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# Romans

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

"What shall we say then?" This question is introduced in order to provide a response to Paul's thoughts on verses 14-29. In essence, "How shall I sum up these things?"

Depending on how one views the concept of "total depravity" and also how we become justified before God, different views of how to handle this verse will be proposed. Those who follow Calvinism will naturally use these words, along with other verses such as Romans 3:10-18, to state that the gentiles could not seek after righteousness. This is not at all what is being said, nor is that what Romans 3:10-18 is saying (refer to those commentaries if necessary).

Rather, the word translated as "pursue" speaks of the exertion of ongoing, concentrated vigor towards something. A comparable thought would be a hunter following after game. There is nothing in this verse to state that the gentile world didn't pursue righteousness in some capacity. We can look around the world and see numerous examples of non-Christians who seek peace, the welfare of others, etc. All of these are done as deeds looking to establish some sort of righteousness.

The pursuit which Paul is speaking of here is the right-standing which leads to justification before God - the fulfillment of the law. How could the Gentiles

pursue after that which they did not have? It was the nation of Israel who had the law and they pursued after it with zeal because it was what established them as a people and what offered them life and peace. It also promised them a right relationship with God. The problem for them came in how they pursued it.

The Gentiles didn't have this opportunity, until Jesus. Suddenly the flood-gates of heaven were opened wide to the whole world at large, Jew and Gentile alike. The law, which was that means of being reconciled to God, was fulfilled by Him and in Him. Now, rather than pursuing wrong avenues of righteousness on one's own merits, the proper avenue could be pursued by the merits of Another - He who fulfilled the needed righteousness. Any Gentile, and the number of them started small but grew rapidly, could attain to righteousness now, "even the righteousness of faith."

This term, "the righteousness of faith" is what proves that this has nothing to do with Gentiles seeking righteousness in a limited (or wrong) way. Instead, it demonstrates that they understood, immediately upon hearing the word, that the avenue they had been pursuing (one of deeds) was wrong. The deeds merely interfered with any hoped-for relationship and attainment of righteousness. This was because they became a form of self-idolatry. "I have done these great things; God will love me."

This is fully substantiated by the coming three verses. Stay tuned as we complete chapter 9 with those thoughts.

Life application: Where is your righteousness to be found? If you state anything other than "in Christ Jesus" you have missed the mark. In and of ourselves, there is no true righteousness. Christ has done the work. Now, place your faith in Him and you will stand righteous before God; not on your own merits, but on the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.

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

"But" is set as a contrast to 9:30 - "That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith."

Israel actively pursued the "law of righteousness." The same word used for "pursue" when speaking of the Gentiles in the preceding verse is used again in this one. What the Gentiles didn't pursue, they attained; the same thing was pursued by Israel and yet not attained. However, this is speaking on a national level, not on an individual one. Peter, Paul, and the other apostles, plus many early believers were all Jews. Throughout the ages, Jews have likewise come to Christ. But Israel as a whole, who had been given the law, did not attain to what they actively strived for.

The "law of righteousness" Paul speaks of here is the law given to govern them as a people. It had several components to it. The first is that it demanded perfection from its people, something unattainable. The second is that when perfection couldn't be attained, grace was found within its rituals - sacrifices and offerings, which included the Day of Atonement. But these required something more than their mere observance. The thing they required in order to be effective will be seen in the following verse, Romans 9:32.

Before evaluating that, we can contemplate an example of what was lacking directly from Jesus' words -

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went

down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Luke 18:10-14

Life application: As individuals pursuing righteousness, we need to constantly evaluate what it means for us to be "righteous." If we misunderstand or ignore what God expects, we may become like the Pharisees of Jesus' time and God will not favor our life and conduct, no matter how scrupulous we are in our external observances. Pay heed to what the Bible teaches concerning God's favor and live your life in faith.

**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.** Romans 9:32

The question is, "Why has Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, not attained to the law of righteousness?" The answer is found in how they pursued the law. Leviticus 18:5 says, "You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the Lord." Perfect obedience to the statutes was needed for life. But within the law itself, it was implied that perfect obedience wasn't possible. Where is this found? In the Day of Atonement rituals which are detailed in several locations of the law. Here in Numbers 29 is one example -

"On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation. You shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. You shall present a burnt offering to the Lord as a sweet aroma: one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs in their first year. Be sure they are without blemish. Their grain offering shall be of fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; also one kid of the goats as a sin offering, besides the sin offering for atonement, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings." Numbers 29:7-11

Even more specific details fill the entire chapter of Leviticus 16. Notice that the offerings include a "sin offering." Why is this important? Because a sin offering

implies sin has been committed. Thus, the law itself demonstrates that sin is expected. But, the law says, "which if a man does, he shall live by them." Therefore, the law implicitly notes that man cannot live by observance of the law because man is unable to perfectly observe this same law.

So then how could the people continue before God? By observing another portion of the law, one based solely on faith; the Day of Atonement. Even though the rituals within the Day of Atonement were mandated by the law, they anticipated something from outside the law. The question is, did the sin offerings cover the sins of all the people? The answer is, "No." If someone stayed at home and worked (something contrary to the law) on the Day of Atonement, he was to be "cut off from his people" (Leviticus 23:29). Therefore, he had to have faith that going down to Jerusalem and fasting and praying would actually bring about what the law stated.

Likewise, could the animal sacrifices permanently take away the sins of the people? Again, "No." The New Testament tells us that it was "not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 9:4). In those sacrifices was the reminder of sins every year, but the sins continued. Thus the law itself demonstrates that through pursuing the mere observance of the law one could never attain righteousness.

In fact, attempting to do so would only become the basis for something else, self-idolatry. By observing the law, without faith, a man became confident in himself apart from the very law he was observing. This was because the law implied sins would be committed and needed atonement. And therefore, many years after the introduction of the law, Habakkuk was able to confidently say,

"Behold the proud,  
His soul is not upright in him;  
But the just shall live by his faith." Habakkuk 2:4

This is the "stumbling stone" that Paul speaks of and which still permeates the Jewish society of today. It is also, unfortunately, a stumbling stone for people in a vast variety of denominations, sects, and cults. It is a tripping hazard leading to hell.

The Bible makes it perfectly clear that there is one way to be saved and it is by a complete dependence on the work of Christ. One must abandon self and "call on the name of the Lord." Only Jesus satisfied the demands of the law perfectly. Therefore, by faith in His work alone can we stand justified before God.

Life application: Are you being told that there are certain things you must do beyond calling on Jesus as Lord in order to be saved? If so, then maybe you haven't trusted fully in Jesus and are depending on "self." Unfortunately, "self" can only lead you to destruction. Give up on self and call on Jesus as Lord. Then, go forth and tell others of the freedom which is found in Christ.

**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.”** Romans 9:33

To close out chapter 9 of this precious book, Paul returns one last time to Scripture - "As it is written." Time and again, Paul reaches into the very words which his people relied on for their establishment and continuance as a group. He does this in an attempt to open their eyes to the truth of who Jesus is. As a second purpose, it is to show the gentile people why Israel would be cast off. If he didn't do this, then it might seem as if God was being arbitrary and unreliable. But by doing so, he will also be able to demonstrate (coming in chapter 11) that He is capable and just in both re-favoring Israel and removing gentiles for disbelief.

Paul's method of arguing directly from Scripture to make his case is seen in his travels documented in Acts also. For example, in Acts 18:27, 28 we read this account -

"And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."

The reason why he could do this, and the reason that he followed through with it, is that Jesus Christ is the center of focus and the basis for all of Scripture. Everything points to Him - His coming, His work, and His lordship. By failing to note this one great truth, people miss the mark of what God is doing in the course of redemptive history.

And so, for the closing of this chapter, we are directed to two separate quotes from Isaiah - 8:14, and 28:16. These have been combined by Paul to make his point. Verse 8:14 is speaking of the One mentioned in 8:13 - "The Lord of Hosts" or "Jehovah Sabaoth." Refer to the comments on Romans 8:29 to understand this term. What Paul is doing is showing that "Jehovah" of the Old Testament is, in fact, Jesus Christ. He is the foundation stone of Zion.

The foundation stone is the most important stone in the building because upon it everything else is supported and aligned. The Lord, through Isaiah, is saying that Jesus is the foundation of the faith and He is the establishment of God's work. Jesus, the foundation stone, will be "a stone of stumbling." One stumbles over what they don't see. The nation of Israel failed to open their eyes and evaluate God's word impartially. Because of this, they stumbled right over the very thing God was trying to show them. Jesus demonstrated this to them in John 5:39, 40 -

"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

Instead of believing, Jesus became a "rock of offense." This means that what should have been to them life, faith, and practice instead became a source of scorn and derision. They were offended at His words and claims because they

couldn't open their eyes to who He is. But for those who do believe, they will "not be put to shame." And so there is a contrast. Failure to accept Jesus (meaning disbelief) causes one to trip and be offended; they will be put to shame. Understanding who He is and accepting Him (meaning the exercising of faith) will lead to God's favor.

And this explains what Paul stated in the preceding verse (9:32) which said, "... they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law."

As is consistent throughout the Bible, faith is what reconciles man to God. But misdirected faith is wasted faith. The Jews Paul speaks of had faith in themselves and in their deeds of the law, not in God's provision.

Life application: The book of Romans is a step by step instruction concerning God's working in redemptive history. Each step logically builds upon the preceding one in order to show us the marvelous plan He has laid out for the people of the world. When you see that God rejected Israel, it's important to understand why. With this knowledge, we can be assured that it wasn't done arbitrarily. Further, when God restores them, we can see that it is solely an act of grace. Through this select group of people, and how God has dealt with them, we can better understand how He deals with us. He is full of grace, completely fair, and will never cast out those who properly exercise their faith in what He has done.