one else has to do it. 2) Everyone can get in on it.

The "word of faith"—the gospel, which proclaims the lordship of Jesus Christ—is accessible. All one has to do is believe it and confess it. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit, one finds the gospel in his heart and confesses it with his mouth. Confession that Jesus is Lord, a common occurrence at baptism, is the assumed outgrowth of belief that

God raised him from the dead (Acts 22:16, 1 Corinthians 12:3, 2 Corinthians 4:5, Philippians 2:11). The resurrection, which proves the lordship of Christ, is integral to the gospel. You don't ascend into heaven and you don't bring Christ down; you confess that he is Lord. You don't descend into the abyss and you don't bring Christ up from the dead; you believe that God has raised him from the dead. The obedience that Moses calls for in Leviticus and hopes for in Deuteronomy is fulfilled through belief that Jesus is the resurrected Lord of the world.

It doesn't end there, of course. The "obedience of faith" that the Holy Spirit creates begins with the belief that Jesus is Lord and issues in ongoing, albeit imperfect, obedience to him as Lord (Romans 1:5, 16:26). The kind of obedience that God has always been looking for is obedience to him from the heart instead of to laws that leave the core of one's personality unaffected.

The result of confessional faith is righteousness, which is membership in God's people, and salvation, which in Romans is mostly future and involves final deliverance from all that is opposed to God, principally sin and death. Those who enjoy covenant membership in the present will be saved in the future. In the end God will vindicate not "whoever" believes the gospel but literally "all" who believe the gospel so that they will not be disappointed, regardless of their present experience.

As usual, for Paul "all" means Jew and Gentile—particularly Jew and Gentile together in the same Roman church. Earlier he noted that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in that all have sinned (Romans 3:22). Now he notes that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in salvation in that all believers have the same Lord, Jesus Christ. The way of salvation for Jews is the same as it is for Gentiles: faith, which is equivalent to calling Jesus Christ Lord and calling on his name.⁸ In that Jews and Gentiles in Rome have the same Lord, they belong in the same church.

The new covenant is here

In Romans 9:30-10:4, Paul said that many Gentiles became members of God's people because they believed the gospel, while many Jews, the original members, have been excluded by their failure to believe the gospel. In Romans 10:5-13, Paul demonstrated that the gospel, and its inclusion of the Gentiles, fulfills the new covenant, which was predicted in the scriptures of the Jews. Now, in Romans 10:14-21, Paul responds to a presumed Jewish protest that the new covenant, even as Paul understands it, has not been enacted. He focuses on Gentile response in verses 14-18 and Jewish recalcitrance in verses 19-21.⁹

For Gentiles, or any people—but Paul has the Gentiles particularly in mind—to respond to the gospel, they need to hear it from those who preach it. Paul and the other apostles of Jesus have been sent, or "apostled" (Greek: *apostellō*), by God to preach that Jesus is Lord, so it can be assumed that the new covenant anticipated by Moses and the prophets has been enacted.¹⁰ Paul, quoting from Isaiah, says that the gospel is "our report"—that is, the report of the other apostles and him.¹¹

True, not all Gentiles have embraced the gospel, but it is not thereby discredited, for Isaiah implied that it would not be universally received: "Lord, who has believed our report?" If the response among Gentiles has not been universal, perhaps the message has not been universally delivered. If so, perhaps the new covenant has not been enacted. Paul rebuffs this argument as well. Paul could say, even in his day, that the messengers had

indeed taken the gospel “into all the earth” and “to the ends of the world.” He’s not claiming that every person in the world had heard the gospel in his day. He says elsewhere in this letter that his ambition is to preach the gospel in places where Christ is not known, such as Spain (Romans 15:20-24). Nevertheless, his claims for new covenant fulfillment are bolstered by unprecedented missionary activity among Gentiles.¹²

In verses 14-18, the objection to new covenant fulfillment concerns what the Gentiles have heard. In verses 19-21, the objection concerns what the Jews have known. Granted that the new covenant is being fulfilled by the inclusion of the Gentiles, perhaps unbelieving Jews should be excused because they had no way of knowing that it would be fulfilled in this way. Paul refutes this objection as well.

He earlier said that Jews who have not embraced the gospel did not know about the righteousness of God: his faithfulness to his promises that would open up membership in God’s people to the whole world. Now Paul says they should have known about the inclusion of the Gentiles. Paul understands that both Moses, in Deuteronomy, and Isaiah anticipated the inclusion of the Gentiles.¹³

Paul comes full circle with his argument, which began in Romans 9:30-33. Gentiles, who did not pursue membership in God’s people but attained it nevertheless, have found the God of Israel, though they did not “seek” or “ask for” him. Jews, who pursued membership yet did not arrive at it, because they pursued it in an exclusive way, remain “disobedient and obstinate,” unresponsive to the gospel of God that was predicted in their own scriptures. Yet, there is hope. God intended Gentile inclusion to make Israel jealous and bring them to faith. Paul will have more to say about this in Romans 11.

Is the gospel universal?

One of the things Paul is doing in Romans 9-11 is showing that the gospel stands up to arguments against it. Jewish unbelief, as seen in Romans 9:1-29 and again in this passage, does not discredit the gospel. The implication of Roman 9:30-10:21 is that Jewish unbelief today does not discredit the gospel because the Hebrew Scriptures envisioned the gospel. The gospel is there for anyone—particularly a Jew—to see in the pages of the Jewish scriptures. Neither is the gospel discredited by Gentile unbelief, for the same scriptures that envisioned the gospel never envisioned universal acceptance of it. Some would expect more widespread submission to Jesus if in fact he is Lord. Jesus himself, however, said that the gate is narrow and that not everyone will find it (Matthew 7:13-14).

Some today would also claim that the gospel is discredited because it has not been universally proclaimed, but Paul could say, even in the first century, that God’s messengers had gone out into all the earth. And if it can be said today that not everyone has heard about Jesus, it can also be said, as Paul himself says in Romans 1:18-23, that creation preaches about God but that humans turn a deaf ear. The fact that all humans haven’t heard the gospel doesn’t discredit it because not all humans want to hear it.

Has God proved himself?

The passage not only explains why the Jews should have believed the gospel, it also explains why they didn’t believe the gospel. Jesus’ contemporaries didn’t believe he was the Messiah because they had different ideas about what it meant for God to be

faithful and about what it meant for people to belong to him. The gospel is rejected today for the same reasons.

Like the Jews of old, our world is ignorant of God's righteousness: his faithfulness to rescue the world. Our culture has difficulty believing that God addressed the problems of the world through an individual who lived in the first century. People see that the problems are still with us. They don't see that God, if they even think he exists, has done very much about their problems. So they tend to think of him—again, if they think of him at all—as mostly irrelevant. Jesus, they say, hasn't proved himself.

The gospel, though, concerns not only what God has done through Jesus but what he will do through Jesus. In the first place, God defeated evil in the death and resurrection of Christ, and in the second place, he will destroy evil through the return of Christ. The gospel claims that Jesus is the resurrected Lord of the world and that he is, even now, subduing everything that is opposed to God (1 Corinthians 15:26). If we can't see how a good God could possibly allow the ongoing presence of evil, the gospel tells us to wait. God is using evil for good, even if we can't see it. One day, when Jesus returns, we will see it, and all will be well.

Most people have a different idea about what it means for God to rescue the world. I recently spoke with a friend who thinks that natural disasters undermine the gospel's claim that all will be well. Despite my best efforts, I couldn't convince him otherwise. We must admit that the gospel makes audacious claims. It takes faith to believe that God has defeated evil, that he's using evil for good and that he will one day destroy evil. Nevertheless, the gospel is God's message. He sends it out with his Holy Spirit, who makes faith possible.

Who are God's people?

Even if people don't believe the gospel, they still believe in something. Whatever it is they believe in makes it difficult for them to believe the gospel. The Jews of old failed to recognize God's faithfulness in Christ because they had preconceived ideas about what it meant to be the people of God. They misused God's law and took it as a sign of national privilege. All cultures tend to define themselves in order to bolster the insecurity of their members by making them feel superior to other cultures. Whatever culture you inhabit, certain laws define who's in and who's out.

Membership in the people of God is defined solely by faith. If this is so, members must abandon their alternative definitions, which make them feel secure and superior. They must cast themselves on the mercy of God, which makes them feel insecure. They must embrace all who believe the gospel, especially those they shunned. They must be merciful to all. Jesus would enter their lives, as he entered Jerusalem of old, but they send him away. They do not recognize the day of their visitation.

Our culture continues to advance belief in the existence of God. Surveys routinely report that the overwhelming majority of people in our country believe that there is a God. Our culture is decisively monotheistic. Most people, however, part company with the gospel when they define what it means to belong to God. First century Israel was blinded by nationalism; our culture is blinded by individualism. The individual can do anything he or she wants as long as it doesn't harm anyone else. There is widespread agreement, however, that being a "good person" is important. If you're a good person,

you can persuade yourself that God—if he exists and if there’s an afterlife—will give you a pass in the end. So we’re told.

I have a theory that goes like this: Most people who think there might be a God do good deeds because they hope to avoid him. They want to do just well enough so that God—if he exists—will keep his nose out of their business and give them a pass at the end. They’ve convinced themselves that their possibly existent God wants them to be good people and that they’re good enough. To think otherwise is to admit they need him. God doesn’t want people to do good deeds. He wants people to receive his love and love him in return. He wants people to do good deeds *because* they love him. Good deeds, it turns out, can be every bit as sinful as bad deeds. It depends on why you’re doing them. Jesus showed the Pharisees that there was a dark side to their good deeds (Matthew 23).

I had a conversation recently with a woman who was articulating standard “good person” theology. I trotted out my theory that most people do good deeds to avoid God. Needless to say, she didn’t like it. She made it known that our conversation was over.

The gospel does not exclude people who want God. On the one hand, it invites people who want him to draw near to him. On the other hand, identifies people who don’t want him. Many people in our culture express their desire to keep their distance from God by being what they prefer to think he expects them to be: good people. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the word of God—that is, the gospel message—“is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” in that it exposes one’s disposition toward God (Hebrews 4:12).

Can the world see Christ?

Our culture has different ideas about what it means for God to be faithful. It has different ideas about what it means to be “in.” It also has different ideas about what it means to be a believer in Jesus. Many people in our day, largely because of portrayals in the media, identify gospel believers mostly with intolerance and bigotry. If our world’s basis for belonging to God is basic goodness, it thinks that our basis for belonging to God is hateful opposition to abortion and homosexuality. The scriptures speak to abortion and homosexuality, and we must wrestle with those passages, in the context of the entire biblical story, so that we may speak intelligently, truthfully and compassionately to our culture concerning these issues, in addition to matters of poverty, social justice and the environment and the arts.¹⁴ But these are not the issues that define us. Faith defines us. Simply, we believe that Jesus is Lord and submit to him. Mostly, we have something to say about him.

Perhaps our world is not so much stumbling over Christ as it is stumbling over what it perceives to be Christianity. The world does not need Christianity; it needs Christ. We must do our best, in our lives and in our church, to clear the stage of Christianity and give it to Christ. We must examine ourselves to see if our obsessions and insecurities have caused us to care more about Christianity than about Christ. We do not want to be like the Jews of old, or like most people in all cultures who are blinded by their own definitions of what it means to be “in,” so that we do not see “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). In order to better help the world see Christ, we must see him better ourselves. And we must learn to delight in what we see.

Ernest Gordon, who wrote *To End All Wars* and *Miracle on the River Kwai*, felt followers of Jesus were the kind of people “who had extracted the bubbles from the

champagne of life. I would have preferred a robust hell to the grey sunless abode of the faithful.”¹⁵ How do we answer such an accusation? Rejoice! Rejoice that you know your Creator and Redeemer and will serve him forever. Rejoice even when you are persecuted, for your reward in heaven is great. And if they see us rejoicing, not merely putting on a happy face but truly rejoicing from the place in our hearts where we know God’s love for us, maybe we’ll clear the stage for a few more cynics and skeptics so that they can see Christ. Let’s win the world over with joy.

Is the gospel accessible?

We must not, however, think that the gospel’s accessibility to our culture depends on us. It doesn’t. It depends on the Holy Spirit, who sweeps away the cultural clutter with the gospel message so that men and women can see Jesus and believe in him. If God has done the impossible, raising Jesus from the dead, he’s going to accompany the gospel message with his Holy Spirit so that when people believe it, they will feel as if all along they were just waiting to believe. They will feel as if they didn’t even have to look for the gospel because they found it, to their own surprise, in their own hearts, where the Holy Spirit did his work.

The gospel, then, is the most accessible thing in the world. No one has to do the impossible; it’s already been done for everyone, which means everyone can know God. God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is now Lord of the world. Believe it, and you will be saved. This is the obedience that God wants: an obedience that believes that Jesus is Lord and submits to him.

The culture can paralyze us if we let it. If you start talking about Jesus, you know that that you may be put in a box. You know that Jesus will be put in a box. But if death couldn’t hold him and a tomb with a giant stone over its mouth couldn’t contain him, do you think he’s going to be confined by a cultural box? Tell the world that Jesus is Lord, and trust the power of the Holy Spirit.

Tell them Jesus is Lord

What should we do, as followers of Jesus, in the face of our culture’s rejection of the gospel? Answer the objections as best you can with patience, respect and cheer. They have good questions, and they deserve good answers. Above all, tell them that Jesus is Lord. Tell them that a new world of justice and beauty is coming and that they don’t want to miss out on it. It’s the truth, and it’s the truth that can save them.

A few years ago, writer David Klinghoffer reviewed two books on faith for the Wall Street Journal. He found both of them wanting. One author, he wrote, “entertains no dark notions about sin, no upsetting thoughts about the possibility that there may be such a thing as religious truth—or untruth.” The other author said that the idea of a judgment day complete with a resurrection was simply too “distasteful” to believe. Klinghoffer couldn’t recommend either of the books and noted:

I wish there were some other bestseller on the scene more like the preacher I see in the subway station every day under Times Square: “You kin pray-ay to Booda. You kin pra-ay to Mary. You kin pra-ay to yo’ dead ancestors. But you better pray to Jesus, ’cause he’s the only one gonna hear you.” It’s debatable

whether these are the only choices, but to the reader of these two books, the stark seriousness of such language comes as a welcome slap in the face.¹⁶

The latest book that Klinghoffer would presumably take issue with is *The Secret*, which promises to help readers understand the hidden untapped power within them in order to bring joy to every aspect of their lives. I'd rather listen to the subway preacher. So, presumably, would David Klinghoffer, who doesn't even believe the gospel. There are more out there like him. Let's give them the gospel, and let's give it to them straight.

If anyone reading this does not believe the gospel, let me give it to you straight: Jesus died for the sins of the world, including yours, and God raised him from the dead. He is Lord of the world, and he will one day consummate his reign. Those who have made him Lord will serve with him in the new creation. Those who don't will be condemned and will "pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:9). God doesn't want good people; he wants you!

What should you do? Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved. You may find that it's not that hard to do, that it's not that hard to believe. You may find that the faith you need is as close as your heart, where the Holy Spirit has convicted you of truth. In the end, the gospel is easy to believe. On the final day, you will not be disappointed.

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¹ The term "righteousness" in Romans 9:30-31 conveys membership status, not moral goodness. Paul says that Gentiles who attained righteousness were not pursuing righteousness. Certainly, many of those Gentiles were pursuing moral goodness, apart from wanting to join God's people, just as many today pursue moral goodness in the same manner. Therefore, it is unlikely that Paul understands righteousness in verses 30-31 in terms of moral goodness.

² Israel was pursuing not "a law of righteousness" but "*the* law of righteousness"—that is, covenant status defined by the Mosaic Law. But the "law of faith"—that is, gospel faith that fulfills the law—is determinative (Romans 3:27).

³ In Romans 10:11, where Paul also alludes to the same verse in Isaiah, it is clear, based on the context, that the reference is to Christ.

⁴ The stumbling stone, Christ, was also the cornerstone of a new temple composed of living stones, both Jews and Gentiles who believe the gospel (1 Peter 2:4-10).

⁵ The first use of the word "righteousness" in verse 3 is not the righteousness "from" God. It's not a status or standing that he grants. It's the righteousness "of" God: a quality of God that he acts upon, in faithfulness to his partnership with Israel, to save humanity. This is the righteousness to which the Jews did not "subject themselves." One does not become subject to a status; one receives a status. One becomes subject to God. The reference to the Jews' "own" righteousness, on the other hand, speaks of the membership status they wished to establish as God's people. Their obedience to the law was not in order to achieve the membership status of righteousness; they were obedient to the law because they believed they already had such status. They sought to maintain it for themselves while excluding others. They believed God had created their status; they sought to "establish" it for Jews and Jews only.

⁶ The word translated “end” (*telos*) in verse 4 can also be translated “goal,” which is to be preferred. Christ, and faith in him, fulfills the law; he does not terminate it.

⁷ Likewise, when Paul introduces the gospel at the outset of the letter, he features the birth and resurrection of Christ (Romans 1:1-4). Moses, the mediator of God’s first covenant with Israel, came down from Mount Sinai after the people disobeyed God. He destroyed the two tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written and went up the mountain to meet with God again and receive two new tablets (Exodus 32-33). Christ, coming down from God and being brought up from the dead, mediated a new covenant, which fulfills the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of his followers.

⁸ Joel 2:32, which Paul quotes in verse 14, speaks of the new covenant, which the gospel fulfills.

⁹ Paul doesn’t specifically identify the people he is speaking about in verses 14-18, but the universal invitations to worship the God of Israel recorded there were customarily addressed to the Gentiles (Psalm 66:1). Paul’s specific mention of Israel in verse 19 may indicate that only at that point is he speaking regarding the Jews.

¹⁰ Isaiah 52:7, which Paul quotes from in verse 15, originally applied to the Lord’s expected defeat of Babylon, which would allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem. The message was so great that even the feet of the one who carried it were said to be beautiful. Furthermore, Isaiah anticipated a greater return from exile, in which God would defeat not Babylon but sin so that his people—indeed, the entire world—could return to him. What Isaiah anticipated has come to pass. The gospel declares that God has defeated sin in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Isaiah 53:1, which Paul quotes from in verse 16, refers to the report concerning the Servant of the Lord, who turns out to be Jesus, according to the New Testament.

¹² In its context, Psalm 19:4, which Paul quotes from in verse 18, refers not to gospel preaching but to the witness of the heavens. Gospel preaching, Paul seems to be saying, is like the witness of the heavens in that it has been universal. Psalm 19 speaks not only of the heavens but also of the law of the Lord, which is fulfilled by the gospel.

¹³ Deuteronomy 32:1, which Paul quotes in verse 19, speaks of what turns out to be God’s regular practice of empowering other nations to discipline idolatrous Israel. The practice continues with Gentile responsiveness to the gospel. Isaiah 65:1-2, which Paul quotes in verses 20-21, referred originally to rebellious Israel. Now, as he did with the words of the prophet Hosea in Romans 9:25-26, Paul applies the words of Isaiah to once rebellious Gentiles who are finding the God of Israel. The restoration of Israel, which the context of Isaiah 65:1-2 speaks of, is being fulfilled, from Paul’s perspective, by Gentile inclusion.

¹⁴ Concerning Paul’s words about homosexuality, see my commentary on Romans 1:18-32 titled *World Gone Wrong*.

¹⁵ Quoted by Jonathan Lamb in sermon titled *Heaven in us before we are in Heaven*, © 2006 by Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino, Nov. 6, 2006.

¹⁶ David Klinghoffer, *The Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 1995. P. A12.