

Romans 9... 10... 11

“What shall we say then?” would have been the name of Paul’s radio ministry. He loves the phrase! This is the fifth time he’s used it in Romans.

Romans 9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;

He’s getting ready to make a point based on what he’s been saying. Remember, he’s been arguing that God is not unjust or inconsistent in saving Gentiles while disciplining the nation of Israel.

Even though both Jews and “Gentiles” were getting saved, Paul was drawing a contrast between all those getting saved and Israelites who were still pursuing salvation by keeping the Law of Moses. The Gentiles getting saved had no relationship to the Law. They were an extreme example.

He describes the Gentiles by saying they “did not pursue righteousness...” It’s a contrast with the Jews who were pursuing “the law of righteousness” (v31).

- being changed to bring change -

Read through the Book of Acts and you see the Lord saving Gentiles who had no knowledge of the Law. Nevertheless they were receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

At one point it gives rise to the council at Jerusalem during which the issue of whether or not Gentiles needed to first convert to Judaism in order to get saved. The wisdom of that council was, “No.”

How were they getting saved apart from the Law? They “attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith.” Gentiles were being saved by believing God. They believed God and He put it into their account as righteousness. “Righteousness” is being right with God. It is being able to stand before God, to be accepted into His holy presence.

Warren Wiersbe calls his commentary on Romans, *Be Right*.

Romans 9:31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

“Israel” means those Jews who were stubbornly holding to the Law as a means of obtaining right standing with God. To obtain righteousness by “pursuing” the Law you must keep it perfectly in every point. No one can do that outwardly, let alone inwardly.

God’s Law is wonderful but its intention is to show you your falling short and your need of a Savior. No one has or ever could “attain to the Law of righteousness.”

Galatians 3:24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

The one exception is Jesus. Jesus perfectly kept the Law as a man. He did it on our behalf as our representative. Then He took our place on the Cross. That’s why when I believe God I am declared righteous.

Romans 9:32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

Notice something. Paul holds the Jews responsible. They were accountable. He doesn’t say the reason they weren’t getting saved was because God is sovereign and He didn’t ‘choose’ the Jews. I only mention this because this chapter, Romans nine, is used as a key proof text by Calvinists and others who hold a Reformed theology to show God’s absolute sovereignty and man’s total inability.

Paul was not a Calvinist. His thinking was not Reformed. He thought men were responsible and with the responsibility there must be real freedom to choose and be held accountable.

“Faith” has always been the principle upon which a person is saved. The early portions of Romans discuss Abraham and others who were saved by faith prior to the giving of the Law.

The Israelites Paul was addressing were still trying to keep the Law by their own efforts. They would not admit their inability to do so, seek forgiveness of their sins, and believe Jesus Christ. They thought self-righteousness was the path to salvation.

Paul described their attempt to approach God by saying they “stumbled at that stumbling stone.” The apostle Peter identified Jesus as the “stumbling stone” when he said,

1 Peter 2:4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHIEF CORNERSTONE, ELECT, PRECIOUS, AND HE WHO BELIEVES ON HIM WILL BY NO MEANS BE PUT TO SHAME."

1 Peter 2:7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE,"

1 Peter 2:8 and "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE." They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

The Israelites stumbled because Jesus did not meet their expectations. They were not looking for a spiritual Savior but rather a political one.

Expectations of Jesus still can lead folks to stumble. Years ago a fellow here at the church came out of the closet as a homosexual. He divorced his wife and left his kids. A few years later he repented and said he wanted to remarry his ex-wife. She agreed and they began seeing each other. A short time later he committed suicide.

What happened? At one point in his journey he told me he thought that if he repented and called homosexuality 'sin' that God would take away temptations and change him. He was stumbled when it didn't happen. I think that is why he ended his life. His expectations of Jesus were really demands and he was stumbled.

We need to be careful to not set ourselves up to be stumbled in more subtle ways. The Lord has promised us a lot; but we can be selfish in the way we apply those promises and expect His resources.

To show that God anticipated this stumbling by the nation of Israel Paul quoted from Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16, combining the two statements to indicate the two contrasting reactions by men to the stone that God placed in Zion

Romans 9:33 As it is written: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STUMBLING STONE AND ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME."

The palace of King David had been built on Mount Zion. The court of Israel convened on the mount. "Zion" came to represent Israel and its glory and government.

Jesus, in His first coming, was to be the glory and government of Israel. But the nation's leaders and its court rejected Him.

There are ultimately only two possible reactions to the claims of Jesus Christ to be the only way of salvation:

- You reject Him and He becomes to you a "stumbling stone and rock of offense." Or,
- You "believe on Him" and find no reason to feel shame or embarrassment from the Cross on which He died.

God did not send Jesus to stumble anyone. He was sent to save.

As we come to the end of chapter nine Paul has thoroughly and biblically defended the Lord. The Jews were accusing God of unrighteousness towards them when, in fact, their stumbling was anticipated in the Bible.

I hope, too, I've said enough to show that you cannot defend a Calvinist or any Reformed position from Romans nine. The teaching that God's sovereignty excludes man's free will is not in these verses.

We believe simultaneously the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. Attempts to reduce one or the other lead you to extreme conclusions that denigrate the nature and character of God's love.