

Title: Be Right with God!

Text: Romans 9:30–33

If you were to take a poll asking the question, *“How does a person get into heaven?”* What do you suppose the result would be?

I believe the result would be something to do with *“Getting into heaven requires being a good person.”*

I also believe that you would get a similar answer in other countries and cultures.

Whether it be in **Nepal in a Hindu temple**

Or a Buddhist monk taking a vow of poverty, prayer, and daily rituals as they serve in a Buddhist temple.

Or Muslims - who must say their creed and pray prescribed prayers five times each day, give alms, observe the fast of Ramadan, make pilgrimages to Mecca, and perform other rituals. All of this is with the hope that Allah will have mercy on them because of what they have done for him.

Cults - *“All the cults we know of are a works-based mindset as well. “The way to heaven in through good works. This may require knocking on doors to share your faith, going on a two-year mission, tithing your money, abstaining from certain foods and drinks, and other duties.” Lesson 62 Bible.org*

*“But such an approach to God is not limited to non-Christian religions or cults. Many in Christian religions think that they can earn the right standing before God by **going to mass** and confession, doing good works, and **sometimes by harsh treatment of their bodies...***

...Martin Luther was a classic example. He gave up a career in law to join a monastery where he devoted himself to prayers and fasting, penance and the confession of sins, and living in self-imposed harsh conditions. He was trying to earn salvation by his works, but he could not find peace with God because he knew that his works were all tainted by his sin.” Lesson 62 Bible.org

Wouldn't it be the most terrible tragedy to devote one's life to the service of God only to find out when you stand before Him that you got it all wrong and you are now facing His eternal wrath?

How is it the man on the cross was ushered into heaven on that day hanging with Jesus, and those who work so hard will be cast into the lake that burns with fire?

Matthew 7:21–23 ESV

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Friends, this life is short, and eternity is, well, eternal!

So, we might want to get this right. We might want to have a clear understanding of how it is that you and I can be right with God.

If the Bible is correct - and it is. You and I should genuinely listen to what it has revealed regarding salvation from God's eternal and holy wrath.

Paul is planning to set this straight in the verses we will cover today...

Main Idea: God's Work, Not Your Work, Makes You Right with Him!

1. Be Right with God by Faith (vs. 30-31)

Romans 9:30-31 ESV

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

"What shall we say then?" This phrase brings to a close the discussion of this chapter and the idea that Paul has been addressing which is...

"If God is faithful to His covenant promises to His chosen people, then why are most of the Jews rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and Lord." Bible.org

Great question! And as we learned last week, God's intention was never to save all Jews, but instead a remnant of Jews.

Remember, no one deserves salvation

Not the Jews

Not the gentiles

Not you or I deserve salvation.

So, what shall we say then? Paul lays forth a profound distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.

Look at the next part of the verse...

Romans 9:30 ESV

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;

In other words, the Gentiles didn't pursue righteousness and received it nonetheless. They didn't receive it through the Law because the Law was given to the Jewish people.

The Jews had a distinct advantage over everyone else, yet missed it. The gentiles merely heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, without all the background of the Jewish life and came to saving faith nonetheless.

What is Paul's point?

First, one does not need to be a Jew to be saved.

Second, salvation does not come through one's heritage. Salvation does not come through one's religion, knowledge, experience, works, etc.

Righteousness, which is necessary for salvation from God's wrath, is BY FAITH!

This, by the way, is the transition verse from a focus on God's sovereignty to human responsibility.

It is the exercise of faith that brings about righteousness.

The gentiles heard the gospel message - Your sins are forgiven in Christ. Believe and repent, and you will be saved from the wrath of God.

Romans 10:17 ESV

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The Jewish nation, on the other hand, was given the very oracles of God - God revealed Himself in a very special way to these people. They have a rich history with the God of the Bible.

Romans 9:31 ESV

but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

Perhaps a better translation of the verse is, for they were "pursuing the law **FOR** righteousness."

In other words, the Jews believed that righteousness was attainable by following the law.

I can be righteous by what I do!

There are two potential paths to righteousness.

1. Faith in Christ's finished work on the cross.
2. Faith in yourself.

The Jews "*Pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.*"

Righteousness is by faith, not by the works of the law. By the works of the law no flesh will be justified.

Romans 3:20 ESV

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Galatians 2:16 ESV

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

The Jews thought their adherence to the law would save them, but they were wrong. Dead wrong.

Why does faith please God? Because it shows God that you have confidence in Him. That you need Him for who he is and what He is capable of. Remember another word for faith is belief.

What does it mean to believe in Jesus Christ?

If I'm on a luxury liner that is sinking, I should want to get off of the luxury liner and get to safety. If the crew calls out to me and says, "The liner is sinking. Get in the lifeboat so you'll be saved from drowning in the ocean," that is good news in a bad situation. The lifeboat can save me from death.

Now, I could say, "I know there's a lifeboat, but I'm going to take my chances. I'm going to stay on the big boat. I'm a little uncomfortable with the lifeboat. I heard what the crew is telling me to do, but I want to try another way." If I say this, it won't be because I don't know there is another way. I will be choosing, however, not to accept what I know.

There may be another person who says, "Well, if the captain said to get in the lifeboat, I am going to get in the lifeboat."

Believing in the Bible is not merely accepting information. It is entrusting yourself to the information that you say you accept. In other words, there is no belief until I get into the lifeboat.

Talking means nothing. I could say, "Oh, that lifeboat sure looks good. I believe that lifeboat can save somebody. I believe that lifeboat is more than able. I believe that lifeboat is the wheel in the middle of a wheel. I believe that lifeboat is so high you can't get over it, so low you can't get under it, and so wide you can't get around it. I believe that lifeboat is the Rose of Sharon, Balm of Gilead, and Bright and Morning Star." I could say all of this and still drown in the ocean if I don't get in the lifeboat.

To tell me you believe that pew you're sitting in can hold you up is meaningless until you sit down. It is the sitting down; it is the act of faith that equals real faith, not merely the discussion about faith. How do you know that you've acted in faith? Simple—you reject everything but Christ to save you. You only trust in Christ. - Tony Evans, Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations: Stories, Quotes, and Anecdotes from More than 30 Years of Preaching and Public Speaking (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 265.

Faith is at the heart of humility. God is so merciful to the humble...

James 4:6 ESV

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Peter 5:5-6 ESV

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you,

In order for you to be saved, you must be humble and admit you need saving AND you must admit that you are not capable of saving yourself by what you do.

Remember, God is not impressed by you. He loves you, but you do not impress Him.

Do you believe that the Lord God is capable of saving you? Do you believe that if God says something in His word, He is capable of performing it?

Apply - Who do you believe in more? You or God?

Review - God's Work, Not Your Work, Makes You Right with Him!

- Be Right with God by Faith

2. Be Right with God by Avoiding God's Offensive Rock (vs. 32-33)

I am gifted at tripping over my own two feet, or flat carpet, or whatever. Sometimes I've been known to trip up the stairs. As long as I am walking, there are plenty of opportunities for me to stumble over something.

Well, there is a rock that many stumble over. A Rock that Paul brings to our attention. And we need to decide about this rock. What should we do with it? Believe me, it is either an offensive rock. Or it is a rock that you can build your life on.

Let's take a look at verses 32-33 to see what we can learn about this offensive rock...

Romans 9:32-33 ESV

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Why did Israel not succeed in reaching the law (aka righteousness by the law).

Paul says rightly in verse 31 the reason. *"Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works."*

Again, the law was never intended to save.

It was intended to reveal the holy character of God.

It was intended to show God's people the impossibility of living out God's law flawlessly.

It was intended to point to the only One who could and did live out God's law perfectly.

That person is Jesus, of course.

But the law could, nor world save anyone from eternal condemnation.

Hebrews 10:1-4 ESV

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Titus 3:5 ESV

he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

And it is this thought that Paul uses to talk about a stone that people stumble over.

What did they not pursue by faith? Righteousness!

What did they pursue as if it were by works? Righteousness!

They thought the Law would make them RIGHTEOUS. But all the Law did was contribute to their SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Some questions come to the surface as we look at this passage...

What is a stumbling stone?

What does this imagery mean?

Why does God lay a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense?

Does God purposely put up a barrier to salvation?

Paul takes part of [Isaiah 8:14](#) and 28:16 in a very strategic way to show the two purposes of the *“stumbling stone and rock of offense.”*

First, notice that it is God who puts the stumbling stone in Israel.

The Jews however are responsible for stumbling over this stone.

They should have seen it and avoided stumbling!

The [Isaiah 8:14](#) passage demonstrates that the Lord Jesus Christ is the stone to strike and the rock to stumble over.

Isaiah 8:14 (ESV): *14 And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*

On the other hand...

The [Isaiah 28:16](#) shows that God puts the stone in place as a cornerstone to build on.

Isaiah 28:16 (ESV): *16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD,*

“Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,

a stone, a tested stone,

a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation:

‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’

“How can the Lord be both the stone itself and yet the one who puts the stone in place?”

“Answer: The Messiah is the Lord God! By combining the text on judgment with the other text on hope, Paul shows that Christ the Lord is both the hope of salvation for those who build their lives on Him and yet at the same time a rock of stumbling and a stone of offense for those who take pride in their own good works.” Bible.org, 4.

The fact is, While Jesus Christ is a safe haven for the believer, He is a stumbling stone for the unbeliever.

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 ESV

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Why would the Lord purposefully place a stumbling stone in Zion?

Because the message of the Gospel is offensive. Why is it offensive? Because it goes after our pride. Whether I care to admit it or not, I am helpless without God! Even the unbeliever is preserved by the merciful had of God.

For those actively rejecting Jesus and the Gospel today, hear me. It is only by God’s mercy that you are not in Hell right now. Turn to Him before it is too late.

God saves me by grace and preserves me by His mercy!

What do I bring to the table in God’s process of salvation?

Just the sin that makes my salvation necessary.

I cannot boast in anything because everything I have and can do is because of the Lord!

The only thing I can boast about is the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:17

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.

So, what does this boil down to for you and me?

Christ, the rock is a stumbling stone for those who believe their righteousness is sufficient for an eternal heaven.

How could a lowly carpenter be the Messiah? How could a CRUCIFIED Messiah be the King of kings and the Lord of lords?

“Any plan of salvation which gives no offense to self-righteous men, is certainly not of God.” - Charles Simeon

You have a choice with Jesus. You can either trip over Him or build your life upon him.

Matthew 7:24–27 ESV

²⁴ “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

Either way, the stone, the rock does not move. You’re the one that has to move.

So, will you stumble over Christ on your way to eternal hell?

Or, will you build your life on the ROCK and thus have the promise of eternal heaven with Christ?

By building your life on the rock, the rock is no longer offensive, but instead, life-giving!

What a beautiful promise! *“Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

What will you do with Jesus?

How will you answer the question from God on that day when you stand before Him?

“Why should I let you into my heaven?”

The only way to avoid stumbling on the stumbling stone is to build your life on the rock.

Start by believing Jesus is whom he says he is.

Second, repent of the idea that you can earn your way to a relationship with God.

Review - God's Work, Not Your Work, Makes You Right with Him!

- Be Right with God by Faith

- Be Right with God by Avoiding God's Offensive Rock

Conclusion

On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand

*My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

Refrain:

*On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

*In every rough and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the vale.
When all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]*

*When he shall come with trumpet sound,
oh, may I then in Him be found,
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne. [Refrain]*

Please! Stand on Christ alone!

How would your life be different if you lived for the one who died in your place?