

MAN'S RIGHTEOUSNESS V. CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2012)

Scripture Reading: Is. 8:11-22; Rom. 9:30-33

Introduction

R. C. Sproul in his commentary on Romans briefly shares his experience years ago ministering in the city of Cincinnati as part of Evangelism Explosion. He and over two hundred people who were part of this program asked thousands of people some basic questions about death and heaven and what basis people had for believing they deserved to enter heaven. He estimated that 90% of people when asked why God should allow them into heaven responded with an answer of works righteousness. "I tried to live a good life." "I went to church." "I gave my money to a good cause." Only 10% gave an answer based on the truth of Scripture that there is no reason why God should let me into heaven except that He promised that if I put my trust in His Son that He would bring me into His family. That is my only hope in life and death – not my own righteousness but His.¹

This is a sad testimony but should it surprise us? What is even worse is that probably many people who have a false hope attend church somewhat regularly.

The false hope of salvation that many in our nation have is not identical to what we find in Romans but there are certainly parallels.

So many of the Jewish people during the days of Paul tried to establish their own righteousness rather than submitting to the righteousness of God. So many people in our own day probably have no concept of actual righteousness but think of God as this kindly old man who will hopefully see their good intentions and focus more on the good things they have done than on the bad. God exists after all to make us happy, right?

What Paul says in Romans about so many in Israel seeking to establish their own righteousness is still very relevant nearly 2000 years later.

If you are trusting in anyway in yourself, in what you have done, some experience you have had, you will fail. You will die in your sins and without any hope for eternity.

Make sure your hope and your righteousness are found in Jesus Christ.

¹ R. C. Sproul, *The Righteous Shall Live by Faith*, 345.

1. A GREAT CONTRAST, 9:30-33.

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

Romans 9:30 – 10:21 should be considered as one section. Because of the length of this section we will look at these verses over several weeks.

The main part of Romans 9-11 is how we are to understand the great privileges given to Israel in light of the general refusal of most of Israel to believe the gospel message and trust in the Messiah. It is in this context that Paul presents clearly the argument that the failure of men and women is not a sign that God’s promises have failed. God’s faithfulness is not challenged by men’s failure. God is free and sovereign first in choosing Israel and to choose only some from Israel to be part of his true children.

Starting with Romans 9:30, Paul also presents what we might call the side of human responsibility. Why is Israel in an accursed situation? Because she did not recognize in the gospel message and in Jesus the culmination of God’s work of salvation. Further Paul shows in these verses that Israel’s situation is inexcusable. It is not simply that most Jewish people do not believe the NT but that they also don’t believe and understand properly the OT.²

Now imagine watching the 100-m dash at the Olympics and finding out that the winner of the race was a man who spent the entire year preparing for this race by watching TV and eating junk food. It would not be conceivable that someone could live this way and win such a race.

Starting with verse 30, Paul presents what might be even more inconceivable. How is it ever possible to think that Gentiles, those of the nations, who did not pursue righteousness have attained to righteousness while Israel pursuing the law of righteousness has not attained to the law of righteousness? Verses 30 and 31 present this incredible contrast.

Now it is very important to understand that Paul doesn’t use the word righteousness to mean exactly the same thing in every place.

If we turn back to Romans 6:18 Paul states,

² Moo, 618.

Rom. 6:18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

The purpose of Romans 6 is to show that grace does not lead to sin or mean that we can live however we want and just claim God's grace. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ and you have been set free from sin, you are now to be a slave of righteousness. If you have truly experienced the grace of God there should be clear evidence that you now pursue holiness and truth.

Rom. 6:22 But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.

What Paul is describing here in Romans 6 is what we call sanctification, where a believer by God's grace seeks to put to death the deeds of the flesh and grow in love and obedience of Jesus Christ. And the reason you do this is not earn God's love but because you have already been shown God's love in Jesus Christ. This is the response of love not the pursuit of earning God's love or favor.

But Paul in Romans 9:30 is not speaking of sanctification but rather of justification. The righteousness of verse 30 is what can be called forensic righteousness – a right standing before God your Creator and Judge.³

What we are talking about here in verse is God's work of justifying a believer, that is imputing righteousness to the believer apart from works, apart from anything that you do to earn or deserve such.

Paul in verse 30 says that those from the nations did not pursue righteousness and yet have attained to righteousness. Paul is not saying here that none of the Gentiles or those from the nations had no interest in living properly, living moral lives. There were Gentiles who were interested in living what might be called moral lives, but this is not the righteousness that Paul is speaking of in verse 30. Paul is saying that although the Gentiles in no way were seeking forensic or imputed righteousness, they attained to it. How did this ever come about? They attained this righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. They came to believe the message of the gospel and in this way they attained to righteousness.

Paul earlier in Romans 9 declared

16 So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

³ Moo, 621.

Listen also to the words of Paul to believers in the city of Thessalonica from 2 Thess. 2:13-14.

2Th. 2:13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, **14** to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote the book of Romans from the city of Corinth in about the year A.D. 57 after over 25 years of gospel ministry. Paul was privileged to see some of his own countrymen come to saving faith in Jesus Christ. The mission of the church after Jesus' ascension was based in Jerusalem. But in Paul's ministry beginning with his commission by the church in Antioch, it was mainly Gentiles who came to believe the gospel message. It was Gentiles who previously had no understanding of the true God and the nature of faith who came to believe in Jesus Christ after hearing the gospel message proclaimed.

On the other hand as Paul states in verse 31, Israel pursued the law of righteousness and did not attain to the law of righteousness.

God's Law is so perfect that if a man could truly keep everything in the law, you would attain righteousness. The problem is not God's Law which He gave to Israel. The problem is because of sin, there is no possible way to attain righteousness by your own efforts. The problem of righteousness that comes through your own works is the holiness of God.

As I have mentioned before, there is considerable debate today about the nature of Jewish belief and practice at the time of Jesus and Paul. What did most Jewish people believe about salvation and law? The New Perspective on Paul movement argues that most people misunderstand the nature of the Jewish people and also misread the NT. We are told that most Jewish people actually believed in some sort of salvation by God's grace. The problem is that the Jewish people were not willing to embrace Gentiles unless they became Jews through circumcision and the like.

But if we carefully read other parts of the NT including the gospels we find presented what Paul is teaching here, that too many of the Jewish people believed they could obtain righteousness through their own works.

Listen to several passages.

Matt. 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice

and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

Here Jesus is speaking of the religious leaders of Israel not just the common person. But it is significant that these religious leaders who must have been influential focused as Jesus says here on making sure that they paid tithes from their tiny plants – mint, anise, and cummin. If the religious leaders emphasized these things, do you not think that this had an effect on many Jewish people?

Remember Jesus had to warn his own disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees.

Another classic passage is description of the Pharisee and the tax collector who went up to the temple to pray.

Luke 18:10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** 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. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

When it comes to the nature of Jewish belief and practice, should we not first consider the Words of Jesus before we consider the writings of the supposed scholars? There are, of course, no bar charts in the NT which shows the different things that the Jewish people believed and practiced, but I think we have enough recorded in the gospels and other parts of the NT to conclude as does Paul that Israel seeking to attain to the righteousness of the law did not attain. The reason is clearly given in verse 32.

They did not seek righteousness by faith but by works, the works of the law.

Paul’s reference here to faith would not be some general or bland faith but faith in Jesus Christ. This is confirmed by the end of verse 32 where Paul says that they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

At this point, think back to the picture presented in the gospels of the scene where Pilate offers to release Jesus. In Matthew 27:20 for example we read,

Matt. 27:20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.

Listen also to a typical passage from Acts about how Paul preached Christ in a Jewish synagogue, in this case in the city of Thessalonica.

Acts 17:2 Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, **3** explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” **4** And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.

So tragically as Paul opens Romans 9 declaring, so many of the Jewish people who knew about Jesus Christ, who even after hearing how Jesus is the promised Messiah and that the OT itself shows that Jesus had to suffer and rise from the dead, rejected the message of the gospel, choosing instead to base their salvation and hope on their own efforts in keeping God’s Law.

Again Paul turns to the OT and again to the book of Isaiah in ending Romans 9.

When I taught Bible at CLA, it was not uncommon when grading memory verse exams to see students blending together incorrectly parts of two different passages.

But here at the end of Romans 9 we have a correct example of blending two different passages. In verse 33, Paul takes the first part of Isaiah 28:16 then brings in part of Isaiah 8:14, and then finishes this citation by taking another portion from Isaiah 28:16.

What unites the two passages is the word stone. The language of a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense comes from Isaiah 8:14. Isaiah 8:13 is a call that Israel fear the LORD of hosts. The stone of stumbling and rock of offense of verse 14 is God himself, the LORD of hosts, which Paul properly applies to Jesus Christ.

Interestingly Peter also brings together these two passages in 1 Peter 2 speaking of Jesus Christ. Peter also exactly in line with what we read here in Romans declares that those who stumbled over Jesus Christ were disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Both Peter and Paul well recognized the Sovereignty of God and yet this did not keep them in the slightest from preaching about Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 8 and 28 not only to show that the failure of so many of his brethren repeats the pattern of judgment found in the OT but also to again emphasize that Christ is clearly found in the OT. The failure of Israel is not just the rejection of the NT but the failure to understand and believe what the God through His prophets and others spoke to them.

Paul also quotes from Isaiah to exalt the glorious message found in Isaiah 28:16. Whoever believes will not act hastily or as we find translated here at the end of verse 33, whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.

Isn't this such a beautiful promise? One thing that we can certainly say is this, there is no one who can trust too much in God. Everything else that we trust in has limits. Your bank will only insure your money up to a certain amount. Your insurance company or your bank might go bankrupt and you could lose all you have saved or invested. Who knows what might happen to all our retirement accounts moving forward.

Technology can fail. Your computer unless you replace it before it happens will likely crash or it could get infected with a virus. The good doctor that you see certainly doesn't know everything nor can he or she keep you from dying.

But the promise at the end of our text is a call for complete trust in God, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You will not be put to shame if you are fully resting in Him.

The great promise here speaks to those Jews who did believe in Jesus Christ and in some cases suffered much as a result.⁴ The book of Hebrews is written to encourage these Christians to stand fast for truth even in the face of shame that would come from family or friends.

Today there are those who come to faith in Jesus Christ from Islam. And so often they will experience incredible pressure from family and the threat of death if they will not turn back to Islam.

Think of many of the martyrs of the faith following the Reformation who suffered greatly by placing their faith fully in Jesus Christ rather than in trusting in the papacy.

The end of Romans 9 has great application for Christians in every age.

The greatest testing that every person will experience will be the Day of Judgment. Yes, there are times of testing also that come in this life. I believe this promise speaks to both, but especially it speaks of the Day of Judgment, when every person will stand before God to give account.

Those who have confessed in life that their only hope for salvation has been in the Lord Jesus Christ will never be put to shame.

⁴ Dunn, 594.

But if your trust is truly not in the Lord Jesus Christ but you are looking to your own goodness somehow or you think that God is not going to call you to account, you will face shame and eternal judgment. Some just laugh entirely at the message of the gospel. They are trusting not in their works but in their supposed wisdom and intellect. They have been enlightened by going to college and they now know better than the Apostle Paul they think. What rubbish is your supposed wisdom and knowledge. What shame you will face after you breath your final breath in this life.

Speaking to those in this congregation. I in no way want to encourage doubt but do you truly understand the only hope of standing righteous before God? Do you confess this day and recognize your sin and total unworthiness. Do you take seriously the call that those who believe are now called to pursue holiness?

Make sure your hope and your righteousness are found in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Hymn: 449

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen. weary and discouraged in your souls.