

Romans
Human Responsibility (Part 1)
Romans 9:30 – 10:21
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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas

We find ourselves in the third great section of Paul's letter to the Romans; that section is from chapter 9 through Chapter 11. I've entitled it, "The Gospel Defended: Election, Israel, and God's Promises." This actually is an important part of Paul's letter to the Romans, because as he argues for the permanence of our salvation, for the reality that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God at the end of chapter 8, it invites the question, "So what happened to Israel?" What happened to God's Old Testament people? Has He changed His mind? Has He changed His plans?

Now we've already considered an overview of Paul's argument in these three chapters. He begins with a brief introduction in chapter 9, verses 1 to 5, in which he simply raises the question, "Why has a majority of God's chosen people, Israel, rejected their Messiah and His gospel?" He gives us three answers to that question as he develops these three chapters. The first answer is, "The Reality of Divine Election," beginning in chapter 9, verse 6, running through verse 29. He explains that God did not choose every Israelite to be His spiritual child. We've looked at that together.

The second answer that he gives to this issue has to do with, "The Reality of Human Responsibility." This begins in chapter 9, verse 30, and runs all the way through the end of chapter 10.

The third answer that he'll give is found in Chapter 11 and it is, "The Reality of God's Faithfulness." God is not done with the Jewish people; He will keep the promises that He has made.

Now today, we begin to consider Paul's second answer to this question of, "Why have so few Jewish people, and why do so few today, believe in their Messiah?" And the answer to that is, "The Reality of Human Responsibility." Now it's clear that verse 30 marks the beginning of a

new section in Paul's argument for a couple of reasons. First of all, you'll notice the question at the beginning of verse 30, "What shall we say then?" That's a question that is often used by Paul, including here in Romans, to introduce a new section of thought. In addition, beginning with this verse, there is a definite change in Paul's vocabulary. In fact, the words "faith, believe," and "righteousness" become key words in this section, appearing more than twenty times collectively. But those three words don't appear one time in the first part of chapter 9, chapter 9, verses 1 to 29, and they don't appear a single time in chapter 11. They belong to this section, "faith, believe," and "righteousness."

Now it's clear that personal responsibility is the focus of this section; let me show it to you. Look at chapter 9, verse 32, notice the responsibility, speaking of Israel, "they did not pursue (righteousness) by faith, (They didn't do it.) but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone." We begin to get the implication that they are somehow responsible. It becomes clearer in chapter 10, verse 3, "For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, (Notice this.) they did not subject (They did not submit.) themselves to the righteousness of God." Here we get to human responsibility.

Notice verse 16, "However, they did not all heed the good news." In our English translation, the word is 'heed;' in the Greek text it's the word 'obey.' "They did not obey the gospel." And then the ultimate expression of personal responsibility comes in the last verse of this section. Look at chapter 10, verse 21, "But as for Israel (God) says, (this) 'ALL DAY LONG (In other words, continually.) I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS (the picture of an invitation; that's the picture of "Come!") TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.'" There you have the ultimate expression of human responsibility.

Now the point of this paragraph then is that in addition to divine election, a second reason the Jewish people did not, in the first century and do not today as a whole, believe in their Messiah and His gospel is, "The Reality of Human Responsibility." They simply refused to believe, and they refused to believe Paul's going to share with us for several reasons. They refused to believe because they failed to understand the purpose of the Old Testament Law. They were unwilling to pursue salvation on God's terms through the means of faith. They refused to obey the

message and commands of the gospel that was preached to them, “Repent and believe.” They simply refused to do so.

And all of that, and here's the key point to get, all of that, in their response to the gospel, is inexcusable. Why? Because as Paul will show with a number of quotations, the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, are clear about these things. In fact, in this section we begin today, Paul quotes the Old Testament in eleven of twenty-five verses. He quotes from all three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures. He quotes from the Law, the first five books of the Old Testament; he quotes from the prophets, and he quotes from that third section that is simply called the writings and includes Psalms and other books. He quotes from all three of them. He is going to prove to us, in this section, that all three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures bear witness to salvation by faith alone through the work of Messiah alone. As we have seen throughout this letter, the New Testament gospel, the gospel that Paul preached, is in complete continuity with the Old Testament Scripture.

Now, we have plumbed the depths of Paul's first answer, divine election in chapter 9, verses 6 to 29, and in fact, somebody told me this morning they were disappointed--they expected to come back on their birthday in May and for me to be in part 27. I'm not going to do that; we need to move on.

We need to consider the second reason that so few of the Jewish people have believed, and listen, it's not just about the Jewish people because it turns out that the reason here that they didn't believe is the very same reason that so few Gentiles believe, that so few people around us believe, people who are your neighbors, and people who are in your family, and people at your workplace don't believe, it's the same reason. It's the very same reason; it's human responsibility. That's the message of chapter 9, verse 30 through the end of chapter 10.

Now before we begin to examine this passage in more detail, we first need to ask the key question, and it is the big question that people always ask. What is the relationship between these two paragraphs--the one we've just studied and the one we start today? Or, let's put it differently, what is the relationship between divine election and human responsibility? “Okay

Tom, tell me how do you reconcile those two?” Well, there are several possible ways to explain the relationship of these two paragraphs and these two key themes of divine election and human responsibility. Let me give you the four most common, the four most common ways to reconcile them and as you can guess, I'm leading from the worst to the one that I would suggest you embrace.

The first one, in fact, is not embraced by any conservative evangelical. The first way that some people say you reconcile these two truths is simply this, divine election and human responsibility are inherently contradictory. In other words, they would say Paul is simply contradicting himself from one paragraph to the next. This is the typical explanation of liberals, those who reject the inspiration of Scripture. I actually have a commentary or two on the book of Romans in my library where they say exactly this. Now frankly, this explanation is an insult both to the apostle Paul and to the Holy Spirit; it assumes that a brilliant mind like the apostle's, somehow missed the obvious fact that he's contradicting himself in this paragraph after having just said the opposite in the previous paragraph. Now, I am not bright like the Apostle Paul, but I think I could even manage that, and certainly the Apostle Paul could.

But more importantly and more to the point, this section of Romans is not the product of Paul's mind; it is the product of the Holy Spirit's mind. And Jesus, our Lord Himself, in John 14:17, calls the Holy Spirit, “The Spirit of Truth.” The Holy Spirit is characterized by truthfulness; He doesn't tell us what isn't reality; He doesn't tell us what isn't true; He doesn't contradict Himself. This is a bad explanation. So, let's move on to the (other) explanations. The other three that I'll give you are embraced by evangelicals. That one, no serious evangelical would embrace, only liberals. But let's move to the other three.

Here's another way to reconcile divine election and human responsibility. Number two, the human response to the gospel is the basis of election. In other words, they would say this, “God chooses some people for salvation (Okay that's clear; you can't really deny that from the previous paragraph.) but according to this view, this new section that we come to explains the basis on which God chooses. That is, human faith. God chooses, but He chooses only those whom He knows will believe, and He rejects and hardens only those whom He knows will not

believe. This is a very popular view. In fact, I suspect that many of you here (at) some point in your lives have been taught such a view.

The main problem with this view is that what Paul has just taught us is that God's choice is unconditional; it is not conditioned on anything in the people that He chooses. Now, I'm not going to re-preach this paragraph; so if you weren't here, you can go back and listen. But let me just remind you of a couple of key verses. Look at Romans, chapter 9, verse 11. Verse 11, talking about Jacob and Esau, he says, "for though the twins were not yet born (Notice this.) and had not done anything good or bad, (And here was the reason for this.) so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works (Not because of anything they did.) but because of Him who calls."

But it becomes even clearer in verse 15, "For God says to Moses, 'I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.'" It's My decision! "So then," here's Paul's commentary on that quotation in the book of Exodus, "So then it does not ('It' meaning election.) does not depend on the man who wills (Election is not based on human decision.) or the man who runs, (Election is not based on human effort.) but (it is based) on God who has mercy." It's God's sovereign choice! And just to drive that home, verse 18, "So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." So this second explanation of the relationship between divine election and human responsibility simply doesn't measure up to what we've already learned in chapter 9.

A third explanation of the relationship of the two is that the human response to the gospel is the result of election. In other words, those who hold this view say, the reason people don't believe is that God didn't choose them; that's why they don't believe. Now, the problem with this is it makes God responsible for their unbelief. If only God had chosen them, they would believe. This also doesn't measure up to Scripture. Go to, again to verse 21 of chapter 10, "But as for Israel he says, 'ALL...DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.'" God doesn't take the blame for their unbelief; He lays the blame on them. You have Jesus's words in Matthew 23, verse 37, "Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, (And listen to this.) and you were unwilling.” There's the issue, “You were unwilling!” So this third explanation is not suitable; it doesn't mesh with the rest of Scripture.

So the best way then to explain the relationship of divine election and human responsibility is this. Number four, the human response to the gospel is the result of man's own fallenness, pride, and self-righteousness. That is what we're going to see in this section. Apart from electing saving grace, left to himself, man will never, let's make it more personal, you and I would never respond in faith to the gospel! Now why? Why is this true? Well, Paul is going to explain in this section.

Now, how can these two seemingly opposite truths work together? You've got divine election and human responsibility. How can they work together? They seem to be at odds. I love the explanation of Charles Simeon. Charles Simeon ministered in Cambridge as a pastor in Cambridge in the first half the 19th century, and he wrote this, of course at the dawning of the Industrial Revolution. He says, “As wheels in a complicated machine may move in opposite directions and yet serve a common end, so may truths apparently opposite be perfectly reconcilable with each other and equally serve the purposes of God in the accomplishment of man's salvation.”

The watch I have on, there are parts that move, and if you could take it apart, you would find that there are these gears; and if you watch those gears, you would discover that they are moving at times, maybe all the time, in opposite directions. And yet the designer has so fashioned them so that they work together to accomplish the purpose of the watch, which is to tell me time. And the same thing is true with divine election and human responsibility; they mesh together. They appear to be moving in opposite directions; but in the mind and purpose of God, they accomplish His saving purpose.

Now you say, “Tom, you still haven't told us what the relationship is between divine election and human responsibility.” Okay here it is, okay? Think of the relationship between these two

like this. The only reason anyone is ever saved is divine election; that's the paragraph we just finished studying. Secondly, the only reason anyone is ever lost is human responsibility; that's the section we come to today. Let me say it again, the only reason anyone is ever saved is divine election; the only reason anyone is ever lost is human responsibility. The ground of a person's salvation is always in the sovereign grace of God and the ground of a person's condemnation is always in himself.

Now again, let me go back to my illustration that I think helps clarify this, the illustration of death row inmates and the governor going to pardon someone. If you look at that death row inmate there on death row, and you ask yourself this question, "Why is he on death row?" What is the answer you arrive at? Is it the governor's fault that he's on death row? Of course not! Is it the judge's fault who condemned him? Of course not! Is it the law's fault who found him guilty of breaking the law? No! He's not there because of any of those things ultimately. Why is he ultimately there? Because of his own sinful choices; that's why he's on death row, and that's the only reason he's on death row. Nobody else is to blame for his being on death row, and the same thing is true with every single sinner. We all lived before Christ on death row, and we deserve to be there. It wasn't God's fault; it wasn't our parent's fault; it wasn't Christ's fault; it wasn't the law's fault; it wasn't the judge's fault. It was ours and ours entirely!

Now go back to the governor. He walks into that maximum-security prison; he walks through the cells there where the death row inmates are kept, and he chooses to pardon one of them. Does that prisoner share in the contribution to his pardon? Of course not; it's all the sovereign choice of the governor. The same thing is true with God.

So do you see how human responsibility and divine election works? Human responsibility places us on death row and only human responsibility because of our own sinful law-breaking choices. And only gracious, sovereign election gets us off of death row--that's the relationship of these two concepts.

Now, as he has been from the beginning of chapter 9, the section we come to today, Paul is still explaining the reasons for the shocking fact that so few of the Jewish people have come to

believe in their Messiah. And now he wants to make it clear to us that they can never blame divine election for their unbelief; it's their own fault. And by the way, it's not just true of the Jewish people; this is true of anyone who doesn't believe. None of us will ever be able to stand before God, if you're here this morning and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, you will not stand before God and say, "God it's your fault, You didn't choose me." You will not be able to stand before God and say anything at all. In fact, Romans 3 says your hand will be over your mouth; you'll have nothing to say because the reason you're there is you and entirely you! That's what Paul wants us to see. When people don't believe in Jesus and His gospel, they are personally responsible.

Now, what are the primary factors that contribute to the Jewish responsibility for not believing the gospel? Or what are the primary factors that contribute to anyone's personal responsibility for not believing the gospel? Let's look at them together. There are three of them we'll see unfold. Let's look at just the first today.

Here's the first primary factor that contributes to human, personal responsibility for not believing gospel. It is a failure to understand the clear purpose of God's Law, a failure to understand the clear purpose of God's Law. This is what we learn in Romans, chapter 9, verses 30 through 33. Let's read it together, you follow along.

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith. But Israel pursuing a law of righteousness did not arrive at that law. (Why?)...Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone...as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Now in these verses, these four verses at the end of chapter 9, Paul is struck by the fact that two incredibly unlikely outcomes have actually happened. The first of those is that the Gentiles who were not pursuing righteousness attained it, that's verse 30; and secondly, the Jews, who made it their life's ambition to pursue righteousness, completely failed in their mission, that's verse 31.

So why exactly did the Jews fail? Well the answer comes in verses 32 and 33. The sort of Cliff Notes or Sparks Notes version is this, they refused to be saved on God's terms. Instead, they insisted that they could be justified by their own efforts.

Now let's look at it together as he unfolds their misunderstanding of God's Law. Paul first observes that many Gentiles have gained righteousness apart from God's Law. Look at verse 30, "What shall we say then?" This, of course, is Paul's familiar question with which he introduces the implications of what he's just taught. So in light of the fact of what he's just said in the last few verses, that God has chosen and saved a whole lot of Gentiles but only a remnant of the Jews, what should we conclude from that? Verse 30, "That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith."

Now, notice first of all, that verse 30 introduces us to the key word in this whole section; it's the word 'righteousness' which occurs ten times. Now, let's make sure we understand what Paul is talking about here. If you remember back in chapter 6 through 8 of Romans, Paul used this word 'righteousness' primarily to refer to practical, moral righteousness. In other words, talking about how we live. But in this section, Paul is going to return to his earlier use of this word back when he explained the gospel in chapters 1 to 4. And the second use of this word and the word the form that used here, is a forensic righteousness--our legal status, not how we live, but our legal status before God. That's what he means here in the section by 'righteousness.' This righteousness here refers to a right standing before God that cannot be earned, but only received as a gift on the basis of the perfect life and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. It can only be this right standing before God, this righteousness can only be received by faith as a gift. Paul has made this point again and again, let me just highlight a couple key of passages.

Go back to Romans, chapter 1, verses 16 and 17, as Paul introduces us to his theme here. He says this, Romans 1:16:

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 to the Greek. (And then here he gets to the content of the gospel.) For in (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed (and it's the kind of righteousness that's) from faith to faith (That is, it's entirely faith, so a right standing

before God that is arrived at by faith.) as it is written, "...THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

There he introduces it; go over to chapter 3, verse 21; when Paul finishes the bad news, you know the gospel starts with the bad news, we all desperately need God's intervention, because left to ourselves, we have no hope; we're all sinners, condemned sinners. When he gets to the good news, chapter 3, verse 21, this is what he writes, "But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, (and this righteousness that I'm talking about, it's)... witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, (and it's in the Old Testament.)" What kind of righteousness. Paul? Verse 22:

...even the righteousness of God (which comes to us) through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all (of us) have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So how then can we who are sinners gain a right standing before God? Verse 24 is the key. We are "justified (That is we are declared right with God; we're declared right before God.) as a gift by His grace (How?) through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Specifically, verse 25, His crucifixion and what He accomplished in His death. He was a propitiation; He satisfied the just wrath of God against the sins of those who would believe in Him--that's the gospel.

Now, understand that that's the way that we learn from Paul we can gain a right standing before God. But that is not the only way people try to be justified before God. In fact, there are two completely opposite ways to attempt to gain a right standing before God, and that becomes crystal clear in the new section we're looking at. Go back to Romans, chapter 9. Here, Paul contrasts two different kinds of righteousness, two different paths to justification. Let me show them to you. The first contrast comes in verses 30 and 31 of chapter 9. You'll notice in verse 30, he speaks of the righteousness which is "by faith" or "out of faith," and then he contrasts it in verse 31 with the "law of righteousness." We'll come back and explain that in a moment, but just see that contrast. Now go to chapter 10, verse 3, here's the contrast again. You have "God's righteousness" and their own "righteousness."

And then the third contrast comes in chapter 10, verses 5 and 6. You'll notice in verse 5 there is "the righteousness which is based on law;" and then in verse 6, "the righteousness based on faith." So you have these two kinds of paths to pursuing a right standing before God. One path is by faith, it's God's righteousness given to us; the other path is a righteousness pursued by obedience to the law.

Now, just as he's done throughout this entire letter, Paul contrasts then these two entirely different approaches to being right with God. There are only, let me say this, there are only these two potential paths to try to be right with God. There is, first of all, a false kind of righteousness, trying to gain a right standing with God based on your own efforts. Paul's going to deal with that at length. And then there is, secondly, the true kind of righteousness. This is where you seek to gain a right standing with God based on faith in the efforts of Jesus Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection. Those are the only two ways to pursue being right with God.

Now go back to verse 30 with that background. "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness?" Stop there, Gentiles did not pursue righteousness. Now that is the understatement of the year. I mean, you remember chapter 1 where we learned of the moral condition of Gentiles, and we saw it is absolutely dreadful and disgusting, it is reprehensible and we see that in our world. We see it today, but that's not what Paul is talking about here because it's not true that no Gentiles pursue moral righteousness. In Paul's day and in our day, there are Gentiles who pursue a good moral life; that's not what he's talking about here. He's not talking about how they live, he's talking, remember in context, about that forensic righteousness, our legal standing, a right standing before God. He's saying the Gentiles weren't pursuing a relationship with the true God; they were too busy worshiping their idols. They were "without God in the world," Paul says in Ephesians. They didn't pursue being right with the true God, their Creator, verse 30, they didn't pursue that, but they "attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith."

Now the Greek word translated 'attained' here means 'to grasp' or 'to seize,' sometimes even violently with force. This word doesn't speak of something you earn, but rather of something

that suddenly becomes yours that you eagerly take hold of, that you seize. It's even used in secular Greek for receiving an inheritance, which obviously isn't something you earn, something just given to you because you were born into that family or the person decided to give it to you. Paul says there were people who were not pursuing a right standing before God; they had no interest in pursuing a right standing before God; it hadn't even occurred to them to ask how you would obtain a right standing before God. And then, by God's providence, they heard the gospel. Some of you fall into this category. You heard the gospel and you seized it, you grasped it, you took hold of it eagerly.

Now just to be clear, Paul adds, at the end of verse 30, I'm talking about "the righteousness which is by faith." Literally which is out of faith, which is based on faith, which has its source in faith. Faith is indispensable in gaining a right standing before God. It is the only means or instrument by which we can take hold of the work of Jesus Christ.

Listen, if you're here this morning and you are a follower of Jesus Christ, understand this, if you have a right standing before God and if you're a true follower of Jesus Christ, you do; you have that standing because you seized it in this way. You heard about the gift of righteousness and you gladly, eagerly, grabbed onto it and you took hold of it. If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Christ, this is the only way you'll ever be right with God, is if you seize or take hold of this message. It's by faith in Christ's work that Gentiles had gained the status of righteous, a right relationship with God.

Now, go back to our text because, secondly, Paul points out, having pointed out that many Gentiles had in fact come to gain this righteousness apart from God's Law. He moves on to say, no Jews have gained righteousness through the law, not one! Notice the fact in verse 31, he simply states it is as a fact. "But," here's the contrast with the Gentiles, "but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness." Now understand this, there were and are exceptions to this, but Paul is saying, as a whole, that the Jewish people have pursued a law of righteousness. Now Paul wasn't being anti-Semitic; he was Jewish; he loved the Jewish people; we're going to see that. He's just stating the fact, the reality, that they pursued a "law of righteousness." What does that mean?

The obvious way to understand this expression is that it refers to righteousness gained by keeping God's Law. It describes the pursuit of a right standing before God, based on obedience to the Mosaic Law. That's how many of the Jewish people in the first century thought.

I think one of the clearest illustrations of that is Jesus's encounter in Matthew 19 with the rich young ruler. You remember there was a young man who was a ruler of the local synagogue; that says a lot about this guy. It was very unusual for someone of his age to have such a prestigious and influential position. He was obviously very spiritually zealous, a very mature young man. He was also wealthy; he had many possessions. Specifically, we're told, in land. And he comes running up to Jesus one day, and he says, "Teacher, tell me what I must do, (You see his mindset here.) what I must do to inherit eternal life."

And you remember Jesus responds by quoting several of the 10 Commandments to him, to which he responds, "Yeah, yeah, got all that. I've done that from my youth up. I've always done that."

And Jesus responds, "Okay, there's just one thing you haven't done yet. I want you to sell everything you own; I want you to give the proceeds to the poor, and I want you to come follow me."

Wow! Now what was Jesus doing? Don't misunderstand; Jesus was not saying that every person who wants to come follow Him must sell everything they have, give the proceeds to the poor. In fact, there are many examples in the New Testament where that's not true. There is specific instruction in I Timothy 6 to the rich as to what to do with it, and it's not to sell it all and give it to the poor. They're to be generous, yes.

But this was unique; why did Jesus tell this young man to do this? Well, He was doing two things. Jesus was, first of all, exposing this young man's flawed idea about how to pursue eternal life. He thought it was by what he did, and Jesus wants to give him an impossible command to show him it's not going to happen.

Secondly, He wanted to show this young man that he hadn't really kept the commandments like he thought he had kept them. "Ah, I've have kept all those."

Well, Jesus says. "No, I want you to sell everything and give it to the poor and come follow me." What was Jesus telling them? He was saying, "Look, you don't really love your fellow man and I'm going to show you that."

Secondly, "You don't really love God, because I'm telling you to give all that up and come follow me, and you're not willing to do that. So you don't love your fellow man, and you don't love God; you haven't really kept the commands at all." But that was the mindset; that was the thinking, that's what, to use Paul's words here in Romans 9, that's what Israel pursued--a law of righteousness, righteousness by their own efforts. And he says, "Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, (Notice this.) did not arrive at that law." It's a really picturesque expression. The Greek verb that Paul uses describes running in a race; running in a race and making every effort, straining every muscle to reach the finish line, but never arriving, never arriving, We've all seen those tragic scenes in the Olympics where some poor runner, where he or she has spent his/her entire life preparing for that moment, and he/she start the race with great enthusiasm and eagerness and excitement about the potential, and then something tragic happens in the flow of the race, and maybe he/she injure himself/herself, or there's a fall, or something else happens, and he/she never finishes the race. Israel started this race with the full intention of being justified before God, but Paul says they never arrived; they never arrived at the goal of a right standing before God based on their obedience to God's Law. That's simply the fact!

But why is that true? Well, notice the reasons in verses 32 and 33, there are two of them. First of all, they didn't reach the finish line because they stumbled over the means of justification; they stumbled over the means. Notice the ultimate reason for their failure to gain a right standing before God. Verse 32 says, "Because they did not pursue it by faith." Now, what does that mean? What does it mean to pursue the Law of God by faith? Well, I can't put it any better than one author did, listen to this.

The answer must be surely that it is to respond to the claim to faith which God makes through the law, and it must include accepting, without evasion or resentment, the law's criticism of one's own life, recognizing that one can never so adequately fulfill its righteous requirements as to put God in one's debt, accepting God's mercy and forgiveness and so beginning to be released from one's self-centeredness and turned in the direction of a humble obedience that is entirely free of self-righteousness.

That's what the law does, and that's what it means to pursue the law by faith. It means you let the law do what God designed the law to do. Their problem, verse 32 says is they "did not" pursue it "by faith," but they pursued the law, the "law of righteousness"...as though it were by works." In other words, they misunderstood the means by which they would be made right with God. They thought it was their works; they thought it was their obedience to God's Law that would earn their justification.

You see, in the end, they misunderstood the entire purpose of God's Law. They thought the law, keeping the law, was their means to being right with God, to being justified, to gaining a right standing before Him, and that was all wrong. In fact, go over to Galatians, chapter 3; Galatians, chapter 3, and notice verse 19. Paul has just been talking about the promises of the gospel made to Abraham; and having said of the importance of the promise, some people are going to say, "Well, what about the law, what role did it serve?" Verse 19, "Why the Law then?" Why did God give His Law? "It was added because of transgressions." God gave it because of sins. Why? Verse 21, "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then (God's Law) would...have (done it;) then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." But that couldn't happen. So what was the law about?

Verse 22, "...the Scripture (The Law) has shut up everyone under sin." The Greek word there is a word, which means 'to enclose us on every side.' That's what the law did. The law said, "Okay, you want to earn your way to God, into His favor; you want to earn your justification, your right standing before God? Here it is, it's very simple, 'Just love God perfectly every moment of your life, and love your neighbor as yourself.'" That's all you've got to do. It closed

us in on every side. We realized there's no way! I've never done that, much less every moment of my life. And so it closed us in.

Verse 23, "...before faith came," I think he's talking both about in the sense of before Christ came, so sort of redemptive history. I think he's also talking about before faith came into our lives and thinking of our own individual histories.

Before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law (Here it is.) has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

This was the purpose of the law; it was to take our hands and show us just how bad we really are. Okay, you want to satisfy God and His holiness and His righteousness? Then here's what you need to do; and by doing that, it lead us to Christ because we saw how utterly impossible it would be to earn it on our own. That's the role of the law. So they misunderstood the purpose of the law.

But that's not all they misunderstood. They misunderstood the demands of the law because they actually thought they kept it well enough to earn their own salvation. But that could never happen. God's standard is way too high for that. Go back to Romans, chapter 2, look at verse 13, "for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." You actually have to do it! Oh, and no one has, chapter 3, verse 10, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE." So nobody has done it. In fact, notice verse 23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Nobody has met the standard.

James 2:10 says, "...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." If you could actually keep every command of God but one, and you broke that one, you would fall short of God's demands for perfection. In fact, in Galatians, chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, we read this: "For as many as (He says for as many as) are of the works of the Law (that is who rely on the works of the Law for their justification, they) are under a curse."

If you're here this morning, and you think you're getting to heaven by your own efforts and works, you're under a curse. Why? Here's the Old Testament, "CURSED IS EVERYONE

WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.” Unless you keep them all, you’re cursed. Only Jesus Christ fulfilled all righteousness. Only He kept God's Law perfectly. It's only in Him that the demands of the law can be completely met in our case. 2 Corinthians 5:21, “(God) made (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin (for us,) so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

You see, it's only as we repent and believe in Jesus Christ that we can gain a right standing before God. Israel pursued a righteousness based on their own works, but they never arrived because they stumbled over the means of justification. They thought it was their own righteousness instead of the gift of Jesus’s righteousness given to the believing sinner.

Charles Hodge writes, “They would not submit to the method of justification proposed by God and persisted in trusting to their own imperfect works.” Now folks, no passage could be more practical for us than this one because this is still the reason most religious people, both Jews and Gentiles, don't believe the gospel. It may be the reason you don't believe the gospel.

Listen, don't misunderstand the purpose of God's Law. It is not for your justification; it is for your condemnation to show you you need Jesus Christ, and don't underestimate the demands of the law. It's perfect love for God; perfect love for others, 100% of the time. And it's not just about your behavior; it's about your heart including your motives. Let God's Law show you that you are like the rest of us, a sinner, and you have no hope in yourself, and let God's Law, whether written on your heart or written in the Bible, lead you to Jesus Christ, your only hope of righteousness. That's the gospel.

Let’s pray together. Father, we thank you for these amazing truths. Lord, I pray for those of us who are in Christ that you would seal these truths to our hearts; may they produce love and joy and peace and adoration. And Father, for those who are not in Christ, may they abandon their own righteousness today and look solely to Him and His work. We pray in Jesus’s name, Amen.