***The Stumbling Stone of Israel, No. 1
Romans 9:30-33
RO130-02***

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Romans 9. Down to the end of the chapter this morning, verses 30-33. Our subject is The Stumbling Stone of Israel. The Apostle Paul closes the ninth chapter of Romans with the unbelievable conclusion that most Jewish people will never get to heaven.

A few years ago, a Southern Baptist Convention leader made the public pronouncement that God does not hear the prayers of Jews. And it created an enormous flap in the news media and in the religious world, and of course, from the Jewish community. So, finally, he backed off and, in effect, said he really didn't mean it and that God does hear the prayers of Christ-rejecting Jews.

Instead of taking a manly, godly courageous as did the apostles of old and said, "You tell me whether it is right that we should listen to God or men," when men were saying, "Back off, backpedal, don't say that. We don't like to hear that. Don't tell us that's true. He should have come through and said, "The Word of God says that Jesus Christ is the Way and the Life and the Truth. Without Him, you have no access to God."

And since the Jews have rejected Jesus Christ, this leader - prominent leader - should have taken this opportunity to the whole Jewish community to say, "I go on record to commend to you what the Apostle Paul has tried to warn his people from the very first: that without Jesus Christ, you are doomed. And without Jesus Christ, you have no access to God. He does not, indeed, hear your prayers or anything else."

The Old Testament prophets Hosea and Isaiah pointed out this same principle. In fact, Paul has quoted them to show that they indicated that Gentiles would become the people of God and Jews who had all the spiritual advantages would be cast out. God as "YHWH Sabaoth," that is, as the Lord of Hosts, which means, "the commander of the armies of heaven," has preserved a remnant of Jews who believed in Jesus Christ. And they do go to heaven. If it were not for God's sovereign election of some Jews to heaven, the whole nation, Paul points out, would have been devastatedly wiped out, as were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin.

Paul now sums up Israel's past history, that which he has been dealing with in the ninth chapter. He has been looking at Israel in the past, what its past history has been. He now sums it up with the present condition before God. So, we begin in verse 30. Paul says, "What shall we say then?" The word "what" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "tis." It's an interrogatory pronoun. It's introducing a question.

"What shall we 'say,'" is the Greek word, "lego." The question that he has here is, "What conclusion shall we now arrive at? What summary statement can we make as the result of all that we have said thus far in this chapter about the Jewish people and their condition from their past relationship to Jesus Christ?"

This particular word in the Greek Bible is in the future tense, so he's saying anytime in the future, this statement is true today as it always has been. It is in active voice: Paul's own conclusion. A statement of fact here. What shall we say "then," and that's the word "oun." This word indicates an inference to be drawn now from what Paul has said. So, "What shall we say then," simply says, "Ok, let's sum it all up. What is the conclusion of all this?" And then, he proceeds to give it.

"That." He introduces it by the Greek word "hoti," which indicates that a conclusion is to be drawn. And that is a conclusion concerning the Gentiles. The Greek word is "ethnos." This refers to all non-Jews. The opposite of a Jew is a Gentile. The opposite of a Jew is not a Christian. That's often done in common speech, but that is the wrong comparison. Paul is saying, "Here's this whole mass of humanity that were God's special people from Abraham. Here's this other mass of humanity, the rest of them, who are Gentiles." Now, he says, "We may conclude that the Gentiles did something. He says the Gentiles followed something.

The Greek Bible has the word "dioko." "Dioko" actually means, "to pursue." It is the word that you would use of somebody who was on a race track who was in a foot race, and he's on the track, and he's headed for the goal. He's pursuing the prize of victory. In Philippians 3:14, we have this word used in that way to illustrate it. Paul says, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." "I press toward" is this word, "dioko." I am pursuing it with the objective of securing the prize, and that is the rewards in Christ. This word, however, is also associated with the Greek negative, "ne," which therefore says that this is something they did not pursue. The Gentiles who did not pursue something.

It is present tense, which in the Greek Bible means it's always their habit. They never did foresee this. Active: it was a personal characteristic. And what they did not pursue was righteousness. The word is "dikaiosune." "Dikaiosune," the word for righteousness, refers here to the absolute righteousness of God which alone can satisfy the justice of God, the holiness of God, and which will then result in a person being justified.

I think all of you understand that when God says we are justified in His sight means that He sees us as perfect as Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be justified. That means that the absolute righteousness of God is to our credit. And every believer in this auditorium this morning is justified in the sight of God; He has absolute righteousness with God.

**The Spiritual Degradation of the Gentiles**

And, the Gentiles obviously did not pursue. They were not interested in having absolute righteousness from God. That's true of Gentiles today. Most of the people that you and I deal with could not care less about being perfect in God's sight. They know they're not. They don't really care whether they are or not.

They are not actually seeking God, and that's what Paul earlier in the book of Romans has said, "There is none righteousness." Nobody has absolute righteousness. "There is none that seeketh after God, no not one." So, Paul is reiterating the same thing. The observation of history is that Gentiles, as a group of humanity, in contrast to the Jews, did not concern themselves with being righteousness in the sight of God.

The Gentiles, as a matter of fact, were a very benighted group of human beings. This is illustrated in Romans 1:18-32, which we will not take the time to read this morning, but which clearly demonstrates how unrighteous Gentiles were, how spiritually benighted they were. It is in that context that Paul observes that the Gentiles were so spiritually degraded that they fell into homosexuality and lesbianism, and that this was in their view an acceptable lifestyle.

You may have seen the program on AIDS this week. It was a shocker. But the thing that was shocking about it was not only the sadness of listening to people who are dying of AIDS, as one of them said, "I just wish I could have my life back again," who know that only death awaits them.

But throughout the whole program, there was one thing that was clearly declared, and that is that sex outside of marriage is ok. It is no longer debatable. It no longer comes into any question at all. It isn't an issue. Of course you should be like barnyard animals! Of course you should be wherever you can be to whomever you can be! That's accepted. That's a given. That's understood. Nowhere through the program was there the slightest indication that this was evil. And they had one person after another that was standing up and quoting what they had done, and the people they had been, and the horror of discovering that this partner was full of AIDS. And now, what was going to happen them? It was just the craziest thing on earth. The Gentile humanity and its . . . spiritual darkness was clearly portrayed on that program.

And this is what the Apostle Paul is talking about. They were not concerned for one moment, "Is what I'm doing right by the highest standard of the universe, the God who made us and who is the judge of us all, not by what 51% of Americans agree is all right to do or not by what is acceptable within a circle that I move in? So, it is still true today, and everywhere we look, we have this degeneracy clearly demonstrated that characterizes the Gentile population as Paul described it here in Romans 1.

Another evidence of this benighted condition, for example, is indicated in Acts 14:16, where we read, concerning the Gentiles, "Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways." God, as far as the Gentiles were concerned, said, "Go ahead and do your own thing." Back in Romans 1 concerning the homosexual and lesbians, God said the same thing. He said, "All right. If you insist on not listening to me when I tell you that you were not created to function with sex outside of marriage. There will be terrible consequences if you do. You won't listen to me. Go ahead, and I am going to deliver you to all of the consequences of that kind of an act." And no greater consequence illustrates that than the AIDS virus today: a direct consequence of divine judgment upon that sexual degeneracy and violation.

**Made Alive**

Now, God, in times past, Paul says here in the book of Acts, just let people go their way. God said, "The Gentiles can go as they want to go. Now, to you Jews, I want to inform you. I want to keep you from being like this. I've got something special for you."

Ephesians 2:1-3 puts this in perspective to those of us who are Christians now. As Paul looks back upon us as Gentiles before we were Christians. Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you hath he made alive." You know what "made alive" means. It means to be born again spiritually. And you know how our society hates to hear that if you're not born again, you're not going to heaven. They equate that with some kind of a bigoted, fundamentalist view of scripture that God is not in sympathy with.

But the truth is, the Bible is very clear that you who have trusted in Christ have been made alive spiritually. You have been born again, in contrast to your previous condition ".who were dead in trespasses and sins; which in times past ye walked according to the course of this world [you walked in all the evil vileness that's acceptable in the society of Satan's world], according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan], the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience [this rebellious spirit against God's rules of morality which works all these disobedient Gentiles, as it once worked in you]: Among whom also we all had our manner of life in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Yes, we all came from that background in varying degrees of indulgence of sin. But we all came from that background of rebellion against God in a manner of life which was satisfying the lust patterns of the sin nature. And that's what he means by, "the lusts of our flesh, the desires of our flesh and of the mind." It's the lust patterns of the sin nature. That was the name of the game for all of us. Some of worse, some not so bad, but all in some degree.

Now, this is what is characterizing the Gentiles, and that's the background of this statement in Romans 9:30 when Paul says, "Well, let's summarize this whole thing, what we've been talking about, that, namely, 'the Gentiles who followed not after righteousness.'" The Gentiles who God had abandoned to their own pagan idols and their own immorality and their own spiritual darkness - Gentiles who just were indifferent to God and did not seek Him.

**Righteousness Through Faith, Not Works**

Those Gentiles we find, history demonstrates, found something. They "obtained." The word is "katalambano." "Katalambano" is an emphatic word. Not only obtained, but they really grabbed it. They really had a grip on it. They had a grip on it in such a degree that they could never lose it again. The indifference on godly Gentiles who never had the enlightenment of the scriptures that the Jewish people have. Have obtained, they have obtained something, they have appropriated something as their own. They did this, aorist tense here in this word, which indicates at a point in time.

Of course, that point was when they came in contact with the Gospel and believed it, acted with a personal decision, an act of their own volition to trust in Christ? Indicative mood: a statement of fact here. The most likely thing happened in that the pagan Gentiles secured God's absolute righteousness while the Jews failed to receive it. These Gentiles who sought not absolute righteousness have attained to absolute righteousness. Now, that is a most unlikely thing to happen.

And then Paul says, "Here's how it happened." "Even." It's the word "de," which is usually translated as "but." It introduces the kind of righteousness secured by the Gentiles. See, the Jews also pursued righteousness. The Jews pursued righteousness by keeping rules, like a lot of you do when you want to pursue spirituality and you say, "I don't do certain things, so I can be a spiritual Christian." And you think that by not doing certain things, you now attained a level of spirituality with God, which is not true.

And the Jews made the same mistake. "What we do," the Jews said, "will determine whether God will accept us for heaven or not." And God says, "That's not true at all. What you do has nothing to do with whether you will come into heaven or not. How many moral rules you keep will not take you into heaven or keep you out." Hell, this moment, is filled with billions of enormously moral people.

"But," Paul says, "these people had a righteousness. They had a certain kind of righteousness as a result of the way they sought it out. They had a righteousness, an absolute righteousness which was 'of.'" And the word is "ek." This is a preposition which indicates source. A righteousness which came from a certain place, and namely, that place is faith: "pistis."

Now, I'm sure you know as a result of our recent studies that the word "faith" means "trust." Here, it refers to trust in Jesus Christ as personal Savior. The word "faith" connotes a gift from God, rather than something that is the payment of wages that one has earned. The Jews gained a righteousness of keeping rules, and indeed, they had a certain right conduct. But it was not a righteousness which was acceptable to God. It was relative righteousness. It just meant that they didn't lie as much as the next person. They didn't steal as much as this next person. They weren't as immoral as the other guy, but it did not mean that they were as perfect as God. And that was the difference. Faith in Jesus Christ as Savior is totally detached from human works to merit that absolute righteousness.

So, a righteousness which is our of faith means that it is not secured by human works or by rituals of any kind. This is the same idea that we have in the book of Philippians 3:9, which says, "And be found in Him [Jesus Christ, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the point of your faith in Christ places you into Christ, and be found in Him] not having mine own righteousness [that's what the Jews had - their good conduct righteousness], which is of the law [that is, of rules that you keep], but that [righteousness] which is out of faith [faith] in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." A righteousness which God gives you, then, as the result of your trusting in Christ.

So, you can get righteousness by keeping rules. It'll never get you into heaven. You'll have the certain right conduct, and for a certain level, they'll give you a good conduct medal. But there is a righteousness that counts with God to take you into heaven that only He can give you.

And that was the distinction the Jews were never able to make. And they cannot make it to this day, because there is a double blindness upon the eyes of every Jew. Every time you shake that hand of a Jew for the first time as a total stranger, look into his eyes and realize that there's a double scale. He has the natural blindness that all human beings have from the sin nature toward God and toward spiritual things. He's just blind to those things. All Gentiles are like that.

But the Jews have a double whammy, because they call down upon them and their children the judgment of God, the guilt for the blood of Jesus Christ that they shed. They have a second blindness, which has been imposed upon them so that they are absolutely, totally dull to any understanding of who Jesus Christ is in a God system of faith salvation. They are terribly and doubly blinded, and they cannot apprehend a righteousness that comes as a gift from God. They can only think about a righteousness that they earn by their good works.

The pagan Gentiles did not even try to establish that kind of righteousness. They had nothing that they brought to God to be accepted. And lo and behold, what did the Gentiles do? They hear this message from men like the Apostle Paul, and they come storming into heaven. They believe it. They exercise faith in Jesus Christ, which is the means by which the benefits of the death of Christ for man's sins are applied to the believing sinners. Faith in itself is nothing. Faith in itself is meaningless. But the object of faith is where it gets its value. And if the object is Christ, then that faith is of great value. But if your faith is in your good works, then it's of no value whatsoever.

The Gentiles had never been given the Mosaic Law. So, they did have one great advantage; you could say that for the Gentiles. Because they never had the Mosaic Law, they were never tempted to look to it as the means of salvation. The fact that the Jews have this guideline proves to be their undoing, because they did not understand that it was a guideline. They thought it was the absolute way by which righteousness was to be achieved.

Verse 31 then goes on to say, "But Israel." And he's contrasting Gentile victory here with Jewish failure. "But," the Greek conjunction, "de," introducing a contrast with the Gentiles. "But Israel," referring to the Jewish people, "followed after." "Dioko," same word that we had before, meaning again, "to pursue with the objective of securing some desired objective." This is in the present tense: the Jews constantly pursuing. Active: it was done by their personal volition. They decided to do this. Participle means the statement of a spiritual principle here.

And what they pursued after was law. The word "law" is "nomos." Here, this word refers to a principle. "Law," here as a principle - not specifically Mosaic law, but law as a principle. They were looking for some principle that would achieve for them righteousness. Some principle that they could follow of something that they could do that would achieve for them absolute righteousness. The Jews sought this principle in keeping the Mosaic Law. That was the basic jumping-off point. They concluded, "If we keep the rules of the Mosaic Law, then God will give us absolute righteousness. We will have earned that absolute righteousness from God."

But the truth of the matter was that the Mosaic Law was not given as a means of salvation. The Apostle Paul has made that very clear previously here in the book of Romans. Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law [Mosaic Law or any system of keeping rules such as that] there shall no flesh be justified in his sight [because, to be justified, you must have absolute righteousness. [Keeping rules, even of a set of rules like the Mosaic law that God gave, will not give you absolute righteousness, so you will never be declared justified.]: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."

And that was the point. God said, "I'm giving you the Mosaic law to show you how far short you fall of the glory of God," that is, the absolute righteousness of God. "And I give you the law, which is an expression of My righteousness to show how far short you fall. I don't ever want you to tell you a lie. But you can't make it. I don't ever want you to be immoral, externally or in the mind, but you never make it. I don't ever want you to take what doesn't belong to you - ever. But you do. You never make it. I don't ever want you to misrepresent somebody, but you do. I don't ever want you to want what somebody else has to the point that you're willing to take it from them or destroy it if you can't get it. I just don't want you to covet, but you do. I don't ever want you to say a foul word that calls upon Satan's base. I don't want you to use the word 'damn.' I don't want you to use the word 'hell' as a curse word. And I certainly don't want you to use the name of God as a curse word, but you do."

So, the whole point was the Jews had a standard which was impossible to keep, and they should have looked at that standard. And God said, "I gave it to you so like a mirror, you could see how dirty you were. And you would say, 'We're never going to make it this way.'" And like Abraham, you would have turned back to God and said, "How am I going to make it? You know I can't make it this way." And then, God comes through, as He did to Abraham, and He said, "Abraham, trust me. And trust in the Savior that I'm going to bring down the line." And the Bible says that's what Abraham did. He trusted God to solve the problem, and Abraham was given absolute righteousness on the spot.

So, the Jews here, Israel, followed after some principle of righteousness. They were looking for some means through their efforts to gain salvation. What was the result? They had not attained. The word is, "phthano." "Phthano" means, "to arrive at something." And it has the negative, "ou," which means, "they did not arrive or did secure." The Jews, at no point in time, were able to arrive at what? True, the word "eis," indicates the objective. And the objective was, again a, "nomos," or here, a principle. No matter how they tried, no matter how they pursued, they never arrived at a principle.

Using the race course illustration again that seems to be behind this line of thought here. It's like people who are on a race track, and they're all running. They finally see the string, the ribbon attached to the "go" line. And as they run, the ribbon keeps moving away, and it keeps away, and it keeps moving away. And they keep running harder and harder. The thing keeps moving away. And no matter how much they tried, they saw that there was the ribbon. There was the goal line: absolute righteousness. And no matter how much they hustled, they never got any closer to it and never attained it at all. And that's what Paul is saying.

The word "righteousness" here is simply, "they did not attain to the principle." The word "of righteousness" in your King James translation is not in the Greek. They just did not find a principle of human conduct by which they could achieve absolute righteousness. They never caught up to what they were seeking.

**The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector**

Luke 18:9-12 illustrates this problem. "And he spoke this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves [who were seeking a principle of righteousness of what they could achieve] that they were righteous, and they despised others." Here were a group of people sitting before Jesus: leaders of Israel, people who were devotees of the Mosaic Law who despised others. They had contempt for other people who did not keep the rules of the law. And they considered themselves very righteous. Why? They considered they had an "in" with God. Why? Well, because they were able to keep the rules.

"'Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.''"

Now, what was he saying? This man was saying, "I had a principle for securing righteousness with God," and then he explained it with all these things he did. Now, should he have done these things? Yes. These were required of the law. These were right things to do. Should you not lie? That's correct. Not steal? That's right. Not be sexually immoral? That's right. All those things are required of a human being in Satan's world, whether you're a Christian or a non-Christian. That's how you survive in Satan's world. But they are not the basis for covering your own sin. This man clearly thought he was covering his sin.

And you know how the poor tax collector there. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven. He just beat his breast and says, "God, I'll never make it. Do it for me. God, be merciful." And you remember what that word is there? God be propitiated to me, a sinner. God, be satisfied toward me, a sinner.

You don't ever want to tell an unsaved person to pray when he wants to be saved, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." That's blasphemy. I'm always hearing people and Christians, and even preachers and evangelists who say, "Turn your eyes upward to God, and pray, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner.'" Because, God is already propitiated. 1 John 2:2 tell us that He is the propitiation for our sins and not for our sins only but for rather the whole world. God is already satisfied. Why do you insult Him by going to Him and saying, "Please, be satisfied relative to your justice concerning my sin so that You don't have to judge me and send me into the lake of fire." He's already done that. All He wants you to do is to accept the gift and the offer to escape that.

So, here's the contrast. The Pharisee standing here thinking he had a principle that would take him into heaven, and the tax collector realizing there was no such thing and casting himself upon God's provision and His grace. Philippians 3:4-6 is another illustration where the Apostle Paul says, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh [that is, in what I can do relative to right living]. If any other man thinketh that he hath reasons for which he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."

Got that? As relates to the righteousness which is in the law, Paul says, "I was blameless. I just was not sexually immoral. I did not lie. I did not misrepresent people. I did not cover. I did not use God's name in vain. I observed the Sabbath day and kept it as a holy day. I did everything that the moral law required. And I could stand and face anybody eye-to-eye and say, 'I am blameless. I don't do these things.'" But Paul said, "After I had that, I had nothing. I was blameless and headed for the lake of fire," just as all Jews today and throughout history who may be blameless relative to what God requires of them morally are still headed for the lake of fire.

These Jews, of course, were very zealous indeed in their search for this principle of righteousness, but they never achieved success simply because there is no such principle. You cannot find the principle of working your way into heaven. And the Jews are still looking for, and that's why they still are doomed. They're never going to find such a principle.

In contrast, the Gentiles find absolute righteousness because they were happy to take it as a gift from God and to trust in Christ as Savior to receive it and forget all that hustling and struggling and trying. We translate Romans 9:31 in this way, "But Israel, who pursued after a principle of righteousness, did not arrive at that principle." The irony in all this is the Gentiles outside of God's special revelation of scripture and who were not interested in absolute righteousness necessary for salvation did secure that righteousness. While the Jews who had the Bible and sought absolute righteousness apart from the scriptural pattern by some system of works never did secure that absolute righteousness.

This illustrates, you see, a very important point that sincerity is not enough to get one into heaven. If you think that God is going to take you in because you're going to be sincere, and you did the best you could, as best you knew how, because you tried, sincerity is not going to get you in. There could be nothing truer than any Jew today than his sincerity in pursuing his entrance into heaven. There can be no question of the sincerity of the Jews that Paul dealt with. They wanted to please God, but they would not do it God's way.

Salvation, you see, has to be pursued God's way, or it cannot be attained at all. God does not give you brownie points for sincerity. He only is interested in one thing: His own absolute righteousness. He will not bless a single thing that you and I do or anything in us. There's only one thing He blesses: His absolute righteousness. Once He can put His righteousness in us, we now become the target of His blessing, and that's the only thing that He will bless.

**Jesus As the Jews' Stumbling Stone**

So, what a sobering, terrible picture here of sincere people who were out to try and find heaven and lost it all. Then, at verse 32, he takes up the other side of the picture. He's been talking about the spiritual victory of the Gentiles. Now, he talks about the spiritual defeat of the Jews in verses 32-33. Now, he brings up a very natural question: Why? Why are the Jews going to hell who were sincere in seeking absolute righteousness when the Gentiles who didn't give a Fig Newton about it are all storming into heaven? The idea here is, "Why not?" And he's going to give an explanation.

He introduces that, "Because." "Hoti." This conjunction that indicates that an explanation is imminent. In verse 30, Paul has pointed out that the Gentiles attained saving righteousness by faith and is now going to explain why the Jews did not. Why? Because.

And then he uses that device of the Greek language: when you want to emphasize something, you don't use a verb. So, there's no verb here, but you have to add some words for it to make sense. "They sought it." We insert those words. That's understood, but it's actually not in the Greek Bible.

"They sought it not," and we have "ou." "Ou" is the strongest of the Greek negative. "Because they did not seek that absolute righteousness by." And now again, that important preposition, "ek," which is, "source." Out of which here in the center of this thing where it's all to be found, they didn't seek it by faith, "pistis," again, which means, "trust." Here, trust in Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of the world on the cross. Why did they not find it? Because they did not seek absolute righteousness by faith in Christ.

"But." And the word "but" is the word that is the strongest word for "but." You have another word, "de;" it's a little weaker one. But when you want to say, "BUT," big contrast, and we use, "all'," and that's what he has here. "BUT," big contrast here.

"They sought it not by faith BUT as." And the word "as" is the Greek word "hos." It's a Greek particle. It indicates where the Jews thought they would secure absolute righteousness. What this word really means is, "with what they thought they should pursue, but, as it were." And again, there is not verb, there is no word. We just have to insert it to make sense. "As it were by." And again, "ek."

Out of what? Well, they wouldn't take it we've seen previously out of the faith source. They're going to have a different source that they're going to find their absolute righteousness, and that is by "ergon," the word for "works." Human conducts. From lifestyle. So, they went instead to this works source for their absolute righteousness. They went for the works. They word "law" is not in Greek there. Translation here is, "But as if it were by works."

The Jews pursued absolute righteousness for salvation relentlessly through the keeping of the rules of the Mosaic Law. They really kept those rules. The Jews thought that the Mosaic Law was given to them as the source of salvation. God gave it to them, as we've indicated, to show how far short they fell from God's standard and how impossible it was by human effort it was to live up to these rules.

The Jews refused to listen to Jesus Christ no matter how much He warned them that the law was not going to take them into heaven, that they needed an absolute righteousness to get it the way Abraham received the righteousness, the way Paul described it in Romans 4:3, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Abraham believed God. Believed that God would make the provision. The Jews, in turn, depended on themselves for righteousness instead of on God, so they lost everything.

While God sovereignly chose some Jews for salvation, those who are lost, you will notice, have only themselves to blame. That's an interesting point. While God indeed elects certain ones out of the mass of lost humanity and out of this mass of lost Jews, it is clear at the same time that the person, the Jew, was lost because of his own rejection of what God was telling him, "Come to Me by faith, and I'll give salvation to you as a gift. Come to me with your good works, and you'll get nothing."

And because they refused to believe that, the result was that they did not secure salvation, and instead, the end of verse 32 says, "They stumbled." "Proskopto." This word means, "to trip up." It is in the aorist tense. At some point, the Jews were tripped up, at the point of having to accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah Savior. It's active voice. This happened to the Jews themselves. It's a statement of fact. They stumbled, it says, upon a stumbling stone.

The word "stumbling" is "proskomma." "Proskomma" connotes more than just tripping. You know, every now and then, you walk down the sidewalk, and one part is a little higher, and you trip on it. And you'll stumble, and you'll catch yourself, and you stabilize, and you'll go on. That's not what "proskomma" means. Here is a stumbling stone, referring to a stumble that smashes you. It's the kind of stumbling that just sends you reeling and just smashes the whole body down to the pavement.

Here, it is a stumbling stone, a "lithos," which is just the Greek word for, "a stone." They did not just momentarily lose their balance. They actually on the stumbling stone, which was Jesus Christ, these Jews simple smashed themselves completely. Jesus Christ was the means to absolute righteousness. He is the Way. They rejected Him, and He became a stumbling stone to them, and they smashed themselves. Because God said, "My Son is the Cornerstone of My salvation provision. If you will not accept Him, you can receive nothing."

So, the Jews were running the race of life to secure absolute righteousness. They hit Jesus Christ, the stone in their path. They sprawl flat on their face on the track when they hit that hurdle that they could not get over: the stone of Jesus Christ, which was the foundation of God's salvation plan. And consequently, when they stumbled, they smash themselves to death. They lost all possible access to eternal life.

And it is a terrible consequence of those who turn their back upon Jesus Christ. If you have not trusted in Him as personal Savior, that is your only way out. Trusting in your good conduct may get you a medal, but it will never get you heaven.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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