

Romans Part 33 – Chapter 9:29-33, 10:1-10

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Romans 9:29-33

29 And as Isaiah predicted,

*“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”*

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.”*

Paul now reveals the stumbling stone is Christ:

Romans 10

Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

5 For Moses writes of the righteousness that is based on the Law, that the person who performs them will live by them. 6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will go up 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 which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Romans 10 verse by verse dissection:

1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

Paul directly addresses his brothers and sisters: the Christians in Rome to whom he is writing this letter. He calls them siblings because they are all Christians. Paul is speaking of the Israelites. In addition to a Christian and a Roman citizen, Paul is also Jewish. He writes that his heart's desire and his prayer is that the Jewish people may be saved.

Some Jews have come to faith in Christ through the preaching of Paul and the other apostles. Yet the nation as a whole has rejected the Messiah, including the Jewish religious leadership. Sadly, this is still the case today. Further, the Jewish people of Paul's day not only rejected Christ, they tried to silence Paul and others who preached about Him. That doesn't change Paul's desire to see those same people come to Christ.

2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

Now Paul writes of his respect for their zeal or enthusiasm. They love God and seek to honor Him and obey Him. The Jewish people of Paul's day were especially passionate in their worship of God. Paul himself demonstrated that kind of fervor—in a tragic way—before his conversion to Christianity, as a persecutor of the church (Philippians 3:4–7).

Paul is saddened, though, that Israel's zeal is not driven by a true understanding of who God is or what He wants from them. Paul knows from experience the traditions the Jewish religious leaders have and their exhaustive knowledge of the Scriptures. To know all of that, however, and to not know Christ is to know far too little.

3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.

Paul calls them ignorant of the righteousness of God. He may mean that they do not understand that God requires absolutely perfect righteousness in order for anyone to be received by Him on their own merits. They do not understand that no human being is able to achieve that level of righteousness (**Romans 3:23** – *For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*). Or, it may be that Paul means they are ignorant that God offers His righteousness to all who come to Him through faith in Christ. In either case, the Israelites were missing the key to being accepted by God and saved from His wrath.

Their lack of understanding of how God's righteousness worked caused them to try to set up their own standard of what it means to be righteous in God's eyes. Paul describes this as a prideful attempt to decide what God should be satisfied with instead of submitting to His declaration of what it means to be righteous before Him.

4 For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now Paul shows that the law was not meant to stand on its own forever. It always pointed forward to Jesus Christ. As Paul puts it, Christ was always intended to be "the end of the law." He kept it perfectly and fulfilled its righteous requirements once and for all.

Now Christ's righteousness is available to everyone who believes in Him. This is an idea explored in greater detail in the book of Hebrews. There, the writer—possibly Paul himself—explains exactly how God had always intended to bring a new covenant. That covenant was established by Christ, and in Christ, and was meant to end man's dependence on rituals and animal sacrifices (Hebrews 8).

5 For Moses writes of the righteousness that is based on the Law, that the person who performs them will live by them

Now Paul refers to a teaching from Moses, found in Leviticus 18:1–5. This describes a path to righteousness for those who keep the law, who live by the commandments of the law. In the context of the old covenant, this was a means for Israel to honor their relationship with God, and to obtain His earthly blessings (Deuteronomy 30:15–18).

However, this teaching was also meant to demonstrate that when it came to sin, salvation, and God's eternal standards, nobody can possibly maintain this obedience (Galatians 3:24). Not perfectly, and not nearly well enough to earn eternal salvation (Romans 3:10). That's why nobody can be made righteous by keeping the law. Everybody breaks the law. Everybody sins (Romans 3:23).

James put it very simply, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (James 2:10). Those who seek to be justified before God based on their actions are doomed to failure (Romans 3:20). This is why God promised, even before Christ, to establish a new covenant to resolve those flaws (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

Hebrews 11:23-26:

23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

26 considering the reproach (possibly for example "insults like those later suffered by Christ") of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

This verse also refers to Moses bearing the "reproach of Christ." Christ is a title, derived from the Greek *christos*, which is used to translate the Hebrew word *meshiach*, from which we also get the term *messiah*. Moses' identification with the people of Israel, then, is tied to the same faith spoken of in the rest of this passage. Namely, a faith in God's overall, eternal plan, including His Promised One. Moses chose to favor the "reproach of Christ," by identifying with God's chosen people before the earthly birth Jesus Christ, foreshadowing those who would bear the "reproach of Christ," after Jesus' earthly ministry.

Notice as the Hebrews are preparing to move into Canaan to possess it according to God's promise to Abraham, Moses issues a series of warnings, one of which contains a prophecy concerning the Messiah in **Deuteronomy 18:15-22**.

15 "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— 16 just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'

17 And the Lord said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. 18 I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. 19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.'

20 But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.' 21 And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken?'— 22 when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.'

On first read, these references to a prophet seem a little vague; one might even think that Moses is referring to Joshua who is to follow him. However, Jesus points out in Luke 24:27 that Moses prophesied concerning the Messiah when he says, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Earlier in his ministry Jesus had said in **John 5:46**: "*For had you believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*" This is another reference to Deuteronomy 18:15-22.

Here's the question: Did the Jews of Jesus' day regard Deuteronomy 18:15-22 to be a Messianic reference? To answer this question, let's look at **John 1:45**: *Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* From this reference, it is logical to deduct that Jews were looking for a fulfillment of Moses' prophecy and had equated the prophet of Deuteronomy 18 to be the same as the Messiah.

Peter himself refers to this passage in **Acts 3:22-23**: *For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'* Notice Peter's understanding of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 18:19 when he says, "...whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." In Peter's message, he understands that phrase to mean, "shall be destroyed from among the people." Without question, Peter regarded Moses words to be Messianic prophecy.

Stephen further confirms this understanding when he mentions it in passing to his all-Jewish audience in **Acts 7:37**: "*This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall you hear.*"

From these passages of scripture, we may deduct the following:

1. Moses prophesied concerning the coming of the Messiah
2. The people of Jesus' day understood that to be the meaning of Moses' words
3. Jesus was the fulfillment of that Mosaic prophecy.

6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will go up into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down),

Now Paul describes a righteousness that is based on faith. Specifically, those with faith in Christ can achieve, through Christ's life and death on their behalf, a state of permanent righteousness before God. Paul explains this righteousness as if it were speaking in some way. It is offering a warning to Israel, and Paul quotes from Israel's own Scriptures to make the point.

First, Paul quotes the opening words of Deuteronomy 9:4–6: "Do not say in your heart." Though he doesn't quote the rest of the passage, Paul's Jewish readers would likely have understood the context. God was repeatedly telling Israel not to deceive themselves: they were not taking possession of the promised land because of their own righteousness. God called them a stubborn people. Instead, they would succeed in taking the land because it served God's purpose of judging the wicked nations of the region.

Next, Paul begins to quote from Deuteronomy 30:12. He applies what God says to Israel, about receiving and obeying His commands, to their need now to put their faith in Christ. In Deuteronomy 30:11–14, God said the command He had given to Israel was not—is not—too hard for them. They should not ask "who will ascend into heaven" to find out this information. They already have the command in their mouths and hearts (Deuteronomy 30:14).

Now Paul applies this idea to Christ. Israel should not think that faith in Christ is too hard for them. They ought not expect some new person to go to heaven to find the Messiah. Paul writes in his context that this would be a futile attempt to bring Christ down when He has already come down and walked among them (Romans 10:8).

7 or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."

Israel, in Paul's context, should not look for someone to ascend into heaven to bring the Messiah down or, now, to descend into the abyss to bring the Messiah up, as if from the dead. Christ has already come to them in the form of Jesus and walked among them. He descended to the earth, died on the cross, descended into the abyss, and then ascended back to earth before ascending to heaven.

In other words, Christ has already been near to Paul's Jewish readers. They should not continue looking for the Messiah to come down or come up. Instead, they should understand that He has been near them and that the Word of God, and faith, is right in front of them ready to be believed. This "word of faith" is a reference to the gospel: the message of God's intended plan for our salvation.

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,

Paul concludes his quote of Deuteronomy 30:11–14 with this verse. That passage describes God saying to Israel that they should not deceive themselves into believing that God's commands are hard to understand or obey. They shouldn't ask who will go up to heaven or down to the abyss to get the command for them. They already have God's command in their mouths and hearts. It is near them.

9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Romans 10:9–10 are two of the great salvation-related verses in the entire Bible. It's important to understand their context in this chapter.

Paul has just concluded quoting from Deuteronomy 30:11–14. There, God says to Israel that His command for them is not hidden or far away; it is already in their mouths and hearts. Paul has written that this is true, as well, for the "word of faith" in Christ. This "word of faith" is a reference to the gospel: the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This message is near Israel's mouths and hearts.

Now Paul clarifies what this word of faith is; he explicitly describes what the Jewish people of his day should welcome into their mouths and hearts. He writes that instead of seeking to become righteous by following the law, they should confess with their mouths that Jesus is Lord. He is the Messiah. Also, they should believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. If they do those things, they will be saved, Paul writes.

We should not necessarily take these two conditions as Paul's final statement on the plan of salvation or how to become a Christian. He has been clear that faith in Christ, including Christ's place on the cross as our substitute in the payment of our sin, is the key to being declared righteous by God. These two conditions—belief in Christ's resurrection from the dead and a verbal confession of His place as Lord of all—appear to serve as evidence that our faith is in Christ. Anyone who trusts in Christ for his or her salvation is sure to agree that Christ is Lord and that He was raised from the dead. That person will be saved, Paul writes.

Acts 16:29-34: *And the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” 31 And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” 32 And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. 34 Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*