

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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October 25, 2026

Sermon Title: The Stumbling of Israel → The Hope of Mankind

Sermon Text: Romans 9:30-10:13

Rom. 9:30 ¶ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;

Rom. 9:31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

Rom. 9:32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,

Rom. 9:33 as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Rom. 10:1 ¶ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

Rom. 10:2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Rom. 10:3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.

Rom. 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Rom. 10:5 ¶ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

Rom. 10:6 But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down)

Rom. 10:7 “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

Rom. 10:8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

Rom. 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Rom. 10:10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Rom. 10:11 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Rom. 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.

Rom. 10:13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Main Idea: Israel stumbled over the message of Jesus Christ because he and his message were one of righteousness by faith, not by works; and yet the very law that Israel loved was meant to lead them to Jesus, and that message was meant to go out into all the world.

Outline:

1. Faith-Righteousness (9:30-33)
2. The Self-Righteousness Trap (10:1-7)
3. The Saving Riches of Christ (10:8-13)

Introduction

This morning I think we need to get oriented to what Paul has been doing up to this point in Romans. He has been lamenting the fact that so many of the Jewish

people – who were the recipients of the promises of God, the law of God, the promises of the Messiah – he has been expressing his sorrow for their unbelief.

But then he said, “That doesn’t mean that the promises of God have failed. Why? Because of election and the freedom of God. He is accomplishing exactly what he intends to accomplish, even in their unbelief.” And that took us to the last few weeks as we sought to listen to Paul expound from the Scriptures the freedom of God in who he saves, and in how he saves.

And his argument was, “It turns out God calls people from the Jews and also from the Gentiles, and that’s what he always promised to do in the Scriptures.” And then he quoted from Hosea and Isaiah to show that God’s promises are being kept according to plan – even when things look like they’re *not*.

But that brings Paul in our reading today to almost pause after all of this to sort of recalibrate. He begins by saying, “What should we say then?” It’s a summary question. “Wait a minute. Are you saying that the Gentiles have righteousness now, and that Israel has stumbled? Has everything just flipped?”

So today’s passage is Paul taking that step back, talking about where things stand at this moment. So today, we’ll look at what Paul is doing with three points. The first is Faith-Righteousness. The second is the self-righteousness trap. The third is the saving riches of Christ.

And I know that this isn’t a very memorable outline, and it may seem a bit scattered, but it all comes together. Because Paul continues to be broken hearted toward the Jews, but he is also willing to give an honest assessment of where things stand.

As we look at each of these three points, I want us to examine ourselves. Because it would be easy to think that this is a passage about studying Jewish unbelief and helping us to be skilled finger-pointers [“See, this is why things didn’t work out for you.”].

As covenant people ourselves, it is very easy for the very same advantages which the Jews had [but neglected] to become stumbling points for us, as well. We are not immune to the temptations that befell the Jewish people. We are not immune to self-righteousness and pride.

This is all before us today in this passage.

1. Faith-Righteousness (9:30-33)

First today, Paul speaks of righteousness. The righteousness that comes from faith in the first three verses of our reading.

How does righteousness come from faith? To begin with, here's what it doesn't mean: Faith does not *merit* our righteousness. Faith is not like a work where God looks and says, "Well this guy has faith, and faith is a good deed, and so as a reward I will give him righteousness." That would be a huge mistake. Don't think of righteousness as a reward for faith, because then faith becomes really a direct cause of our salvation in itself.

The problem is, if faith was the direct cause of our salvation, then the ground of your peace with God – your justification – would ultimately be something *inside you*—your ability to believe. That would be just as shaky of a ground for your salvation as if any work or good deed was the basis of your salvation.

Instead, theologians have spoken of faith as the *instrument* by which we are united to Christ and then receive the gift of righteousness. Faith isn't a work, it is an empty hand that takes hold of Jesus Christ and all that he has done for sinners.

The New Testament is constantly pushing us away from having a transactional mindset when it comes to salvation or righteousness. Yes, the courtroom metaphors matter and they are important. God is the judge of all the human race. We will stand before him, and we do need to be justified in his sight.

But even that courtroom language is profoundly personal. We aren't being driven in the gospel to an idea or a rule. We're constantly being pushed to a person – the person of Jesus Christ, in whom we have all of the blessings and benefits of salvation. That's why Paul calls the church the "*body* of Christ." He is our head, and we are a part of him. Jesus is really clear about our need to be united to him by faith. That's why in John 15:5 he says,

"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

He's the source. He is the one with life. If we aren't vitally united to him, then his work remains outside of us.

So my point in all of this, is that faith isn't a work. It's the way that we united to Christ and receive his blessings and the benefits of His work. Galatians 3:26:

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, *through faith*.”

Ephesians 3:17:

“...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts *through faith*.”

Colossians 2:12 says that

“you were raised with Christ *through faith*.”

This is how the New Testament speaks: you are “in Christ Jesus...through faith.” Christ dwells in your hearts “through faith.” You're raised with Christ “through faith.” How do you have these benefits? Only by being “with Christ” or “in Christ”. And that only happens through faith. Faith is the instrument God uses to unite us to Christ.

My point here is that faith is not a work that deserves salvation or forgiveness or righteousness. It is the *instrumental cause* of our salvation because it unites us with Christ. And it is in *Christ* that we are righteous.

But here is the issue: this is not the sort of righteousness that the Jews were interested in, on the whole. That's why Paul says Israel stumbled when it comes to Christ. They were seeking righteousness through works and not in Christ by faith.

They were hoping to set up a righteousness where they could point to themselves and say, “Look at us. Look what we did. This is what kind of people we are. We accomplished this. We were the underdogs and we lifted ourselves up by our bootstraps.” They wanted to be able to boast.

And so then when Christ comes, proclaiming the good news, which Abraham believed, which David believed, which the Old Testament saints loved and believed, many of the Jews (though certainly not all of them) stumbled over him. So Paul says here,

“Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.”

Now, we spoke in the last chapter about God’s sovereign plan. And so remember that. Because even this stumbling is used by God. How is it used? Their stumbling has become the occasion for Gentiles to be brought in and ingrafted into the covenant.

And this means that even with stumbling there’s reason for hope. People reject Christ, but many people receive him.

2. The Self-Righteousness Trap (10:1-8)

Second this morning, Paul points out that this true righteousness is something that the Jews refused to submit to.

We’ve already talked about this a bit, but Paul again says something familiar in 10:1:

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

Paul tells us that the Jews told themselves and believed sincerely that they were following the law, but they were actually very far off track because he tells us in verse 4, that Christ is the end of the law. [Next week we will devote all our time to that idea.]

But for the moment, just know that all of the law was pointing us to Christ, taking us to Jesus, and stealing away reasons for self-righteousness. Because of that, Paul says, they refused to submit to this kind of true righteousness that the law had been preaching to them for centuries this whole time. And when he says they refused to submit to the law, that’s really another way of saying they refused to submit to Christ. Verse 3:

“Since they...attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to *God’s* righteousness” (10:3).

The law was constantly preaching a message: you are fallen. You are a sinner. You cannot wash yourself. You need the life of another. You need a sacrifice. God will establish his own righteousness in the Messiah, whom you should believe in by faith. The law was constantly preaching that true righteousness only comes through faith, just like it was for Abraham. And the entire Old Testament was proclaiming this for anyone who would hear it.

All he wants for them is the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises that He has been preaching to them since the beginning: believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. That sentence is the fulness of the covenant promise. "Believe on the Lord Jesus!"

But this is where they stumble. They want to be righteous, but they're ignorant of true righteousness. They think they are supposed to have this righteousness in and of themselves so that they deserve the blessings. But they can't deserve it and have Christ.

By the way, look at verse 2 here again: "They have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."

Think about this a moment: They have a zeal for God. They're zealous. They care. They're energized! They seem to be sincere. They want to be righteous, but they aren't willing to listen to the Gospel that is proclaimed in every page of the Law.

They are sincere in the sense that they *want* to be righteous. They are eager. They want holiness for themselves. But what they don't want is to be righteous on *God's* terms through his Son. And among other things, I think this serves as an important reminder that sincerity is not the same thing as truth. People can be sincerely wrong. They can believe something with all their heart and be wrong about it.

In his novel *The Moviegoer*, writer Walker Percy noted that our modern culture often uses raw emotion and "sincerity" to excuse bad behavior or avoid looking at the objective state of our souls. He mocked a world where people think that as long as an action "strikes a sufficiently heartfelt and authentic note of sincerity," it should be congratulated.

We often treat feelings as a substitute for truth. But feelings cannot do the heavy lifting of salvation. Israel had more religious feeling and zeal than anyone on earth, yet they did not have righteousness because they did not pursue it by faith. Sincerity without truth is empty.

Modern people especially tend to think that feelings can be a substitute for truth, solid argument or virtue.

But the strength or seriousness of your feelings or desires is not the same thing as truth. The people of Israel were the most feeling people on earth. Nobody wanted righteousness more than them. But Israel didn't pursue it by faith, and so they didn't have righteousness. Their sincerity was wasted.

Meanwhile, the Gentiles "who did not pursue righteousness have obtained the righteousness that comes by faith." Sincerity and feeling can only get you so far. They are important, but they can't do the heavy lifting. Feeling without truth is just a synapse in your brain firing or dopamine hitting the blood stream. What really matters is truth! What really matters is, "Are you in Christ?"

Paul is showing us that the sincerity and zeal of the Jews does not make them right. The question is, what is true?

And that takes us to something else here that is very important. I mentioned that according to Paul the Jews are ignorant. That's not an insult, it just means that they don't know something. They are missing something.

But that doesn't mean that Paul thinks that unbelieving Jews were victims of lies or disinformation. No, they had everything they needed. Instead, he's argued that this is willful ignorance. That's why Paul says in verse 3 that "they did not submit to God's righteousness." It's ignorance, and it's willful. There's a decision being made here to miss the person who has been right in front of them all this time.

There's an opportunity for us to take what's happening here to heart and point it back at ourselves a moment. It's pretty easy to read this passage and think that the message is, "Jews bad." That would be a mistake, because the real message of Scripture is that all Jews and Gentiles are bad. We're all in the same boat. There is a world of Gentiles out there who also don't believe.

But even more, think of this: Israel was God's covenant people. They had his sacraments, his signs, his words, they had all of these advantages.

In that sense, we have that in common if we're in the church, if we grew up in the church especially. But we can also be surrounded by the truth, we can see the signs of God, we can hear true preaching, we can be in the midst of an assembly of the truth of God. And yet we can refuse to submit to God's righteousness, too. It can happen to us, just as well.

This is why I am preaching through Romans and spending so much time in this book. I want all of us to be challenged: do I hold the gospel like a marker or a badge so that people can see I'm supposed to be here, I belong? Or is the gospel (for me) about truly taking hold of Christ and treasuring him by faith?

Am I here for Jesus, or at rock bottom is this really about me and what I want? Many of the Jews answered that question by saying, "This is about me." Paul, before Jesus got hold of him (if he was truly honest) would have said, "This is about me."

And Christians also need to be challenged: we could be in the bounds of the church, hear the gospel on a regular basis, but we could also still give the same answer: "This is about me." So we should hear this section with humble self-awareness: I can be prone to gospel amnesia, too. I might know the truth and still forget it.

3. The Saving Riches of Christ (10:9-13)

Third this morning, Paul presents us with the saving riches of Christ.

Quoting Deuteronomy 30, Paul explains that salvation does not require us to perform some impossible cosmic feat. It has already been accomplished through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Because of this, peace is close at hand. Receiving Him is as near as believing in our hearts and confessing with our mouths.

How does the Holy Spirit apply what Christ has done to us? We place our faith in Him. We respond to the good news that Jesus is Lord by believing it is true—not

just as a historical fact, but believing that He has rights over us, that He has triumphed over the grave, and that He is King.

Paul writes in verse 10: "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

The heart is the core of who we are; it determines what we love. To believe with the heart means we love and surrender to this truth. And because of this inward change, our outward speech changes. Faith and confession go together.

Confession without faith is hypocritical fakery. But faith without confession is a sham; speaking the truth of Christ is the natural fruit of genuine belief.

Do you confess Jesus Christ, or do you keep your faith to yourself out of fear of what others will think? Is your faith real?

Conclusion

But if you are sitting there this morning asking yourself, "Is my faith strong enough? Is my confession bold enough? Am I doing this right?"—take a deep breath and look back at the text.

Because Paul doesn't wrap up this section by telling you to go on an inward hunt to measure the sincerity of your heart. He doesn't send you on a cosmic quest. He points you to the sheer, overflowing grace of Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 11:

"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

And verse 12:

"...the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him."

If salvation was based on the strength of your own consistency, you would have every reason to worry. If it was based on your heritage, your pedigree, or your perfect track record of never being embarrassed of the gospel, you would stumble just like Israel did.

Paul says Christ is "bestowing his riches." The Greek word there is *ploutōn*—He is *wealthy toward us*. He is not a stingy judge counting up your slip-ups; He is a lavish Savior pouring out a righteousness that He fully paid for.

Think about what this means for us today. You do not need to scale heaven to bring Him down. You do not need to conquer the grave to bring Him up. You do not need to establish a resume of religious achievements to make Him notice you.

Why? Because the Word is near you. It is as close as a heartbeat; it is as near as the breath in your mouth.

Whether you have been in the church for twenty years and have realized today that you've been relying on your own self-righteousness, or whether you are hearing this for the very first time—the invitation is exactly the same. The ground is completely level at the foot of the cross. There is no distinction.

Stop trying to build a ladder to God. Stop trying to look inward to find a righteousness of your own making. Just open your mouth, look to the Person of Jesus, and use the empty hand of faith to take hold of Him.

Because the promise of God's covenant has never changed, and it never fails:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Let's pray.