

Romans 9:30-10:21

Israel Gone Astray

For the interrelationship between this and the preceding section, see Main Thoughts, below.

A. Notes on the Text

Verse 30

"What then shall we say?" i.e. what conclusions can we draw from this? In the foregoing it has been made clear that God, in his sovereign good pleasure, can reject those who are his people, and adopt those who are not his people.

Paul now explains that God's predestination does not eliminate the will and responsibility of man, but that he holds Israel responsible for its unbelief. (See more on this in Main Thoughts.)

"Righteousness that is by faith": that is the fulfilling of the law by Christ as atonement for the guilt of those who are his and for reconciliation with the Father, which righteousness is accepted in faith.

In this fulfilment of the law we can also look at the suffering, or the bearing of punishment for sin. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the righteousness of Christ as "suffering and obedience" (see A. 79; also A. 60 and 61). Thus, righteousness includes: suffering (bearing the punishment for sin) and obedience (fulfilling the law). When we speak of "righteousness" (of Christ) later, that is its meaning.

Verse 31

"Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it": it pursued righteousness based on the law ("pursued" is a sports term, referring to a race), but could not manage to attain or keep the righteousness of the law. The unstated reason is that a sinner cannot keep the law perfectly!

Verse 32

D. Holwerda summarizes this verse accurately: "Why? Because Israel does not expect righteousness through faith, but acts as if it depends on works."

Verse 33

In the temple where the sacrifices were brought for forgiveness and atonement, the Christ (in the Old Testament) was the cornerstone on which the whole building rested. This cornerstone can also become a stumbling block and a rock that will make men fall. That happens when one does not seek the righteousness

of Christ, but one's own righteousness (works of the law). The quotation is a combination of Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16.

"And the one who..." i.e. "but he who..."

Verse 1

It is odd that those who divided this letter into chapters caused chapters 9, 10 and 11 to begin wherever Paul repeatedly mentions his love for his people, whom he could not let go.

(A. Van Veldhuizen)¹

Also at this point the chapter division is less than perfect. Paul inserts the declaration of v. 1 three times, so that no one will think he finds pleasure in the spiritual decline of Israel.

Verse 2

As an ex-Pharisee, Paul knows only too well how great a zeal Israel has for God, but that zeal is not "enlightened," it is without (believing) insight.

Verse 3

Israel's error was that it did not want to accept God's righteousness (which was present from times of old, see the following verses!), and instead attempted to achieve a righteousness of its own. That error still existed in Paul's time.

Verse 4

Paul is now going to show that Christ's righteousness (see the Notes for 9:30 and 33, above) was already present under the old covenant. Christ was and is the ultimate end of the law (see further Main Thoughts).

Verse 5

There are many differences of opinion about this verse. I believe that Paul's meaning is this: "It is true that Moses says: he who does what the law requires receives life with God. This does, indeed, concern the perfect fulfilment of the law. God is not satisfied with less." Fulfilment of the law is a source of life. (See Heidelberg Catechism, A. 62; also A. 113,114; and note texts like Leviticus 18:5ff.; Ezekiel 20:11,13,21; Galatians 3:12). But Moses does not say that a man, who is a sinner, can keep this law perfectly.

Verse 6

Moses particularly directs Israel to the word of faith which is nearby. God's law knocks Israel down. That is good, for Israel has to realise that it cannot fulfil the law by itself. But in this law the Mediator (Christ) comes to Israel, for the end of the law is Christ, and he will fulfil the law for his people. Moses says (Deuteronomy 38:11ff.): Israel does not need to bring God's righteousness down

¹ Ed. Note: Quote is from *Paulus en zijn brief aan de Romeinen* (1918).

from heaven (Christ came first in the Word, and thereafter in the flesh at Christmas!), nor to bring it up from the abyss (for Christ is risen from the grave at Easter!). In the Word of faith (i.e. the word of promise, which must be accepted in faith) Christ is near (v. 8).

Verses 9ff.

The word of God, which is within us, must be confessed or pronounced, and this confession should be supported by the conviction of the heart. Further, this faith does not put to shame, it does not disappoint. For in answer to prayer the LORD grants the riches of salvation to Jews and Greeks (all non-Jews) (vv. 12,13. See 1:16).

Verses 14, 15

This is why the gospel must be preached all over the world, to all peoples. Paul testifies to the necessity of the preaching by means of a list of presuppositions and a chain of reasoning: first faith; it presupposes hearing; hearing presupposes preaching; preaching presupposes preachers; and preachers presuppose their mission. Thus, you have a chain with the following links: calling upon the Lord, believing, hearing, preaching, being sent. Paul likes such figures of speech (cf. 5:5 [suffering, endurance, character, hope, God's love], and 8:28-30; and cf. 2 Peter 1:5-7). Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7, where the feet of those who preach good news are called beautiful.

Why especially the feet, their lowliest part? Why not the eye, full of enthusiasm (rapture), and the mouth, full of eloquence? A cannibal knew the answer to that, when he said of a missionary that his feet would surely be very tasty. Again, why? When one longs for someone to come, it seems that he approaches too slowly. Then we think especially of his feet because they do not move, in our opinion, quickly enough. We watch and wait for the mailman in the same way, until we have received the expected letter. In short: God has taken care that all could receive the gospel.

(A. Van Veldhuizen)²

(See also Ephesians 6:15: the feet are fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.)

Verse 16

"Not all": Paul is already thinking of the few, the "remnant" of Israel who did, and do, believe (see 11:1ff., esp. v. 5). In Isaiah's time there was much unbelief in Israel (see Isaiah 53:1 and 6:9-13).

Verse 17

Answers the question why so few Israelites believed (under the old covenant and also) in Paul's days. Once again Paul draws attention to the fact that faith in

² Ed. Note: Ibid.

God's Word is brought about by means of hearing that Word (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 65). The first condition for believing is hearing.

Verse 18ff.

Well then, Israel has heard the Word. Paul quotes Psalm 19:1-4 to say that as the heavens, the firmament, "preach" God's glory day and night (without voice, speech and language) to the ends of the earth, so also the gospel of Christ has gone out to Israel and all of the then-known world in Paul's days (by voice and speech and language; see Acts, and Paul's letters, and the other writers of the New Testament). Thus, Israel has heard (v. 18) and understood (v. 19) this word of faith. Israel was not ignorant of the salvation in Christ!

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:21 (in v. 19), Isaiah 65:1 (in v. 20), and Isaiah 65:2 (in v. 21), in order to answer the question that was asked. Thus (v. 19): Israel could indeed understand the gospel, but did not want to accept it, and now a "foolish"[RSV] (ignorant) people, the Gentiles, will accept it. Israel certainly had the opportunity to do so. Verse 20: the apostle again stresses the will of God. Concretely: if Israel will not in faith accept the Christ, then Christ is given to the Gentiles. This verse refers back to chapter 9.

Verse 21

Yet God held out his hands to unbelieving Israel. In chapter 11 the apostle will show that God continues to do so in his time. Conclusion: God is in no way to blame for Israel's error and unbelief. Sovereign election and reprobation never abrogate man's responsibility.

B. Main Thoughts

1. For the context of Romans 9:30-10:21 we must remember that we are still dealing with God's righteousness (covenantal dealing) concerning Israel.

In 9:1-29 it is stated very clearly that God is totally sovereign in election and reprobation. That is shown in Israel's history from Isaac onwards. However, Israel's will and responsibility have not been eliminated thereby. On the contrary, God's absolute power and sovereign good pleasure, leave Israel fully responsible. (See Glossary #3.) Israel's error and unbelief are its own fault, and it is responsible for this guilt (9:30-10:3).

2. In 9:30-10:3 it becomes clearer what Israel's error was (under the old covenant) and remained (in Paul's time). They by-passed God's revealed righteousness in order to seek their own righteousness. For God's righteousness is revealed, even in the law (v. 4). (For Christ as the cornerstone, see Psalm 118:22,23 and Isaiah 28:16. For Christ as corner-and foundation-stone, see also Zechariah 10:4; Ephesians 2:20ff.; 1 Peter 2:6.) This Cornerstone guarantees the structural soundness of the temple as a place of salvation. In its nervous rush to do works of the law, Israel ran into

Christ the Stone, and stumbled over him as over a rock (Isaiah 8:14; see also Luke 2:34 and 1 Peter 2:7ff).

3. Israel should not be lamented so much as accused, because it did not see the law in the light of the revelation of Christ. For Christ is "the end of the law" (v. 4). That means: (a) the law in its religious rituals foreshadowed Christ and his mediating work; (b) Christ's incarnation was the ultimate sign that the law was not a means of salvation, and (c) in Christ, God opened the way to obtain the righteousness of Christ through faith (see the Notes above for the meaning of this concept).

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