

They Do Not Submit To God's Righteousness

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Romans

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Bible Text: Romans 9:30-10:21
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We turn in the word of God again to the book of Romans, Romans chapter 9, Romans 9 verse 30, found in page 1,139 of the church Bibles, page 1139. We're reading from verse 30 in chapter 9 to the end of chapter 10. This is God's word.

30 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. 5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. 6 But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on

him. 13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."
14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. 18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." 19 But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." 20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me." 21 But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

Amen. We're looking this morning at the passage from Romans which was read a few moments ago from chapter 9 verse 30 to chapter 10 verse 21 at the end of the chapter. We'll be looking at more or less the whole chapter, but I've chosen as a title words in verse 3 of chapter 10, "They do not submit to God's righteousness." This what this chapter is about, people of whom these words are true. And as I look at all of you here this morning, I wonder if at the end of your life on earth any of you will end up in hell. I hope not. I pray not. But it's possible. It's possible that in many, many churches there will be people who attend to the church perhaps all their lives, and yet at the end of life they go to hell and not to heaven. And if that should happen, dear friend, it will be your own fault. You will not be able to blame God.

That's Paul's argument here about Israel. The New Testament church is faced with a surprising fact that the Jews, with a few exceptions, have rejected their Messiah. They don't want their Messiah. They're not believing in him. Why? And Paul has just pointed to the truth, I think, in chapter 9, verse 11, with the phrase, God's purpose of election. God's purpose of election. God has made a sovereign choice of some people and not others to receive his mercy. He's called some people to submit to him and to worship him. Other people were not called by God to do that but that doesn't mean that those people had no responsibility. It doesn't mean that it was God's fault or in that sense, in God's choice. We cannot blame God for the condemnation of those who reject him and do not believe in Christ.

So Paul goes on to show in this chapter that it is Israel's own fault if they have not obtained salvation. They have not been chosen for hell, they have volunteered for hell. And that's just as true today. Now in this chapter, we're not thinking of those who have never heard the gospel. That's a different case. If they have not believed, they too will go to hell but we'd be using a different argument there. Paul is thinking here of men and women who have read the Bible, who know the Bible, who have gone to places of worship all their lives, and millions of them are unconverted, and that's still true today,

and they will be lost and that is because responsibility lies squarely at their door. And if you're not a Christian today, a true Christian, the responsibility is yours. And if you never become a Christian and die not a Christian, the responsibility is yours. It's not God's.

Now we can't discuss everything in this long chapter in a fairly short message. This morning I want to make three points that will help you to get the overall look of it. We think, first, of tragic misconception; secondly, of simple provision; and thirdly, of inexhaustible rejection. First then, from chapter 9 verse 30 to chapter 10 verse 4, our subject is a tragic misconception. Paul begins with the puzzling paradox of the world of his day. God's ancient people are outside his kingdom, and his kingdom is being filled with all sorts of new strangers who are entering it. Now that does look strange, doesn't it? He has been the God of these people for two thousand years and they're not entering his kingdom, and there are other people who only heard about him last week and they're in his kingdom. Verses 30 and 31, the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith. But Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law. Amazing, isn't it? Surprising. Note the problem, and it's a problem that's missed, I'm sorry to say, by some evangelicals today. The problem is not that Israel was disinterested. Israel were interested. They were interested in God. But the problem Paul puts in verse 31, they pursued a law that would—sorry, this is their interest—they pursued a law that would lead to righteousness. They pursued it for verse 2 of chapter 10, "I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God." Never was a people more devoted to obtaining a right standing before God. They made enormous efforts for centuries. Why then did they fail? They went about it in a wrong way. Verse 32, because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on words. That was the problem. They were doing it the wrong way. Verse 2, "a zeal for God but not according knowledge." Their goal was good. Their approach was wrong, wrong. Their misconception was tragic. Verse 3, "being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, did not submit to God's righteousness." They weren't interested in the righteousness that God would give them, that God would make theirs and apply to them. They were interested in their own righteousness, in getting their own righteousness, and making their own righteousness.

You see what mistake they're making. They're trying to work up their own righteousness. They're trying to earn God's salvation by their obedience. And let's not be harsh with some of them. Some of them were earnest and careful and gifted but they were in the wrong way. They were doing the wrong thing and their failure was gigantic. If you think of somebody preparing a wonderful garment for himself, the best they could do for God, they said, "God wants me clad in purity and white," the best they could do was to find a few dirty tattered pieces of cloth and start trying to stitch them together to make a garment. That was their best. What God required was a shining, perfect robe. They were never going to make it. Never. They couldn't see, they wouldn't see that this robe was to be obtained from Christ, or as Paul puts it in verse 32, "They have stumbled over the stumbling stone." They wouldn't accept crucified Jesus as Savior. Their confidence was in themselves and in their ability, rather than in the power of God. When they heard, "You need to be saved with God," they said, "Well, I'll make myself saved." They didn't

say, "God, I can't. Will you save me?" They preferred a DIY approach. Some of them were serious and painstaking and eager, and they were utterly misguided.

And my dear friends, that was not just a misconception of long ago, it's reflected in the thinking of many religious people today, religious people who, in a way, are sincere. They want to be right with God, and they want to go to heaven, but they're trying to achieve it by their own efforts, by attending church, by doing good, by giving to needy causes, by becoming better people. And some often, in ways, in ways, some of these people are admirable. They're even heroic in what they do. Some people who are not Christians are far better, in a sense, in their daily behavior than some of us who are Christians. But it can never succeed, for it ignores the vital factor. Verse 4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." If you're getting to heaven, God isn't going to say, "Did you obey command one? Did you obey the second command? Did you obey the third command? Did you obey the fourth command?" He says, "Where is Christ for you? Did you find Christ? Did you trust Christ? Did you receive his righteousness as your salvation." It ignores the vital factor, verse 4 again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." There's no other way. Now that Jesus Christ has come and died and risen, no one can ever come to God through keeping a law. There are two ways of seeking acceptance with God, and they're mutually exclusive. One comes from man, the other comes from God. One ignores Christ, the other is through Christ. One is related to the law, the other is apart from the law, faith.

So that's our first point, a tragic misconception but then secondly, in verses 5 to 13, we have a simple provision. A simple provision. It's tragic that people make this terrible mistake because God's way of salvation is very, very simple. Verse 13, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Nothing about what you do, about how many commandments you keep, about how much you give to this or that, or what duty you carry out, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Trying, you see, to save ourselves by obedience is exhausting and it's hopeless. You could be a bit deceived by verse 5, "the person who does the commandments shall live by them," but who does the commandments? Who does all the commandments perfectly? Nobody does them. Nobody except Jesus. But what God provides isn't impossible. It's easy for us.

Paul now quotes from Deuteronomy chapter 30 where Moses is encouraging the people to obey God's commandments and he points out in chapter 30, verse 11, that, "This commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off." This is the important commandment, the commandment that isn't too hard, and it's not far off. He uses proverbial expressions for what people claim and he says, "It's impossible. You don't have to do that. Who will descend, who will ascend into heaven," that's how you look at it. "Who will descend into the abyss," and Paul reinterprets Moses' reference to the commandment as a reference to the gospel. Verse 8, "the word of faith that we proclaim."

And Paul points out that God doesn't require hard things from us. He doesn't require many things from us. He doesn't require huge things from us. He doesn't require

impossibilities from us. Verses 6 to 8, "the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" or "Who will descend into the abyss?" What does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.'" We don't need to bring a Savior down from heaven. He has come down. We don't need to bring him up from the grave. He has already risen. All we need to do is to believe. That's what he says in verse 9, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

That's the answer. That's the solution. That's the simple provision. Believe. Confess in Jesus. Dear friends, isn't it simple? We're just asked to believe, to trust God's Son, to yield yourself to him, to call on him to save you. Nothing else. You don't have to be good enough to be saved. You'd never be good enough. All you need to do is ask Jesus to be your Savior. You don't need to be from any particular nation or background. Paul says in verse 12, "there is no distinction between Jew and Greek." It doesn't matter. It doesn't make any difference. He goes on and says that "the same Lord is the Lord of all, bestowing his riches upon all who call on him." It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter whether you're rich or poor. It doesn't matter whether you've just committed a few sins or you've committed a huge number of sins. It doesn't matter whether you have great gifts or no gifts. It doesn't matter. Ask Jesus. He'll save you. The law says, do it. The gospel says, Jesus Christ has done it. Believe him. That's it. That's the simple provision. and it's too simple. It's too simple for many Jews then, and it's too simple for many churchgoers now. Tragic.

And that brings us to the final point, verses 14 to 21, an inexcusable rejection. An inexcusable rejection. There are arguments here that I haven't time to spell out in detail. Israel, on the whole, has not believed in Jesus. Why not? Why hasn't it believed? Why didn't it believe? Where does the problem lie? Paul now analyzes what is essential for someone to be saved and he identifies the root cause, and he gives us four elements in verses 14 and 15, and what you need to notice is that he puts them, I suppose we could say, in the reverse order. He puts them in the reverse order of how they happen or how they come about. He mentions belief, and then hearing, and then preaching, and then sending. "How are they to call on him in whom they have not believed?" That's the first thing he mentions. "And how are they to believe in whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" If you were going to write the story of the gospel, you'd have to put them the other way round.

Where has the breakdown occurred? Well, some of the enemies would say, perhaps no one was sent, perhaps no one proclaimed, perhaps no one told the gospel but he says in verse 15, that isn't the case, "As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.'" That is a symbolic statement I bring home to your hearts. How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news. Paul says there have been plenty of people who told the gospel. There are hosts of prophets and preachers. That's not the problem. Perhaps the problem is that they never heard the gospel. Verse 18, "Have they not heard?" Paul says indeed they have, "For their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." The preaching of the gospel to the Jews has gone

on for centuries and it has been as widespread as the revelation of God in creation. They've heard.

Next objection comes in verse 19, "But I ask, did Israel not understand?" Is that why they weren't able to receive the gospel? Paul argues that that isn't the case. It can't be the case because people who have never heard the gospel in their lives and didn't understand a single word of it, as soon as they heard it, they believed and they were saved, and if people without any background, without any blessing, without any teaching, without any history, he says in verse 20, "those who do not seek me," no interest in God, when they heard the gospel they were able to understand the message, and if they could understand the message, Israel could understand the message because they'd heard it hundreds of times. Every week of their lives, they'd heard it. There's only one explanation, verse 21, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." They didn't want to believe. They preferred not to believe. God, their Father, stretched out his hands to them in loving eternity, with passionate invitation to be saved, not just once or for a moment, but all day long, verse 21, all day long. But Israel, Paul says, was disobedient and contrary. They didn't want to listen. They weren't concerned to believe. They excluded from the kingdom of God by their willful belief and their stubborn wickedness, and the rejection is their own fault. The rejection is their own fault.

How searching is this analysis? How searching it is especially for anyone here who has not trusted Christ. It may be some of our teenagers. You've come to church all your life, but you've never trusted Jesus for yourself as your Savior and your Lord. But it might not just be teenagers. It might be people in their twenties and thirties and forties, and you've joined this church, and you've said all the things that you were expected to say but the truth is, it was never reality in your heart. Or it may have been some of us now in middle age who were born into this church and baptized and at the age of 16 or 17, we were received to communion as members of the church, and perhaps we thought. When I was 17, I was the leader of the Young People's Society in our congregation. I think I told you this. I'd got a Bible for repeating the Shorter Catechism. I had given papers at events. I was well known for my ability and knowledge of the Bible and I wasn't converted until I was twenty. I wasn't a Christian. I wasn't a Christian. I knew the Bible. I knew the whole Catechism. I knew sixty or seventy Psalms off by heart. Knew them, led meetings, something good. Someone here could be like that. Or even coming towards the end of your life, years, you thought of as a Christian, but it may be that someone is not and if you don't believe, it's because in your heart of hearts you don't want to.

My dear friend, God holds out his hands to you this morning as he has been holding them out for years now, and he calls you to his Son. He calls you to his Son, to trust him as your Savior. Paul here reminds us how simple it is for Jesus Christ has done everything you need, all you need to do is call on him to save you. Verse 13, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Will you do that? And if you refuse, for some reason, you stand condemned, and you're volunteering for hell and that's a terrible thought. And it's frightening. It's an appalling thing for those in the church who are Christians to think that maybe that there will be some in this congregation when at the end we find them in hell, we have to say they deserve it. Hell is the proper place for those

who turn their backs on Christ and we pray, we pray, those of us who are elders, all of us, we pray that there may be no one in this building today who will be found at the end as without belief and I would plead with you, if you're not sure, come to him today.

Let us bow in prayer.

Heavenly Father, guide us all by your Holy Spirit to understand freshly that faith in Christ is what matters. Those who have been Christians for many years, genuine Christians and perhaps we've done a lot for you, and we've served you well and we've developed our gifts, we've used up our time and our effort, Lord, it's easy for us to rest on these things and to think on these things. That's wrong. It's Jesus. It's Jesus we trust. It's Jesus we think of, and anything we have done is due to him. Lord, we pray for any young people who are brought up in Christian homes, they just haven't come to the moment when they believe that they have to trust Christ as their Savior, we think of them, Lord, many of us were in their position, we think of them with great love and with great tenderness and we pray, O God, that you, by your Spirit, will bring them to trust Jesus for themselves. If any of us who are deceived, we pray, O God, that you will bring us to reality and truth. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.