

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans X:27-33

Lesson #31

Introduction

With this lesson we should be completing chapter nine of Romans. It has contained some of the most debated subjects in all Christianity. But, as we said earlier, it isn't difficult to understand What it teaches, it's just difficult to believe That it teaches these things, because we've neglected and ignored them for so long that they seem unusual to us. Chapter nine of Romans leaves us with a renewed perspective of the absolute sovereignty and transcendent majesty of God, and the realization that He freely uses that sovereignty in the lives of every single one of His creatures. He is that Potter who uses His authority to make vessels of every sort and for every purpose to suit His particular needs. Some, from the very beginning were intended for glory, and some from the very beginning were intended for destruction, because He has consciously chosen to use both in the working out of His eternal cosmic plan of creation. Each will serve its purpose for which God has made it. Our role in this cosmic play of life is assigned by God. *11 ... so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.* Now in these last verses of chapter nine, Paul describes the method that God has ordained to call out from among the mass populations, those who are His chosen vessels of mercy, and the means by which they are prepared for glory. And it's all about His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord.

The Stumbling Stone Placed by God

27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "Though the Number of the Sons of Israel Be like the Sand of the Sea, it Is the Remnant That Will Be Saved; 28 for the Lord Will Execute His Word on the Earth, Thoroughly and Quickly." 29 and Just as Isaiah Foretold, "Unless the Lord of Sabaoth Had Left to Us a Posterity, We Would Have Become like Sodom, and Would Have Resembled Gomorrah."

30 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 did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by 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 9:27-33 (NASB)

Verses 27-29:

In verses 27-29 Paul shows us that the number of people of the earth will swell to numbers that resemble the grains of sand on a seashore, but then immediately tells us that in spite of the vast numbers, it is only a small remnant of humanity on whom God has chosen to show His mercy. In the example of Sodom and Gomorrah God exercised His authority to kill every resident of those cities for their forbidden behaviors except the family of Lot. No signs of that place remains. In the days of Noah God chose to exercise His authority to kill all the inhabitants of the earth for their violence and idolatry, and continual evil. Surely God wouldn't kill everybody, men, women, and children, He would only choose the very worst of mankind, just a couple of the serious offenders, and spare all the rest, right? Well, is that what God did? We know that it's not, don't we? So why are these examples recorded in the scriptures, and what are we intended to learn from them? One thing we can learn is, that what we seem to think is only minor, seems to be very serious indeed in the eyes of God. When God gave His Commandments to Moses, the penalty for disobeying a great many of them was death. Nevertheless, in this very day we are openly promoting many things that God has clearly forbidden, and set serious penalties, but we seem to think nothing of it. Even the apostate churches are embracing most of these forbidden practices, and calling it loving. And it is loving, it's the love for sin that's behind the acceptance of those things forbidden by God. Churches that love sin do not love the true and living God of the bible. They love that fictitious god they have manufactured in their own carnal minds, as Arthur Pink said. And just like the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the days of Noah, there is an astoundingly small number who are chosen by God to escape the coming resultant and unavoidable destruction and receive mercy.

The multitudes won't believe it until they see it with their own eyes. If the Word of God doesn't convince them then neither you nor I will do it either. By His own sovereign choice and ordination, God has determined to redeem only a small remnant of mankind from among all the multitudes of peoples that ever live on the face of the earth. It is tragic just how common a thing this salvation has become in the eyes of that which calls itself the church. In earthly terms it's somewhat like walking out into your back yard and finding a 10 carat diamond laying in the dirt. It just doesn't happen every day, in fact, it's so rare as to be almost beyond belief. And so it is with the gift of God's mercy, through imparting saving faith in Jesus Christ to a lost sinner stumbling through life without so much as a clue. Nearly every evangelist and bible teacher today tells us that there's a 10 carat diamond just laying around in everybody's backyard, and all we have to do is decide to go pick it up. Of course we know that's absurd, and absolutely not true about the diamond, and it's equally untrue about the mercy of God. The upcoming verses discuss this very point, in demonstrating that the precious treasure of mercy and glory are a gift of faith, given at the discretion of God alone, and not by our own doings, meaning our behaviors, our will, or our free choices. God's mercy and forgiveness is not a common thing, it is a rare and priceless treasure of unfathomable value.

Verse 30:

³⁰ What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith

To fully understand this verse we must realize that it's speaking of the Gentiles in direct contrast to the Jews, God's chosen people, who did at least make some feeble attempt at learning and observing God's commandments for righteous living. The Gentiles, meaning every other nation and ethnic group in the whole world, still makes no attempt whatsoever at knowing and carefully observing God's standards for righteous life. In fact, we can see that the nations all reject outright, almost everything God calls righteous, and embrace almost everything that God calls sinful. There is a clear and obvious difference of opinion between that which God has said in His holy scriptures, and that which unregenerate mankind believes in his own heart and mind. The Gentiles have created their own gods and their own laws and their own set of values and virtues. Paul's statement that the Gentiles do not pursue righteousness (at least not God's righteousness) is not even open for debate. In fact, the Gentiles are openly hostile to God's form of righteousness and seek to destroy it and anyone who promotes it. And this is absolutely understandable, because God's righteousness is diametrically opposed to just about everything that the Gentile nations love and desire. I agree with Paul wholeheartedly that the Gentiles do not pursue the righteousness of God, and yet, some of these same lost and sinful Gentiles who wanted nothing whatsoever to do with God, have been chosen by Him to receive His mercy through the gift of saving faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. They were granted the faith to believe in, and desire to follow after, Jesus Christ who has freely imparted His perfect righteousness to them through nothing other than their belief in Him as their Lord, and Savior, and God. They didn't want it, they did nothing worthy to attain it, they received it as a free gift of God, even when they weren't looking for it. This is just not how we humans think things work, is it?

Now, at this point it's imperative to understand that faith is not something that we all have in our backyard, like the 10 carat diamond example I made earlier. We cannot just go out in the backyard and pick up saving faith at our own discretion, because, like the diamond, there just isn't any of it out there. Faith and salvation are clearly elements of the gracious gift of God described in Ephesians, chapter 2, verses 8-10. And it says that these elements are not by human works or human will but they are a gift of God. It was designed this way intentionally, so that no one would have any possible ground to boast in their own wisdom or their own accomplishment. God chose to save man by faith alone, apart from any contribution whatsoever from man, because it forever abolishes, for all eternity, any thoughts of self importance or earned entitlements. We were all hopelessly lost sinners, seeking only our own interests, when God sovereignly intervened in our lives, overpowered our innate fallen nature, and regenerated us from the inside out. He didn't wait for us to decide, nor ask us for our permission, He first chose us, we didn't first choose Him, our choice followed His, and was

the direct result of His initial doing, not ours.

Yes, we willingly responded, but only after receiving the faith necessary to do so, which was His gift. More often than not the actual gift of faith follows an extended period of “calling.” In the last part of verse 11 Paul said: ¹¹ *.... so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls*, and back in chapter 8, verse 29 he said: ²⁹ *For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;* ³⁰ *and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.* These are very well known verses that we should be familiar with. But familiarity with a verse doesn't always mean properly understanding that verse.

Our study verse, (Rm 9:30) says that the Gentiles, who did not even pursue righteousness, nevertheless obtained righteousness anyway. That doesn't seem to make sense, unless you see the whole picture. In the reference verse from chapter 8, we had Paul's wonderful description of what we might call a logical, or progressive order of salvation. It starts with those whom God has foreknown and predestined, these are the vessels of mercy prepared beforehand for glory. (9:23) God has designed everything to work out on a precise timetable, so when a predestined vessel of mercy comes to the right time, as designated by God, then God begins His “calling” process on that person. This calling process varies from person to person but usually includes a new sense of uneasiness over our eternal destiny. A real and growing fear of death and hell for eternity begins to replace the former apathy. Also a change in our attitude toward the pleasures of sin, and a kind of remorse for it begins to grow where only the desires for self-gratification and gain once dominated our minds. This can be very quick, or it can go on for years (as it did in my own life) and the sense of helplessness to affect any change by our own efforts becomes glaringly apparent. I was made painfully aware of my absolute and total inability to control what my heart and mind truly believe, and I cried out to God that He was unfair, demanding of me that which I had no ability to perform. A person can decide what clothes to wear, and what to have for breakfast, but nobody can simply choose what they really believe in the depths of their heart and mind. And this was my dilemma for at least 2 years before my conversion. I knew what I needed, but I had no ability to perform it. And who was I going to fool by lying about it? Maybe I could fool men but did I think I could fool God? Of course not, and therein was the source of my 2 year mental agony. And therein lies the tragedy of this quick and easy Arminian theology that teaches that we all can simply choose to believe any time we want. That simply is not true, it is a frustrating deception, it is a lie pure and simple, and we all who have received the gift of faith by the grace of God alone full well know it, but it keeps being preached every day.

Now perhaps you're thinking, Why is he telling us this? I'm using my own example to demonstrate that the whole process that God implemented in my life was His sovereign design, because by His grace and mercy, He chose me to be one of His vessels of mercy. I was formerly a gentile who had no interest in the pursuit of godly righteousness, but He had chosen me from before creation to be His own, and when the time came He began the calling process that was designed to prepare me to receive that precious gift of saving faith that I had learned so very well that I couldn't possibly do myself. This is why the gentiles who did not pursue righteousness obtained it anyway, because it is a gift of God alone, and He has predestined many gentiles, from before creation, to receive this mercy when their time finally comes. And it is also the reason that the Jews could not attain it through their works, because it isn't something that is possible by human works. The means that God has chosen to dispense His mercy was intentionally designed to avoid the situation that Satan was used to demonstrate. That pride and self-importance has no place whatsoever in the eternal kingdom of God, unless of course you are God. For God to have an eternal family of authentic and sincere worshipers, all of them must realize that they have a very good reason to worship God, and the desire to do so willingly and eternally. If any thought that they got there by any merits, or wisdom, or choice of their own doing it would leave room for self importance that would eventually grow into that same pride that destroyed Satan. That is probably the primary reason that God made Satan, to use as an example of what happens to any creature that begins to think of itself as being in any way equal to God himself. This was the well spring, the source of all sin. God has said outright

that the He will not give His glory to any created beings or to fictitious gods. (Isa 42:8)

If things actually worked out the way we humans think they do, or like we think they should, then no gentiles at all, and precious few Jews either should ever attain God's mercy and salvation, because few indeed, if any, are those who show any interest in knowing and living by God's commandments. The human species has a way that seems right to us in our own reasoning, but the end result of that way is inescapable death for all of us. (Pr 14:12, 16:25) We think that there are two roads in life and we can make a choice which one to follow by nothing but our own free will. We think the choice is ours, we think we are the captain of our soul and the master of our fate, but we all function with the same operating system, and that operating system has a flaw that affects our choices. That flaw is a fallen sin nature that innately loves all those things that God calls sin, so we are predisposed to choose those things, by our own unforced will, that will result in our eventual death and condemnation. While we might say we are in control, nevertheless the whole process that we use to exercise that control is functioning with a flawed and damaged operating system. Yes, we do freely make choices, and we are responsible for those choices, but the innate drives and affections and desires that steer those choices are damaged and we don't even know it.

I'm using all these examples because I want us to understand that it is God and God alone who has, and does, determine who will receive mercy and who will be hardened, (v.18) and It is God and God alone who has set all things in place to see to it that those things actually come about, (v.11) and at the same time remain the free, unforced choices of the individuals involved, so that everyone is fully responsible for their actions. We either don't or can't think like this, but God can and He does. This pool of fallen humanity, with the damaged operating system, is that one and the same lump of clay that the potter of verses 21-24 uses to make **both** vessels of destruction to demonstrate His power and wrath, **and** vessels of mercy to demonstrate His glory, and He does so as He alone sees fit. No matter how we might personally feel about this, it is undisputedly what we have been taught in chapter nine of this epistle. If this seems too harsh to us, then perhaps it's because we've lost the respect, the reverent fear, the realization of the transcendency and sovereignty of God, and think of Him as being just like us, with similar rights and limitations. That would be a mistake of monumental proportions. We don't worship a God who is just like us, we worship a God who is entirely beyond the realm of anything we can comprehend. Yes, Jesus took on human form, and He lived among us, and experienced what we experience, but He was not at all like us in His righteousness, His holiness, His power, and His majesty, in these He towered over mankind like a mountain towers over a pebble.

Now I realize that we're steering a wide course as we navigate this verse, but how do we really fathom the whole point of God's eternal and predestined plan of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, completely apart from the works of man, unless we understand the whole situation involved? The more we understand the more it makes sense and the more evident is the grand wisdom of God.

If you're a Christian, and you go to church regularly, then you've often heard the question asked: "why do some believe and others not when they hear the very same message?" This is a common question isn't it? And there are a few common answers that we come up with. But the scriptures offer the true answer many times, and these verses are among them. Some believe because they receive the gift to believe, and others don't because they do not receive that gift of belief (faith), and solely on our own merits and abilities we are not capable of truly believing unto salvation, it is that simple. Our fallen nature has blocked us from genuine saving faith simply by our own choosing, and thus it has been designed, with full intent and purpose, *so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls*, and Jesus told us the same thing through John's gospel, where He was quoted as saying: *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.* (Jn 6:44), and again in that same chapter, and even more directly He says:

⁶⁴ *"But there are some of you who do not believe."* For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did

not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. ⁶⁵ And He was saying, "*For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.*"

These verses make it abundantly clear that God has chosen who will believe and who will not, according to His own purposes, and He has set in place the necessary means to assure the results. For instance, was there any possibility whatsoever that Judas Iscariot could have chosen not to betray Jesus, and therefore never have set the whole crucifixion process into motion? Of course not, and we all know this. Judas made that decision of his own free choice, but God had already hardened his heart such that it was the only choice that Judas could make. Judas was a vessel of wrath, prepared beforehand by God for destruction, and he had no innate desire or ability to change what he was. He functioned according to his own driving nature and affections. He did what God had designed him to do, he betrayed Jesus as the scriptures had long ago foretold. No matter how obvious it is, we still refuse to accept that our whole existence and destiny has been predestined by God from before creation. It is our fallen and prideful sense of self-importance that clouds our judgement and dims our understanding. We do not know the true and living God of the holy scriptures, we know a god that we have devised in our own fallen, sinful, and prideful minds, a god who is just like us. So we thumb our nose at His commandments, and we ignore His statutes, and think we have every right to pick and choose our own ways and our own behaviors as we see fit. Nothing is going to change this, vessels of wrath will continue to behave according to their nature, and in the end serve their designated purpose, which is to demonstrate the wrath and power of Almighty God to all creation. And the vessels of mercy will then see and comprehend the value and scope of the boundless mercy and forgiveness of Almighty God on His chosen children. And thus we see that the gentiles, who did not by their own unaided choice simply choose repentance and faith, nevertheless received it as a free gift of God, because He had predestined them for mercy, apart from their own works or merits. Which brings us to the next verses:

Verse 31-32:

³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,

What could be more logical and obvious, we all earn our own destinies by our actions and choices that we freely make during our lifetimes? This is like common logic 101. But are there times when common logic is wrong, when what seems to be obvious is actually not the case at all? If we've been around for very long then we know there are such situations. Situations where we think we've got it all figured out, but we're missing some important aspect that totally changes everything. We've probably all experienced these situations, haven't we? And such it is with our eternal fate and destiny. We only tend to see it from our own perspective, and only consider our own actions and choices as relevant, but what if there's a whole other perspective that's unseen by us that's even greater than our own? What if our destiny isn't being determined each and every day solely by our own choices and actions, but rather has been planned out from before our creation by another who is far above us in power and authority? This could change everything couldn't it, but that would require us to accept the existence and authority of someone, or something, that we can't see or touch.

By our very nature we don't like this, we want to believe we are in control of our lives and destinies. And such was the case of those people being described in these two verses we're examining now. These Israelites had received the commandments of God, and were given all His statutes for living righteously before God and remaining in His favor and receiving all His blessings. They perceived that they could do this simply by their own choosing, but they were missing a vital and key issue in the process. They perceived that the desire and ability was present within all of them to live righteously if they chose to do so. They were missing a vital part of the process, and without that essential part they were coming up with a flawed conclusion. They never arrived at a righteous life because they believed they could do it on their own, simply by their own choosing, without that key element of faith. They pursued righteousness by keeping the Law of God with their own human capabilities, but those human capabilities, apart from faith, proved to be entirely inadequate, entirely ineffectual.

The innate desires of the flesh rendered the keeping of the Laws of God impossible, and the Laws began to be redefined and rewritten so as to bend them into conformity to man's own longings and desires. As long as man's nature is fallen, this will be the eventual condition of his living and his practices.

Man does not willingly keep the commandments of God unless he has genuine saving faith in God, through Jesus Christ, to motivate and empower him. Obviously, some are innately more like God commands and some are less, but none are righteous, no not one, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Everything we think we know about our eternal destiny is useless and wrong, unless we understand and factor in the element of faith. Faith changes everything, and this is entirely by God's design. And let's make it clear that even those who have the gift of faith do not then earn their way into heaven by their works. Oh yes, faith, if it is genuine, does affect our works, our faith does radically change our thinking and behaviors, (Jn 14:15; 1Jn 5:3) but that's not how we get into heaven. It is faith in the imputed and perfect works of Jesus Christ that is our only hope of heaven. Concerning those religious Israelites who were trusting in their own righteousness, and who had rejected and caused to be crucified Jesus Christ, Luke wrote:

¹¹ "He is the Stone Which Was Rejected by you, the Builders, but Which Became the Chief Corner stone. ¹² "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Jesus Christ is God's own stumbling stone for vessels of wrath who will not accept Him as their only means of reconciliation and righteousness. Religious man has devised every kind of fictitious deities, and twisted rules and laws and morals and ethics that they think, or hope, will allow them to eventually earn their way into heaven, and they trust in these false hopes. Mostly because of pride they stumble over the Stumbling Stone that could be their eternal salvation, but instead becomes their worst possible mistake, because they do not have the humility and faith to accept the works of another to be substituted for their own. Perhaps because doing so is to admit publically that our own works are not going to save us from the wrath of God. For mankind, justification for sin, and attainment of righteousness is never, ever an **accomplishment**, it is **a free gift of God**, pure and simple. (Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-10) In the next verse Paul continues:

Verse 33:

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."

These are quotations from the Old Testament, from Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14. The context of the section from chapter 28 is Isaiah's rebuke of the religious leaders of Israel who thought that they had made a pact with evil to escape God's judgements. They thought they had successfully hidden their iniquities in clever deception. But God tells them, through the prophet Isaiah, that He is setting a foundation stone of righteousness and truth, that will trip them up, and set the record straight. Those who reject this Stone will know first hand the sheer terror of the wrath of God. (Isa 24:19)

What does it mean by a Stone of Stumbling? Well, essentially that one who rejects Him (Jesus Christ) stumbles and falls in their journey through life. If we encounter an obstacle in our path then we must take some kind of action or we'll collide with it. And so it is with Jesus Christ. He is an object, in the form of a man, whom God the Father has intentionally placed in our path, (meaning all mankind) and our response to Him determines our eternal destiny. Like all obstacles He also requires a response, and to many this is an annoyance, or an offense. To believe in the Jesus Christ of the scriptures requires that we accept all that He says about us and our condition, and that's not very complimentary. In fact it's downright offensive to be told that we are hopeless sinners who seek only evil continually, especially if we're religious people. (Gen 6:5; Rom 3:10-18) Certainly Jesus was the most hated and despised and offensive person that the Jewish leaders had ever encountered. They thought of themselves as the elite of society, the cream of the crop, and He told them to their face: ²⁷ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear*

beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. I don't know about you, but to me that sure seems to qualify as offensive. If our offense to what He says causes us to reject Him as God's Son and Savior of the world, then we have stumbled over the stumbling stone, and will be forever diverted from the way, the truth, and the life, and we will never come to God the Father by any other means. (Jn 14:6)

But, for those who have been granted access, (Jn 6:65) those who are the called of God (Jn 6:44; Rom 8:30) and have received that gift of saving faith, (Eph 2:8-9) these who believe in Him will not be disappointed. In as much as all that Jesus Christ is, and all that He has done is freely imputed to our account, we can never be disappointed unless Jesus himself is disappointed, and that is never going to happen, because in Him God the Father is well pleased. (Mat 3:17, 17:5)

Conclusion:

In life there will be triumphs and there will be tragedies, and with some things we will be disappointed and heartbroken, and with others we will be overjoyed and delighted, but concerning our eternal life and our entrance into the everlasting kingdom of God, all who truly believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and the only means of coming to God the Father; concerning these things we will not be disappointed, ever. So says the Lord God Almighty. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
06/30/13