

Chapter 45

Salvation by Amazing Grace

(Romans 9:30–33)

The position of Israel was a highly privileged one (9:1–5) but salvation is not by nationality, it is by God’s amazing grace (9:6–23). In Paul’s day God was calling more gentiles to salvation than Jews (9:24) and that fact had been predicted in the Old Testament (9:24–29).

Now Paul is approaching his second comment on the plight of the Jewish people. In Romans 9:30–33 Paul is summing up the relative positions of Jews and gentiles. Then he will make a major point: the Jews were approaching salvation in a false way, seeking ‘to establish their own righteousness’ (10:1–21).

So he asks,³⁰ *What then shall we say?* If God’s salvation comes by his electing grace, what is the position now? *Because gentiles who are not pursuing righteousness have laid hold of righteousness, the righteousness which is by faith,*³¹ *but Israel although pursuing a law of righteousness did not achieve that law.*

1. Because God’s grace is predestinating grace it often produces great surprises because God chooses some very unexpected people. He often saves people you would never think would be saved. In Paul’s day the gentiles were not in any way looking for salvation. Paul has already said: they ‘hold down the truth in unrighteousness’ (see 1:18, 21, 22, 25, 28, 29).

2. The traditional people of God, wanting so much the coming of their Saviour, rejected him when he came! ‘He came to what

was his own, and his own people did not receive him' (John 1:11). It happens again and again in the story of the church. Where there is a new movement of the Spirit, you expect the 'traditional' Christians to rejoice at what is happening. But no, they start criticizing.

Paul now asks why it is that Israel has fallen so badly and has, generally speaking, missed the way of salvation, and seems to have been left aside by God. Israel did not achieve that law.³² *Why not?* Paul answers: *Because they pursued the law of righteousness not by faith but as if it were by works.*

3. The Jews wanted salvation but pursued it the wrong way. They pursued the 'law of righteousness'. Not everyone is like this, but some are. In Paul's day the people of Israel knew there was such a thing as salvation and in their own way they were pursuing it. But it is a great mistake to admire law but neglect faith. The people of Israel generally 'pursued the law of righteousness not by faith but as if it were by works'. We might have expected Paul to say they pursued the 'righteousness of the law' (which is how some translations inaccurately express it). But the Jewish people were not simply pursuing righteousness, they were also pursuing the law itself as a means of getting righteousness. 'You . . . rely on the law . . .', Paul said (2:17). Jewish people focused not just on righteousness but on the law itself. The law is 'the law of righteousness' for the Jew.

What God wants more than anything is faith! Faith in himself, faith in his promises concerning Jesus, faith in Jesus' faithfulness to us, faith in Jesus' blood. The 'natural man' invariably thinks he is saved by works. It is instinctive to all of us to think we are saved by morality. Because the Jew also had the law of God given to him it intensified this style of thinking and even more he tended to think he would be saved by his general morality and obedience to the law of Moses.

In every religion, in almost every ideology, people tend to think that some type of law is the all-important thing. Strangely,

people who have no faith in God at all and claim to be atheists still talk about things that we ‘must’ do and things which we ‘shouldn’t do’. They still think in terms of law. But anyone who thinks that righteousness comes by law-keeping will stumble over Jesus. *They stumbled at the stone of stumbling.* People who feel that they are living a good life do not see how much they need Jesus. They stumble over the type of salvation he came to bring. The Jewish people in Jesus’ day expected a ‘Messiah’, a Saviour, but the kind of Saviour they expected was a political and socio-economic Saviour. They stumbled over his humble circumstances, over his self-chosen humility, over his refusing to accept law and morality as the way of salvation, over the people to whom Jesus was friendly. Supremely, they stumbled over the cross and over the simplicity of the gospel.

God had said it would happen. Paul reminds his readers of Isaiah’s words. It ought not to surprise them that Israel had stumbled. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling, said Paul:

³³*As it is written,*

*‘Behold! I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling
and a rock that will make people fall . . . ’*

This is a reference to two verses from the book of Isaiah – 8:14 and 28:16. Whatever folly the Israelite leaders may have committed, God’s plan to send salvation stands secure. ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone . . . ’ God is sovereign in what he does (‘Behold, I am laying . . . ’). He is planning to do something in Jerusalem (‘in Zion’). He will send someone who will be like a sure and stable foundation stone in a building that he is building. But another passage (Isaiah 8:14) lets us know that the One who can be a Rock on which to build one’s life can also be a stone over which one stumbles to one’s death. This is all fulfilled in Jesus. Isaiah had added a promise: the person who

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believes in him will not be put to shame. Think of it in terms of what happens to your **past**. God's forgiveness releases us from the shame of what we have been and what we have done. Our past is strangely and mysteriously overruled. Our **present** daily life is blessed. We are given spiritual understanding. Then there comes into our lives the joy and peace of God. We have happy consciences and an assurance that God is with us. Our very characters will change. We participate in a kingdom of love. Think of it also in terms of **the future**. Although in the world we shall have tribulation, this does not have to terrify us. Jesus has overcome the world. In this world we shall 'lay hold of that for which God took hold of us' (as Philippians 3:12 suggests to us). Our inner man will be renewed daily. We are journeying towards heaven. Death will never separate us from Jesus. We 'never die', said Jesus (John 11:26). When we seem to descend into the deepest shadow we ascend into the most glorious brightness, to be for ever with the Lord.

We are to live on Jesus, and let him be our law. We shall be led into pathways of love, and eventually we shall be enjoying a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.