

Deadly Ignorance

“Brothers, truly my heart’s pleasure and supplication to God on behalf of Israel is for [it] to be saved. For I testify to them that they have zeal to God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God. For Christ [is] the end of Law for righteousness to everyone that believes” (Romans 10:1-4).

In Romans 10:1-4, Paul judges those who are ignorant of specific doctrine to be lost. This article expounds this passage and relates it to the most popular of the false religionists that come in the name of Christ but who are ignorant of the righteousness of God – namely, those who believe that Jesus Christ died for everyone without exception (universal atonement advocates).

1. *“Brothers, truly my heart’s pleasure and supplication to God on behalf of Israel is for [it] to be saved.”*

The Apostle Paul shows great concern for the salvation of Israel. This is the same Israel that he mentions in Romans 9:1-5. They are his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. They are not his spiritual brethren in Christ, for the simple fact that he is praying for their salvation. If Paul is going to pray for Israel’s salvation, then it is necessary for him to make a judgment concerning their spiritual state, the state of their hearts. And since Paul is praying for their salvation, he is judging them to be lost. Obviously, if they were already saved, then there would be no need for Paul to pray that God would save them.

This judgmental prayer of Paul is important to point out, since we encounter many people who falsely and hypocritically accuse us of claiming omniscience nearly every time we judge a certain person to be lost. Yet these same people will not accuse themselves of claiming omniscience when they judge that same certain person to be saved, showing their hypocrisy. If we are claiming omniscience by judging a person lost, then these false accusers must say that Paul is claiming to possess God’s incommunicable attribute of omniscience when he prays for the salvation of unbelieving Israel in Romans 10:1.

Again, it is important to reiterate the fact that when Paul says that he is praying for Israel’s salvation, he is simultaneously judging them to be lost, since one does not pray for the salvation of saved people. Those who are lost are not believers in Christ and are thus abiding under the wrath of God (John 3:36). My point here is that there is absolutely no inconsistency between showing genuine love and concern for someone’s salvation while at the same time judging that person to be lost and under God’s wrath. Paul’s prayer for Israel (and his great grief and pain over them in Romans 9:2) clearly demonstrates this fact. And this love that Paul and all Christians show toward those who are enemies of the cross of Christ has nothing to do with the emotions. It is a fixed determination of the will to obey Christ’s commandment to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

In contrast to Paul, the false prophets in the Old Testament showed hatred toward the lost by telling them that they would have peace despite their worship of false gods: *“So says Jehovah of Hosts, do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they make you vain; they*

speaking a vision of their own heart, not out of the mouth of Jehovah. They say to those who despise Me, Jehovah has said, you shall have peace. And they say to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, evil shall not come on you” (Jeremiah 23:16-17).

Just like these false prophets of old, there are many false religionists in our day who are showing hatred to the lost, as evidenced by their speaking peace to those who are confessing one of the many variations of salvation conditioned on the sinner. One example of the aforementioned is the person who claims to believe the doctrines of grace but who considers at least some who believe in the Christ-dishonoring lie of universal atonement (i.e., the belief that Christ died for everyone without exception, including those who end up in hell) to be his brothers in Christ. These spiritually dead false peace-speakers are saying to those who despise the Lord Jesus, “God has said you shall have peace, and no evil shall come upon you, despite your belief in a false gospel of salvation conditioned on the sinner.” The true believer will not judge such blasphemers to be his brothers in Christ; instead, he will, like Paul, love them by judging them lost, praying for their salvation, and proclaiming the true gospel to them.

2. *“For I testify to them that they have zeal to God, but not according to knowledge.”*

The Apostle readily acknowledges that Israel is a very sincere and moral people. But although they have zeal, it is not according to knowledge. They are ignorant of something, and Paul is judging them to be lost based on this ignorance. It is very interesting to note that Paul is attributing their lostness to ignorance alone. It is interesting because there are many people who would say that universal atonement advocates are still saved, but they are just ignorant of a little bit of doctrine (as we will see later on). They will point to the universal atonement advocate’s religious zeal and fervency as proof of regeneration. These people contradict the Apostle, and by judging universal atonement advocates saved based on zeal and fervency rather than by the gospel, they show that they, too, are lost. Paul says that zeal without a certain kind of knowledge is dead zeal. This ignorance is deadly, no matter how moral, how religious, how sincere, how zealous the person is for God.

3. *“For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness of God.”*

Here is the crux of the matter. What is the knowledge that these zealous religionists were missing? What were they ignorant of that would cause Paul to judge them to be lost?

Paul says that Israel is ignorant of the *righteousness of God*. Scripture tells us that the righteousness of God is Christ Himself (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30) – His person and His work. His righteousness is imputed to His people (2 Corinthians 5:21). This righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel: *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone believing, both to Jew first, and to Greek; for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; even as it has been written, But the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:16-17).* This righteousness that is revealed in the gospel demonstrates how God declares certain sinners just and forgives them in a way that is consistent with His holy law and justice. The gospel demonstrates on what grounds God declares elect sinners forgiven and

righteous in His sight. This verdict declared by God is a forensic, declaratory act. It is not based on any act of the sinner or any act God enables the sinner to do. God justifies apart from works: “But now a righteousness of God has been revealed apart from Law ... for a demonstration of His righteousness in the present time, for His being just and justifying the [one] that [is] of the faith of Jesus. ... Then we conclude a man to be justified by faith without works of Law” (Romans 3:21-28). God justifies His people solely on the grounds of the wrath-appeasing, salvation-securing, atoning blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. Thus, all boasting in self is excluded (Romans 3:27). Faith, whether “Spirit-wrought” or “self-wrought,” does not make the difference between salvation and damnation. If it did, then boasting would not be excluded. Boasting in self is only excluded when one boasts in the cross of Christ alone. Those who truly make their boast in the cross of Christ alone believe that it is His cross work that makes the only difference between saved and lost, between salvation and damnation (Galatians 6:14). What one believes makes the ultimate difference between heaven and hell is what one boasts in. In the wicked doctrine of universal atonement, there is boasting in self, since Christ supposedly did the same thing for those in heaven as He did for those in hell. If Christ’s work is done equally for both the saved and the damned, then the sinner’s effort becomes the ultimate deciding factor in salvation. This is a false gospel of salvation conditioned on the sinner, and so there is plenty of room for boasting in self. Paul had asked whether or not the person believing the gospel could boast in self. Those who believe the gospel do not boast in self. It is excluded (Romans 3:27). No one who believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ boasts in self. The universal atonement advocate boasts in self. Therefore, no universal atonement advocate believes in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mark 16:16 says that those who do not believe in the gospel will be damned.

If one is ignorant of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel, then he is *ipso facto* ignorant of Christ who is Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). And if he is ignorant of Christ, then he is ignorant of the gospel of Christ wherein the righteousness of God is revealed (Romans 1:17). And if he is ignorant of the gospel of Christ, then he cannot believe the gospel of Christ, since he cannot believe what he does not know (Romans 10:13-14); therefore, he is unsaved. Also in this passage, Paul says that the Israelites are ignorant of the righteousness of God and are thus automatically, inevitably, and necessarily seeking to establish their own righteousness. If they are ignorant of God’s righteousness, then they must believe that something other than God’s righteousness needs to be established in order for them to be right with God. And being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they obviously cannot be submitted to it as the only ground of salvation. If one is submitted to God’s righteousness, then he believes that Christ’s righteousness makes the only difference between heaven and hell. For whatever work one believes makes the ultimate difference between heaven and hell, that is the righteousness that is established for that person. Whatever work one believes makes the ultimate difference between heaven and hell, that is the righteousness being submitted to. To be ignorant of the righteousness of God is to believe that it is not the work of Christ alone that makes the difference between salvation and damnation. Instead, it is to establish one’s own righteousness. If Christ’s righteousness is not what makes the difference between salvation and damnation, then one’s own righteousness is what makes the difference. And that is what all who hold to the heresy that Jesus Christ died for everyone without exception believe.

The righteousness of God shows Him to be both a just God and a Savior. “*Gather yourselves and come; draw near together, escaped ones of the nations; the ones who set up the wood of their carved image, and the ones who pray to a god who cannot save; they know nothing. Declare and bring near; yea, let them consult together. Who has revealed this of old; [who] has told it from then? Is it not I, Jehovah? And there is no God other than Me; a just God and a Savior; [there is] none except Me*” (Isaiah 45:20-21).

Note that these idolaters lack *knowledge*, like the Israelites in Romans 10:2. They are *ignorant* of certain things, and thus they pray to a *false god* who *cannot save*. If one is ignorant of the *true God*, then one must automatically believe in a *false god*. In this passage, to be ignorant of the *true God* is to be ignorant of the fact that God is a *just God and a Savior*, or, as Paul puts it in Romans 3:10, that God is both *just and justifying*. Anyone who does not know how God is *just to justify* the ungodly, how God is both a *just God and a Savior*, is an idolater who prays to a god who cannot save, because he is *ignorant* of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel.

The god of the universal atonement advocate, unlike the true God of Scripture, is not a *just God*. For this god sends to hell those whose sins are forgiven, whose sins have been paid for, whose sins have been punished at the cross. This idol also justifies the wicked on unjust grounds, for he declares the sinner righteous because of something the sinner does rather than what Christ did. Those wicked people who believe in universal atonement say that Christ’s death only made salvation possible, that salvation is only made certain when the sinner “accepts it.”

The universal atonement advocates freely admit that Christ’s work only made salvation possible by giving everyone a “chance.” But what is the meaning of the word “chance”? The word denotes an absence of a cause. In the demonic doctrine of universal atonement, the death of Christ only gives a chance at salvation. Therefore, according to this abominable view, the death of Christ is not the cause of salvation, for in this view, Christ’s death equals a chance, and a chance is not the cause of anything. So if the death of Christ is not the effectual cause of salvation, then the sinner becomes the deciding cause of his own so-called salvation. If Christ’s work only demanded a mere possibility of salvation, then it follows that salvation can only be made certain by the “repentance” and “faith” of the sinner. So in this view, Christ’s cross work demands a “chance” or a “possibility” of salvation, while the unregenerate sinner’s “faith” demands his salvation. In contrast to this blasphemous view, the faith of God’s elect believes that Jesus Christ met all the conditions for salvation, and since they believe that Christ met all the conditions for salvation, they also believe that all for whom He was a Substitute and Representative will receive the salvation that He merited. Thus, no one for whom Christ died will go to hell. The justice of God demands it (Isaiah 45:20-21; Romans 3:21-26).

To assert that Christ died for those in hell is to assert that He did not meet all the conditions for salvation. If Christ did not meet the condition of a perfect righteousness that answers the demands of God’s law and justice, then it must be the sinner who does (Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10). As you can see, it is painfully clear that all who believe that Christ died for everyone without exception are ignorant of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. They are ignorant of how the precious blood and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ guarantees and

makes certain that no one for whom Christ died will go to hell, because the holy law and justice of God demands it (Romans 3: 24-31).

The god of the universal atonement advocate, unlike the true God of Scripture, is also not a *Savior*. For this god shows “grace,” “mercy,” and “love” to everyone without exception by desiring to save and trying to save them. But since there are many sinners who refuse to let him accomplish his desire, he just gets fed up with them and casts them into hell anyway, in spite of the death of “christ” (a false christ) in their place. This god, manufactured in the idolatrous minds of the universal atonement advocates, is frustrated, baffled, and thwarted by sinful man. This idol, being formed and fashioned in the fires of free will and universal atonement, is not God. For the God of Scripture *“does according to His will among the army of Heaven, and [among] those living in the earth. And no one is able to strike His hand or say to Him, What are You doing?”* (Daniel 4:35). *“But our God [is] in Heaven; He has done all that He has pleased,”* in contrast with the idols who *“[have] mouths, but they do not speak; they [have] eyes, but they do not see; they [have] ears, but they do not hear; they [have] a nose, but they do not smell; their hands do not feel; their feet do not walk; they do not mutter through their throat. The ones who make them are like them, [and] everyone trusting in them”* (Psalm 115:3-8). The idol of those who hold to universal atonement does according to the sinner’s will – as if the potter could be esteemed as the clay (Isaiah 29:16)!

Continuing on with the truth that God is both just and the justifier of the ungodly, Proverbs 17:15 says, *“He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD.”* In light of universal atonement, the universal atonement advocate is saying, in effect, that God is declaring the wicked man to be inherently just. Something within the sinner (his “faith”) demanded his salvation, not the work of Christ. The doctrine of universal atonement would have God condemning the just, since He would be sending to hell those for whom Christ supposedly lived and died as their Substitute and Representative. In contrast to this blasphemy, the truth is that since Christ’s people are righteous, God would be unjust to condemn them to hell. God will not send His people to hell any more than He would send His beloved Son to hell, since they are His body. By believing in universal atonement, these blaspheming idolaters would say that God would do the very thing that Proverbs 17:15 says is an abomination to Him.

The false gospel empathizers might say that the universal atonement advocate’s difficulty with such doctrines as total depravity, unconditional election, effectual atonement, and justification by Christ’s imputed righteousness alone, are not due to malice or rebellion, but due to the simple fact of ignorance. These people show their own ignorance of the simple fact that ignorance regarding how certain sinners receive eternal life comes from a hardened, unregenerate heart. *“Therefore, I say this, and testify in [the] Lord, that you no longer walk even as also the rest [of the] nations walk, in [the] vanity of their mind, having been darkened in the intellect, being alienated [from] the life of God through the ignorance which is in them because of the hardness of their heart”* (Ephesians 4:17-18). Those who are alienated from the life of God are necessarily ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, for it is His righteousness freely imputed to the His people that ensures and demands this “life of God.” The life of God is His favor and fellowship towards the elect sinner which the imputed righteousness of Christ demands (Colossians 1:21-22; Titus 3:4-7).

Those who say that the universal atonement advocate is saved despite his belief of the false gospel of salvation conditioned on the sinner often say that the reason for this is that there is enough “truth” being preached in a false church in order to regenerate someone, especially if they are using only the Bible. These people falsely think that the true God could speak through the various false propositions preached in false churches. Some of these false propositions are: “Christ died for everyone without exception.” “God wants no one to go to hell.” “Mary is another redeemer.” They must believe, along with the likes of Emil Brunner, that God can speak his word to a man through false doctrine. Or maybe, they (like Soren Kierkegaard) believe that as long as someone is really zealous and prays with “infinite passion,” then it does not really matter what god is being worshipped. The “what” (as in what God, or which Christ) of doctrine is unimportant. What matters is the “how” (as in how moral and zealous I am, despite my ignorance of the righteousness of God). The persons Paul called down the wrath of God upon in Galatians 1:8-9 were surely using the Scriptures that contained the true gospel. But when the true gospel contained in the Scriptures is perverted by untaught and unstable men, it ceases to be the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16; 2 Peter 3:16).

4. *“For Christ [is] the end of Law for righteousness to everyone that believes.”*

This doctrine in verse 4 is what the Israelites and all who are going about to establish a righteousness of their own, including all universal atonement advocates, are ignorant of.

This verse means that righteousness does not come through our own efforts but through the righteousness of Christ. The function of God’s Law was to show forth His perfect standard of righteousness so His people would rest in a Substitute who would and did meet that perfect standard of righteousness on their behalf (Galatians 3:24). This righteousness of Christ that is imputed to His people demands their salvation in the same way that Adam’s sin imputed to his posterity demanded their condemnation (Romans 5:18). To believe that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness is to believe that Christ met and answered all the righteous demands of God’s Law. The demands of God’s Law are twofold: First, death as the wages of sin, the transgression of the Law; second, perfect righteousness as the condition for eternal life (Leviticus 18:5; Romans 10:5).

In other words, to believe that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness is to believe that His blood and righteousness met in full the demands of God’s holy Law (death for sin) and fulfilled the condition of perfect obedience for eternal life. Christ, therefore, secured and demanded the salvation of all whom He represented in His life, death, and resurrection. Thus, all for whom Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again will go to heaven (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10), and all for whom Jesus Christ did not live, die, and rise again will go to hell (2 Corinthians 2:15-16). Those who believe that Christ is the end of Law for righteousness believe that His righteousness is what makes the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

All regenerate persons believe that Christ is the end of Law for righteousness. “End of Law” means that Christ’s righteousness answers the demands of God’s Law. God’s Law demands that the sinner “do this and live.” Or, as Romans 10:5 states it, *“The man doing these things shall live by them.”* Sinful man has not done this, nor is he able to do this; thus, all who do not have perfect

righteousness, which are all sinners without exception, are cursed by God. For it is written, “*For as many as are out of works of Law, [these] are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things having been written in the book of the Law, to do them*” (Galatians 3:10). But Christ became a curse on behalf of His people and He purchased for them the promise of the Holy Spirit. The obedience and blood of Christ guarantee and demand that all for whom He died will, without fail, receive the gift of eternal life (Galatians 3:13-14). Therefore, those for whom Christ did not become a curse will remain cursed, since the purpose of Christ in redeeming His people from the curse of the Law was that they should receive the promised Holy Spirit. The condition for receiving the Holy Spirit (eternal life) is perfect righteousness, which Christ alone has met. So if eternal life comes through the sinner’s efforts in any way, shape, or form, then Christ died for nothing (Galatians 2:21).

The blasphemous view of universal atonement has Christ dying for everyone without exception (even those who will eventually go to hell). In this view, Christ is not the end of the Law for righteousness; the work of Christ does not demand the salvation of anyone. Rather, it is the sinner’s willing, working, and/or running that demands that sinner’s salvation. In this view, the mercy of God in Christ is not the only basis for the sinner’s salvation; rather, it is the sinner’s efforts that form the ground of salvation (Romans 9:16).

The true gospel believer believes that the righteousness that Christ established for them makes the only difference between saved and lost, and they are thus submitted to it. The universal atonement advocate believes that it is the “righteousness” of the sinner that he establishes for himself that makes the ultimate difference between saved and lost, showing his deadly ignorance of the Biblical Christ who is the end of the Law for righteousness. That is, the universal atonement advocate is confused about whose righteousness demands and ensures salvation. The universal atonement advocate vainly supposes that he at least helped to fulfill all righteousness and so merits everlasting life. He must not believe that Christ alone fulfilled all righteousness, because if he did, he would understand that this righteousness of Christ imputed to His people demands and ensures their salvation (Romans 5:15-19). He thinks his “faith” demanded salvation, while Christ’s righteousness just made salvation possible. What blasphemous dung.

Being submitted to the righteousness of God means that one believes Christ “did this and lived” (Romans 10:4-5) in the stead of His people. It means that one believes that Christ’s obedience and death satisfied the demands of God’s law and justice. God demonstrated that He was pleased with Christ’s righteousness and was appeased by His bloody death by raising Him from the dead. And since Christ was not acting for Himself but as a Representative and Substitute for His people, all sinners for whom He lived and died will be freely given eternal life (Romans 6:23). Jesus said in John 14:19, “*Because I live, you shall live also.*” Christ’s substitutionary death and resurrection guarantees that everyone for whom He was a Substitute and Representative will be raised to spiritual life. All those for whom Christ died will certainly be given life (Romans 6:3-5). The reason for this is that salvation is not conditioned on the sinner’s efforts but on the work of Christ alone. Christ was raised for His people’s justification (Romans 4:25), and His righteousness imputed to them demands that they be regenerated and raised with Him to be seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:5-6).

In Romans 10:1-4, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is saying that those who do not know about and thus do not believe this righteousness of God that is revealed in the gospel are unregenerate. They are very zealous at their religion, but they are lacking knowledge. And that knowledge is the knowledge of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. If you do not have this specific knowledge, then you are lost.

If you believe that Jesus Christ died for everyone without exception, then you do not believe that God is both *just* and *justifier*. You are ignorant of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel. And, as Romans 10:3 says, all who are ignorant of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel are *seeking to establish their own righteousness*. You set up a carved image of your own vain and blasphemous imagining. You pray to a god who cannot save, since your god (idol) wanted to save those sinners who end up in hell but is not able to accomplish his desire. This god is certainly not the God of the Bible, for the true and living God of the Bible accomplishes all His purposes and does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 46:10-11, John 6:36-39). You believe that your “christ” died for those in hell. The true Christ did not die for those in hell. Thus, you do not believe in the true Christ. If you believe that Jesus died for everyone without exception, then you do not believe that it is Christ’s work alone, His righteousness alone, that makes the difference between salvation and damnation. Instead, you are seeking your own righteousness that, to you, makes the difference between salvation and damnation. Whatever you think makes the difference between salvation and damnation is the righteousness that is established for you. If you believe that Christ died for everyone without exception, then it is *your own effort* that is your righteousness, and God will not accept it. If you think that what you do recommends you to God or entitles you to heaven in any way to any degree, then you are pleading yourself as your righteousness. You may have zeal, but it is not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). And ignorance in this area, which is the very heart of the gospel, is deadly. You need to repent of your evil thoughts and deeds, and believe the gospel in which the righteousness of God is revealed through the effectual work of Jesus Christ.

If you claim to believe in the true gospel, yet also believe that some universal atonement advocates are saved persons, then you deny that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone believing (Romans 1:17). You either think that (1) not all regenerate persons believe the gospel, (2) the gospel includes universal atonement, or (3) belief of the gospel does not include the knowledge of the righteousness of God apart from the sinner’s efforts (Romans 3:21). You are not submitted to the righteousness of God, since you believe that those who are ignorant of this righteousness are nevertheless saved persons. You contradict, and thus deny, Romans 10:1-4. You, just like the universal atonement advocate, may have zeal, but it is not according to knowledge. And ignorance in this area, which is the very heart of the gospel, is deadly. You, just like the universal atonement advocate, need to repent of your evil thoughts and deeds, and believe the gospel in which the righteousness of God is revealed through the effectual work of Jesus Christ.