

The Consumer is *not* King

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part V

Romans 10:11-13

Introduction

If you are old enough, you will have no trouble remembering that famous fast food commercial, “Have it your way.” In fact, you can probably sing the little jingle . . . not now, though! Do you remember what that commercial was selling? I remember the song, but I could not remember the item.

That jingle stays with you. “Have it your way” kind of resonates with the human spirit, doesn’t it?

The *USA Today* front page headlines recently announced, “You Want It Your Way.” The newspaper article begins, “America is becoming a nation of picky eaters, where now more than 70 percent of restaurant orders have some form of personal customizing.”

I thought, “Oops, I’m guilty of that.”

When I go to Olive Garden, I do not want the kind of pasta they put with grilled chicken – I want angel hair pasta. I also want alfredo sauce, not marinara sauce. And I want a little extra alfredo sauce on the side, so I can dip my bread in it. Have you ever tried that? It is better than dessert.

This article went on to quote Ron Shaich, the CEO of Panera bread, who said, “We live in an ever increasing world of, ‘Gimme a lot of choices so I can customize my food.’”

Ron Shaich believes customization is the way to go. With it, he has turned his company, Panera Bread, in only ten years, into a one billion dollar corporation.

This article gave a number of illustrations of food companies filling the personal desires of their customers. Arby’s, which sold one kind of roast beef sandwich in 1964, now sells thirty different sandwiches, most of which are not even roast beef.

Tropicana, which had only two kinds of orange juice just a decade ago, now offers twenty-four different kinds.

Starbucks – now I know I’m treading on sacred ground here – can serve a cup of coffee with five kinds of milk, from whole to organic to soy, and it can actually offer – get this – 19,000 ways to serve your coffee tastes. I am afraid of my wife finding this out. At five dollars a cup, that is 95,000 dollars worth of, um, opportunity. As soon as I read this, I did the math. It is frightening.

This article struck a nerve in me, primarily because it included nothing less than a revelation of human nature. I quote, “What the food giants want to know is, what will people want tomorrow? One thing is certain: consumers want choice.”ⁱ

It would not be so bad, if we could keep this growing philosophy inside the grocery store or the coffee shop. The consumer is king – what the consumer wants, the consumer gets. However, we cannot.

It happens to be our current national anthem. It is sung from Arby’s all the way to halls of academia, where the standards are changed so everyone can pass the test, even if different answers are given. It has become the theme song of philosophy and politics, where we have learned that ethics can change at will.

Duke University went through its own politically correct makeover two years ago, when its annual “encouragement of the students toward chastity” was challenged by homosexuals on campus. The faculty members were confronted, “Did the faculty mean to imply that their activity was unchaste?” The faculty put their heads together and decided to redefine “chastity” so that it could include sexual relations between members of the same sex, but evidently, not between members of the opposite sex.

Let us just redefine the definitions, at all costs, so that the consumer gets what the consumer wants.

Worst of all, this is becoming more and more the attitude of the church. This is not just in matters of physical food, but in matters of spiritual food – doctrine; values. Many churches today, choose what they want to believe and vote on what they will teach.

In other words, “Don’t get so hung up about what the Bible says. Besides, it no longer really matters.”

The consumer has freedom to carve it up, disregard some of it, disagree with much of it, believe some of it, and scoff at the rest of it – “It doesn’t matter . . . God won’t mind!”

This was well demonstrated in an interview with long time musician, Paul Simon, not long ago, when he was asked, “What do you think God requires of us?” He responded, (and I quote), “The only thing that God requires from us is that we enjoy life.” How convenient! The only thing God demands of us is that we have a good time!ⁱⁱ

And why not?! The consumer is king!

Can you imagine parenting your teenagers that way?! As they get ready to walk out the door on a Friday night, say, “I don’t care what you do out there, just make sure you have a good time, for heaven’s sake.” Or, “I don’t care what your teacher says to you in school today, just make sure you have fun!”

Someone recently sent a satirical cartoon to me. It shows a middle-aged man, sort of facing the camera, announcing, “I’ve just edited the New Testament to make it reflect our individual rights to [our choice of] lifestyle; I cut out all the New Testament passages which refer to sinful activity; then I took the liberty of removing all the other offensive sections which inflict archaic Biblical notions of morality, leaving only one, non-offensive verse – “Jesus wept.”

This attitude of consumer sovereignty and self-sufficiency is not new, of course.

Go back as early as 1875, when a man named William Henley wrote his famous tribute to human self-reliance, autonomy, and pride, entitled *Invictus*.

Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll,

I am the master of my fate;

*I am the captain of my soul.*ⁱⁱⁱ

That is simply another way of saying what our nature loves to declare, “I, the consumer, am king.”

Go back further than that; in fact, go all the back to the Garden of Eden. The very first man and woman who ever lived became infected with consumerism. Adam and Eve decided they wanted something that was not on the menu either.

“Have it your way” was not original with McDonalds. Adam and Eve were singing it in the garden! They would eat whatever they wanted to eat; they would believe what ever they wanted to believe!

Then God visited them, and Adam and Eve discovered the absolute truth that the consumer was not king, God alone is King.

In Romans, chapter 10, Paul is in the process of telling the world of consumers that they are not going to heaven their way! However, what sounded like bad news, would eventually become good news. Let me show you how.

The Invitation of the Gospel

In Romans, chapter 10, Paul delivers, first of all, the invitation of the gospel. He writes in verse 11,

For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

Would you note that Paul does not say, “Whoever believes in himself, will not be disappointed.” Have you ever disappointed you?

Neither does Paul say, “Whoever believes in some spiritual teacher . . . whoever believes in the church . . . whoever believes in the latest spiritual fad . . . as long as you believe in something, God will understand.”

No, Paul clearly says, “Whoever believes in Him.” Who is “Him”? Go back to verse 9.

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;

That is Who!

This is the invitation of the gospel!

Paul bookends his statements with this phrase in verse 13.

. . . Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

What does it mean to call?

What does it mean to call? Let me give four meanings.

To acknowledge Him

1. First, it means to acknowledge Him.

In the book of Genesis, chapter 4, verse 26b, it says that there came a time when,

. . . men began to call upon the name of the Lord.

In other words, they acknowledged the Lord and worshiped Him.

To praise Him

2. Secondly, it means to praise Him.

David wrote in Psalm, chapter 86, verses 4 and 5,

Make glad the soul of Your servant. For to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon You.

To identify with Him

3. Thirdly, it means to identify with Him.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, in I Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 2,

To the church of God which is at Corinth, . . . with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours

In other words, calling on the name of the Lord became an identifier of true believers.

To depend upon Him for salvation

4. Fourthly, it means to depend upon Him for salvation.

In Psalm, chapter 116, verse 4, David said,

. . . I called upon the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!"

So to call upon the Lord means:

- to depend upon Him for salvation;
- to identify with Him in salvation;
- to praise Him for salvation;
- to worship Him.

Would you notice that Paul repeatedly defines the object of our dependence, identification, praise, and worship? In:

- verse 11 – . . . *Whoever believes in Him . . .*
- verse 13 – . . . *Whoever will call on the name of the Lord . . .*

Paul uses the covenant name of God – Lord. It is always, at least in my translation, given in all capital letters. This is the covenant name of God – Jehovah or Yahweh. In our last session we spent time studying this fact. However, I want to point out again in these verses, that Paul is not saying to call out to any god, but to call out to the Lord who is Jehovah, Yahweh.

Salvation is not belief in some god, or any god of your choosing, but Jehovah, Yahweh, or Kurios, in the Greek. Over and over again in the New Testament, we read, "Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Lord and Savior. Think of those two titles in this way:

- Lord – that is a reference to who He is – Jehovah God;
- Savior – that is a reference to what He did – "I came to seek and to save those who were lost."

"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord . . ." then, believes Who He is and in what He has done.

Hilary Swank, winner of the 1999 Oscar for Best Actress, was asked, "Where does Jesus fit into all of your success?"

She responded, somewhat embarrassed, "It's not like we're Catholic or Christian or Episcopal or practice Judaism or Buddhism even. We just kind of believe in a higher power." She went on to quickly add, "And that doesn't mean a man-God, or someone on a cross."^{iv}

I thought it was interesting that in one sentence, she denied *the* two things that are required for salvation. She denied who Jesus was – the God-man, and she denied what Jesus did – died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin.

To call on the name of the Lord is to recognize who He is and what He has done.

Not long ago, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, a law professor at DePaul University, said, “All religions lead to God using different paths. The judgment is not by the choice we make, but by how we pursue the path of the choice we make. Different religions and cultures are equal in the eyes of God and should be seen as equal in the eyes of man.”

If he were to take his logic back into his own field of law and apply it to the decisions of the court, he would have social chaos. If his logic were taken into any field of science, physics, geometry, rhetoric, he would fail every class.

The truth is, he would never suggest we take his logic of contradiction into the sciences or law or social constructs. But in matters of spirituality, suddenly that is different. Somehow God is so simple minded, or absent minded, that He really does not care how you come to Him – in fact, you do not even have to believe in Him.

Remember, the consumer is king! Whether you are choosing your cup of coffee or your god, whatever you choose is right.

Paul, however, makes it undeniably clear, in verses 11 and 13, that we must call on the name of the Lord and then, we will be saved.

That is the invitation of the gospel!

The Impartiality of the Gospel

Next, Paul reveals the impartiality of the gospel. Notice verse 12a.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all . . .

Now, it is rather difficult for us to imagine the shock of this truth that Paul presents once again.

Think of it this way. As shocking as it is to people in your city to hear you say that salvation comes only one way – it was equally shocking to the Jew to discover that salvation could come to more than one race – Jew and Gentile alike.

As irritating as you are to people who say to you, “You mean to tell me that you believe everybody who doesn’t believe in Jesus is not going to heaven?” – it was even more irritating for a Jew who would

say, “You mean to tell me that you believe a Gentile can go to heaven?”

That is exactly the radical, upsetting truth of the gospel.

This message that Paul was preaching was politically incorrect to the Jewish people, but it was not something new! In fact, his words in Romans, chapter 10, verses 11 through 13 are quotations from the prophets Isaiah and Joel.

The Jews were to be a blessing to the nations of the world. Through them came the law and the prophets and the covenants and the promises and the Messiah. They were to be the evangelists of the Old Testament. Paul already delivered this reminder in Romans, chapter 9. However, the nation hoarded the truth and developed a lifestyle that was anything but loving, compassionate, and evangelistic.

In the first century, a committed Jew who returned to Israel from some distant place would stop before entering their land, take off his sandals, and shake out the sand . . . he would brush the dust off his clothing as well. Why? So he would not carry defiled earth back into his land. In addition to that, the Jews developed isolating customs in dealing with Gentiles. They would not enter a Gentile house; they would not eat or drink from a Gentile vessel, or so much as touch a Gentile hand. [For those who were born of mixed blood – Jew and Gentile, known as Samaritans – a Jew would not even speak to them. That is why the woman was so shocked when she came to the well that morning and Jesus said to her, “Could you please give me a drink of water.” Not only did He talk to her, but He was willing to drink out of her cup. And her first response was, “How is it that you, a Jew, would speak to me, a Samaritan?”] In the time of Paul, every morning the Jewish man would pray [among other things], “I thank God that I am not a Gentile.”^v

The Jew might respond, “What do you mean, Paul, that there is no distinction between the Jew and the Gentile? We are God’s people; we are God’s chosen race; we are holy and separated unto God.”

Jonah was a classic example of their attitude, though centuries earlier.

God said to Jonah, “Go to Nineveh and warn them of My coming judgment.”

“Nineveh?”

Nineveh was a city of nearly one million pagans. They were Assyrians by race, and were infamous for their immorality and idolatry. Their soldiers were renowned for their brutality.

Nahum, another prophet, described Nineveh, in chapter 3, verses 1 through 4, as a,

. . . bloody city, completely full of lies and pillage . . . The noise of the whip, the noise of . . . galloping horses, and bounding chariots! Horsemen charging, swords flashing, spears gleaming, many slain, a mass of corpses . . . [Nineveh commits] the many harlotries of the harlot, . . . the mistress of sorceries . . .

Jonah said, “No,” to Nineveh and set sail in the direction of a city more than two thousand miles away. “God will have to use someone else for sure.”

However, God sent a storm to stop the boat and an underwater taxi to take Jonah back. After three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, Jonah repented.

Do not miss that! Jonah was so hard hearted that it took three days for him to repent. It would have taken most of us three minutes inside the whale’s belly to realize that we were still alive and to begin to pray, “Lord, I’ll go anywhere . . . even to Nineveh.”

It took Jonah three days to repent. Then, he prayed, according to Jonah, chapter 2, verse 9,

. . . I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. . . . Salvation is from the Lord.

God moved through Jonah’s message of warning, and redeemed the entire city of Gentiles.

What was Jonah’s response? Anger! In other words, “You saved a bunch of Gentiles, and they didn’t deserve Your compassion.”

The problem was simple – Jonah did not believe in the impartiality of the gospel.

Centuries later, the Jews in Paul’s day were even more stubborn. Paul rattles their world with this declaration that no one is more important to God than anyone else – Jew or Gentile.

In his ministry newsletter, Leonard Ravenhill told about a group of tourists visiting a picturesque village in Europe. They walked by an old man sitting beside the path, next to his fence. In a rather patronizing way, one tourist asked him, “Say, were any great men born in this village?”

The old man replied, “No . . . only babies.”

Ladies and gentlemen, there are no great people born into the kingdom of God . . . only sinners – Jew and Gentile alike.

That is the impartiality of the gospel!

I remember reading several years ago, about Robert E. Lee entering a church sometime after the civil war. He was seated next to a former slave, and they sang together and knelt together in prayer as the service progressed. Afterward, General Lee was criticized and asked, “How could you kneel and pray next to that man?”

He responded, “The ground at the foot of the cross is level.”

That is the message of the gospel. That is the proclamation of grace!

No matter who you are; no matter what you have done, the ground at the foot of the cross is level.

You might say, “But Stephen, what about my past? You don’t know what I’ve done!”

Everyone has a past, my friend, but with Jesus Christ, you have a future!

There is one more thing that Paul wants to emphasize about the gospel. Not only the invitation and the impartiality of the gospel, but a third point as well.

The Inheritance of the Gospel

Paul also reveals the inheritance of the gospel. He writes in verse 12b,

. . . for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;

Look up the word “riches” sometime in your Bible study – you will not believe all the implications for the believer.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, referring to their wealth, over and over again. Look at chapter 1, verses 7 through 8a.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.

In chapter 2, verses 4 through 7, he writes,

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

I have been to England and Scotland and have seen the royal thrones. I have seen where kings and queens have sat for centuries, before parliament and at worship. They are made of wood – ornate, but wood. They are not even gold plated; not even painted in gold leaf. They cannot compare with the thrones we will occupy in the grandeur and magnificence of Christ's heavenly court. That is not to even mention the lavish gifts from our gracious God.

If I were to tell you that everyone who comes up after the service and signs this piece of paper; this document that simply says you will join this church, will, within forty-eight hours of signing the document, inherit one hundred million dollars – do you think there would be a line? In addition, I would give you the keys to your own personal estate – with beautiful gardens and orchards and a river running through the estate for you to enjoy sitting by and swimming in.

You might say, "I don't have the strength to swim anymore."

That reminds me that I will also give you a secret potion that will heal all your diseases; take away all your aches and pains; restore you to a youthful age where you will stay for the rest of your life.

I will give you another potion that will erase every memory of sadness. In fact, you will never be able to have a sad or sinful thought again.

You believe me and come up and sign – and within twenty-four hours the promises come true. Others of you were skeptical – besides, you have been coming here for six or seven years and you have not joined yet (ahem!). Well, now you are motivated; you realize you have waited long enough. The following Sunday, you sign as well.

Imagine that all of that could be yours in forty-eight hours!

Dear friends, many of us in this auditorium, will experience all that I have just said and more, within the next forty-eight years. Some will experience it sooner; some later. You will not experience it because you joined this church, but because you joined the family of God.

You took Paul at his word and, at some point in your life, called on the name of the Lord for salvation and you were saved! And within forty-eight years,

more or less, you will inherit immortality in heaven; a new mind and body and memory; sinless perfection at last; a new earth to explore and enjoy; a personal residence with the river of life flowing through it, with gold so commonplace it is used as pavement in the holy city; never a sad or sinful thought again!

We cannot imagine the internal and external riches of God, through Christ Jesus. We cannot even imagine our inheritance in heaven.

However, for those who will be king for now and who refuse the King of Kings, you can say with Henley, who wrote with futile courage and misguided faith,

*Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.*
Ah, the consumer is king.

Or, you can lay down the royal robes of your own making; put away your self-reliance, your pride, and say with Dorothea Day, a Christian who wrote a response, entitled *My Captain*, to Henley's *Invictus*,

*Out of the light that dazzles me,
Bright is the sun from pole to pole,
I thank the God I know to be,
For Christ the conqueror of my soul,
It matters not, though straight the gate,
He cleared from punishments the scroll,
Christ is the master of my fate,
Christ is the captain of my soul.^{vi}*

The consumer is not king; Jesus Christ alone, is King.

Is He your King? If He is not, I invite you to put into practice Paul's invitation in Romans, chapter 10, verses 11 through 13, to bow your head, call upon the name of the Lord, the one and only living Lord, and you will be saved.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/19/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ USA Today (Mar. 5, 2004).

ⁱⁱ Anthony Decurtis, Rolling Stone (Feb. 1, 2001), p. 50.

ⁱⁱⁱ Frank Pollard, "Our Greatest Victory," <http://www.PreachingToday.com>.

^{iv} Jeff Johnson, "I Am Hilary Swank's Best New Girlfriend," Jane, (Oct., 2001), p. 128.

^v John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 80.

^{vi} Dorothea Day, "My Captain," quoted by Charles R. Swindoll in The Grace Awakening.