

Romans 9:30-10:4

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[0:00] Well, good morning. Please take your copy of God's Word and join me in Romans chapter 9. It's very good to be here with you this morning, opening God's Word together as we continue our verse-by-verse exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans.

Good teachers build cases, laying one truth on top of the next, leading from point to point to aid their hearer's arrival at the truth they intend to present.

Paul, being carried along by the Holy Spirit, is a good teacher. He has been building the case that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in the person and finished work of Jesus Christ alone.

In chapter 1, verse 16 and 17, he states his thesis for the entirety of this letter. There he says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in it, that is the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

[1:23] The rest of this letter is expounding on what is found in those two verses. He goes on to explain that whether or not a person has God's standard in writing, they have it written on their hearts.

Which leaves all mankind guilty on the day of God's judgment, for we have all willingly transgressed the standard. Paul states this most clearly in chapter 3, verse 10 and following as he cites the Old Testament.

None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together, they have become worthless.

No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips.

Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known.

[2:31] There is no fear of God before their eyes. Beloved, this includes us. Having established that all mankind is guilty before God, he then unpacks justification.

Justification is a declaration that one is righteous. That is, never committed a sin and has perfectly kept all that's required of them.

And he unpacks that this is through faith alone. Having been justified by faith, Paul teaches us that we continue by faith, having been set free from the enslaving power of sin.

He then roots comfort for our continued struggle with sin in this life in God's sovereign election, calling, justifying, and glorifying work.

We see this in chapter 8. We find him in chapters 9 through 11 now, working out the implications of God's elective purposes for those who will not be saved.

[3:41] Particularly, his concern is for the Jewish people. Clay very helpfully worked us through the majority of chapter 9 over the past three weeks.

Which begins, this is chapter 9 and verse 1. Paul says, I am speaking the truth in Christ. I am not lying. My conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

This is in response to all he has said about God's elective purpose. Which is a comfort for those who are in Christ. But then he turns quickly with this anguish and sorrow.

Verse 3 tells us why. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh. And he's talking there about the Jewish people who had largely rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ. We see a continuation of this sentiment in today's text.

[4:45] Which is Romans chapter 9, verse 30, through chapter 10, and verse 4. And in verse 1, he says this. This is 1 of chapter 10.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. While Paul loves deeply the doctrine of sovereign election, as he should and as we should, this doctrine does not make him cold to those who will not repent and believe in Christ.

We will see this morning that God's choosing of a people for his praise does not exclude the responsibility of people to respond in faith to the saving work of the gospel.

And this is where he turns his attention now. Much of our consideration in the coming weeks will be concerning the nation of Israel. But let us not merely think this morning that we are speaking of some distant others and that the warnings here aren't also for us.

So, good teachers build cases. Good teachers also anticipate and answer objections. Paul being carried along by the Holy Spirit is a good teacher.

[6:05] And he anticipates another objection at the end of chapter 9. Let's read this text together. Romans 9, verse 30, through 10, verse 4.

We remind you before we do, beloved, that this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. And so, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Paul writes, What shall we say then? That Gentiles who do not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith? But that Israel, who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law?

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 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. Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

[7:14] For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now, in Romans chapter 9, verses 23 through 26, Paul speaks of God making known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles. As indeed he says in Hosea, Those who were not my people I will call my people, and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.

And in the very place it was said to them, You are not my people, there they will be called sons of the living God. God, God, beforehand, in his sovereign election, has called a people for his praise from every tribe, nation, and tongue.

All peoples, when you see this Jew and Gentile, he's talking about the whole world. It is to that declaration that Paul anticipates the objection found in verse 30 through 32 right at the beginning.

[8:37] Please know that both the chapter and verse breaks in a text are not inspired. Sometimes I just disagree with where they put the breaks, so I take the liberty to break it up myself.

So, see again, what shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it. That is a righteousness that is by faith. So, those who didn't have the law and weren't seeking to obey God in any measure at all, they have obtained righteousness.

But that Israel, verse 31, who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law. And in the beginning of verse 32, why?

How is this possible? That Gentiles who did not pursue, and Israel who did pursue, are blessed differently. This would have been a significant objection in the Jewish mind.

To show you just how deeply fixed the idea that God only intended his saving work amongst Israelites, I want to read to you an episode from the life of Christ, which I think you'll do well to turn

to with me, found in Luke chapter 4.

[9:49] So, if you could join me there. Again, how deeply fixed this idea was in the Jewish mind. God only intended his saving work for them. That was the idea that was prevalent in the day.

This is Luke 4, beginning in verse 16. And Jesus came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, his hometown.

And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

[11:00] He's saying, I'm that one. And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

And he said to them, anticipating the next things they'll say, Doubtless you will quote me this proverb, Physician, heal yourself. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.

They asked him to perform miracles. And he said, Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land.

And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.

[12:17] But passing through their midst, he went away. Now, what happens between verse 22, and all who spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth, and verse 28, when they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

Simply this. Jesus pointed out two times that God's mercy passed over Israelites and was extended to Gentiles.

A Sidonite widow named Zarephath and a Syrian leper named Naaman. This is from their own scripture. The Jews of Jesus and Paul's day were so conditioned that God's favor had to do with their lineage and their law-keeping that they couldn't even entertain the idea from their own holy text that God would be gracious outside ethnic boundaries and they considered Jesus a heretic and worthy of death.

That's how deep-set this type of thinking was. Paul answers this objection. You can join me back in Romans. By pointing out the error of Israel, I, as Paul does here, am speaking in generalities. So praise God that many Jewish people have and will place saving faith in Jesus Christ. We're going to explore some of this in chapter 11. But Paul's concern in this text and our concern for today is the broad rejection of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and completed work of Jesus Christ alone.

[14:06] Paul in his day is seeing this broad... And beloved, we live in a place that people should know better. God's word abounds in the place in which we live.

And yet, there is a broad rejection of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So let's look at Paul's argument by framing it with the following three points.

Number one, Israel's ignorance of the purpose of the law. Number two, Israel's ignorance of the point of the scripture. And number three, Israel's ignorance of the person of God.

So number one, Israel's ignorance of the purpose of the law. And we see this in chapter 9 in the rest of verse 32. He asks the question, why?

Why? And he says, because they did not pursue it, that is the law, pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.

[15:11] Notice Paul says that the law, the righteousness contained within, believing that somehow the pursuit of it would be saving. We live in a glorious day that we understand how it is that the law is fulfilled by faith.

They didn't quite understand, saw things as a shadow, as a glimpse of what would come, but it was to be pursued, nonetheless, by faith. Paul has established already that no one has kept God's law perfectly, and that the righteous requirement of the law is its perfect keeping.

So what was to be done with an expectation that could not be met? The Jews of his day seemed to think that they were meeting this expectation, that it was not being met.

Paul asks and answers this question for us in Galatians chapter 3. Listen to what he says there, beginning in verse 21. He's spoken of grace, and then he asks, is the law then contrary to the promises of God?

Certainly not. For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

[16:35] Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith.

The law was, and is, meant to point us to the one who kept the law on our behalf. We're supposed to see our failure in it, to recognize that we have transgressed it.

Every one of us has not kept God's law. And a single transgression of it deserves the curse of death. The sinless life of Jesus Christ is called his active obedience, and it is a vitally important part of the offer of the gospel for our salvation.

He grants to us his perfect law-keeping through faith. Unique in all the world is the grace and mercy of our God who makes a requirement of all who will be saved and then provides for all that he commands.

The gospel declares that we must be perfect to be saved and then grants us perfection through faith in Christ.

[17:56] This is so incredibly important to understand. So important that I will not grow tired of saying that one is justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and completed work of Jesus Christ alone.

But I will tell you, even as I say that, I need to say that. I need to declare that to the church. I will not grow tired of saying this because sometimes I am tempted to grow tired of saying it.

We need spines of steel when it comes to declaring these great truths. The law is meant to show us that we need God's grace that's given to us as a gift through faith and that Christ accomplished all that we need that we might be saved.

We're confessional as a church. We believe that it's important to draw together what the Bible teaches about particular things that we might put it in our minds and live accordingly.

And so we do things like recite catechisms together. Some of you may be familiar with the New City Catechism. It's one that we do with our children quite often. Question and answer 15 says this, Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose?

[19:17] And then very succinctly stated that we may know the holy nature of God and the sinful nature of our hearts and thus our need of a Savior.

The law is meant to have us looking for some way in which the law will be fulfilled. Now we live in a Western culture and Western logic is very linear.

I'm grateful for the New Testament. The Greeks were very linear. This is the heritage that we receive in the way that we logic through things. But Eastern logic is very circular and I don't mean that as a cut to Eastern logic.

The Old Testament being written in Hebrew has a much more circular logic to it. That is, the Old Testament says, not this, not this, not this, not this, not this.

And it's leading us to, well then what? Well then, what? And we're supposed to arrive at this realization that the Messiah is this one, Jesus Christ.

[20:31] And the New Testament unfolds all of that for us. Israel was ignorant ignorant of the purpose of the law.

They thought that by keeping it, by some measure, they could gain God's favor. All kinds of people think this way today.

They want to put their works on a scale. The good versus the bad and they hope that the one outweighs the other. If you ask the average person if they'll go to heaven, they'll say, well, I think so because I think I'm a good person.

And the gospel says, Romans says, no, you're not. You do not deserve heaven. You do not deserve restored relationship with God. But, and that's such an important conjunction, God, because He's gracious and He is merciful, has made a way by grace alone through faith alone in the person and completed work of Jesus Christ alone.

It could be said we are saved by works, but not our own, the works of another, the work of Christ. Secondly, notice Israel's ignorance of the point of the Scripture.

[21:52] Notice this in chapter 9, the very end of verse 32 and into verse 33. There Paul says, they have stumbled over the stumbling stone. 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.

Now, what he's explaining is what he has just said. Right? He's helping us to understand this is according to the Scripture. Right? And we see God's elective purpose in this.

They've stumbled over Christ. Rather than laying Him as the foundation for their hope of the future, they have stumbled over Him. But, I say this, Israel's ignorant of the point of Scripture because the Jewish people had the Bible of their day, the Old Testament, and would have known what God had said to the prophet Isaiah, which is the citation found here in verse 33.

It's a bringing together of a number of texts from Isaiah. Isaiah. All of the Scripture is meant to lead us to Christ. And you will not be able to plead ignorance on the day of judgment.

We can read of another episode in Jesus' life, this time after His resurrection in Luke chapter 24. There we see recorded that very day two disciples were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

[23:23] And they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened while they were talking and discussing together. Jesus Himself drew near and went with Him, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.

And He said to them, What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?

And they stood still looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered Him, Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

And He said to them, What things? And they said to Him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered Him up to be condemned to death and crucified Him.

But we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us.

They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find His body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see.

[24:35] And He said to them, O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?

And before I read the last verse I intend to read from Luke 24, I just want to say between this episode and the transfiguration, there's debate in my mind which I would have rather been at.

Verse 27 says, And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Notice that they are weak of heart. They stood, they are sad, they are not so sure about the resurrection. He calls them foolish and slow of heart to believe and then He takes them to the text and He walks them through the Old Testament showing them that He is in fact the Christ. God will hold you accountable to what can be seen of Him and His saving work through Christ in this precious text. You will be accountable on that day.

[25:52] He has spoken, you and I do well to listen. May Christ for us not be a rock that has stumbled over but the sure foundation of our deliverance.

I am grateful to be part of a Christian tradition that takes the Bible seriously and to help pastor a church that takes the Bible seriously but we must know that a constant nagging temptation for those who reverence God's Word and see good in His commands is to drift off into legalism.

To begin thinking once again that we could ever have that same purpose. We can lose sight that people are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Jesus condemns the Pharisees who were the legalists of His day for this very thing. Listen to the indictment of John chapter 5 verse 39 and 40.

There He says, You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness about Me that you refuse to come to Me that you may have life.

[27:10] You seek to follow the rules from the text and yet those rules are supposed to show you your need of Me that you would come and believe in the Gospel.

Thirdly, notice Israel's ignorance of the person of God. So we jump down into chapter 10 now verses 2 through 4.

I bear them witness. He desires that they would be saved because I bear witness they have a zeal for God. They're energetic toward God but not according to knowledge.

The Jewish people had made a God of their own invention and they weren't coming to Him on His terms. For being ignorant of the righteousness of God or of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own they did not submit to God's righteousness for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

They had failed to see that God is the standard that His righteousness has been explained to us in the law and therefore their zeal was not according to knowledge.

[28:40] Notice Isaiah chapter 6 I'm thankful Ernie referenced this in his prayer of praise this morning. Isaiah sees a vision of holy God.

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim each had six wings which two He covered His face and with two He covered His feet and with two He flew.

And one called to another and said holy holy holy holy that three time repetition means perfectly righteous righteous righteous is the Lord of hosts the whole earth is full of His glory and the foundations of the threshold shook at the voice of Him who called and the house was filled with smoke.

And here is Isaiah's response. This is zeal for God according to knowledge. He says woe is me for I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips for my eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts.

What is wrought in Him by this vision of God's holiness is humility. Worship according to knowledge. He sees His need of cleanliness to be made clean.

[30:14] And if you read on in Isaiah He is and He is sent He is commissioned by God to be a messenger of the good news of Christ. Isaiah more than any other prophet speaks of the coming Messiah.

So note that response right? A zeal for God begins with this humility. Another place that we can witness this is Luke chapter 18 this is verse 9 and following Jesus tells a parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself prayed thus. Look how contradictory this is to the response of Isaiah.

God I thank you that I am not like other men extortioners unjust adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week I give tithes of all that I get.

But the tax collector standing far off will not even lift up his eyes to heaven but beat his breast saying God be merciful to me a sinner.

[31:29] And then Jesus says I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

In this parable the tax selector comes by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Pharisee comes on his own merit and is not justified.

Again speaking of these Pharisees and I'm driving at this because I think there's such a danger of that for us. Matthew chapter 23 verse 27 and 28 Jesus says woe to you scribes and Pharisees hypocrites for you are like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncluenliness so you also outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness so if we are to go to God if we have a zeal for God which I commend it must be according to knowledge we must come to him on his terms we must recognize that we have nothing to offer to our salvation but humility of heart and the faith that he gifts so an application for closing if you have yet to place saving faith in Jesus

Christ maybe this morning you find yourself trusting in your own works it resonated with you when I said people put things on a scale and hope that they have been good enough this text teaches that if you will cease laboring to justify yourself and rather place all of your hope in the personal work of Jesus Christ then you will be saved from the eternal consequence of your sin you will not be put to shame if you trust in Christ if you have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ church this text teaches both the sovereignty of God and salvation and the human responsibility to believe the gospel both things are being taught right here in this text the sovereignty of God and salvation his eternal purpose of election and the human responsibility to believe the gospel both truths are to be believed they are important for us otherwise they would not be taught

Charles Spurgeon once said this is on the back of your bulletin it's the same historic quotation found there last week but Clay didn't reference it and so it's just too good not to read it so I left it in place he said this two truths cannot be contradictory to each other two truths cannot be contradictory to each other if then I find taught in one place that everything is foreordained that is true and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions that is true both things are taught in scripture and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other we sometimes feel that right it feels contradictory to me but that's my that's my folly not the truth proclaimed so both truths are to be believed and finally this text teaches that there is a way to be saved praise god we don't have to stay in our sin there's a way to be saved by grace alone through faith alone in the person and completed work of

[35:23] Jesus Christ alone so we must maintain this truth and we must proclaim it boldly I told you at the outset of our study of Romans that a reason we determined to study this text is to remind us of the hill that we are meant to die upon there seems to be so many lesser truths being challenged and debated as distractions from the gospel of Jesus Christ may we not get confused between the gospel and gospel implications we need to stand shoulder to shoulder arm in arm on the hill of justification by grace alone through faith alone in the person and completed work of Jesus Christ alone let's pray together as