

Why Did Israel Stumble Over Messiah?

📖 Romans 9:30-33

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Last time we saw a very interesting passage in Romans 9:24-29. In this passage verse 24 clarifies that God is presently calling out both Jews and Gentiles. In verse 25 and 26 Paul discusses Gentile salvation. He quotes the OT prophet Hosea in support of God's presently calling out Gentiles. This is an interesting prophet to quote because Hosea's context is speaking of God's final restoration of the ten tribes of Israel to her land after their exile. During exile they were not God's people and were not shown compassion but God would again, in the future, make them His people and show them compassion. Paul applies this to called Gentiles in the present age because of the point of similarity that they at one time were not His people and were not shown compassion but now are His people and are being shown compassion. Not to be forgotten are the believing Jews. In verses 27-29 Paul quotes the OT prophet Isaiah in support of God also presently calling out Jews. The contexts of Isaiah are also speaking of God's final restoration of Israel to her covenanted kingdom after their exile. This is a physical salvation or deliverance from their end-times enemies. Until that time there will always be a believing remnant. Paul's point is that if there was not at this time a believing remnant of Jews then the entire nation of Israel would be totally destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. So 9:24-27 discusses Israel and Gentiles and 9:30 continues this discussion.

He says, ³⁰**What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³²Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³just 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."** Here Paul answers why Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness attained it whereas Jews who did pursue righteousness did not attain it. What it means to pursue is a critical idea. The Greek word **pursue** is *διωκοντα* in verse 30 and the related *διωκων* in verse 31. The words mean "to run after with haste in order to find, to strive, to seek after, to aspire to." What the nation Israel was *aspiring to* was not legal or imputed righteousness. Legal righteousness is not something you aspire or seek after or strive for, it is received freely on the basis of grace through the instrument of faith, as with Abraham in Gen 15:6 who believed and it was credited to him as righteousness. So if legal righteousness is not in view

then what kind of righteousness was the nation aspiring to? The only other kind of righteousness available was experiential righteousness based on keeping the Mosaic Covenant (or Law). What Paul seems to be saying is that experiential righteousness was not being pursued by Gentiles but they did attain it, whereas, Israel did pursue it but did not attain it. This is difficult and confusing for people to understand.

So let me show you why it's difficult to see this way. There are two things you can easily get wrong when you read verse 30. First, that the **righteousness** in view is a particular kind of righteousness. As you read note that the last usage of righteousness is prefaced by the definite article **the** in the English. That leads the English reader to think that a particular kind of righteousness is in view, usually legal righteousness. Second, the following phrase, **even the righteousness which is by faith** lends credence with most people that Paul has legal righteousness in mind. The problem with this is that there is no definite article in the Greek, so it is not specific, the translators added that to smooth out the translation, and further that all righteousness that is acceptable before God is attained by faith, whether it is legal righteousness or experiential. So nothing is really solved as to which kind of righteousness is in view, whether legal or experiential. And finally, what is implied by the concept of pursuing righteousness is that they were trying to generate experiential righteousness in order to impress God. So if any kind of righteousness is more likely in the context it is experiential and not legal. What I intend to show is that what Paul intends is experiential righteousness and that Gentiles who did not pursue an experiential righteousness actually attained it as they came to Christ by faith and learned to live by the Spirit. But Israel who was pursuing an experiential righteousness based on the law did not attain it because they did not pursue that law by faith, but by works or self-effort, and what this caused was national blindness so they did not identify their Messiah.

There's no question this reasoning is difficult to follow but that's only because 99% of popular Bible teachers don't understand the Bible. The tendency of most Gentile Bible teachers when they come into the gospels is to misunderstand God's kingdom program for Israel by interpreting it as God's plan of salvation for the one people of God. This runs roughshod over the plain meaning of language and over the covenants. God has a covenant plan for Israel and at the head of that covenant plan is the Abrahamic Covenant. This covenant was made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the Twelve Tribes which define the nation Israel. It promised them a land, a particular real estate, a seed or offspring who is Messiah and that they would be the conduit for global blessing to the nations of the world. Added to this covenant 430 years later was the Mosaic Covenant. This covenant was also made exclusively with the nation Israel. It conditioned enjoyment of the promised land, recognition of the seed and global blessing to all the nations on obedience to the Law of Moses. Ultimately the nation will by faith obey, the new covenant will be fulfilled and the covenanted blessings will be enjoyed in the kingdom. So what we are saying here is that the Law of Moses was given to the nation so they would be set apart for God and through it live lives pleasing to Him; in other words it was given for national sanctification. God was interested in individuals and the nation having an experiential righteousness as they pursued obedience to the Law by faith. But if they pursued it by works then the experiential righteousness would not be sufficient to please God and so

He would not give them enjoyment of the land, the seed and the blessing in the kingdom. And that's exactly what Paul is saying in these verses.

Let me remind you that righteousness before God, whether legal or experiential, is always a result of faith. When we talk about legal righteousness we're talking about phase one righteousness, it's where God legally declares righteous the one who has faith in Christ. However, isn't it also true that experiential righteousness in phase two is **by faith?** Experiential righteousness is the fruit of the Spirit that is produced through us as we live by faith. So righteousness in phase one and phase two is a result of faith. We're justified by faith at phase one and we're sanctified by faith in phase two. Actually, from beginning to end righteousness is always by faith. Isn't that what Paul told us at the beginning of Romans? Look at Romans 1:17, this is part of the theme verses of Romans. In Rom 1:16 he's talking about the gospel. In 1:17 he's saying that the gospel reveals "the righteousness of God from faith to faith." In other words, every time we believe the gospel, whether it's at phase one - justification, in phase two - sanctification or at phase three - glorification, there is a revelation of the righteousness of God. So there's only one way for God's righteousness to be manifested and that is through faith. So the fact that Paul says in Rom 9:30 that **Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith...** does not clarify whether this **righteousness** is phase one, the positional righteousness when God legally declares righteous the one who has faith in Christ or phase two, the experiential righteousness that the Spirit produces as we live by faith. And when you come to Rom 9:30 it's very difficult to tell which one Paul has in mind. Taken out of context it could apply to either but what's important is finding out which one Paul intends.

Let me show you two other verses that are extremely difficult in Romans because they can apply to either phase one or phase two. The first one is Romans 6:23. Let's read this verse out of context. That's the way most Christians read the Bible anyway. Who cares about context? Just memorize your favorite verses whether you have a clue what they mean or not. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What does it mean? Is this referring to phase one or phase two? Actually taken out of context it could accurately describe either. It's true in phase one that "the wages of sin is death." Death in phase one refers to eternal separation from God. And also, "the free gift of God is eternal life." Life in phase one refers to receiving the possession of salvation that is being justified. But it's also true in phase two that "the wages of sin is death." Death in phase two refers to temporal separation from God, being out of fellowship. And also, "the free gift of God is eternal life" can refer to phase two. Life in phase two refers to receiving an enjoyment of salvation, the abundant life or being sanctified. So it's very clear that this verse could refer to phase one justification or phase two sanctification. But which one is being referred to? How would we know? Context. Always the context. What's the larger context of Romans 6, 7 and 8? Phase two, sanctification. What's the immediate context of Romans 6:23? The previous verses. Just look at 6:22. 6:23 is an explanation of 6:22. What does 6:22 say, "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God," past completed action, so that is phase one, we have been freed from the penalty of sin. So that on that basis, Paul says, "you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the

outcome, eternal life." There's the result of sanctification and the outcome is eternal life. So eternal life here is being viewed as a result of sanctification. As we are sanctified we have a fresh enjoyment of our eternal life which is all phase two. So now when we read verse 23 we see clearly that he is talking about when we sin as a Christian there's a payment for that, we lose fellowship with God, the wages of sin is always death, here it's temporal death, which is always a separation, so separation from fellowship with God. But the free gift of God is eternal life, or the grace of God, free gift is the word grace and the grace of God, when we live by grace the result is a bestowal of eternal life in the sense of an enjoyment of that life we possess. So in context this is a sanctification verse. Taken out of context it could apply to either justification or sanctification but Paul is using it for sanctification. It's not really a verse that should be used in the Romans Road with unbelievers. The Romans Road in Romans actually begins in Romans 3:23 and ends in 5:8. That is all that needs to be said. If you want to bring Romans 6:23 into the picture now you're talking about sanctification. And the real meaning, which is almost always missed in this verse, is that when a believer sins (i.e. lives by the flesh) he receives the death dealing consequences of sin which are loss of fellowship with God, loss of joy, loss of harmony with God, etc...but when he lives by grace (i.e. by faith and the Spirit) he receives an enjoyment of life that is fellowship, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, etc...all the fruit of the Spirit. So the verse could apply to both but its real meaning is about sanctification.

The second difficult verse that could apply to either phase one or two is Rom 8:1. Let's read it out of context. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What does it mean? Almost universally this verse is understood to refer to phase one, justification. And in fact, it is true that there is no eternal condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. But is that the context? What is the larger context of Rom 8:1? It sits in Rom 6, 7 and 8 which is phase two, sanctification. What's the immediate context of 8:1? The previous verses, 7:24-25. "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Now is Paul talking of himself as a believer or an unbeliever? He's talking about himself as a believer and how when I, Paul, am the source of striving to produce godliness I, Paul, blow it, because all that I do activates the sin nature. But He's thanking God that there is another way to live, there's another source to produce godliness so I can be free from the power of the sin nature. And he describes in verse 25 this struggle. "So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God" clearly a statement only a believer could make, only believers can serve God in their mind; "but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin." What he wanted to do in his mind he could not do, but there was a way that it could be done, and that is what Paul is thanking God for. When we come to 8:1 what is he saying? "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Grand conclusion, since we are in Christ Jesus we are not condemned to live by the sin nature. There is another way we can live and that way is declared in 8:2 to be by the Spirit of life. So while 8:1 can be yanked out of context and applied to phase one, justification, in the context Paul is referring to phase two, sanctification. So we illustrate to show the kind of hard thing you run across in reading Romans because we're not accustomed to thinking in Pauline terms. We're accustomed to what 99% of

popular Bible teachers have taught all our lives and what we have heard. But if we discipline ourselves to read the text in context and let the text speak and not read into the text we discover something different.

What I'm suggesting is that when we read Rom 9:30ff we have the same type of difficulty we have in Rom 6:23 and 8:1. It can be read as either phase one righteousness, legal, or phase two righteousness, experiential, and what Paul actually has in mind is phase two, experiential righteousness. In verse 30, **Gentiles...who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith** or "out of faith," using the exact construction used later in Rom 14:23 when he says that "whatsoever is not out of faith is sin" in a sanctification context. He's talking about Gentile believers not pursuing the production of experiential righteousness and yet attaining that experiential righteousness because under the principles of sanctification in the NT the believer must live by faith and when we do the Spirit of God produces a righteousness through us, His fruit. But then Paul contrasts in 9:31 saying, **but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.** He's looking back to Israel in the OT and how they were **pursuing a law of righteousness**, that is, the Law of Moses that God gave at Mt Sinai. There's no question the law itself was righteous. Paul even said in Rom 7 that the Law is good and holy and righteous. The law wasn't the problem. Israel even pursuing the law was not a problem because that was how they could have experiential righteousness and enjoy blessing in the land like in the time of David and Solomon. But after all that was lost they did not arrive or get restored to enjoying blessing in the land. Why? Well, because they **did not arrive at that law.** Why did they **not arrive at that law?**

The answer is very clear in 9:32. **Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.** What did Israel **not pursue by faith?** Read verse 31 again. What did Israel **not pursue by faith?** The **law.** Paul's argument is that if they had they would have met their Messiah. But instead, what they did was pursue the law **as though it were by works and they missed their Messiah.** Question, was that the way they were supposed to try and keep the **law?** By works? Self-effort? No way. How were they supposed to pursue the law? Friend, there is only one way to live before God no matter what dispensation you live in. Whether it's Adam and Eve or Noah or Abraham or Moses or David, there is only one way to respond to God and His word and that is by faith. It's by faith that obedience is produced. Never the other way around. Faith precedes and is the cause of obedience. So according to verse 32 how were they supposed to pursue the law of righteousness? **By faith.** That was the only way to keep it and be restored to enjoying the land. God was looking for the obedience of faith; experiential righteousness. But if they just tried to obey it's always self-effort. It's works righteousness and that's not what God is interested in! Remember what Jesus said to the nation Israel in the Sermon on the Mount? Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. He's saying that the nation Israel needs to get in line with the Law of Moses and pursue it by faith in order to enter the kingdom at that time because the scribes and Pharisees were pursuing it by works and the righteousness they were producing was yuck, just disgusting to God. So they would not enter at that time if they continued to follow the scribes and Pharisees who were pursuing the law by self-effort.

Now let's review how this happened. Let's think about it. In 1447BC God redeemed the people of Israel out of Egypt and gave them His law at Mt Sinai. Was there any problem with the Law as God gave it? No problem at all. Paul says in Romans 7 the law is good and holy and righteous. The law was not the problem. If the law was a problem then there was a problem with the Lawgiver! So no problem with the Law. What was the problem? What happened during the intertestamental times? Say 400BC till the time of Christ? The scribes that descended from Ezra started to come into contact with the Greeks and the Greeks tried to Hellenize the Jews and there was great pressure to Hellenize. Many Jews did Hellenize and the whole thing came to a head in the time of the Maccabees. At that time there was a split among the Jews and that's when the Pharisees formed and they were so strict against Hellenization that they started to write down all these extra-biblical laws just so they didn't get close to breaking the laws. And this body of law came down to the time of Christ and it became known as "the tradition of the elders." Jesus talks about this in Mark 7 so take a look at what He thought. And remember, what Jesus was actually wanting to see was the nation Israel return to the Law of Moses because if they truly followed it then they would have a righteousness that surpassed the Pharisees and then they would recognize their King and the kingdom would come. But here's the kind of thing that was going on. Mark 7:1, "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem,² and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed."³(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders;" not the Law God gave at Sinai, "the traditions of the elders" and this is what most people tried to follow because who could be more holy than the Pharisees. Verse 4, "and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)" You see the same thing today when you go to Israel, there will always be these little pots in the bathroom to wash your hands with, it's all nitpicky traditions that they invented a long time ago that have nothing to do with righteousness. Verse 5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And you can tell by this time He's put out with them. "⁶And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. '⁷BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' "⁸"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." Pharisaism was a man-made religion, it opposed God's word. And what they have today in Orthodox Judaism is entirely derived from Pharisaism. The AD70 destruction of Jerusalem erased Sadduceeism. The only thing that continued was Pharisaism. Verse 9, "He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition." You see they didn't follow the Law of Moses, they followed their tradition which was the invention of their own hearts. In verse 10 Jesus gives an example, "For Moses said, 'HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER'; and, 'HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH';¹¹ but you say," and here's how they set it aside, 'If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),'¹² you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother;¹³ *thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and

you do many things such as that." They invented a way to get around this law which said honor your father and mother. How would you honor your father and mother in their old age? Take care of them, pay the expenses. Why didn't they want to do that? Because they didn't trust God to take care of all their financial needs. They had five or ten rug rats running around and how are they going to pay for all that and so they said, we're not going to pay for our old parent's expenses. Were they pursuing the law by faith? No. How did they get around it so that they could say they were following it? They wrote a new law that said, "Ok, you have to support your elderly parents *unless* you dedicate that money to God. Then you get a free pass." So that's how they invented a way to get around the Law and Jesus said in verse 13 that by doing this they invalidated the Law and they did this with many such things. They did it with the whole Law. They invalidate the whole thing. And so what Jesus does is just give an example of how Israel pursued the law by works and not by faith. What would it have looked like if they had pursued it by faith? They would have said, "Alright, I don't see how we're going to make it financially, but God says to help your elderly parents and so we're doing to do that and see how God provides." That's living by faith. And there were some individuals who did that. Joseph in the Gospels did that. He was going to marry Mary but he kept the law by faith and according to the Law he had to put her away during the betrothal period. And the text of Matt 1:19 says, "Now Joseph was a righteous man." He was experientially righteous because he went against what Joseph wanted to do. You don't think he really wanted to put her away do you? No way. He loved her. But the Law says and so he pursued the Law by faith and God worked out the details! Now that's keeping the law by faith. And there were other individuals classified as righteous such as Simeon and Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus says "the righteous man" implying that there were those among the nation who had an experiential righteousness under the Law. But as a nation, Romans 9:32, they did not pursue the law by faith, but instead by works, by self-effort and consequently what happened?

Romans 9:32, **They stumbled over the stumbling stone.** Who is the **stumbling stone**? The Messiah! They **stumbled** over the Messiah. He completely tripped them up. Why did their Messiah trip them up? What happened? Let's think about this. What happens when you don't trust the word of God? Let's say you are a Pharisee and you have the word of God before you, as they did, and you invent some way to get around it, all along convincing yourself that you kept the word. What's that called? Faith or Sin? S-I-N. And what does sin do to you? What does it do to your mind? It blinds your mind to the truth. You don't think correctly. Now having said that, why did the nation stumble over the Messiah? Why did they interpret Him as someone who was offensive? Because they were blind! Verse 33 quotes the OT and says he was "**a rock of offense.**" Why? Because He didn't come according to their petty little traditions and their sin blinded them to who He really was! That's why I say that if Jesus walked in the door of 98% of churches and started speaking from the pulpit I don't think they'd recognize Him at all. What did they do to Him at Nazareth when He got behind the pulpit? They tried to run Him off a cliff! That was His own hometown. They didn't recognize Him because they were too blinded by their sin to see straight!

Now what I am saying is that the Law of Moses was given to point directly to the Messiah. Paul says in Galatians "The Law was a tutor that led to Messiah." The Messiah was, in fact, the embodiment of the Law. He lived out the Law perfectly! His life was a living exposition of the Law and any Jew who really knew the Law, and there were some, obviously the Gospels refer to this small group of Jews, followed Him and recognized Him and identified Him as the Messiah. Jesus said, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter said, "Thou art the Messiah." Some people saw. Why did they see? Because they pursued the Law by faith and not as it were by works as the scribes and Pharisees did. And because of that they had eyes to see and ears to hear. But the majority of the nation? No way. They were following the system of works based experiential righteousness and it was nothing but sin and they stumbled right over their Messiah; the one who was the perfect embodiment of the Law. And so why didn't they attain it? Because they pursued it by works, it was nothing more than Pharisaism. If they had been pursuing the Law by faith it would have led them straight to faith in the Messiah. Straight to Him. He was what the Law pointed to all along! And every Jew in the NT who genuinely pursued the law by faith did see Him and did believe in Him. That was the whole point. The whole law pointed to Messiah and they turned the Law into the traditions of men and that is what Paul is explaining in Rom 9:30-33.

We'll detail more of this out next week but the summary is this. In 9:30, Gentiles did not pursue experiential righteousness before God before the time of Messiah but now that Messiah has come they have attained it as they live by faith and see the righteous production of the Spirit of God in their lives. By contrast, in 9:31, Israel pursued a law of experiential righteousness in the OT but they did not arrive at righteousness because in 9:32 they did not pursue that law by faith but as it were by works, and as such distorted it into the traditions of men. As such they were blinded by their sin and stumbled over their Messiah. In 9:32 there was still hope for individual Jews for the one who believes in Him will not be disappointed. Paul says the same thing in 2 Cor 3:15-16, "But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

The takeaway is this is actually in sanctification, we are to live by faith and that is how we see the positive production of experiential righteousness in our life by the Spirit of God. Otherwise it's sin and sin blinds and stumps our spiritual growth. There is no other way to live than by faith. God doesn't accept us coming to Him on any other basis. It is a faith life and the faith life says, I hear the word of God and by hearing the word of God over and over and over I am convinced more and more of its truth value and therefore I live by faith and enjoy life, a supernatural life and not just a mundane life. What life do you want to live? Supernatural or mundane? I'm aiming for the supernatural because I'm tired of the mundane.