

**So faith comes by hearing,
And hearing by the word of Christ**

What did Paul mean in this statement to the church in Rome? What is the context of Romans 10:17? Can faith be so easily accessible?

The former Pharisee Paul was well versed in the Old Testament, and when he addressed Jews, he often referenced passages from renowned prophets. While it is more work, a good method of study is to observe what Old Testament passages Paul cited and the context he intended with his message to the New Testament church in Rome.

Before Paul states, "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ," he makes a reference to Moses' indication of "righteousness based on the Law" in a contrast to "righteousness based on faith" (Rom 10:5-6). This contrast emphasizes the human failure of keeping one's commitment to the Law and maintaining righteousness in God's eyes. By speaking of Jesus Christ in the context of Moses and the Law (Rom 10:6-10), the apostle associates Jesus Christ with the word of God (Deut 30:12-14).

<p>Romans 10:5-13</p> <p>For Moses writes of the righteousness that is based on the Law, that the person who performs them will live by them. But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will go up into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." 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 are preaching, that 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; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame." For 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; for "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 30:6-14</p> <p>"Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, so that you may live. And the Lord your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the Lord, and follow all His commandments which I am commanding you today. Then the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in every work of your hand, in the children of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; if you obey the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and soul. For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far away. It is not in heaven, that you could say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us, and proclaim it to us, so that we may follow it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you could say, 'Who will cross the sea for us and get it for us and proclaim it to us, so that we may follow it?' On the contrary, the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may follow it.</p>
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The association of Jesus Christ with the word of God is precisely what the apostle John wrote in the introduction of his gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of mankind. (John 1:1-4)

With the Law, Moses writes that God's moral standard, taken to heart by the faithful, will bestow God's promises of blessing on the obedient (Deut 30:6-10). As the stewards of God's word, there is no excuse for not... (continues)

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... knowing how to be holy, "the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may follow it." Because of the failure of the nation of Israel to uphold their covenant commitment, Paul writes of the implications of God's New Covenant, that Jesus Christ died for one's sins, and His resurrection was proof of eternal life that was available for those who believe in Jesus Christ's death in atonement. With that genuine faith, the Holy Spirit is bestowed, and together with the words of Jesus Christ, God's moral standard of holiness can be known. Because Jesus Christ fulfilled the purpose of the Law, God's word comes through Jesus Christ, "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'" (Rom 10:8).

This concept of faith, believing in the reality of God and placing a trust in His word and promises, is introduced by God Himself when He is making the Old Covenant:

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: **You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. (Ex 19:3-8)

In like manner, when His Father is inaugurating the New Covenant, Jesus seeks to establish the reality of His Father through the historical reality of Himself being present on earth who human beings can see, hear and touch; faith is based on the truth of Jesus Christ's real existence:

"If I alone testify about Myself, My testimony is not true. There is another who testifies about Me, and I know that the testimony which He gives about Me is true.

Testimony of John the Baptist

You have sent messengers to John, and he has testified to the truth. But the testimony I receive is not from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved. He was the lamp that was burning and shining, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

Testimony of Works

But the testimony I have is greater than the testimony of John; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish - the very works that I do - testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.

Testimony of the Father

And the Father who sent Me, He has testified about Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form. Also you do not have His word remaining in you, because you do not believe Him whom He sent.

Testimony of the Scripture

You examine the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is those very Scriptures that testify about Me; and yet you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. I do not receive glory from people; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you accept glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have put your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? (John 5:31-47)

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As Paul writes, “the word of faith which we are preaching, that 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 (Rom 10:9),” he writes within the context of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) and the fact that Jesus is in the Believer (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20) and through the Believer, the world sees and hears Jesus Christ.

<p>Romans 10:14-15</p> <p>How then are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? How are they to believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? But how are they to preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”</p>	<p>Isaiah 52:6-7</p> <p>Therefore, My people shall know My name; therefore on that day I am the one who is speaking, ‘Here I am.’”</p> <p>How delightful on the mountains Are the feet of one who brings good news, Who announces peace And brings good news of happiness, Who announces salvation, And says to Zion, “Your God reigns!”</p>
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For Jews, Paul's reference to Isaiah is a reference to Isaiah's messianic prophecy; Isaiah's good news is the good news of Jesus Christ. With faith in God, holiness and righteousness is no longer based on one's compliance to the Law but to a trust in Jesus' sacrifice and words.

Despite the simplicity of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the availability of salvation to all, Paul states that many will not pay attention to the good news. With his quotation of Isaiah, he is referring to the same attitude that people had towards the Messianic prophecies in Isaiah's time.

<p>Romans 10:16-17</p> <p>However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.</p>	<p>Isaiah 52:13-53:1</p> <p>Behold, My Servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were appalled at you, My people, So His appearance was marred beyond that of a man, And His form beyond the sons of mankind. So He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; For what they had not been told, they will see, And what they had not heard, they will understand.</p> <p>Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?</p>
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By preaching the gospel to all who hear, faith is simply believing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and placing a trust in the good news that our sins are forgiven. This was a foreign concept to the Jews who were conditioned to maintain their righteousness (holiness) by complying to the Law.

As once the Pharisee Saul, Paul was fully cognizant of the history of the Jews. God emphasized the relationship between “hearing” and “doing” (Ex 19:5-8; Deut 28:1-2; 30:11-14). The conditional Mosaic Covenant invoked a human being's responsibility of hearing (and doing) the word of God, and through this relationship, the nation of Israel became the “people of the Law.”

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Paul knew that the figurative phrase “hard heart” described an obstinacy towards God’s call and command. Proverbs characterized the ungodly as hard hearted or stiff necked for their steadfast refusal to listen to God (Prov 28:14; 29:1); unbelief was at the core of a “hard heart” (Ps 95:8-11).

Paul knew that despite being chosen as God’s own people (Gen 17:7; Ex 19:5-6), the Jews hardened their hearts (2 Chron 36:13; Zech 7:12), which the prophet Isaiah confronted the nation of Israel for in their failure to listen to the word of God.

Because the nation of Israel no longer wanted to listen to God, they would be unable to (Isa 6:9-10). God’s word would still be proclaimed; but, they would be unable to understand (Isa 28:12-13). God’s judgment would be the destruction of the nation (Isa 6:11-13), and it occurred with the Babylonian Exile (2 Chron. 36:17-20).

It is in this context that Paul continues his argument to the church in Rome that, while the name of Jesus is not mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament, the prophets of God did speak of Jesus Christ.

<p>Romans 10:18-21</p> <p>But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? On the contrary:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.”</p> <p>But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“I will make you jealous with those who are not a nation, With a foolish nation I will anger you.”</p> <p>And Isaiah is very bold and says,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">“I was found by those who did not seek Me, I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me.”</p> <p>But as for Israel, He says, “I have spread out My hands all day long to a disobedient and obstinate people.”</p>	<p>Deuteronomy 32:21</p> <p>They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation,</p> <p>Isaiah 65:1-4</p> <p>I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, A people who continually provoke Me to My face, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks; Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; Who eat pig’s flesh, And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots.</p>
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From the very beginning, when the Law was established, the song of Moses prophesized that the nation of Israel would forget about God and fail in their covenant commitments. Instead they would worship idols and make God jealous, and in return, God would make the nation jealous when He makes other nations His people.

Paul cites this passage as a reminder of what was happening: Gentiles are coming to faith and becoming God’s elect, and the Jews should too.

And despite their history of covenant infidelity, God did not forsake them in the course of His commitment to the promises He made to Abraham.

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Understanding the Old Testament is essential to understanding the New Testament. With this article, it is hoped that you would be encouraged to take the time to explore the New Testament references to the Old Testament. In so doing, your comprehension of the New Testament passage would be richer and God's word will have a greater impact on its application to your life.

Faith really does come by the physical sense of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. God made this very clear to the Peter, James, and John:

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice from the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; **listen to Him!**" (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35)