



When in Romans Do as the Righteous Do

“Stumble Thyself in the Sight of the Lord”

Romans 9:30-33

Christian radio programs all have a distinguishing name. *Grace to You; Insight for Living; A New Beginning; Focus on the Family; The Connection; The Active Word; Somebody Loves You.*

If the apostle Paul had a radio program, I’m pretty sure it would have been called, *What Shall We Say Then?*

Those are the opening words of verse thirty, but it’s now the fifth time he’s used the phrase in Romans. It indicates he is about to draw a conclusion but, more than that, an inevitable conclusion. It means he has done more than prove his position biblically and that there is no other possible conclusion.

And he used the word “we” as if to say that the Holy Spirit, Who had inspired his reasoning and arguments, had brought all of them to this understanding.

What is it Paul had proved? In a nutshell, he had proved that God was not unrighteous for setting Israel aside and for saving Gentiles directly with the Gospel.

Romans 9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith; Romans 9:31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

“Righteousness” means having a right relationship with God. There are two, and only two, ways of attaining a right relationship with God:

1. One way of attaining a right relationship with God is to pursue it by keeping the Law of God as revealed to mankind by Moses. You can, by the way, be righteous by keeping the Law. But you must keep it perfectly and not just outwardly, but inwardly. Only Jesus Christ, the God-man, was ever able to perfectly keep the Law. And only He among all the human race after Adam and Eve was born without a sin nature.
2. The other way of having a right relationship with God is to believe God and have Him declare you righteous on the basis of your faith.

The Bible way of righteousness is by faith. We are accepted as righteous, and treated as righteous by God on account of what the Lord Jesus has done. He was made sin; we are made righteousness. On the cross, Jesus was treated as if he were a sinner, though he was perfectly holy and pure, and we are treated as if we were righteous, though we are not. On account of what the Lord Jesus has endured on our behalf, we are treated as if we had entirely fulfilled the Law of God, and had never become exposed to its penalty. We have received this precious gift of righteousness by faith, not by works.

Paul had already proven earlier in Romans that righteousness was always by faith. He appealed to both Abraham and David as examples of Jews who believed God and were declared righteous on the basis of faith.

Here in his conclusion to chapter nine Paul was making an application of righteousness by faith. The Jews, you remember, were wondering how God could set aside the nation of Israel and offer His salvation directly to the Gentile nations. It wasn't even so much that Gentiles were getting saved; it was that they were getting saved entirely apart from the Law. They were not being required to be circumcised or to keep the Sabbath or any such thing.

So Paul reminded them that salvation, even among Jews, was always by faith, never by keeping the Law. Therefore when the leaders of the nation of Israel officially rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah, they also rejected salvation by faith in favor of keeping the Law.

“But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.” God, therefore, set them aside, for a time, and was going directly to the Gentiles to call out a people for Himself made up of any from all nations, tongues, tribes and peoples who believe on Jesus Christ.

These people, this group, is the church - born on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter two and awaiting the resurrection and rapture at the return of the Lord in the clouds.

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.

Why didn't the Jews attain “righteousness?” As we've just said, and as we always point out, they thought righteousness came to them because they were ethnic Jews who were keeping, in some measure anyway, God's Law.

Earlier in chapter nine Paul had established that “they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (v6). He meant that there were three ways to be descended from Abraham - to be considered Abraham's “seed.”

1. All ethnic Jews are “Israel” as the physical descendants of Abraham, but not every Jew is saved.
2. Those Jews who, like Abraham, believe God are saved because they are declared righteous by God. These are both physical and spiritual descendants of Abraham.
3. Gentiles who are saved by faith are also considered the spiritual “seed” of Abraham, but they are not Israel. They inherit the promises God made to non-Jews in the Abrahamic Covenant.

The Jews did not admit their inability to keep the Law perfectly and turn by faith to God for forgiveness. Consequently they “stumbled over the “stumbling Stone.”

What “stumbling stone?” The one Isaiah had warned them about.

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."

Jesus Christ is identified as “the stumbling Stone” by the apostle Peter in his letters.

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.

Jesus is also referred to as the stumbling stone in First Corinthians 1:23.

The first century Jews stumbled over Jesus because of many things:

1. Some were stumbled by the manner of His birth. They didn't believe He was born of a virgin but accused Him of being illegitimate.
2. Some were stumbled by His lowly parentage. He was only the Son of a carpenter.
3. Some were stumbled by His childhood residence, thinking nothing good could come from Nazareth.
4. Some were offended by His plain appearance. Isaiah 53:2 says of Jesus, “For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”
5. Many were offended by the company He kept. “And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them.” (Luke 15:2).

The list goes on-and-on, culminating in the fact the Jews were stumbled by the Cross on which He died and by His resurrection from the dead.

Jesus was not at all what they had expected in their Messiah. So they rejected Him and with Him the offer of righteousness by faith.

Paul quoted from Isaiah 8:14 and Isaiah 28:16, combining the two statements, to indicate the two contrasting reactions by men to Jesus.

Paul was telling his readers, his listeners, that the nation of Israel, officially, reacted to Jesus as an “offense” and, therefore, they “stumbled” over Him.

Meanwhile “whoever believes on Him,” Jew or Gentile, will be saved by the righteousness that comes by faith.

We are all on board with the righteousness that comes by faith. It doesn't mean, however, that we are free from the thinking that we still must *do* something, must *keep* something, must *observe* something, in order to really be saved or to maintain our right standing with God.

I was reading a chapter in a book by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum in which he cited Jewish friends of his who think it ironic that Christians accuse the Jews of trying to keep the Law while simultaneously adding their own works of righteousness to salvation by faith.

Baptism is one of those works. One author noted the following:

There are several religious groups which teach that baptism is necessary for salvation. Among them are several "Church of Christ" groups, some branches of the "Christian Church-Disciples of Christ," and many small groups in the Christian tradition.

Of course, the largest and most well-known of the ‘baptismal regenerationist’ groups is the Roman Catholic church. **Such groups teach that water baptism is absolutely essential to the salvation of the soul.**

To make it even worse for Roman Catholics, the official Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church goes on to state,

To receive the free gift of salvation, Catholics must until their last breath, maintain the righteousness that they received during the Sacrament of Baptism. Ongoing righteousness is maintained through the reception of the Sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist. While belonging to the invisible Body of Christ, Catholics recognize that they absolutely need the Sacraments of the visible Body of Christ, the Catholic Church, as their assurance of righteousness and salvation. Hence, believers require the Catholic Church as the "fullness of the means of salvation."

It's easier than you might think to fall into thinking that salvation, once received, must be maintained by works. The apostle Peter went to visit the Gentile church at Antioch. It was the custom of the early church to share a meal once a week. They called it the "love feast"; we call them pot-lucks! Peter, though a Jew, had been set free from Jewish dietary laws. He could eat anything he wanted, with whomever he wanted. He enjoyed this

wonderful freedom of grace - until some Jews came from the church at Jerusalem. Fearing their criticism, Peter gradually withdrew from fellowshiping with the Gentiles. His hypocrisy led others, including even Barnabas, into hypocrisy. He was causing a serious division in the church between Jews and Gentiles.

The apostle Paul had to openly and publicly rebuke Peter!!!

If Peter could fall back into this kind of thinking and behaving, so can I. In fact, by default I always fall back to a position of thinking there is something I must do to attain or maintain righteousness.

There isn't! The Christian life is by faith from start to finish.

So how do we live it? By the indwelling Holy Spirit and by walking with God as our Father and with Jesus as our Friend.