

OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS BY FAITH

Romans 9:30-33 by Abri Brancken, 10 Sept 2017

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 9:30-33 (Israel's Unbelief)

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."

THINGS THAT PEOPLE DO TO TRY TO GET TO HEAVEN

As people, we try many things to get to heaven. If you ask the average person on the street what they think they should do to get to heaven, you get answers like this:

- I must try to be a good person
- Do my best to do good to others
- By helping the poor
- By being religious and bringing sacrifices and offerings
- I have to work my way up to heaven by balancing the good and evil
- I daily need to say a creed, pray many times a day, make pilgrimages to holy sites
- Going to confession, lightening candles, etc.
- Through harsh treatment in their bodies, e.g. monks, even Martin Luther gave up a law career and joined the monastery. He slept in cold rooms on hard beds, denied himself pleasures, etc. in order to be more devoted to God. Later God opened Luther's eyes to see that salvation is by faith.

A RIGHT AND WRONG WAY TO COME TO GOD

There are right and wrong ways to come to God. Heathens (non-Jews) grab hold of their false religions and sinful practices while the Jews grab hold of the Law. Let me just add here that the Law is holy and good, but people are sinners and cannot keep the Law. There is nothing wrong with the Law itself. The Jews were trying to be saved by following the Law, by their own good works and they failed to recognize that it is all about the Messiah, Jesus. They were so focused on self-works and pleasing God through their works that they could not see God's ultimate work in working salvation in the life of man.

Salvation and righteousness in the Bible has always been achieved through faith, not by keeping of the Law. Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith. There was no law when Abraham lived. The Mosaic Law (Law of Moses) came only much later. You cannot be justified by Law keeping because you cannot keep it. You cannot perfectly keep the Law because of sin that rules within and if you break even one law or fail to uphold all the laws, you fall short of God's standard of righteousness. That is why God Himself had to come to save us because human effort cannot save the human soul. Salvation is therefore something that is initiated by God, executed by God and sustained by God.

Imagine the disappointment when someone devoted his/her whole life to try and gain access to heaven only to find that the door is shut after having tried everything while on earth to open the door.

God provided a way to enter and that is through Christ. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Bible teaches that no one is righteous, except Christ. The goal of the Law is to lead you to Christ. It's a guardian leading us to Christ, showing us that we cannot be saved through your own effort.

Galatians 3:23-24

Before this faith came, we were held in custody under the Law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the Law became our guardian to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

To accept the gospel, you have to deny yourself and accept Christ's righteousness.

GROWING UP IN A CHRISTIAN HOME OR BEING ONE FOR A LONG TIME

There are many advantages in growing up in a Christian home, truly many, but the danger is that you might grow up to believe that you are a good person, better than others in the world, thinking that your goodness brought about your salvation. If you start trusting in your own righteousness you fail. It is God's undeserved grace to sinners. The foundation of your salvation is always faith in God. Paul grew in this understanding more and more as he progressed.

ISRAEL WAS CHOSEN AS A VESSEL

Israel was entrusted with God's oracles. He chose them as the vessel through which He wanted to bless the world. The majority of them did not believe in Jesus and that He is the Messiah, yet some did. God used the few believing Jews (Acts) to bless the whole world with the message of salvation. So, did God's plan fail because Israel did not believe? No. God is faithful in fulfilling His promises in spite of our weaknesses and He always works with a remnant.

Jesus came and offered God's righteousness, but people did not want it and continued to try to work out their own righteousness. Never forget that Christ is the goal of the Law.

IMPORTANT: The bigger message of the Law is that you need to look beyond the Law for your righteousness. The law is an arrow pointing towards the source of true Righteousness, Christ.

THE STONE OF STUMBLING

Romans 9:33

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."

Paul here quotes from 2 verses in Isaiah.

Isaiah 8:14

And he will become a sanctuary and **a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling** to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 28:16

therefore thus says the Lord God, "Behold, **I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone**, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: 'Whoever believes will not be in haste (in a hurry).'

Paul takes passages out of both these verses in Isaiah and sandwiches it together. Paul is showing us how Isaiah points to Christ and the difficulty that people will have in believing that the Messiah Yeshua (Jesus) is in fact the salvation that we long for and need.

Isaiah 8:14 says that He will become a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling
In Isaiah 28:16 it says that God is the One who lays the stone. Here the stone is distinct from the Lord.

How can this be? How can it be God who lays the stone but at the same time the stone is Himself?

The answer; Messiah is the LORD Himself. Jesus is God.

Paul wants us to understand that the LORD is both our Salvation (foundation) and the Judge (stone of stumbling). If you want to have salvation, you must believe in Him. If you choose not to believe in Him, You will be under His judgement because your own efforts towards righteousness and salvation will fail.

THE CROSS IS FOLLY TO THE PERISHING (1 Cor 1:18-31)

Jesus is described as a stumbling block to Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:18-31)
The cross confronts human wisdom, strength and pride. It testifies that our human effort at righteousness fails terribly.

The Jews were looking for someone who would preserve the Law exactly like they did. They thought that the Messiah would not be killed by Romans, born in Bethlehem, grew up as a carpenter's son.

1 Cor 1:18

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

I say again, people have the tendency to want to find other ways to become righteous before God apart from Christ and therefore Christ becomes the stumbling block to them, the obstacle in their efforts, the reason for their offence.

WHY A STUMBLING BLOCK

Why would God put a stumbling block deliberately in Zion? Because it offends our pride, and our pride needs to be humbled. It is not because you are so good that you inherit salvation. It is because of God's mercy. If God shows you mercy it shows that you are in lack, you are in need of something that you don't have and cannot achieve, that you are not as great as you think you are. You can't boast in your morality, good works, fasting, ceremonies, pilgrimages, etc. for is does not remove sin.

CONCLUSION

Romans 9:33b

'whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'

Human righteousness always falls short of the mark. We need perfect righteousness because that is what God demands. Perfect righteousness only comes from God Himself. We have to renounce as the basis of achieving righteousness our own good works.

When we claim for ourselves any righteousness in ourselves we obscure the righteousness of Christ.