

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 9:30-33

Study Notes:

- **The Question:**

“In the light of everything I have told you, what conclusion should we draw?”

A story of reversals: The ones who should have easily embraced their own Messiah, didn't. He came to his own, but they did not receive him. That's what John 1 tells us. The ones who should have rejected him embraced him. John says that as well.

- **Obtaining and Attaining**

Verse 30: “That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.”

John Stott: *“To describe pagans as “not pursuing righteousness” is a major understatement. Most of them at least are godless and self-centered, going their own way, lovers of themselves, of money and pleasure, rather than lovers of God and of goodness.”*

“... The Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it ... Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.”

Two important words: “Obtained” & “Attained”. Obtainment has to do with acquisition ... whereas Attainment has to do with gaining something by either measuring up or earning.

The Gentiles obtained righteousness through the process of faith.

Greek phrase: “katalambanoœ” -- grasping or laying hold of something with great force. The Gentiles “laid hold” of justification by faith. See: Matthew 11:11-13; John 1:12

- **Failing To Attain:**

Verse 30: “... But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.”

The Gentiles were not trying to attain righteousness, but they obtained it. The Israelites were trying to attain it but did not obtain it.

The Gentiles lack of striving for righteousness was infamous. (See: I Corinthians 6:9-11) The Jew’s pursuit of legalistic righteousness was proverbial. Paul asks, “Why, then, did they not attain (“reach” or “arrive at”) it?”

John Stott: “... They were pursuing an impossible goal.” Romans 3:20: “Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.”

- **The Stumbling-Stone:**

“How did it happen this way?” “Why didn’t the Jews attain legal righteousness?”

V. 32: “Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.” As it is written: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

The Jews’ failure: The “Stumbling-Stone”: 1 Corinthians 1:23: “... But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles...” I Peter 2:8-10: “A stone that causes people to stumble and

a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.”

Christ became the stumbling block for those who were trying to attain righteousness by the Law. Galatians 5:11: “Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.”

Why do people stumble over the Cross? The Cross undermines our own program of attaining self-righteousness. Galatians 2:21: “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

“If we could save ourselves, why should Christ have bothered to die? The fact that Christ died for our sins is proof positive that we cannot save ourselves.” – John Stott

- **The Stumbling-Stone – Isaiah’s Prophecies:**

Paul takes two phrases from Isaiah 28:16 and one from Isaiah 8:14. When he puts them together it says: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Israel’s “Yahweh” is speaking. He’s saying, “I am laying down a stone that will cause people to stumble and fall.”

Additional voices: Psalm 118: “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone”. 1Corinthians 3:11: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

- **Conclusion:** God laid a “Stone” in Zion, and His own people stumbled over Him. They stumbled because they were seeking righteousness by the works of the Law. The Gentiles were not seeking righteousness, but embraced the “Stone” in Zion, and obtained righteousness.