

Buying Heaven with Make-Believe Money

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part III

Romans 10:4-7

Introduction

In 1929, the stock market crashed. Banks went out of business, and millions of people lost their jobs, their houses, and their money.

A man by the name of Charles Darrow was among the many who lost his job as a salesman. He had a wife and a son, and another baby on the way. He did anything he could find to do for his family to survive – from walking dogs for independently wealthy people to fixing electric irons for people taking in laundry.

One night, in 1930, to take their minds off their sometimes overwhelming poverty, Charles sat at his kitchen table and drew a game on their tablecloth. He had been inventing the game in his creative mind for some time.

It was a real-estate game and Charles named the game's streets after the streets he knew in Atlantic City. He used wooden scraps for little houses and hotels that players could buy. He used buttons for tokens and free paint to color his invention, which he converted to a piece of wood. He created little pieces of money that players earned from other players who happened to land on a street they owned. Players were also paid a regular salary of two hundred dollars every time they passed "GO". Imagine, getting a paycheck again!

If you have not guessed the name of this game by now, it is probably because you have never played the game of Monopoly.

It was not long before word-of-mouth spread and Charles Darrow was making two sets a day, which he

sold for four dollars apiece. But even when a printer friend helped him produce six games a day, he still could not keep up with the demand.

So Charles packed up his game and mailed several copies to the corporate headquarters of Parker Brothers. He thought perhaps they would buy the rights from him and he would survive the Depression.

The executives at Parker Brothers played Monopoly for several weeks, but then, turned it down. They cited fifty-two fundamental errors, including the fact that the rules were too hard and that it took longer than forty-five minutes to play.

Dejected, Charles told his wife the devastating news. His printer friend made five thousand more copies, so that Charles could fill the Christmas orders that had come in. One order, for two hundred sets, was for a store in New York. Would you believe that one of those sets was purchased by friends of a Mr. Barton, the president of Parker Brothers?

The first time Mr. Barton was invited to play this new game, they stayed up until 1 a.m. to finish it. He was absolutely fascinated by a game that his company had recently turned down.

The very next day, Mr. Barton scolded his Vice Presidents when he discovered what had happened. He then offered Charles Darrow a handsome price, as well as royalties on every Monopoly game Parker Brothers would sell.

In the first year alone, two hundred thousand sets of Monopoly were sold – bringing in more than one million dollars. Back orders overflowed laundry baskets that were stacked up and down the hallways of Parker Brothers.

All of this was during the Great Depression, when a game cost the average American several days worth of their hard-earned money. Why would poverty stricken people, in the middle of the Great Depression, buy a game?

If you understand human nature, then why not? You can buy a game with money you hardly have . . . for the feeling of having it all. You can feel the power of owning houses and hotels, charging people rent, and purchasing city property. This game generated a sense of power, success, and wealth – even though most of the players had none.

That is what games are for. You can buy the Boardwalk in Atlantic City; you can strut down Park Place; you can own a piece of Pennsylvania Avenue. What fun!

However, it is just a game. The hotels are made of plastic; the money is only make-believe; the success is only a passing feeling before the reality of life re-enters.

Israelites – Make-Believe Religion

The Israelite of Paul's day had the game mastered. They knew the rules – even the ones that were hard to remember. They could strut around Jerusalem because, after all, they owned a piece of heaven.

Paul, in Romans, chapter 10, verse 1, has declared the nation Israel as lost – unredeemed; unsaved. In verse 2, he has effectively stated that their zeal for God is only a game; their piece of heaven is only make-believe.

The Israelites' bank accounts of religious ritual and ceremony that look so impressive are like vaults filled with paper play money. No matter how much they had in there, it would never purchase redemption, any more than a ten dollar monopoly bill could buy a hamburger at Wendy's.

If I ordered a double combo with extra mayonnaise, extra pickles, lettuce, ketchup, no onion because I am in the ministry, and super-sized fries and then, pulled up to the window and handed the guy a Monopoly ten dollar bill, he would say a few things to me. Among other things, he would say, "We don't accept that kind of currency here!"

The Israelite was taking his righteousness and trying to hand it to God, and God, through Paul, was saying, "We don't accept that kind of currency here."

So, the Israelite would ask, "What kind of currency does God accept?"

Paul answered in verse 3 of Romans, chapter 10, that Heaven only negotiates in the currency of God's righteousness. That is the only kind of money, so to speak, that the bank of Heaven accepts. Everything else is Monopoly money! Everything else is make-believe.

The Israelites' next question is, "How do we get the currency of God's righteousness into the wallets of our souls?"

Paul answers in verse 4,

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

"Christ is the end of the law". This cannot mean that Christ is the termination of the law, since many aspects of God's law in the Old Testament are reiterated in the New Testament.

You could interpret this, "For Christ is the end of legalism"; that is, the belief that obeying rules and rituals earns righteousness.

The best commentary on Christ and the law, is Christ Himself. He said in Matthew, chapter 5, verse 17,

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill [the Law]."

The word "fulfill" (πληροω) normally means, "to bring to it intended meaning". Because of that, many commentators translate Romans, chapter 10, verse 4, "Christ is the goal – the culmination – of the law."

I think that is helpful, so much so that I have written the little word "goal" in my Bible. "Christ is the goal of the law."

The Old Testament:

- types and ceremonies of the law pointed to Christ's death and perfect sacrifice;
- moral law was completed in the living illustration of His perfect life;
- numerous prophecies found their culmination and triumph in His incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection.

That is why Jesus could say, "I have not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come to fulfill them." In other words, "I am bringing them to their intended meaning."

Paul wrote to the Corinthians believers, in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 30,

... Christ Jesus ... became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

Does this mean that we have to be wise in order to be redeemed? Does it mean that we have to be holy in order to be redeemed? Does it mean that we have to be righteous in order to be redeemed?

The Israelite said, "Yes."

In some form or another, the religions of the world say, "Yes."

Paul said, "No."

Read that verse again,

... Christ Jesus ... became to us wisdom ... and righteousness and sanctification [holiness], and redemption,

Romans, chapter 10, verse 4, says virtually the same thing,

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who ...

(... is holy? ... to everyone who is righteous? ... to everyone who is wise? *No!* ... Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who ...).

... believes.

Now, Paul continues in this passage to repeatedly contrast two kinds of righteousness. In fact, if you circle all the times the word "righteousness" appears in these first six verses of Romans, chapter 10, you find the word being used six times.

One kind of righteousness is like play money, with little plastic houses. It can give you the feeling of holiness and spiritual wealth, but it is only make-believe.

The other kind of righteousness is real. It is like authentic, genuine currency, created by and backed by the divine reserve.

Paul writes in verse 5,

For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness [according to that standard].

The problem is, no one can keep the righteous standard. We can try to keep the law; follow the standard; look good; build, as Paul wrote earlier, the shrine and monument of our righteousness by good deeds, but it is all a front that most people would

loudly deny. The religion of works is putting a pretty face on a depraved life.

I thought a survey that I recently read was funny. In the survey, it was found that 15% of the ladies surveyed tinted their hair, 38% sometimes wore a wig, 80% wore rouge, 98% wore eye shadow; 22% percent wore false eyelashes, and 93% wore nail polish. Yet, 100% of the women surveyed voted in favor of condemning any kind of false packaging.

Would you like to meet someone who looked good; righteous; holy?

His name was Isaiah. His personal testimony just sort of swipes all the little houses and hotels off our little game board and scatters all our play money as he says, according to chapter 64, verse 6,

... all of us ... [are] unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment ...

In other words, the best we could ever do is filthy when compared to the righteousness of God through Christ.

We look good; we feel right, but measured against the purity of holy God, we would do exactly what Isaiah did when he had a vision and, according to chapter 6, verses 1 through 5,

... saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." ... And I said, "Woe is me for I am ruined! ... I am a man of unclean lips ..."

Isaiah was a prophet – he used his tongue to speak the word of God. He was surely in good standing, until he stood before the holiness of God. When he did so, he immediately became aware that even though his livelihood was speaking truth, his tongue was still filthy.

I read something recently that illustrated this truth. It was tucked away in my files, waiting for the right moment to pounce onto my notes.

An armed robber named Dennis Curtis was arrested in 1992, in Rapid City, South Dakota. When the authorities searched his wallet, they found a sheet of paper on which was written his rules; his code of conduct that he evidently held himself to. It included:

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to;

2. I will take cash and food stamps – no checks;
3. I will rob only at night;
4. I will not wear a mask;
5. I will not rob mini-marts or 7-Eleven stores;
6. If I get chased by cops on foot, I will get away. If chased by vehicle, I will not put the lives of innocent civilians on the line, and;
7. I will rob only seven months out of the year.ⁱ

Imagine that! A thief who had a sense of morality! He was committed to his standards and to his code of conduct. But no matter how righteous it made him feel; no matter how closely he stuck to his seven standards, it did not matter. In fact, when he stood before the court, he was not judged according to that piece of paper. He was judged according to a higher law – the laws of state of South Dakota.

We can consider ourselves law-keepers too, until we stand in the presence of the holy One of Israel. We can determine our own sense of decency and come up smelling like a rose, until we bow before the Rose of Sharon and smell the fragrance His goodness. Ladies and gentlemen, in the gospel we discover that we are far more guilty than we ever thought, but Christ is far more gracious than we ever imagined.

Do you have your righteousness? Oh, it is nothing but make-believe currency. And you cannot buy heaven with make-believe money.

However, Paul contrasts in verses 6 through 8a of Romans, chapter 10,

But 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), 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” . . .

Now, if you are wondering, what in the world these verses mean, do not panic. Paul is actually quoting from an Old Testament passage that sheds light on this New Testament passage. In fact, when you notice that verses are italicized or printed with all the letters capitalized, it is either because they are added for commentary or they are quoted from another passage.

Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy, chapter 30, verses 11 through 14. Moses is challenging the people to follow after God’s word.

For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it.

Now, if you were following along in Romans, chapter 10, you might have noticed that Paul added a parenthesis with each major statement – applying it in some way to Christ.

Notice Romans, chapter 10, verse 6b, again, with Paul’s application to Christ in parentheses.

. . . “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down),”

Continue to verse 7, with Paul’s application in parentheses again.

“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

“The abyss” in Hebrew is “the sea,” or literally, “the place of the dead”.

Moses was telling the people that they had everything they needed to respond to God. Paul is saying the same thing, but applying it to Jesus Christ.

In other words, you do not need to go up to heaven to find the Word of God – the Word of God has already come from heaven in the incarnation of Christ. As John, chapter 1, verses 1 and 14a, tells us,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

How close can you get to that?! You do not need another word from God.

To the Muslim who says, “You need the words of another prophet,” Paul, in these verses, says, “No, you have the words of Moses, applied to the resurrection of Jesus – and that is enough.”

Even Timothy, as a young child, came to faith in Christ through the Old Testament scriptures (II Timothy 3:15).

To the Mormon who says, “You need another gospel – you need the words of Joseph Smith,” Paul

says, “You have the words of Jesus Christ – and they are sufficient.”

Paul wrote, in Colossians, chapter 1, verse 5,
***because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,
of which you previously heard in the word of
truth, the gospel***

It is not a religion of works, it is redemption, based on the word of faith, that reveals to us a God of grace.

Christianity is not a game – it is a gift.

One Bible college student wrote of an unforgettable experience that illustrated this issue of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone.

“In the spring of 2002, I left work early so I could have some uninterrupted study time before my final exam at Hannibal College in Missouri. When I finally got to class, everybody was doing their last-minute studying. The teacher came and said he would review with us before the test. Most of his review came right from the study guide, but there were some things he was reviewing that most of us hadn’t studied . . . when questioned about it, he said they were in the book and we were responsible for everything in the book. We couldn’t argue with that.”

“Finally, it was time to take the test. ‘Leave them face down on the desk until everyone has one, and I’ll tell you when to start,’ Dr. Tom Hufty, instructed.”

“When he said to begin, we turned them over and to my astonishment, every answer on the test was already filled in – by hand. My name was even written on the exam in red ink. At the bottom of the last page Dr. Hufty had written, ‘This is the end of the exam. All the answers on your test are correct. You will receive an A on the final exam. The reason you passed this test is because the creator of the test took it for you. All the work you did in preparation [may have been a great discipline for your study and life], but it did not help you get this A.’”

“Dr. Hufty then went around the room and asked each student individually, ‘What is your grade?’ And we all answered, ‘An A.’ Do you deserve this grade you are receiving? We all answered the same way, ‘No!’”

“Then he said, ‘Some things you learn from lectures, some things you learn from research, but some things you learn from experience and you will probably never forget them. [Ladies and gentlemen,] you have just experienced grace.’”

Isn’t that what Paul is declaring in these verses in Romans, chapter 10? *This is the word that you have!* Jesus Christ came from heaven and rose from the grave to offer His grace to you.

Jesus Christ is the end of the exam; He has hand written all the answers required of you. In fact, He has written your name in His roll book of everlasting life in blood-red.

You had nothing to perform; you had no perfect score to earn on your own in order to have your name entered, yet there it is. And beside your name, as it were, is a perfect score.

Application

Let me give three closing thoughts that, I believe, summarize this section of verses. It is a section, by the way, that began Paul’s explanation of God’s righteousness in verse 4 with the *living* Word and ends in verse 8 with a reference to the *spoken* word. Verse 8 says,

. . . the word of faith which we are preaching,

Let me give three thoughts about this message of faith:

1. The law was delivered from Mount Sinai; grace was delivered from Mount Calvary.
2. The righteousness of the law leads to legalism; the righteousness of the Lord leads to liberty.
3. Salvation is not the result of a faultless performance; it is a relationship with a faultless Person – Jesus Christ!

As II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 21, tells us,

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

In other words, that we might get an “A” on the exam! But it is more than that – we have already flunked the course! No matter how many times we retake it, we cannot keep from sinning; we cannot master the law. But the perfect score of Christ has been credited to our failing grade. And the “F” that we have already earned as sinners in the divine grading system, which is perfect holiness and perfect justice, is replaced with an “A”.

Our “F,” which stands for “Fallen” sinner is blotted out, and there stands His perfect score, attributed to our final grade of an “A,” which stands for “Amazing” Savior; “Amazing” grace; “Amazing” love.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 8/29/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Craig Brian Larson, Choice Contemporary Stories and Illustrations (Baker Books, 1998), p. 181.