

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Righteousness Based Upon Faith

by Dan Trygg

“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³² Why? Because they sought not by faith, but as out from works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ just 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.’ ^{Romans 10:1} Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for salvation. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with true-knowledge. ³ For not experientially-knowing God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ is the end (goal, completion, fulfillment) of the law unto righteousness to everyone believing. ⁵ For Moses writes concerning the righteousness which is based on law that the one doing these things shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith [says] ⁹ ...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” Romans 9:30-10:6,9

Paul had established that **God had chosen to work through the people of Israel to bring the Messianic Seed who would bring blessing to all the nations of the earth.** The family lineage from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, ...and later also from David, had many divergent branches. **God sovereignly chose to wend His way down the family tree through the generations, often choosing to work through unlikely or unexpected members of the family line to fulfill His purposes.** Not everyone physically descended from these forefathers would be people of faith, or children who continued in the promises. **Although many did believe, there were many *more* who did *not*.** As you read through the record of the OT, it is amazing how many times the people of Israel broke with the covenant, and went after other gods. As the quotes from, and allusions to, Hosea and Isaiah had established in Romans 9:22-29, the people of Israel had almost ceased to exist entirely, due to the judgment God had brought upon them for their sin. **If God had not sovereignly kept a “seed”, a remnant of survivors, together, ...and had not chosen to miraculously reinstate them to their land of promise..., they would have come to *nothing*.**

Going back to Paul’s hypothetical statement from vss. 22-24: What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath having-fitted-themselves to destruction (The apostate nation of Israel!), and He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His mercy on vessels of mercy, ...even *US*, ...not from the Jews only, but also from among the other nations (the Gentiles). So, even **though there were many Jews in history who had *not* faithfully followed God’s covenant, ...many who had departed from being devoted solely to Him..., there *was* a small number of people who *did* believe in God and purposed to honor Him. In a similar fashion, there was a growing number of non-Jewish people who were hearing the Gospel message and choosing to believe in God and follow Him.** People from *both* ethnic backgrounds who had been called “*not* My people” were now being called “My people” and “children of the Living God” (vss. 25,26).

This brings us up to today’s study. **Paul asks the question, “What shall we say, then?”** This is a literary device that Paul uses in this book to move along His argument. This is the sixth, and last, time this phrase occurs (4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14,30). **“The Gentiles (people from other nations), the ones *not pursuing righteousness attained righteousness, ... the righteousness out from faith*” (vs. 30).**

This is not the first time we have seen this phrase. In 1:16,17, Paul had declared that he was not ashamed of the gospel (the ‘good news’), for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone believing, to the Jew and to the Greek. For **a righteousness of God is revealed** (uncovered) in it, out from faith unto faith, according as it has been written, **“But the righteous-person will live *out from faith*.”** In 3:21,22, Paul wrote, **“But now *apart from the Law a righteousness of God has been manifested* (made-visible), being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even a *righteousness of God through faith* in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.”** There are a number of passages that describe how **God credited righteousness to the one who believes** (4:3,5,6,9,22). In 4:13, Paul specifically said that **the promise to Abraham or to his Seed, that he would be heir of the world, was *not through Law, but through a righteousness of faith*.”**

Here again we see this dichotomy between two ways, ...two approaches to acceptance with God, and righteousness before Him. The way that many of those in Israel had come to pursue was a Law-based, performance-oriented approach. They were basing their acceptance with God on the works of the Law. They were thinking that if they kept the commandments of God, that He would surely accept them. However, somehow **their focus came to be on *their behavior, not on God’s grace*.** They were always trying to earn their way into God’s favor, by establishing their own righteousness as determined by their religious and moral behavior.

They had “**stumbled over the Stumbling Stone, the Rock of Offense**”. This verse cites two passages from Isaiah. The first from Isaiah 8:14 is about how **apostate Israel was attempting to deliver themselves from their enemies by making a covenant with Assyria, instead of trusting God** (2 Kg. 16). In the end, this became a greater stumbling block to them, and hastened their demise. The other passage is from Isaiah 28:16. Again, the context is about how God was about to judge Israel for their unfaithfulness, and trusting in deception. Verse 5 also speaks of when, sometime in the future, God will become a glorious crown *for the remnant* of His people. **God would like to instruct them, but they were unwilling to listen to Him.** Nevertheless, **He would “lay a stone in Zion, ...a tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the future, firmly placed..., and the one who believes in it will not be disturbed.”** Note, again, some of the same themes we have seen above. The majority have rejected God’s way, and gone away into apostasy. God, however, had kept a remnant. This Cornerstone is to establish a future hope with them. **The stumbling block was to trust in their own way. By contrast, those who trust in God’s way will be established.** Of course, in Jesus’ own ministry, He had referenced Psalm 118:22, “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes?’” (Matt. 21:42) He was the promised Cornerstone, ...a tested, costly, firmly placed Stone. Those who believe in Him would not be put to shame.

As Paul said, “**they have a zeal for God, but it is not in accordance with true-knowledge.**” *How sad.* **They could be sincere, but sincerely wrong; devoted, but devoted to the wrong thing; dedicated, but dedicated to an erroneous perspective of God and salvation.** The word translated as “true-knowledge” refers to a “flash-of-insight-revelation”. It is not just intellectual information; it is spiritual insight. They could have all the right pieces of information, but not understand how they were meant to fit together. By emphasizing the wrong things, the entire picture was distorted. Their zeal for God was self-serving and prideful. **It led them to strive harder, not trust more.**

“For not knowing (‘being ignorant of’, or ‘disregarding’) the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not come under the righteousness of God.” They were unaware of the righteousness that God has provided as a gift through Christ, or they consciously determined to “make themselves righteous” through self-righteousness. In any case, they did not yield to or come under the provision of righteousness God has made available in Christ. **“For Christ is the end of the Law unto righteousness to everyone believing.”** Christ Himself is both the completion and fulfillment of the Law. He not only provided a righteousness as a gift that *covers* us, but He also *produces* a righteousness *within us* which fulfills the intent of the Law. This is a *gift* that is available to those who trust in Him. We do not strive to crank it out on our own, as though we could fulfill the requirements of the Law by our self-discipline. No. **We trust that Christ has provided a righteousness as a gift which both covers us as a garment, and also works within us to produce righteousness in our character and actions.**

In the next few verses, Paul attempts to clarify the essential difference between a righteousness based upon Law and a righteousness based upon faith. **“For Moses writes concerning the righteousness which is based on law that the one doing these things shall live by them.”** This is probably a reference to Leviticus 18:5. The same language is used in Ezekiel 20:11,13,21. **In the original context, God had indicated that if they kept His commandments they would live long in the land** (Deut. 4:40; 5:16). The alternative, which they eventually experienced, was that they would experience calamities, judgments, and eventually be driven *out of* the land. The commandments were given for their good, ...and part of that “good” was their prosperity, health and long life. **No promise was made that simply doing the commandments would make people spiritually alive.** In Deuteronomy 6:24,25, it says, “So Yahweh commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. ²⁵ **It will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all this commandment before Yahweh our God, just as He commanded us.**” The righteousness here is “doing what God expects.” It *would be* a good thing, ...it *would be* a fulfillment of the covenant. ..., if they *did* what God commanded, but there was no promise of absolute righteousness to those who were obedient. In fact, **one of the problems of trying to live by the Law is that no one could do it perfectly.**

By contrast, the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this... What does it say? Paul gives three examples, two negative and one positive. **It does not say, ...“Who will go up into heaven? ...Or, “Who will go down into the abyss?”** These are extreme, impossible things for us to do. **The righteousness based upon faith does not ask us to do impossible, super-human things to get Christ.** “What does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ – that is, the word of faith which we preach. That if ever you might confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and you might believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart a person believes unto righteousness, but with the mouth he confesses unto salvation.” **What is Paul’s point? The righteousness based upon faith is not about YOUR performance. It is trusting in and accepting CHRIST’S performance. We are justified freely as a gift through Christ’s redemption accepted by faith** (Rom. 3:24-26).