

Romans (9:30-33)

Obtaining Righteousness

Part 43 - July 31, 2005

ATTEMPTING RIGHTEOUSNESS

Gentile cities (in Turkey & Greece) were centers of idolatry and indulgence.



Yet the NT reports that in Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Smyrna, & Laodicea, and among the Bereans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, & Thessalonians, hundreds and thousands of Gentiles:

... turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus ... - *1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 NIV*

Now, the Jews in those same cities (except for a remnant), turned in hatred on the missionaries, and cursed them, stoned them, and pursued them from city to city.

And it is in this context that chapter nine was written.

What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” - *Romans 9:30-33 NIV*

The first thing that jumps out at me are the two key words Paul uses to describe the Gentiles gaining rightness (with God) and the Jews failing to get that rightness.

- A. The Gentiles have “obtained” it.
- B. The Jews have not “attained” it.

Q: In this context, what is the difference between *obtaining* rightness (with God) and attempting to *attain* rightness?

A: To “obtain” means to *receive* what is freely offered. To “not attain” speaks to attempting to *earn* in terms of human effort.

REQUIRED RIGHTNESS

Q: Do you know why righteousness *must* be obtained?

Q: And, do you know why it *can't* ever be attained?

You see, even if you choose to receive Christ, - and God loves you and accepts you and forgives you - he still can't *save* you. That is, he *can't* bring you into his eternal presence.

- In order to "be saved," you *must* obtain righteousness.

Q: Remember when the Lord told Moses that he'd pass in front of him and allow Moses to see his glory? Well, not quite *all* of his glory.

"But," [God] said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." ... When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." - *Exodus 33:19-23 NIV*

He didn't say: "I don't *want* you to see my face". He said you can't: "**no one may see me and live**"! In other words: "When your impurity meets the force of my glory I *have* to shield you because ... your head will kind of explode."

- The *reaction* of our sin to God's holiness is "nuclear".

Q: Have you ever heard of superheated water in microwave ovens?



Heated water forms bubbles around impurities or rough surfaces (called *nucleation sites*). People have been injured when heating purified water in smooth glass containers. The purity allows water to heat far beyond its boiling point. Thinking there's something wrong with the oven, people just keep heating it. And then, when an impurity is added (*e.g.* spoon, teabag, or cocoa) it explodes violently.



The blazing intensity of God's unveiled holiness will instantly annihilate imperfection and impurity on contact. And you can't buy perfect purity with a few good deeds!

Q: Did you see the TLC documentary: "The Boy Whose Skin Fell Off"?



Jonny Kennedy had a rare condition known as "EB" where his skin literally fell off at the slightest touch. The inspirational story opens with him in a casket, and his own voiceover narrates: "*That's me in the box.*"

The most poignant scene shows his mother changing his bandages (as she had for 36 years). His back and arms are exposed and raw. And as she gently pulls the cloth strips from his shoulder, a bandage unexpectedly sticks, and tears more skin away; and he snaps and swears at her, and then immediately asks for her forgiveness.

And in the film, the mother tearfully describes what it's like to have a child that you love and care for so much, and yet to hold him or to hug him is to hurt him.

Without healing, without purification (from the infection and pollution of sin), God can't touch his own children.

- God wants you obtain righteousness so he can embrace you.

This requires a miracle cure; and Christ has provided it. The Gentiles were aware of their condition (of depravity) and that's why they so readily received God's deliverance. But the Jews didn't pursue idolatry and/or indulgence, they: "pursued a law of righteousness". And this had sadly led them to a self-righteousness that blinded them to their impurities.

- That's why humility is the *key* to obtaining righteousness.

If we discount, deaden, or deceive ourselves in order to avoid the unpleasant and sometimes painful truth about our condition, we won't be open to the only cure.

Paul gives us two reasons why the Jews missed it.

1. **"They pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works"** (9:32a)

They pursued perfect holiness "as if" it could be established by their own behavior, rather than surrendering (in faith) to the perfect redemptive holiness of another.

Q: Does Paul mean that faith shouldn't require any effort?

A: No. In fact, he told the Philippians to: "*Work out your salvation ...*" (Phil 2:12)

But Paul expects us to "work it out" as a reverent and grateful response, and as a way to grasp and fulfill our created purpose. But we must bear in mind that the necessary efforts we make, in no way whatsoever increase our acceptableness before God.

The second reason they missed it was because:

2. **"They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone'"** (9:32b)

Paul's OT quotes are astoundingly insightful! First he quotes from Isaiah, chapter eight:

The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. -
Isaiah 8:13-14 NIV

And then (using a common interpretive practice familiar to the Jews) Paul ties this reference to Isaiah, chapter twenty-eight:

So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.” - *Isaiah 28:16 NIV*

And, in combining these two prophetic words, Paul demonstrates that the “cornerstone” would not only be “laid” by God (“**See, I lay a stone**”), it would *be* God (“**he will be a stone**”).

Now, let me reread our verse from Romans and you can see how three quotes from these two scriptures have been pieced together by Paul:

As it is written: “**See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall**, and **the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.**” - *Romans 9:33 NIV*

Paul brilliantly uses these OT prophetic scriptures to demonstrate the only two choices offered in regard to Christ:

- Stumble over him, or fall before him as Lord.

Q: Do you remember the debate that sparked chapter nine? (9:6)

The Jews had argued that their rejection of Jesus was *proof* that he wasn't the Messiah (because God's Word would have failed).

So Paul now turns them to the Word, revealing that God himself (through his prophet) had foretold and warned that “**both houses of Israel**” (another way of saying, “All Jews”) will stumble.

Q: But what does it mean to “stumble” over Jesus? How did they stumble? Why did they stumble?

A: Next week! Paul explains it in detail in Chapter ten!