

**Introduction****Slide**

We were all horrified and heart-broken by the news last Monday morning that Stephen Paddock, a lone gunman, had shot and killed over 50 people in cold blood and wounded hundreds more from a hotel room in Las Vegas. We ask ourselves “how could this happen?” How could such pure evil exist in a man who seemed not to have any major financial or relationship problems? We may never know all the answers, but we can say with confidence that this heinous act, while extreme in its gravity and impact, is simply the logical working out of what it means to reject God. Listen again to what Paul says in Romans 1:28-32. He is speaking in this passage of men and women “who suppress the truth...about God”.

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28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. NIV

So we can begin to see the origin of the evil as coming from the pit of hell; the pit where there is no knowledge of God. And we can and should continue to pray for the families of the victims and for the recovery of the injured. But there is something else we can do, and that is to recognize that we too have sinful hearts and we are all murderers and much more in God's sight. But God in His mercy and grace has called us to himself, and so we can rejoice and give thanks that we do not stand condemned but instead stand in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So this brings us to our Scripture for today

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Rom 9:30-10:4

30 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."

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Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

**Dark slide****Prayer**

This passage marks a turning point of sorts in this section of Romans. As Jim Krouscas shared in his introduction three weeks ago, Paul's purpose in writing these challenging chapters was not to give theologians something to debate over for 2000 years, but to give assurance to Christ followers that God was and is completely faithful and trustworthy, and that he had not broken his promises to the Jews. In other words, these chapters were written for **our encouragement**. But today's passage includes not only encouragement, but also a **challenge and a warning**.

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You may be surprised at my use of the word **warning**; you might say to me “I don’t see any warning to Christ followers in this passage”. Well, stick with me, and I will come back to this theme towards the end of the sermon. But let’s begin however with **encouragement**.

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**1. Our encouragement.** Paul is writing to the church in Rome. It is a church he has never visited, although he knows some of the believers there, and he is writing to make sure that they understand the gospel in all its fullness. And so he makes two powerful statements about our Lord Jesus to encourage the believers. I want to take them in reverse order. The first one is in the last verse that we read:

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“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (NIV) The word “end” can also mean “goal”, so Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is both the end of the law, making the Jewish ritual law unnecessary, and he is also the goal to which the law points. He is the one who ended the need for the ritual law by himself becoming the Lamb of God, and paying the price in his own body for your sins and my sins. He is also the one to whom the law and the prophets all pointed, as he told those two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

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Luke 24:25-27 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in **all the Scriptures** concerning himself. NIV

When he died, the curtain in the Temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and that signified the barrier between God and man, was torn in two from top to bottom by the hand of God. This signified that the way into God’s presence was now open through the blood of Jesus Christ.

We sang earlier the lovely song “Jesus what a beautiful name” and this song aptly describes what Jesus has done for us:

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Jesus what a beautiful name  
Son of God Son of Man  
Lamb that was slain  
Joy and peace strength and hope  
Grace that blows all fear away

Jesus what a beautiful name

“Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

Let us be encouraged by remembering what Jesus has done for us.

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The second encouragement is in chapter 9:33, which is a quotation from parts of two verses in Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16.

"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."

We will come to the stumbling of Israel later. For now I want to focus on the last sentence “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” The rock of course refers to our Lord Jesus, the “solid rock” of our salvation. So this is a wonderful promise to all of us who are Christ followers, but what exactly does it mean? Does it mean that those who trust in Christ will lead a sort of charmed life, never being embarrassed, never messing up on an exam, never having an accident, never being rejected? I don’t think so, because we know that strong Christian believers still suffer failures, and above all because we know that our perfect Lord and Saviour was “was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.” (Isa 53:3) So I believe that what it does mean is that those who trust in Jesus will not be put to shame when we stand at the judgment seat of Christ. Because one day we all will stand before our Lord: 2 Cor 5:10 “For **we must all** appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive

what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” And it is at that judgment seat, when all men and women will stand before our Lord, that we will hear one of two words. It will be either Matt 25:34 “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Or it will be Matt 25:41

“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” And so when Paul, quoting Isaiah, says “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame,” we can take great comfort in the fact that we will hear the words “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” What an encouragement to know with assurance that one day we will not be ashamed! Right now some of you are struggling in your lives. Perhaps you have had disappointments in your family or in your work; if you are a student you may be struggling in your courses, especially perhaps in chemistry, or you may be trying to figure out what to do with the rest of your life, or you may be facing serious illness or even death. But if you lift up your eyes and look to the future, you have the assurance that you will never be put to shame. “The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

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#### **Our Challenge**

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10:1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Let us just focus on the first sentence of this passage, and ask “What was it that gave Paul this desire?” After all, he was talking about the very people who had persecuted him. Here are some examples from the book of Acts:

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Acts 13:45

45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

Acts 14:2

But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers  
Acts 14:19

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

Acts 17:5

5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city.

I don't know about you, but if I had been faced with the opposition from the Jews that Paul faced, I might have been tempted to wash my hands of them and leave them to God's judgment. But not Paul. Instead, “my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.”

And so the challenge to each of us, and especially to me, is “how do we develop a heart's desire for the lost men and women in our world like Paul's desire for the salvation of the Jews? Let me suggest three things we can do to help us develop a concern like Paul's.

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1. **Think of the fate** of our friends and neighbors who are living under God's judgment. 2 Cor 5:10 For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

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2. **Anticipate** the joy that you will have on welcoming a new brother or sister into the family of God.  
1 Thess 2:19-20

For what is our hope, **our joy**, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

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3. **Pray** that God would give you a heart for the lost, a heart that longs to see men and women, boys and girls, come to know the Lord. Jim Krouscas shared three weeks ago that there are roughly 147,000 souls that live in the New River Valley. Many of them are spiritually dead, alienated from God and headed to hell without Christ. And the question he asked was ...do you care? Do I care?

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##### **Our Warning.**

And now let me turn to the warning that I mentioned earlier. To do this we need to look at what the passage is saying about Israel, and seek to understand it in the light of the rest of Scripture.

9:31 Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.

32 Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." 33 As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall,

10:3 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and **sought to establish their own**, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

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These verses thus remind us of

##### **The terrible attraction of legalism, or of trying to earn your salvation by doing good works.**

These verses paint the sad picture of the plight of religious people who try to **earn** their salvation by doing good works. Paul decries the nation of Israel as "pursuing a law of righteousness" Your first reaction might be "what is so bad about pursuing righteousness?" "What is so bad about doing good? Aren't we commanded to do good? Didn't Paul write in Gal 6:10 "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us **do good** to all people" And didn't the author of the letter to the Hebrews write Heb 13:16 And do not forget to **do good** and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. And of course the answers are yes and yes. We **are** commanded as Christ followers to do good and to live lives of humble and obedient service, following the example of our Lord who said (Mark 10:45)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." But we need to note carefully that Paul did not say that the nation of Israel was "pursuing righteousness". His exact words were "Israel, who pursued **a law of** righteousness, has not obtained it." So what does that mean? And the answer is that most of the people of the nation of Israel, and certainly the vast majority of its leaders at the time of Christ, had bought into the idea that they could earn their righteousness – their right standing before God – by doing (or not doing) various acts. As long as they did the right things, they were confident that God would be pleased with them and accept them. And then of course they had to write down all the laws and give detailed explanations for how they could be broken. For example, on the Sabbath the lawyers determined that you could only travel 1,000 yards from your home. But if a rope was tied across the end of the street, the end of the street became your residence and you could go 1,000 yards beyond that. Or, if before the Sabbath a man left at any given point enough food for two meals, that point technically became his residence and he could go 1,000 yards beyond that. On the Sabbath, you couldn't tie a knot, because that was work. But a woman could tie a knot in her girdle. So if you needed to draw water out of the well on the Sabbath, you couldn't tie a rope to the bucket, but you could tie a woman's girdle to the bucket!

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Interestingly orthodox Jews still live by these same rules. In New York, for example, there is a high wire stretched around much of Manhattan that marks of the eruv, or area considered as home, within which orthodox Jews can safely walk on the Sabbath.

So sadly the nation of Israel, instead of becoming a light to the Gentiles, became this inward-focused nation, bent on rule-keeping at the expense of the issues of justice and mercy. In short, they had become a nation of **legalists**.

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So what is legalism? It has been defined as *“an attempt to gain favor with God or to impress our fellow man by doing certain things (or avoiding other things), **without regard to the condition of our hearts before God.**”* It is what the Pharisees of Jesus’ time were guilty of when he had this exchange with them in Mark 7:9-13

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“And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! 10 For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 11 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban ' (that is, a gift devoted to God), 12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. 13 Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." So in other words a man could evade his responsibility to his parents by saying “Sorry, but I have pledged the money I was going to use to support you to the temple.” So the priests would get the money and the man would be relieved of his obligation to his parents.

Now at this point you are probably saying something like this to yourself “That’s all fine, and I can see how the Jews of Jesus’ time were legalistic, but I don’t see what all this has got to do with me.” And I hope that it is indeed true of you that you are not in any way a legalist, and that you are depending only and completely on the grace of God for your salvation, but I suspect that there are some here who, perhaps unknown even to themselves, are depending on their good behavior and good works to get them into God’s kingdom.

You see, the problem with all of us, myself especially included, is **pride**. Pride was the cause of Satan’s fall, and it is the root cause of most if not all other sins.

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Like the church of Laodicea Rev 3:17-18

We say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But we do not realize that we are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.'

And because we are proud of ourselves it is really hard to admit that we are wretched and poor and pitiful in God’s sight; instead we may think of ourselves as pretty good people, and God is lucky to have us on his side. But since we have never accepted our spiritual poverty and wretchedness, we make up rules to keep us on the right side of God. Keeping these rules feeds our pride and brings us respect from others, but it conceals the fact that we do not trust in the power and grace of God. So we come to church and we pray and we read the Bible, but all the time we are depending on these acts to earn us points with God. So on Sunday we are good Christians, with a smile for everyone, but on Monday we are short-tempered, we treat others badly, perhaps we have secret sins of lust or pornography or dishonesty.

Could this be true of you? Frank Powell (<http://frankpowell.me/signs-legalism-jesus>) has a blog in which he gives 8 signs that you love legalism more than Jesus. Here are some of them:

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- 1.) You believe God loves you. But you don’t believe He **LIKES** you.
- 2.) You have never been sure about your salvation.
- 3.) The world’s injustices aren’t important to you.
- 4.) Your private life doesn’t match your public life.
- 5.) You believe in joy and peace, but you’ve never experienced them.

Let me summarize with a quotation from John Piper from a sermon he gave on this passage.

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“The reason it is not submission to God’s righteousness when we seek justification by trying to obey God, even with God’s help, is that it dishonors "Christ as our righteousness." It says to God, "My humble, Spirit-empowered behavior will be the ground of my righteous standing before you," while God is all the while saying,

"No it won’t. I have assigned that glorious role to the righteousness of my Son, Jesus Christ. When I accept you and vindicate you and declare you righteous in my sight, I will accept you and vindicate you and

declare you righteous in my sight on the ground of his righteousness alone. Perfect divine righteousness, performed by my Son, is the only righteousness that will justify in my court. You shall obey me through faith! But all your imperfect obedience will be the **fruit** of your justification, not the **root**. My Son alone will have that honor.”

So how can we avoid the temptations of legalism, of thinking that we can somehow earn our salvation? There are many ways; reading the Bible carefully, and paying particular attention to Paul’s teaching on the nature of our salvation in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, etc. So for example we can meditate on a Scripture such as Eph 2:8-10

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8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

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Another suggestion is to begin attending the Lord’s Supper each Sunday at 9:00 am in the chapel. There you will meet with fellow-believers, and share with them in a short service of remembrance of Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. I challenge you to leave that service with any thoughts that you can earn your salvation by your own efforts.

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And using the resources of biblical hymns and songs, such as this verse from “Rock of Ages”

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress,  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.