

Sermon Growth Guide

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Christ Is For Everyone | Romans 9:30-10:7

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Key Verse: Romans 10:4 “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

Big Idea: Now Christ is for everyone. Now God’s grace is for everyone.



Foundations

This week we continue in Romans, in our theme of The People of God. Paul explains how the Gentiles have obtained salvation. This follows a lengthy passage that lays out more of who God’s children are – and what it means to be a child of the Promise, verses only being a descendant of Abraham. Romans 9:8 states “in other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.” Paul is laying the groundwork here for the righteousness of the Gentiles that he addresses in our passage. Furthermore, Paul talks of God’s sovereignty and reminds us in verse 16 that “it does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.”

Here, then, we find out the importance of Christ as the fulfillment of the law. He is the ‘stumbling stone.’ Paul addresses the “unfair” argument here – that Gentiles have obtained righteousness by faith in Christ, rather than earning it by their merit and labor, which the Israelites revered. His heart is for the Israelites to be saved, submitting to God’s righteousness.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Romans 9:30 – 10:7

Here we read of Christ as the ‘stumbling stone.’ Have you thought of Christ in this way? How does that change your perception of Him? When was the last time that you stumbled upon Christ in the midst of your daily life?

Applying God’s Word

Who do you relate to more in our passage today? Those who are striving to earn righteousness, or those who recognize Christ as our stumbling block? Where is your zeal located?

Witnessing God’s Word

This passage talks about the Gentiles not pursuing righteousness, but obtaining it anyway. How does this strike you? Many of us squirm a bit uncomfortably at the thought of grace.

Who can you share the good news of Christ with? Is there anyone that you can think of who is trying to earn their righteousness? How might their lives change knowing Christ?

Last week, Abigail and I were truly blessed to celebrate thirty years of marriage by spending the week in Sicily. That's the gift we love to give each other. Travel. Experience. Time together. One day we visited a town called Cefalu. We walked into the Duomo, the cathedral in the main square, and this is what we saw. I can't really give you the sense of size. This is a huge Byzantine mosaic, a very famous image called Christos Pantokrator. It means Christ the All Powerful, Christ the All-Sustaining, Christ the Ruler of All. Imposing. Formidable. Profound. It is one of three famous Christos Pantokrator's in the world: Hagia Sofia in Istanbul, Catherine Cathedral on the Sinai, and this one. I stood before it and couldn't help but feel a little small—in my shorts, dirty tennis shoes, sweaty shirt, unshaven, looking like I rolled in off the beach... It was hot! Abigail looked lovely and reverent. It is an imposing image. Christ is the judge. But his right hand is in a posture of blessing and his left holds the Word, the Gospel, the good news of our salvation. Do we make too much of Jesus? Or do we make too little? Christ is over all; and Christ is for everyone.

We are studying Romans, moving verse by verse, not skipping over any parts. Right now, we are in the middle of the most difficult portion of the letter, Romans 9-11. N. T. Wright said Romans is eight chapters of gospel at the beginning, four of application at the end, and three of puzzle in the middle. But this is the part of Romans where The People of God are characterized. Who are they? What are they like? What are they doing in the world? And the big question hovering over our heads in Romans 9-11 is the question, why didn't Israel accept Jesus as Lord and Savior? Some did, but most rejected him. Today we take that question straight on. What we learn is that whether we consider ourselves religious and moral or helpless and lost, the only way to salvation is put all your hope and faith in Jesus Christ. Christ Is for Everyone.

“What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.” (Romans 9:30-31) What happened here? The Gentiles, pursuing their own selfish desires, seem to have seized on salvation. Why? Well, when the offer of grace and forgiveness through Christ came to them, they grabbed it. Selfish pleasure-chasing is not a good life, as it turns out. But the Jews kept to their pattern of pursuing self-justification through working the rules of the law. They did not jump on the offer of grace. They did not attain their goal of a right relationship with God. “Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” (Romans 9:32)

We kind of have to go back and tell the whole story. God made us in love. We rebelled in sin and selfishness. So, God said through Abraham, “I am your God; You are my people.” God chose a people to be his special possession. And God was clear; it isn't because you are particularly successful or outstanding in any way. “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8) God said, “You are my people. I am your God, even though you turn from me.”

Then God gave them the law as a gift. “Here. Take this. This is the way of life. Live this way and you will thrive.” And that's true. When you live according to God's Word, life goes better. Listen, the roots of antisemitism run

deep. Life went so much better for the Jewish people that other people hated and resented them. A plague comes to the city. Everyone is dying in the streets, except for the Jews. Why? They wash themselves and their cooking utensils differently than everyone else. They stayed healthy. "Hey, we're dying and they seem fine. They must have done this to us." This pattern went on all the way up to the Bubonic Plague. They didn't eat shellfish or pork or lots of strange field meat that carried unknown diseases. They had different principles about money. They saved, stewarded resources, didn't exploit one another with exorbitant loans. They had reserves. Waves of financial collapse didn't hit them the way they hit everyone else. Human nature being what it is, other people looked at the Jews, and, instead of saying, "Wow, your God seems to have given you some great insights and wisdom. How can I share what you have?" they said, "I hate you. I resent and envy and despise. I wish I could knock you down and take what is yours." And so they did, again and again, right up to 1930's Nazi Germany. Still, God's ways are better.

God said, "You are my people. I am your God. I love you. Love and follow me. Here is the law, the way of life. Promise to follow it. Life will go well for you." "Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: 'The person who does these things will live by them.'" (Romans 10:5) And, God said, "And when you fail, and when you falter, participate in the sacrifices outlined here. They will show you the cost of sin, they will demonstrate how my grace can cover your sin through another's sacrifice, they will train you to watch for the greatest, fullest sacrifice that will take your sin away forever." God wanted them to rest in the surety of his grace. But, people being people, fallen human nature being fallen human nature, the law became a stumbling block. Instead of following God's Word as a gift of love, the people used it as an instrument of leverage, transaction, against God. "If I do what you say, you have to do what I want." God never sent the

law as a way for people to leverage their way into his grace. But that's how they started to use it. "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." (Romans 10:3) They did not accept the gospel. Or, again, "Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone." (Romans 9:32) And if we are not careful, we can do the very same thing.

The stumbling stone. The scandal. What is it? "As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.'" (Romans 9:33) What is this stumbling block, this stone in the path we bang our shins up against? It's Jesus. "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." (Romans 10:3-4) Paul uses the phrase "the righteousness of God" as a shorthand for God's plan to save through the coming, dying and rising of Jesus Christ his Son. The Gospel. Since they didn't know that, since they didn't believe that God was saving them through Jesus, they remained confident that the law was a way for them to clamber on up to God through exercise and discipline and forced behavior. No! You can't climb up to Heaven. Jesus Christ is God come down. They didn't see it. They didn't accept it. It was a stumbling block.

Why? It's hard to accept you need the help of a Savior. It is hard to accept the cross. "As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.'" (Romans 9:33) I lay a stone in Zion, says the Lord. Jesus associated himself with that stone, with that image. He quoted Psalm 118 about himself. "Haven't you read this passage of Scripture: 'The

stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?” (Mark 12:10-11) Jesus is the stone. I am going to let Peter explain this to us. This is Peter’s letter to the church he wrote from maybe the Mamertine Prison in Rome. “As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,’ and, ‘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. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:4-10)

So, will you accept what Christ has done for you on the cross? Or will you double down and reinvest in your own track of self-justification? Will you admit that you are a sinner in need of grace and forgiveness? Or will you grit your teeth and try to prove yourself, master of your fate, conqueror, lord of your own life, etc.? The cross is a stumbling stone. Grace is a stumbling stone. It is a crisis moment when in your heart you decide whether or not to be saved by the work of another, whether or not to rest in the saving grace of the Lord. Jesus finished, culminated, ended that whole law project. Oh, it is still a good way to live. There are parts of the law Jesus set aside quite openly—food laws and some rituals and capital punishments and civic regulations—and he made those clear. We

get to eat bacon. There are parts of the law Jesus sustained. This is the way of life. Marriage between a man and a woman, tithing, fasting, the Ten Commandments. It’s still God’s Word, God’s law, God’s gift. It is still a way to honor God and demonstrate our love and gratitude to him. It is the shape of holiness. But while the people had taken to using the law as leverage against God’s grace, Jesus fulfilled the law and removed that whole pattern. “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4) Now Christ is for everyone. Now God’s grace is for everyone. Not just the Jews. Now there is righteousness for everyone. Christ is for everyone who believes. Even you, Romans. Even you, church.

Why didn’t the Jews accept Jesus? Why did they bang up against the stumbling block? The same reason you do. The same reason I do. When I look up and see Christos Pantokrator, God the Judge, I want to prove myself worthy of his love, worthy of his admiration, worthy of heaven. I want to do what is right to prove myself worthy. Don’t you? This is the old faith versus works divide. We fall into that same trap again and again. Jesus wasn’t looking down from the apse of that great cathedral saying, “You. You think you can roll in here in flip flops and dirty shorts? Look at you. Get it together man.” No, he looks down in blessing, in love, and says, “You! My treasure. My friend. My brother. My son. You are home. You are here. Don’t worry, I paid the price, I made the sacrifice, it is all done, it is all cleaned up, it is all paid. Just come. I am Christ for all! Only believe.” Can you trust in that today? This is the gospel that will change your life, now and forever.