

August 9, 2026

Romans 10:5-15 “Law and the Last Frontier”

Hi. My name is Jesse, and I've watched way too many movies in my life. I've always assumed everyone enjoys movies, but I was talking to someone last Friday about how I went to the movie theater to see the *Odyssey and* the new Spider-man movie ... in one day. They said, "I can't remember the last time I even went to a theater to see a movie." I said, "Yeah, I don't blame you. It's getting expensive. I watch most of my movies on streaming services." They said, "Huh. I don't watch movies at all." I was almost speechless. It never occurred to me that someone doesn't watch movies. So I told Amber, my radio co-host about this because she and I just did a movie review on our show. She said, "Well, okay. So when was the last time you went to see a professional sporting event?" I said, "I went to a Giants game in 1989." Oh! And I went to see a couple of Chico Heat baseball games." She said, "They stopped being the Heat in 2002. You saw the Chico Outlaws." Oh. Then she said, "When was the last time you watched a professional sporting event on TV?" And I had to admit that I hadn't even watched a Super Bowl for the last three years and only because these days you can just go to YouTube to watch the commercials from the halftime show which is why I

watched it in the first place. She said, “Not everyone watches movies.” Point taken.

That conversation and the scripture we have in front of us this morning, got me thinking about a genre of movie I don’t watch very often—the Western. I’m not a big fan of Westerns. There are exceptions, of course. *Three Ten to Yuma*, *Silverado*, *True Grit*, and *The Hateful Eight* are the only ones I have in my library. Does *Blazing Saddles* count? Probably not, but it’s there under comedies. Maybe the biggest problem I have is that a lot of Western fans have bought into the myth that the American West was this lawless frontier where bandits and criminals ruled the land. That’s not true. There were plenty of laws. It’s just that in some places, there weren’t enough people to enforce the laws. Towns had charters. Even mining camps wrote constitutions. Sheriffs were elected. Everyone knew you needed laws. The question is whether people would *honor* those laws. When they didn’t, that’s when things fell apart.

So yeah, America has never really been a “lawless” nation. We’ve always had laws, and we keep making more. It’s not that we have too few laws. It’s that we have too few transformed hearts. We’ve only been a nation for 250 years. We’re young compared to many of the world’s largest nations. By the time Paul wrote the book that Georgia read from, Rome had been shaping the

Mediterranean world for over 700 years. And the Israelites had been living under God's law much longer than that. Yet every one of these societies – American, Roman, and Jewish discovered the same thing: You cannot legislate people into living a fuller, richer and more loving life. In other words, you can't legislate morality. Sure, you can outlaw murder. But you can't require forgiveness. You can punish theft. But you can't create generosity. You can require equal treatment. But you can't manufacture empathy or compassion. And this is the point Paul is trying to make to the churches in Rome. Israel *had* commandments. But they *lacked* transformed hearts.

A lot of folks misunderstand Romans 10. They think it's about abolishing the law. But that isn't the point. Romans 10 isn't about abolishing the law, it's about changing where righteousness comes from. So what does this actually look like? How do you translate that into everyday life? Well, the Law says, "Do *this* and live." Grace says, "*Christ* has fulfilled this. Trust *him* and live." These are radically different starting points when we're talking about Law. One begins with performance, and the other begins with relationship.

America is having the same argument Israel had. We all think that the solution to our problems is to "come up with the right rules." We start out our sentences with,

“Well, if only congress or the Supreme Court would do” whatever we think is right. Or, “If only Sacramento, or only City Hall, or only the school board.” Oh, and my favorite – “If only *those* people.” I think Paul would say, “You know, I think you’ve totally missed the point here.” The problem isn’t legal, it’s spiritual. And before you think “spiritual” is just another word for “religious,” that’s not what I mean. Spiritually speaking, broken people write broken laws. Right? Broken people find loopholes. Broken people divide themselves into tribes. Laws *do* matter. Paul isn’t anti-Law, but he knows that the Law cannot create the righteousness that it requires.

Let’s take a look at this little section in verses 9-13.

Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

Notice how simply Paul presents salvation. It’s not, know enough. Or be Jewish enough. Behave enough. Understand enough. Vote correctly. Attend church

regularly. No, he says, “If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and *believe in your heart*.” That’s it. And it applies to anyone and everyone. Jews and Greek. Insiders and outsiders. Religious and non-religious. Even SBNRs—“Spiritual but not religious.” The wall has come down.

I like the way the translators rendered verse 12 by using this phrase, “There is no distinction.” That would have shocked anyone in that time and place. Sometimes we just breeze past it. Paul’s readers would *not* have overlooked it. This isn’t about “*personal* salvation” like some folks insist. It’s about *who gets to belong*. Grace tears down every dividing wall that we’ve ever built. It speaks directly to our moment. Not by pretending that differences don’t exist, because believe me – they do! None of those distinctions is more important than the one thing we hold in common—we belong to Christ.

But then Paul pivots hard here in verse 14 and 15.

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who *bring good news!*”

That's a quote from the Isaiah passage Georgia read. People can't believe unless they've heard. See, grace is never meant to stop with us. And the church isn't just the *place you go* to receive grace. It's the place from which *grace is carried*.

For 250 years, America has been trying to become "a more perfect union." Christians have been invited to do something even greater. We're not supposed to build a "perfect nation" by passing laws that force our beliefs on others. Christ's followers are more interested in working towards a reconciled humanity. Or at least that's what we should be doing. Legislation has its place, but *reconciliation* begins somewhere deeper. And we don't do this by passing more laws. We do this by being living witnesses to grace. We do this by crossing barriers and treating every person as someone for whom Christ died.

But we keep thinking that if we can elect the right people... write the right laws... create the right system... then we'll finally fix all the things that we think are broken. Paul affirms that laws matter. Again, he's not anti-law. Laws restrain evil. They create order. They're necessary. *But they cannot heal what's broken inside us.* That's why Romans 10 points us *away* from achievement and *toward* grace... away from earning... toward trusting... away from dividing people... toward inviting everyone.

The law can *define* righteousness. Only Christ can *create* it.