

Romans 9:30-10:4

Introduction

Today we are going to be looking at Romans 9:30-10:4. A word of explanation in order. So far, we have studied through Romans 9:23. We are going to skip Romans 9:24-29 until next week because we think as far as ease of understanding and flow of teaching, it will work better to teach through those verses to set up Romans 10:5-13. Therefore, today we are a bit out of order.

So, let's read our text for today- Romans 9:30-10:4:

“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.”

10:1 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.”

You'll recall that last week the answer to the question, “Has God's word failed since most Israelites do not believe and are lost?” was, No. Because, God has always chosen those he would have mercy on and those he would harden within Israel. Romans 9:6-23 dealt with God's sovereignty and Israel's lost spiritual state.

In Romans 9:30-10:4 Paul is answering the implied question: What did Israel do wrong so that they missed the grace of God? The answer to the question is that they tried to establish their own righteousness rather than trusting in Christ for their righteousness. Paul is dealing with man's responsibility and Israel's lost spiritual state.

Let's me summarize the main ideas in the text:

The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness
Yet the Gentiles attained righteousness...by faith.

The Israelites did pursue righteousness
Yet they did not attain it because they pursued righteousness by works- by obeying, by doing good things.

The Israelites had a zeal for God, but that was not enough.
They are lost because they sought to establish their own righteousness. This makes them unwilling to submit to God's righteousness.

They stumble over Christ by not believing and they will be put to shame at judgment day.

Terms

There are a few terms we need to think through in order to understand this text.

Righteousness

What is the righteousness being spoken about here? There are a number of ways to talk about it, but perhaps the most simple way to put define it in this particular context is "Righteousness is everything that is needed for a right relationship or fully reconciled relationship with God." So when the Jews were pursuing righteousness they were pursuing a right relationship with God.

God's righteousness

In this context it Paul is speaking of the righteousness that comes from Christ. God made an avenue by which guilty sinners who offended the perfectly holy God by their sin could actually be forgiven and loved by God. The Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ, to live a perfect life, die at the hands of sinners and experience the wrath and rejection of God in the place of all who will trust in Him and His work. He rose from the dead, showing that His substitutionary sacrifice worked and that he has defeated sin and death for all who will believe. The Israelites refused to admit their helplessness and sinfulness. They rejected God's way to get right with Him through Christ, and sought to earn it on their own.

Relevance?

But what relevance does this particular text have for you and me today? I don't think any of you are Israelites and very few of you are Jewish, even by heritage.

Yet, I want to persuade you that this text is extremely relevant for all of us today. As I said, I think that it might just be that which you have been missing in the Christian life. You see, we have this tendency to believe that because we are going to church and we intellectually believe that Jesus Christ paid for our sins that we are part of the number of the Gentiles who attained the righteousness of Christ. Despite the fact that we don't experience much love, joy, and peace in our lives.

I gave these two illustrations a few weeks ago when we were working through Romans 7. But I want them to come up in your mental rolodex whenever you think about the idea of earning your salvation by works or establishing your own righteousness:

Consider Chariots of Fire, the well-known movie about two athletes, sprinters, getting ready to compete in the 1924 olympic games. There was Harold Abrams (a secular jew) and Eric Liddel (a Christian who later became a missionary to China). Abrams tells us why he runs in a fascinating line from the movie:

"And now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor; 4 feet wide, with 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence. But will I?"

Abrams runs in order to prove something, to prove that he is here for a reason and that he is worthy of living.

We find the same reasoning in Rocky I when Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) is defending his reason to his wife Adrian for fighting the far superior boxer Apollo Creed and he says:

"I can't beat him. But that don't bother me. The only thing I want to do is to go the distance, that's all. Because if that bell rings and I'm still standing, then I'm gonna know for the first time in my life, see, that I wasn't just another bum from the neighborhood."

Rocky was fighting to prove something. He wanted to prove to himself and to the world that he was not a bum. He wanted to prove that he was worthy.

Don't we all do this to some degree? It may not be as blatant as Abrams or Rocky. But we all do it. That's why we get angry when we are not thanked or appreciated or praised for what we do.

Let me move from preaching to meddling for a moment. Let me ask you **two questions**:
1. Have you ever had trouble forgiving someone who has sinned against you—your spouse, a friend, etc? When you do this you are disobeying God. God says we must forgive. But you know that you believe in Jesus as your savior from the penalty of sin. You know you are OK, right?

Let's probe a bit.

What is the problem with harboring bitterness? Why is it wrong.

It is not just that you are breaking a law. Although it is that...the Scriptures do say that we are not to be bitter, but it is more than that. You see, when you become bitter, you are not believing that your sin against God is far far worse than how that person sinned against you. You are not believing that all of your righteousness...even your very life...is hidden with Christ, so that this life doesn't have to be fair or even pleasant. You are not believing that it is a gift from God suffer like Christ now, because you are guaranteed an eternity of glory. Instead, you are seeking to get the wrong made right...you are seeking, in a sense, to establish your own righteousness. If you are stuck in the bitterness of hurt feelings as I have been, you are in danger of missing out on the righteousness of Christ just like the Israelites.

2. Have you ever lied to cover up a mistake or something that you have done that was just plain sin? If you are like me, your default rationalization for this is "Well, I believe that Christ died for me so that my sins could be forgiven, and although it is wrong to cover it up, I'm OK as long as I don't think about it."

Let me give you a glimpse into my own soul here. Sometimes I'll go to the store for Michelle. She will have given me the grocery list. I look and look for the particular things that she wants and inevitably there is at least one that I cannot find. So, I get "the next best thing" and go home. I tell her that I couldn't find "X" and that "perhaps they were all out of X." She sighs and says, did you look over by "A's"? I can feel my stomach tighten. "Uhm...Yes." The truth is, I have no idea where "A" is or that the store even carried "As". "Did you ask someone who works there?" I am starting to sweat now. "Uhm...I couldn't find anyone." The truth is, I never tried to find anyone because I didn't want to look stupid.

Now, clearly I sinned by lying. But why did I lie? I lied because I don't want to be seen as incompetent or wrong by Michelle (or even by me!). At that moment when I lied, I was not trusting in the righteousness of Christ by faith, but I was seeking to establish my own righteousness. Christ's righteousness and God's love for me was not an all-satisfying treasure at that moment. It didn't matter how God viewed me. I wanted Michelle to view me as "righteous."

The scariest part in all of this is that in thinking like this I am covering everything up with religious language. "I believe Jesus died for me...What a savior!" I honor God with my lips but my heart is far from Him. This is exactly what the Israelites were doing. It is possible to pursue God with all of your might by studying your Bible, going to church, and living a "virtuous life" and be rejected by God.

This echoes what Jesus said to the moral religious people of his day:

“Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you” (**Matthew 21:31**).

What is Jesus saying? He is not saying that notorious sinners and prostitutes all go to heaven. He is saying that they are closer to the kingdom than the moralists...those who establish their own righteousness. Why? Because at least these dirty sinners know that they are not righteous. At least they know that they cannot trust in themselves. Religious moral folk think they are righteous and “functionally” they trust in their own righteousness.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that we are all a bunch of self-righteous Pharisees through and through.

But I am saying that every Christian is only to some degree sanctified into the motivational structure of the gospel. We are constantly slipping back into the old way...the flesh...and trying to be our own Savior and Lord.

I am also saying that all of our difficulties come because at the deepest level, at the core, we don't really believe the gospel.

You can see by phrasing it that way that this is serious business. We are not on the path that leads to the Kingdom, we are not living as Christians, when we are simply sorry for the bad things that we have done. We are living as Christians when we are repenting of the reason that we do all the good things we do¹...we are only submitting to the righteousness of Christ when we are being convicted of and repenting of our own “righteousness” (John 16:8-11)...and actively trusting in the righteousness of Christ.

¹ The concept and phraseology here is again indebted to the class taught by Tim Keller and Ed Clowney, “Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World.”

The Motivational Structure of the Heart

So, what we are talking about here is the motivational structure of the heart. Why do you do what you do? Godliness or true virtue is based on the motivational structure of the heart. Real gospel change is inside out not outside in. If we start from the outside in, we can actually have sinful reasons for doing the right thing. And that makes doing the right thing the wrong thing!

Here are two sets of self-examination questions to help you discern the motivational structure of your heart:

1. Are you operating out of the fear of condemnation?

Or are you operating out of the joy that there is no condemnation for you?

2. Are you operating out of self-righteous security that you won't be judged because you are good?

Or are you operating out of the wonder that there is one who was good and was judged in your place?

In his book, *Reason For God*, Tim Keller puts it this way:

“Sin and evil are self-centredness and pride that lead to oppression against others, but there are two forms of this. One form is being very bad and breaking all the rules, and the other form is being very good and keeping all the rules and becoming self-righteous. There are two ways to be your own Savior and Lord. The first is by saying, “I am going to live my life the way I want.” The second is described by Flannery O’Connor, who wrote about one of her characters, Hazel Motes, that “he knew that the best way to avoid Jesus was to avoid sin.” If you are avoiding sin and living morally so that God will have to bless and save you, then ironically, you may be looking to Jesus as a teacher, model, and helper but you are avoiding him as a Saviour. You are trusting in your own goodness rather than in Jesus for your standing with God. You are trying to save yourself by following Jesus...” (Tim Keller, *Reason For God*, Dutton, 177).

The temptation that we “Christians” have is to think that we are justified or accepted by God by faith *but then* in order to **stay** accepted we must perform. We are justified by faith and we are sanctified by working very very hard to obey God. The Israelites most certainly lived like this. This is a tragic mistake. We are justified by faith and we are also sanctified by faith...continual faith...in our justification. Let me say that again: We are justified (accepted/found righteous by God) by faith, and we are sanctified (grow in holiness and persevere to the end) by continual faith in our justification. To cease focusing and trusting in the righteousness of Christ for your continual acceptance with God is to cease “believing.” G.C. Berkouwer, a 20th century Dutch theologian who has written some wonderful things and some not so wonderful things—helpfully writes about the “orientation” a Christian constantly needs to have.²

² I found the particular passages that I cite in this sermon by Berkouwer cited in the class notes from a class taught Reformed Theological Seminary by Tim Keller and Edmund Clowney entitled “Preaching Christ in a Postmodern World.” I wish I had come up with these when I read his work in seminary. Ce la vi.

—Berkouwer writes: “Genuine sanctification—let it be repeated—stands or falls with this continued **orientation** toward justification and the remission of sins...too often the bond between sanctification and justification was neglected and the impression created that sanctification was the humanly operated successor to the divinely worked justification” (G.C.Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification*, Eerdmans, 1952, p. 79).

So, Berkouwer is saying that real spirituality...sanctification...is always supposed to be “oriented” toward justification. In another spot he even goes so far as to say that sanctification “FEEDS ON” justification. I love that word picture. Justification is the food/nourishment of sanctification. You might think that working harder at doing righteous things leads to righteousness. But according to Berkouwer...and Paul and Jesus...that will actually starve real sanctification and ultimately lead us to missing God entirely, like the Israelites did.

So let me ask you, are you basing your justification on you sanctification or are you basing your sanctification on your justification? It makes all the difference in the world.

Richard Lovelace states this truth powerfully in his book *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*:

“Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives...many...have a theoretical commitment to this doctrine, but in their day-to-day existence they rely on their sanctification for their justification...drawing their assurance with God from their sincerity, their past experience of conversion, their recent religious performance or the relative infrequency of their conscious, willful disobedience. Few know enough to start each day with a thoroughgoing stand upon Luther’s platform: you are accepted, looking outward in faith and claiming the wholly alien righteousness of Christ as the only ground for acceptance, relaxing in that quality of trust which will produce increasing sanctification as faith is active in love and gratitude...much that we have interpreted as a defect of sanctification in church people is really an outgrowth of their loss of bearing with respect to justification. Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons...Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce, defensive assertion of their own righteousness, and defensive criticism of others” (Richard Lovelace, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, IVP, 1979, p. 101).

So, we have seen that the Israelites missed the righteousness of God because they refused to submit to Christ’s righteousness and sought to establish their own. We have also seen how easy it is to fall into that trap. So, how do we avoid the trap, trust in, and submit to the righteousness of Christ by faith?

Conclusion

That which you depend on functionally for your righteousness is your savior. The Jews depended on their obedience to God's law to give them their identity and their right relationship with God... We have our own saviors and lords that we depend on for our value and self-worth... jobs, friendships, parenting, marriage, sports, etc. But these saviors only ask for more when we succeed and they can never ever ever forgive us and love us when we fail. All they can do is curse us and tell us to try harder and sacrifice more. My concern here is that if we are Christians and we do not feel forgiven; if we are Christians and we do not feel loved, then perhaps the Christian God is not our functional savior. Perhaps the real God is not the one we are depending on, trusting in, relying on for our righteousness.

There is only one savior and one Lord who always delights in you when you succeed and will even love you and forgive you when you fail. He is the one who died for you. Look away from yourself, look away from other things and look to Christ for your salvation. Look to Christ for your righteousness. If you do and you keep looking you will find a joy and a peace that you have never known, and it will change you and it will humble you.