

Monday, December 11, 2023 • Read Romans 9:30–33

Questions from the Scripture text: How should we counter the sort of speech in v19 (v30)? Who hadn't pursued what? But what did they attain to? What kind of righteousness? But who had pursued what (v31)? To what did they not attain? How should the law (and its righteousness) have been sought (v32a)? But how did the unconverted Jews seek it? Over what did they stumble? Who laid it (v33)? What two negative responses to this Stone did the Lord prophesy? But what response should they have had? And what result comes to those who respond to Him not by works, but by faith?

How should we respond to Israel's partial hardening? Romans 9:30–33 prepares us for the sermon in the midweek prayer meeting. In these four verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **we should respond to the realities of spiritual hardening and saving mercy by focusing primarily upon the mercy, while taking from the hardening a serious warning against works-ism.**

Learning what to say to hardening. v30a. The apostle began v19 with “you will say.” The things that he had heard others say in response to election and hardening were actually the very sort of blasphemous attacks upon God Himself that vindicate the righteousness of God's hardening sinners. Now, the apostle asks a rhetorical question—rhetorical, because he is about to answer it for us: “What shall we say then?” This helps us come into the rest of the passage with the mindset to learn. If what follows is not the way that our hearts and minds are not responding to the hardening of many Israelites, then we have grace to look for and work to do. We need to ask the Spirit to help us see and respond this way. And we need to discipline our thoughts by squelching our wrong responses and preaching to our own souls what Holy Scripture says here instead.

Beginning with mercy. v30. What we should say begins not with what has happened to Israel but with what has happened to the nations. “Gentiles” just means “nations,” and its usage sometimes even includes Israel. In this case, though Israel (taken generally) has stumbled in the way described in vv31–33, many Israelites have believed, just as many from other nations have believed (cf. 11:1). In keeping with the Lord's priority upon mercy in His decree (cf. v16, 23), what we should say also focuses upon mercy. We begin not with those who have stumbled and been hardened, but with those who have attained to righteousness.

And how great is the mercy in which they have done so! The other nations did not pursue righteousness. They did not have “the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” (v4). And, yet, the Lord has still come near to them by His Word (cf. 10:8; Deut 30:11–14), proclaiming Himself to them in Christ. And the Word itself has produced in them a faith in Christ (cf. 10:14–17) that has been accounted to them for righteousness (cf. 4:6, 9, 11, 16).

Warning against works-ism. v31. Although it is good that we might emphasize mercy, so that we would give our first and best attention to the Lord, and to His salvation, it is still important for us to see and heed the warning in the hardening that has come to Israel. The law that they have (vigorously—same word as for persecution) pursued is a righteous law (cf. 7:12, 22). But the righteousness that it offers us is a righteousness by faith, a righteousness that is found only in God Himself, and not in ourselves. Israel did not attain to it (v31), because they did not seek it in this “faith” way (v32a) but as if the law offered to them righteousness by works (v32b). They mistook what Moses wrote in Lev 18:5 (cf. 10:5, hpwl.org/sa231203es), not understanding that in its original context, this verse was about the difference that the Lord makes in His people, not about how His people can earn life from Him.

How the danger of works-ism works. v32c–33b. Works-ism is worse than we might at first think. Works-ism is bankrupt because it looks for good from within a sinner. And works-ism is blasphemous because it reduces God and His righteousness to something that a sinner could attain to. But, perhaps worst of all, works-ism is blind to Christ and His saving virtue as YHWH Himself.

The quote in v33 arises from the book of Isaiah. YHWH had offered to Ahaz Himself for salvation (cf. Isa 7:10–11), but Ahaz had refused under pretense of piety (cf. Isa 7:12), because he had determined to put his hope in the Assyrian king, Tiglath Pileser (cf. 2Ki 16:7). Despite Israel's general refusal to trust in YHWH, He still offered Himself to Isaiah and all who would trust in Him (cf. Isa 8:11–22). As we saw in vv24–29, the idea of a believing remnant within Israel is by new means a new thing in Romans 9. So, in Isa 8:13–14, YHWH is offering Himself to Israelites by faith. But to those trusting in their own efforts, He says that instead of finding Him to be a sanctuary, they will find Him to be “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense” (cf. Isa 8:14a). Later, in Isa 28:16, the Spirit gives the text that is quoted here.

v33 of our passage recognizes what is plain from the entire New Testament: Jesus Himself is YHWH, the cornerstone of salvation, as He offers Himself for us to rest upon and build upon and be safe and saved.

But if someone is running hard after righteousness by his own works, he will not rest upon the Lord Jesus as a cornerstone; instead, he stumble over the Lord Jesus as a stumbling stone. He will be offended at the idea that he must stop hoping in his own works. What a dreadful danger is this works-ism by which we actually wound ourselves upon Christ and His gospel, and then rush to continue running after salvation some other way!

The glorious security of faith. v33c. Our little passage ends where it began: mercy. “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” Isaiah had prophesied that there would, indeed, be a remnant within Israel (cf. Isa 10:20–23), and this applied not only to the near-term salvation from Assyria, but to the eternal salvation from wrath, to which that short-term salvation pointed. Whoever trusts in Jesus, YHWH, will not be put to shame. The righteousness that God offers to sinners has always been righteousness by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. And it is absolutely sure. It is sure of no condemnation, already, now (cf. 8:1). It is sure of no separation from the love of God, forever (cf. 8:39). Salvation through faith in Christ is absolutely secure!

What doings do you tend to treat as if they make you “safe” in this life or the next? What does the difference look like, in your life, between on the one hand stumbling over Jesus and continuing to run some other way, and on the other hand resting upon Jesus and building only entirely upon Who He is and what He has done?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You for giving Yourself to us to be our salvation in Jesus Christ. Forgive us for when we have treated Your law or Your gospel as if either offered to us salvation by works. Grant unto us to find safety, strength, and blessing only in You—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—which we ask even now only through Christ and His merit, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP32AB “LORD, From the Depths to You I Cried” or TPH435 “Not What My Hands have Done”

(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Romans 9, verse 30 through 33. These are God's words. What shall we say then? That gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness. Even the righteousness of faith. But Israel pursuing the law of righteousness. Has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith.

But doesn't work by works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone. And rock of offense. And whoever believes on him. Will not be put to shame.

Amen, lessons. This reading of god's inspired, and Inertward. Back in verse 19, the apostle having Uh, told about the Uh, We're having mercy on some and hardening of others. And in particular, in this context, About how the reason that much of Israel is not believing in the Lord Jesus is that rather than giving them the undeserved contradeserved, mercy of changing what they are.

Like he is hardening them, making them to be more like what they are. And this is always the case. When someone hears the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ. God does not owe to them. To give them a heart. That will be responsive to that gospel. That is a completely contradeserved mercy.

Just of god's own free will of god's own good pleasure. When he gives to the person who hears, the gospel, the heart. To respond to the gospel. And the apostle, having preached that Uh, up through verse 18. He says. You will say to me, then And he proceeds at that point to Relate.

How many people have responded when he has preached? The gospel and explained why? It is that there are those who hear the gospel, but don't trust in Jesus. And they have responded. Those who didn't believe. Out of the Wickedness and blasphemy of their own heart, blaming God. For the sin.

Of disbelieving. The gospel. And saying that that God is to blame. For the sin of those. Who reject him? So he said you will say to me then and then he explains Uh, why that's wrong? And he finishes explaining that why that's wrong. And in verse 29, And pointing out that.

It's the mercy of God that gives a remnant from Israel at all. And it's the mercy of God that gives a remnant from the gentiles and so when he says, what shall we say, then? In verse 30. He's teaching us how to read. Romans chapter 9. That if we find coming out of our hearts, The things that he begins identifying in verse 19.

Then we should tell our hearts instead. The things that he has been saying, and the things that he is saying now, especially in verse 30, through 33, So he's teaching us the right way of responding. To the doctrine of God's electing love and God's saving entirely by resurrecting mercy.

And the way that we should respond, then is Uh, we should prioritize or begin with a focus on mercy in verse 30. And we should watch against. That fleshly response. Of responding to God by works. As we see. In verse 31. Especially. Because if we think that we are going to listen well enough or respond well enough or believe, well enough then we will stumble.

Over the stumbling stone. Which is how trusting and works trusting in our doings. Is dangerous and so, faith must not be a doing on our part. But resting upon What God has done in Christ. A resting upon what Christ has done. And we must assure ourselves. At the end of verse 33.

That those who rest entirely only upon what the Lord Jesus has done that. They will be saved. That their hope in Christ will not be put to shame or embarrassed or fail. But it will find its mark. In the Lord, Jesus. So we are to begin with mercy note that he begins not with Uh, those who stumble.

But those who attain What shall we say? Then that gentiles Who did not pursue? Righteousness. They didn't have. A better nature than the Israelites did. That's not that the Israelites were naturally bad and the gentiles were naturally good. No. They're both by nature in Adam wicked, they did not pursue righteousness.

In fact, not only did they not pursue righteousness. They did not have the law of righteousness that the Israelites abuse with their sinful nature verse 31. But they did not have the advantages that the Israelites had back in verse 4. To whom pertain adoption the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, Now, the gentiles didn't have any of those things.

And yet when Jesus comes by himself, And proclaims peace in himself to the gentiles who are far off. Um, Which, By the way, is a Nice Bible trivia question and effusions. Chapter 2 when the apostle says that Christ came and preached to them peace in Ephesians chapter 2, you want to know?

When did Christ visit Ephesus? And the try and the answer is that it wasn't during his earthly ministry. It was by the preaching of the gospel by his ordained servants, when they came to Ephesus. Just as Christ preaches here in the hope well church every Lord's day. And on the grounds of Ephesians 2, And Romans 10, which we're about to come to and Hebrews 2 and Hebrews 12.

Uh, we ought to receive The preaching of Christ's ordained servant. Uh, the preaching of the gospel as Christ himself. Proclaiming peace to us. In himself. And so the gentiles didn't have all the things in verse 4, but they had that And Christ. Attended the preaching of his gospel with his spirit.

And he brought them into the righteousness that the whole Bible had described. Because it is a righteousness that is found in the Lord Jesus alone just like Jesus told. Those Jews. Uh, you search the scriptures because you think that in them, you have eternal life. But it is they that speak.

Of me. So this is a great mercy. That those who have wicked natures in themselves. Those who have none of the advantages listed in verse 4 yet, God has brought them into the very righteousness that the Bible had been describing along. By Jesus. Coming and preaching himself. Than the preaching of the gospel and helping them by the power of his spirit.

So that it was not Of him who works, or runs or wills, but of him who shows mercy of him who calls And so, we should begin with mercy and remind ourselves that Jesus saves. And then we should warn ourselves against workism. Verse 31, but Israel pursuing the law of righteousness.

And this pursuing is very vigorous. It's not just that they had a law of righteousness and they thought yeah we should do that and they kind of sort of tried to live by it. It's actually the word that in most instances is translated persecuting. It's the Greek translation of the word follow when we say, Um, Surely goodness and hazard will follow me.

All the days of my life. Um, Uh, in Psalm 23. Which there, it's the Hebrew word for persecute there. And,

Of a friend who Likes to translate it. Surely. Goodness and mercy will be hot on my tracks all the days of my life. But this description of the Jews pursuing righteousness, This is zealous just like is he's going to say that he bears them witness in verse two of the next chapter.

That they have a zeal for God but not according. To knowledge. Sadly. Not according to knowing God in that case, but we'll come to that next week. Um, Lord willing in verse 2. So, here they are. Uh, zealously trying to follow the law thinking that they're going to get righteousness out of it.

They misread. Uh the law. They misread things like Leviticus 18:5 which we heard preached last. Lord's day evening. In that wonderful chapter in Leviticus 18, where the Lord is presenting himself as the one, Who makes the difference in the sanctity of the marriage? Of. Um, of an Israelite.

Uh, not saying if you obey these things you will earn life from me. Or if you follow these things, you will make yourself righteous before me. That is not at all. What Moses was saying? When he writes, To them that that Um, The righteous will live by these things.

Now, he's saying, God is the one who has made the difference in you. That produces life. That's what Leviticus 18:5 says. And the law everywhere taught them to depend entirely upon God. Here they had, they had constructed the tabernacle. Entirely according exactly, according To God's. Uh, instruction. And yet they could not enter Because God himself.

God alone could Give them the life, the righteousness, the atonement. There's all from him and not from them. And so everywhere, the law. Uh said to hope in God just as ever the gospel tells us to open God. The gospel does not tell us that believing will earn salvation.

That everyone is on the same ground and if you make a choice that will save you. No choices. Don't save you. Even. The good news that self doesn't save you. It is only Jesus who saves you. But this worksism, this doing ism. Which sometimes we call legalism, but Uh, really the law is the only good thing in that equation.

It's our working, it's our doing. Or even our believing isn't good enough. The law was good enough. The law couldn't make us good enough. Law. Couldn't make Israel. Good enough. And so there's this warning against works ism, especially Because what doing ism does. When you are confronted with Jesus Christ, So, Israel

pursuing the law of righteousness, is not attained to the law of righteousness.

Why? Because they did not seek up my faith. But as it were by the works of the law. Four and now here's what happened. What happens when a workist, a doerist. A if we use the common language legalist Encounters Jesus. They stumbled at the stumbling stone. As it is written behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone.

And rock of offense and whoever believes on him will not be put to shame. Now, the quote, Comes.

Was 28.

From chapter 28 and verse 16. But it's actually referring back to a stone of stumbling and rock of a fence that the Lord had first prophesied in Isaiah chapter 8 and verse 14. And you remember in that section in chapter 7 and chapter 8, The Lord had offered Ahas that he would save as from Syria and from Ephraim.

But we know, That the reason that Ahas says, oh no, I will not ask for a sign. It sounds very, very religious, very pious. Very good in Isaiah chapter 7, though. The reason he did that was Uh that in the second Kings 16. He had already written to take with police or the king of Assyria which was the superpower that was on the rise at the time.

That he would help him. And he had to actually, Uh, plundered the house of Yahai, the house of the Lord. In order to send tribute to take with police or Uh, so that take with police are would say. Syria. Or save Judah from Syria and Ephraim. And you can imagine Ahaz having done that having entered into this.

Um, the secret alliance with the the king of Assyria. Now, the Lord says, I'll save you from Syria and I'll save you from Ahas. Ask for a sign anything. Anything in heaven or on earth. And I'll display the sign and you'll know that it was I who saved you.

And he invites. Uh, he invites Ahas. Into this wonderful resting entirely upon the Lord and being saved entirely. And by God And yet and Isaiah 8 13 through 14 when Ahas has refused. God says, of course, he's gonna He's going to destroy Judah, using Assyria. But the Lord warns Isaiah.

Not to enter into. The false hope. And the false distress but especially the false hope. That Ahas has entered into. Because he himself is still going to save even from a Syria. The Lord is going to say. And the Lord will be. Um, A refuge for his people, a savior for his people, but he says that in verse 13.

And then he says, in verse 14, if Isaiah 8, But the people who are not trusting in the Lord, They will find that to be a stumbling stone. And the rock of offense. And then it's in prophesying Christ. In particular who is prophesied also in chapter 8, but he's being prophesied again with the same.

Uh, stumbling stone and rock of the fence language in Isaiah 28. That he adds whoever believes on him. Will not. Be seen to have acted hastened, hastily I think most of the English translations and the language for being seen isn't there. That's just the sense. However, trusts in him will not act.

Hastily meaning, if you trust in him, it will be, it will come to be known. Approved out to the end, rather it will prove out in the end. If you trust in him, it will prove out in the end as not a hasty choice or hasty decision. Uh, but as something that succeeds The the stone that the Lord lays in Zion, Will save.

You will not be able to shame. But someone who is Running hard after righteousness. By their own works. By their religion. By how sincere they feel, they are this time as they Try to trust in Jesus. If we run hard, We will instead of building upon resting upon The foundation that God has built.

Well. Stumble. Trip over the stone for flatten our face, when we wounded. And what will we do? Immediately pop up and keep running the way we were before. Rather than staying in the one place that was safe. Not at all on what we have done, but entirely On what the Lord Jesus has done.

And so this warns us against how worksism works not, it doesn't just warn us against pursuing righteousness by works, but it warns us that if we do that, We will find it as if it as a hindrance or an offense. That is only Jesus, an entirely Jesus that saves.

Put on the other hand, the passage ends. With that wonderful and whoever believes on him will not be put to shame. If we would rest only entirely upon him. Give up the idea that even our believing can be good enough. But rather believe that only Jesus is good enough.

And rest on him for our salvation. That hope will not be put to shame. But we shall surely be saved. This is the way to respond. To a gospel, a good news that says God's salvation. Is all of grace, only. By his free pleasure by his free will by his free choice.

By his saving. Is to tell ourselves. Total behold the mercy. Watch out for our works. And hope. Rest only on the Lord himself. And we shall be saved. Man, let's pray. Thank you, father, for this portion of your word. Thank you for The help of your spirit who does give.

To our hearts to receive and believe. And I pray. Oh Lord that your spirit would help each of our hearts to respond in faith. That we would not respond from the flesh, which Resists and even accuses, you For the way that you save. Oh, forgive us. Oh, Lord. For how often we have thought or felt in that way.

But deal with us, we pray according to Christ according to his righteousness. According to his sacrifice. And save us entirely by your almighty grace. We ask in Jesus name, amen.