

## Romans

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Romans 9:30-33



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Vs. 30

- Paul here begins to sum up this part of his argument by contrasting the way the Gentiles have come to righteousness (salvation) and the way the Jews attempted to but failed. There can only be one Way and on the whole the Jews missed it and the Gentiles who are in the church found it, or rather, The Way found them.
- The righteousness of God was not really something the Gentiles were pursuing. They had their pagan temples, the gods of their city/nation/people, and a LOT of it had to do with food, wine and sex, (Corinth alone is said to have had over 10,000 temple prostitutes) so most people were satisfied with the religion they had.
- And yet, within a very short period of time the Christian faith had spread all across the Roman empire and the Gentiles in the church vastly outnumbered the Jews. Paul is quite right that the Gentiles did not search for righteousness (although there were many who did not believe in the gods, were disgusted by the hedonistic way the temples operated, and were spiritually empty, looking very favorable on the faith of the Jews for their morality and monotheism). Instead, the faith that leads to righteousness found them. Paul gets a lot of credit for founding the early church, but Scripture testifies that he did not establish either the church in Antioch or in Rome, that there were already disciples/believers far in the interior of what is now Turkey (Timothy and his family), and there is evidence that the faith was spreading into France and Spain by the end of the book of Acts. Good ol' regular church folk were spreading the gospel everywhere. And as they shared their faith with Gentiles the Gentiles responded and were being saved in large numbers. As William Barclay puts it, "It was as if the Gentile saw the Cross and said, 'If God loves me like that I can trust him with my life and with my soul.'"
- To explain how all this happened even in places Paul never visited, I like how Karl Barth puts it: "The Church does not fast as those who have not the Bridegroom...The Church does not wish to

be a stranger in the world...The Church is in great haste; it is hungry and thirsty for the concrete joys of the marriage feast. It refuses, in spite of many defeats, to retire from the lost outposts upon the main position. It wishes to advance...”.

#### Vss. 31-32b

- When one thinks of where the Jewish people **really** started, in the desert with Moses, one can see where the seeds for the failure of the Jews were planted. For a long period of time, perhaps a hundred years or more, the Jews served the Egyptians as slaves. Anything the Jews had, food, clothing, housing, whatever, it had to be earned. Their Egyptian masters would not **give** them anything. So by the time the second generation with Joshua crossed the Jordan to retake the Promised Land, the idea that every good thing must be earned was deeply ingrained in the hearts, minds, faith, and culture of the Jews.
- Again, Barclay points out that, “Fundamentally, the Jewish idea was that a man, by strict obedience to the law, could pile up a credit balance. The result would be that God was in his debt and owed him salvation. But it was obviously a losing battle, because man's **imperfection** could never satisfy God's **perfection**; nothing that man could do could even begin to repay what God has done for him.”

#### Vs. 32c-33

- So deeply ingrained was the idea of salvation by works that Paul says that Faith itself had become a stumbling stone to the Jews. He pulls together Isaiah 13:14 and 28:16 to show how God was using the Prophet to place Faith into the Jewish religious equation as a stumbling stone in order to make them pause and reconsider their current path and turn toward God's Way of Faith leading to Righteousness and Salvation.
- No one understood this better than Paul. Recall that he told the Philippians (3:5) that he was the “Hebrew of the Hebrews”. He had spent his life searching for a law, an obedience, which would put him right with God, and he never found it because there was no such law to be found. Instead, there on the road to Damascus, he found faith, and he was never again disappointed.