



Bishop Lawrence Brown's new book explores interpretation and application of Romans 10:9

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ALTON – Analyzing the original intentions behind verses and phrases in a text as ancient as the Bible takes interest, dedication and most of all, perseverance, something Bishop Lawrence Brown has in abundance.

About six years ago, he became intensely interested in the intended meaning of Romans 10:9, “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

“For many years, Protestants have used Romans 10:9 as a conversion verse,” Brown said. “But if you confess with your mouth and that’s all there is to it – that’s too easy.”

Brown believes there has been an error in the interpretation of Romans 10:9 as a conversion passage for a long time in modern Protestant evangelism.

“The confusion comes from the fact that ‘confess’ meant to ‘preach’ in those times in that context,” Brown said. “The verse actually meant for the church to continue to preach about Jesus with their mouth, and didn’t refer to a conversion scenario nor refer to a confession of an individual sinner seeking the blessings of initial salvation.

“It’s our language of today that’s causing the problem. In the days of the Bible confess could also mean to preach,” he added.

Since Romans wasn’t published until around 58 A.D., Brown said it couldn’t have been the original intended conversion verse.

“There are many Bible scholars who really knew it wasn’t right to use that particular passage for literal conversion, yet couldn’t define the cause,” he said.

Through in-depth study, research and writing of the technical explanation, utilizing the precise editing skills of his wife of 26 years, fellow pastor Tanya Brown, his book, “The Romans Ten Nine Questions” addresses all aspects surrounding the verse, its history and interpretation.

The real means of conversion, he says, exists in other texts. Baptism and repentance are seen in Acts 2:38 and 10:45; and spiritual rebirth and regeneration of being filled by the Holy Ghost in John 3 and 5; Mathew 28:19 and Mark 16:16.

Brown says that more than 80 percent of ministers and theologians use Romans 10:9 for conversion simply because it’s an inherited Protestant tradition. It wasn’t until around the time of the Protestant Reformation during the 16th century, with John Calvin’s and Martin Luther’s theological teachings at the forefront, that the meaning of Romans 10:9 began to be used in such a manner, becoming a Protestant assumption.

“I had given it a lot of thought and one day, I felt compelled to begin researching and working on the questions that have long surrounded Romans 10:9,” Brown said. “God chose me, an ordinary pastor and theologian to do it. I believe if the world gets a real good look at it, it will have a huge impact on Protestantism.”

Fellow theology scholars and pastors have told him after reading it, that the book is researched and written on the level of a scholarly work, yet laymen will find it readable and helpful.

Brown performed extensive research at Yale and Eden Theological Seminary and researched many church fathers’ words to reveal the history, validity and the effects of the passage. He interviewed a number of theologians, pastors, teachers and ministers of many denominations.

“It will challenge ministries to rethink their usage of Romans 10:9 as a conversion passage.

In addition to co-pastoring at the Bethesda Temple Church in Alton with his wife, Brown defines himself as a sort of “freelance apologist,” or one who writes to explain and defend faith, dealing with certain problems and giving answers based on research. He’s been a minister and Bible teacher for 40 years.

The Browns came to Bethesda Temple two weeks after they were married at the request of then Pastor Elder Miller D. Moore to conduct a revival. Moore asked Brown to stay and assist him, later asking him to take on the pastorate of the church.

He was trained under the Honorable Bishop James A. Johnson at Bethesda Temple Church in St. Louis. He served as international chaplain of the International Pentecostal Young People's Union of the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World, Inc., and has served as both the vice president and general secretary of the Midwestern District Council 12th Episcopal District.

Brown graduated from The University of Missouri St. Louis with bachelors' degrees in mathematics, social studies, secondary education and accounting. He taught in the Normandy School District in St. Louis for 25 years.

The church's school, New Vision Christian Academy, is administered by Pastor Tanya Brown. The school offers academics for kindergarten through eighth grade and utilizes the Accelerated Christian Education system, where children learn and progress at their own individual pace.

The church and school work together to instill Christian beliefs, and a character-building segment teaches integrity, dependability, thankfulness, deference and flexibility. Physical education also is included in the curriculum, monitored by the Browns' son, Lawrence Brown III.

"We teach students values and structure and about God," Tanya Brown said. "To me this school is a natural extension of our church. We want to not only promote excellence in academics, but also include a Christian education."

The two minister the church together, alternating Sunday services and offering joint marriage counseling, which offers couples both a male and female perspective.

She's basically in charge of the school, and her husband serves as a consultant for academics and spirituality, and the mentoring program.

"We cover for each other, and we work well together," Tanya Brown said.

Bishop Lawrence Brown is currently working on another book – this time on women in the ministry, entitled "Powerful Women of Purpose, The Woman Preacher."

In addition to the full-sized book, “The Romans Ten Nine Questions,” there is also a condensed version, as well as a concise handbook, available for \$20, \$15 and \$5, respectively.

For more information, or to purchase a copy of “The Romans Ten Nine Questions,” call (618) 463-1845, write Bethesda Temple, 918 E. Fifth, Alton, IL 62002, or visit the Web site at www.bethesdaofalton.com. Bishop Brown is also available for speaking engagements concerning the book and the questions surrounding Romans 10:9.

Cutline for photo:

Bishop Lawrence Brown Jr. is the author of a new book, ‘The Romans Ten Nine Questions,’ exploring the meaning and interpretation behind Romans 10:9. Among his many interests, he learned to play piano in recent years, which he enjoys when time allows.