

- c. Chapter ten continues Paul's interaction with Israel's unbelief and its significance with respect to God's purposes in salvation history. As he did at the outset of the larger context, Paul reiterated to the Romans his sincere burden for his Jewish kinsmen and his earnest longing that they would find salvation in Christ: "*Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation*" (10:1, ref. 9:1-3).

Paul recognized that Israel's unbelief was in accordance with God's sovereign determination and purpose, but he also was painfully aware that it was the result of willful, stubborn opposition to Christ and His gospel. His kinsmen effectively stood as enemies of God and His promise, not because they opposed the principle of righteousness before God, but because they pursued it by works rather than by faith in Christ (9:31-32). In the present context Paul went on to further develop the contrasting principles of *faith* and *works* by correlating them with two other pairs of contrasting ideas: *zeal* and *knowledge*, and, secondly, *God's righteousness* and *self-righteousness*.

"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." (10:2-3)

The first thing to note is that the problem that plagued the Jewish people was not one of spiritual complacency. Far from being unconcerned about God and their relationship with Him, Paul declared that his countrymen were characterized by religious fervency: as a people, they had a genuine "*zeal for God*." Even a cursory reading of the gospel accounts makes this abundantly clear. At the same time, he insisted that their passion for God had a crucial deficiency: it was not "*in accordance with knowledge*." This statement, taken in context, indicates two ways that Israel's zeal contrasted her knowledge: first, it existed in the **absence** of knowledge; and second it was **contrary** to knowledge.

The relationship between Israel's zeal and knowledge becomes more evident when it is seen to be grounded in "*God's righteousness*." Specifically, Paul observed that the Jews' zeal for God operated in the absence of the knowledge of God's righteousness; *their zeal was apart from knowledge* (ref. 10:3a). But he further noted that this lack of knowledge resulted in them not subjecting themselves to God's righteousness; *their zeal was contrary to knowledge*.

Stated simply, Israel's zeal for God was faulty and even detrimental because it was not properly related to the knowledge of God's righteousness. This being the case, it is important to understand what Paul meant by the phrase, "*the righteousness of God*."

- 1) In some contemporary circles this phrase is understood to refer to **God's own integrity** by which He is faithful to keep His word. More narrowly, it is said to refer to the fact that He is a "covenant keeping God" who always fulfills His promises to men. But the Jews understood and believed that God is a righteous, faithful God; they *knew* this aspect of God's righteousness. More importantly, Paul's concern in this context was not with God's righteous character as such, but with God's righteousness as it implicates the righteousness of human beings.

- 2) A second possibility is that Paul was using this phrase with respect to the *Law of Moses*. In other words, the “righteousness of God” refers to the righteous standard God revealed to Israel in the Law and to which He required them to conform. If this was Paul’s meaning, then he was saying that Israel had a zeal for God without really understanding what He demanded of them. In other words, the Jews were zealous in their religious practice, but ultimately disobedient to God’s Law.

This appears to be a justifiable interpretation, for Jesus’ ongoing confrontation with His Jewish brethren revealed that hypocrisy and “lawlessness” characterized the piety of many of them (cf. Matthew 9:9-13, 12:1-14, 15:1-9; 23:13-28; also John 5:1-47; etc.). And yet, this conclusion lacks support in this context. For Paul was not here contrasting Israel’s religious zeal with the objective demands of the Law; quite the opposite, the zeal he was speaking of was directed precisely toward performing the works of the Law (ref. 9:31-32, 10:3-5). It is unquestionably true that many Israelites were hypocritical and disobedient, but Paul was taking a larger view of things. That is to say, he was not concerned here with the false piety of individuals, but was speaking with regard to the overall disposition of the nation of Israel. As a covenant people, the Jews were avowed disciples of Moses who were fervently committed to the Law.

- 3) In the previous verse Paul declared that the Jews were characterized by a zeal for God (10:2). In context he meant that they were zealous concerning the *law* of God as given to Moses (ref. 9:30-32, 10:5). At the same time, he was now insisting that they were ignorant of God’s righteousness (10:3a). But how can this be?

How can those who know God’s law, and are zealous for it, be ignorant of God’s righteousness? For isn’t God’s own righteousness revealed in His law?

The answer to this dilemma is found in the realization that, by the phrase, *God’s righteousness* (alternatively, *the righteousness of God*), Paul was referring to divine righteousness, not as God’s directive to men, but as it becomes the property of men through faith.

- The “righteousness of God” refers here, not to an attribute of God (i.e. His integrity or covenant faithfulness), or to His righteous demands as set forth in the Law, but to His righteousness as it operates on behalf of men and which they receive through faith.

“The righteousness of God,” in this sense...embraces on one side God’s activity of ‘declaring right’ [through His justifying work in Jesus Christ] and on the other the status of ‘being right’ with God that people receive when they respond in faith to that activity.” (Douglas Moo)

- This meaning explains why Paul set in antithesis the righteousness of God and *self-righteousness*: being ignorant of God’s righteousness, the Jewish people have sought to establish their own (10:3b).

- Paul's contrast may be expressed in this way: The Jews were zealous with respect to their righteousness **before** God, while yet they had no knowledge of the righteousness **of** God. Their ignorance of the gospel principle of divine righteousness received by faith manifested itself in the pursuit of self-righteousness. They desired and sought after a righteousness acceptable to God, but they insisted on securing and presenting to Him their own.

Yet, as will be seen, Israel's ignorance did not result from a lack of disclosure on God's part. The nation's ignorance was self-imposed; the Jews failed to grasp the righteousness of God – a principle revealed throughout their Scripture – because they were committed to establishing their own through conformity to the Law. They pursued a “law of righteousness” by *works* (9:31-32). And so, in context the focal point of Paul's contrast is the opposing principles of *God's righteousness* and *self-righteousness*. Knowledge and faith are associated with the former, while zeal and works are associated with the latter:

- True knowledge of God's righteousness is made evident solely by personal faith in Jesus Christ. That is to say, those who know that their righteousness before God is entirely a matter of receiving *His* righteousness through union with Christ, respond accordingly by putting their trust, confidence, and hope in Him. The knowledge of which Paul spoke expresses itself in *faith*.
- On the other hand, ignorance of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ is expressive of – and expresses itself in – the universal human characteristic of self-righteousness. Whether men are given the light of the gospel or not, left to themselves they will always seek to establish their own righteousness before God through personal works, however they may conceive Him. This is what Paul meant by his declaration that the Jews “*did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.*” They refused to receive God's righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, and in fact “stumbled” over it, because they were set on establishing their own through the Law.

“The Jews failed to ‘submit’ to God's righteousness not only because they did not recognize God's righteousness when it arrived [in the person and work of Christ] but also because they were too narrowly focused on seeking a righteousness in connection with their obedience to the law.” (Moo)

A clear and crucial implication of these observations is that each and every human being is faced with only two possible alternatives as he conceives and orders his approach to God and seeks to live in a relationship with Him: the one alternative is God's righteousness, and the other is self-righteousness. Per Paul, the first is obtained solely through faith in Jesus Christ. This faith has its ground in one's knowledge of God's righteousness as revealed and bestowed in Christ. Conversely, the second alternative is pursued through personal works (of whatever sort). This being the case, each necessarily excludes the other, *so that every person orders his life around one or the other.*

- d. These truths are reinforced and summarized by Paul's inferential commentary: "*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes*" (10:4). Not surprisingly, this statement has proven to be a matter of controversy among Christians. This is especially so because of its contribution to the law/grace debate. At least four aspects of this statement need to be considered before Paul's meaning can be rightly discerned.

The first thing to be determined is the sense in which Paul was using the noun, *law*. Four options are commonly cited: law as a *general principle* of righteousness; the *Mosaic Law*; the *Old Testament* as a whole; and law as a synonym for *legalism*. Without addressing all of the various arguments, the context seems to best support the conclusion that Paul meant the Law of Moses. In particular, the next verse (10:5) serves to interpret Paul's statement in verse 4, and there he was clearly referring to the Mosaic Law.

The second issue pertains to Paul's insistence that Christ is the "*end of the law.*" The Greek noun rendered *end* signifies a point of termination, result or realized goal. As such it can carry the alternative connotations of *cessation* or *fullness*, depending on context. And so, some have Paul saying that Jesus brought an *end* to the Law and its authority: the believer has no direct relation to the Law of Moses. Others maintain that Jesus *fulfilled* the Law in the sense that He clarified and reaffirmed it. Usually this continuing operation of the Law is viewed in terms of its role in the believer's sanctification (Calvin's so-called "third use" of the Law) and not as the basis for personal righteousness.

But this question cannot be resolved without thirdly considering the prepositional phrase, "*for righteousness.*" Grammatically, this phrase can either modify the noun *law* or apply to the whole statement as an adverbial modifier. The first option is implied in the reading of many English versions: Christ is the end of the law *as it specifically pertains to righteousness*. Those who hold to a continuing role for the Mosaic Law tend to adopt this reading. They argue that Christ has revealed that the Law cannot bring righteousness, but it does still serve a vital role in the life of the Christian. The second option leads to a translation of this sort: Christ is the end of the law, *resulting in righteousness*. Either way, this righteousness must be viewed in context as synonymous with God's righteousness.

Finally, Paul ascribed the righteousness associated with the "end of the law" to "*everyone who believes.*" Whatever Paul meant by his statement, the righteousness it speaks of (which is the "righteousness of God") becomes the property of all – Jew or Gentile – who place their faith ("believe") in Jesus Christ (ref. 9:30-32, 10:6, 8-13).

In assembling this data, and looking ahead to the next context, it is clear first of all that Paul was contrasting two kinds of righteousness: God's righteousness received through *faith* in Christ, and self-righteousness resulting from conformity to *law*. In this context addressing *Jewish* unbelief, law refers to the Mosaic Law. As well, a core theme in Paul's gospel was that Christ's coming inaugurated a new age in which the Law, being a *pedagogue* that served the promise of righteousness, has fulfilled its purpose. *The Law has yielded itself to faith* (Galatians 3:15-4:11). Accordingly, Paul was here contrasting *Christ* and *law* as the two bases for human righteousness in the scheme of salvation history. As both Fulfiller and Inaugurator, Christ is preeminently the end of the Law.