

# UNIT 20—Israel's Unbelief/Romans 9:30-10:21



## TEXT

### *Israel's Unbelief*

<sup>30</sup>What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. <sup>32</sup>Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." <sup>33</sup>As it is written:

"See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble  
and a rock that makes them fall,  
and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."<sup>a</sup>

**10** Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. <sup>3</sup>Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

<sup>5</sup>Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."<sup>b</sup> <sup>6</sup>But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'<sup>c</sup> " (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup>"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'<sup>d</sup> " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup>But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,"<sup>e</sup> that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: <sup>9</sup>That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. <sup>11</sup>As the Scripture says, "Everyone who trusts in him will

## STUDY

### READ

#### First Reading/First Impressions

How do you feel after reading this passage?

☐ Encouraged by God's grace. ☐ Confused about Israel's place. ☐ Wishing *Reader's Digest* could condense all this.

#### Second Reading/Big Idea

What are the major issues in this passage?

### SEARCH

1. The Gentiles and Israel are contrasted here as two approaches to righteousness. How are the two contrasted? (vv. 30-33)

ISRAEL

THE GENTILES

2. Who is the stumbling block? Why? (vv. 32-33)

3. Although Israel's zeal was sincere, what attitudes blocked them from God's righteousness? (v. 3)

4. What verses in this section emphasize that a right standing with God comes through faith in his work, not in our own efforts? Paraphrase 2 or 3 of them.

# GROUP AGENDA

5. From verses 8-10, what is the relationship between "heart" and "mouth"?

6. How is the phrase "there is no difference" (v. 12) used differently here than in 3:22-23?

7. What is the purpose of Paul's series of questions in verses 14-15?

8. How would you sum up Paul's point in verses 16-21?

## APPLY

On the basis of 10:1-3, how would you respond to someone who said, "What you believe doesn't matter as long as you are sincere?"

Scripture Memory. Romans 10:9-10 is one of the most significant passages on salvation in all of Scripture. Write out these verses (along with the Scripture reference) on a 3 x 5 card and put it on the bathroom mirror or on the dashboard. Repeat the verses everytime you see them until you have them memorized.

***That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.***

**Romans 10:9-10 NIV**

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

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never be put to shame. <sup>1</sup> <sup>12</sup>For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, <sup>13</sup>for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>14</sup>How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup>And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"<sup>h</sup>

<sup>16</sup>But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"<sup>i</sup> <sup>17</sup>Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. <sup>18</sup>But I ask, Did they not hear? Of course they did:

"Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world."<sup>j</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,

"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;

I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."<sup>k</sup>

<sup>20</sup>And Isaiah boldly says,

"I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."<sup>l</sup>

<sup>21</sup>But concerning Israel he says,

"All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."<sup>m</sup>

<sup>a</sup>3 Isaiah 8:14, 28:16 <sup>b</sup>5 Lev. 18:5 <sup>c</sup>6 Deut. 30:12  
<sup>d</sup>7 Deut. 30:13 <sup>e</sup>8 Deut. 30:14 <sup>f</sup>11 Isaiah 28:16  
<sup>g</sup>13 Joel 2:32 <sup>h</sup>15 Isaiah 52:7 <sup>i</sup>16 Isaiah 53:1 <sup>j</sup>18  
Psalm 19:4 <sup>k</sup>19 Deut. 32:21 <sup>l</sup>20 Isaiah 65:1 <sup>m</sup>21  
Isaiah 65:2

# NOTES ON ROMANS 9:30-10:21

**Summary/Romans 9:30-10:21.** The failure of the Jews was not only a part of God's plan (9:6-26) but it was also a matter of their own choice. Paul shows this by contrasting two ways of relating to God: the Jewish way whereby one

## GROUP AGENDA continued

### TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ As a child, what was one goal you worked hard to achieve? ☐ Would you rather raise your children in a pagan society where you had to fight for what you believed or in a religious society where everyone believed as you did? Why? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

### TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person answering 2, etc. ☐ What is the basic difference between Christianity and any other religion? ☐ What did it mean to "confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord'" in Rome at the time this letter was written? ☐ How does this passage explain evangelism? ☐ Case History: A friend scoffed when you said that God raised Christ from the dead (10:9): "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." He even mocked your words by yelling, "Lord, Lord, save me! Save me!" What is your response going to be?

### TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What did you put down for APPLY? ☐ Who or what are some other "lords" that are competing for your loyalty to Christ today? ☐ The church today has been accused of offering "cheap grace." Would you agree or disagree with this accusation?

meticulously kept the law so as to build up a credit balance of righteousness (thus putting God in one's debt and earning his friendship. Of course this never worked because of human sinfulness.). The Gentiles, on the other hand, had not sought God in this way. Rather, being suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with his love as exhibited in Christ Jesus, they simply responded in trusting obedience. Here the way of faith is contrasted with the way of works.

v. 32 **pursued** . . . the problem was not that Israel pursued righteousness but that they did so *by works* and not *by faith*. The contrast is between righteousness sought via deeds and righteousness which is not sought at all but simply accepted by faith.

v. 33 Paul weaves together two passages from Isaiah to show that the failure of Israel to believe in Christ had been foretold by Old Testament scriptures.

**the "stumbling stone"** . . . In Matthew 21:42 Jesus identifies himself as "the stone the builders rejected," quoting from Psalm 118:22-23. Thus the early Christian church came to recognize that the somewhat mysterious references to a stone in the Old Testament refers to Jesus. The idea of Christ as the stone occurs at various points in the New Testament as well: Acts 4:11, Ephesians 2:20; and 1 Peter 2:4-8. In not recognizing Jesus as the inner meaning of the law, Israel can do little else than stumble over him.

**stumble** . . . as in a race, a runner cannot win if a large stone is tripped over. In this case that very stone is He who brings salvation to those who trust him by faith.

v. 1 The fact that Paul continues to pray for the salvation of Israel is a clear indication that he does not consider their rejection as final and complete.

v. 2 **not based on knowledge** . . . this is the flaw in their zeal. They fail to know God as he really is; as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. "There is a perverse and obstinate ignorance at the very heart of their knowledge of God and in the center of their dedicated and meticulous obedience an obstinate disobedience." (Cranfield)

**zeal** . . . in ancient times the Jews were noted for their fanatical and fervent religious zeal. They were desperately in earnest about keeping the law, even when it involved great personal sacrifice or danger: e.g., Eleazar, the priest, allowed himself to be whipped to death rather than to eat pork as ordered by the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes.

v. 3 Paul describes the precise nature of Israel's blindness: they did not see that the status of righteousness is a gift that *comes from God*. Instead they insisted that it was via their own good deeds that righteousness was established.

v. 4 **Christ is the end of law** . . . It is not completely clear what Paul means here. He may mean this in the sense that obedience to the law is no longer the way by which people are accepted by God. Or he may mean that Christ is the "goal" of the law i.e., Christ is the sort of person the law speaks about.

vv. 5-6 Paul contrasts the righteousness that comes via law with the righteousness that is of faith.

v. 5 The quotation from Leviticus 18:5 could be taken to indicate either the impossibility of gaining righteousness as a result of one's own good works or it can point to the achievement of Christ who did just this—He fulfilled the law's requirements.

v. 6-8 It is striking that Paul quotes from the very heart of the law itself (Deuteronomy 30:12-14) in order to show the true nature of righteousness by faith.

v. 6 **Do not say in your heart** ... these are the opening words in the Greek translation of Deuteronomy 8:17 and 9:4—both of which warn against boasting of one's own accomplishments.

**Who will ascend into heaven** ... this phrase means that Israel does not have to go all the way up to heaven (where God lives) to find God's law (Deuteronomy 30:12).

**that is** ... three times in verses 6-8 this phrase is used to indicate that what follows is Paul's interpretation of the preceding phrase. This is typical rabbinical exegesis.

**to bring Christ down** ... the passage in Deuteronomy refers to the law but since Paul sees Christ as the fulfillment of the law (v. 4), it becomes legitimate for him to apply this phrase to Christ. Just as it was not necessary to scale heaven to get the law, neither was it necessary to go there and bring down Christ. He has already come to earth. Both the law and the incarnate Christ are gifts of God to human beings.

v. 7 **deep** ... i.e., the depths of the earth or the place of the dead—Sheol. This word was also used to describe the depths of the sea (e.g., Genesis 1:2), hence Paul's translation here of Deuteronomy 30:13.

**bring Christ up** ... nor is there any need to bring Christ up from the dead since He has already been raised.

v. 8 Just as the law did not have to be sought vigorously, neither does Christ. Both the law and the one to whom it points are near and are to be affirmed verbally and received graciously.

**word of faith** ... Paul boldly identifies the "word" in Deuteronomy 30:14 with the gospel message—since Christ is himself both the fulfiller of the law and the inner meaning of the law (vv. 4-5).

v. 9 **Lord** ... Jesus is to be Lord in contrast to the Roman emperor to whom this title was normally given. **Lord** was also used some 6000 times in Greek Old Testament as the name of God. To confess that Jesus is Lord is to "acknowledge that Jesus shares the name and nature, the holiness, the authority, power, majesty and eternity of the one and only true God" (Cranfield). To call Jesus Lord is to give him both worship and obedience.

**raised him from the dead** ... this for Paul is the distinctive confession of the Christian. In rising from the dead, Jesus verified and demonstrated his claim to be Lord. "His resurrection was no mere resuscitation of a corpse only for it to die again, but God's decisive and irrevocable sealing of him who was crucified as the eternal Lord" (Cranfield).

**saved** ... to be saved is to be granted eternal life, i.e., to share the life of God both here and now and in fulness in the future when Christ returns.

v. 9-10 **confess** ... to be a Christian involves not only inner belief but also outer witness to that belief. It is to declare publicly on whose side one stands.

v. 12 **no difference** ... in 3:23, the emphasis is negative: all are sinners. Here the emphasis is positive: all can be saved by faith.

vv. 12-13 In light of such teaching the Jew should have objected at two points: (1) that the way to God was via trust and not via the law, and (2) that this way was open to all people. To answer this Paul quotes two Old Testament passages. Isaiah 28:16 affirms the need for belief while Joel 2:32 proves that salvation is open to all races.

vv. 14-21 Once again Paul uses the technique of diatribe in which one excuse after another is knocked down. Paul has just said that the only thing the Jews have to do is believe. "But how can man believe the Gospel unless it has been fully preached?" (v. 14). *Answer:* "It has been preached, as Isaiah foretold" (v. 15). "Yet, all have not accepted it" (v. 16). *Answer:* "That does not prove that it was not preached. Isaiah foretold also this neglect of the message" (vv. 16-17). "But perhaps the Jews did not hear" (v. 18). *Answer:* "Impossible. The Gospel has been preached everywhere" (v. 18). "But perhaps they did not understand" (v. 19). *Answer:* That again is impossible. The Gentiles, a people without any real knowledge, have understood.