

## Chapter 46

### God's Righteousness

(Romans 10:1–3)

The thought of Romans chapter 10 follows directly on from 9:30–33 and is the greatest chapter in the Bible concerning faith as the way of receiving salvation. Paul is still considering the tragedy of Israel. Again he introduces his theme sympathetically (10:1–2). *<sup>1</sup>Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.* Paul longed for his own people to come into the experience of being rescued from the old world of death and danger. He wanted them to be transferred to the new realm of salvation, spiritual power and the hope of resurrection to glory. *For I bear them witness,* he says in Romans 10:2, *that they have a zeal for God but it is not according to knowledge.* Paul is not interested in denouncing the Jews or criticizing them. He now comes to the second main assertion that he wants to develop (Romans 9:6a was the first): they missed the way of salvation because they came at it in entirely the wrong way.

**1. It is possible to be enthusiastic for the God of the Bible and yet still miss salvation.** Paul says: 'For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not according to knowledge.' No one can doubt how interested the Jews were in the faith of Israel, but it is possible to be very zealous for our faith, our church, the way we were brought up to respect God – and yet still not know Jesus as a powerful Saviour in our lives. It is possible to live a highly disciplined and moral life and yet know

nothing of the power of salvation. Many church-goers miss salvation because they think their church-going righteousness somehow 'justified' them before God. You can fill your life with prayer and fasting and church-going and righteous deeds but still not know the transforming righteousness of God!

2. **We miss the way if we try to establish our own righteousness.** <sup>3</sup>*For not acknowledging God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness they did not submit themselves to God's righteousness.* **The danger is that we should attempt to stand before God by our own righteousness.** The Jews were interested in obedience to the law of Moses – all of it in all of its detail. It gave them a nationalistic righteousness, a Jewish righteousness that could not be kept by gentiles very easily. It included food laws, circumcision, sabbath observance, ritual purity. It was 'their own' righteousness as opposed to God's righteousness, but it was also 'their own' righteousness in a cultural sense. It included also the demand for morality. It involved the avoidance of idolatry. It forbade adultery – although the Mosaic law did not forbid polygamy. It forbade deceit in a law-court. It condemned the theft of the property of other people. And so on. The Jews were very zealous about this kind of righteousness. They felt that if they lived like this, surely God would accept them.

3. But there is a problem here. **Our own righteousness does not require faith.** Much of the Mosaic law could be kept without faith. Only the tenth commandment was impossibly difficult. Much could be done at least externally by a man or woman without any faith in the God of Israel at all. Perhaps a person would not steal and not lie and not commit adultery – but that did not mean he had faith. Paul says that even before he found Christ as his Saviour, he was blameless in the keeping of the law (Philippians 3:6). Salvation is by faith – a gripping conviction about our need of the blood of Jesus Christ and a personal trust in Jesus.

**4. Our own righteousness is generally an external righteousness.**

The law mainly demanded morality and ritual purity in the visible exterior of one's life. There is not much one can find among the Mosaic regulations that demands purity within. The tenth commandment demanded purity of desire, but apart from that the law mainly demanded external righteousness. This kind of righteousness requires no faith. It requires no new birth. Very 'righteous' people are often quite unclean within. Self-righteousness produces no knowledge of God.

**5. We must receive God's righteousness.** In order to know God a different kind of righteousness is needed altogether – the 'righteousness of God'. What is it? (a) It is a **gift**. This 'righteousness of God' is a righteousness that is given by God, not achieved by us. It is not our personal righteousness. (b) It is a **status** given to us. We are simply clothed with a covering that God gives us, God's righteousness. It has nothing to do with anything in ourselves at all. God's righteousness is acceptable to him. It is his righteousness. It is perfect. It is his sinlessness, his total purity and holiness. We are clothed with **that**. It gives us total acceptance before God. This is why Paul is constantly saying that salvation is 'without works'. This is why we have to give God all the praise. This way of salvation excludes boasting. Salvation is planned in such a way 'so that no one may boast' (Ephesians 2:9; see also 1 Corinthians 1:31). (c) It is **being reckoned as obedient as Jesus**. Jesus has perfectly obeyed the Father. We are reckoned to be as obedient as Jesus. As by Adam's disobedience the human race became sinners, so by Jesus' obedience all who believe are reckoned righteous with his righteousness (see Romans 5:19). (d) It is **having the death of Christ applied** to us. We are 'justified by his blood' (Romans 5:9). (e) It is a gift which is followed by **God's continued work in us**. God's saving 'righteousness' is linked with his character. It is his own determination to establish what he approves, his desire to get things right. It is his character that he brings to bear upon the

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judgement of the wicked (see Romans 3:5; Psalm 50:4, 6 and elsewhere). It is the opposite of our 'unrighteousness' (3:5) in refusing to have faith (3:3–5). It is the attribute which is invoked in God's just judgement upon the world (as 3:6 makes clear) as well as in the salvation of sinners.

This bestowal of a gift of **reckoned** righteousness is called 'justification' in Paul's vocabulary. Romans 4 makes it even clearer. It does not come by works (4:2). It is 'reckoned' (4:3, 5). It brings forgiveness (4:7), the covering of our sin (4:7), an action of God in which our sin is not taken into account (4:8). The beginning of our salvation is when with empty hands we receive the saving righteousness of God, and are clothed with God's righteousness which comes upon us in Christ.

The Mosaic law is no longer directly relevant to us. It does not justify us (Romans 3:20). It does not sanctify us (Romans 7:4). It does not give us new birth (Galatians 3:21). It does not give us the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:2). It is 'abolished' with its commandments and ordinances (Ephesians 2:15). Romans 10:4 says, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.*