

Romans Session 147
Israel's Failure was ignorance of the Person of God: His
Righteousness 3

The ignorant Zeal of Israel 1
The Ignorant Unrighteousness of Israel 1

Romans 10:1-2 (AMP)

¹ *BRETHREN, [with all] my heart's desire and goodwill for [Israel], I long and pray to God that they may be saved.*

² *I bear them witness that they have a [certain] zeal and enthusiasm for God, but it is not enlightened and according to [correct and vital] knowledge.*

Paul earnestly desired and prayed for Israel's salvation because he bore **them witness that they [had] a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.**

The apostle knew from his own experience s a radically zealous Pharisee that most Jews of that day were very religious but far from God.

He testified to the Galatians:

Galatians 1:13-14 (AMP)

¹³ *You have heard of my earlier career and former manner of life in the Jewish religion (Judaism), how I persecuted and abused the church of God furiously and extensively, and [with fanatical zeal did my best] to make havoc of it and destroy it.*

¹⁴ *And [you have heard how] I outstripped many of the men of my own generation among the people of my race in [my advancement in study and observance of the laws of] Judaism, so extremely enthusiastic and zealous I was for the traditions of my ancestors.*

He gave similar testimony to the Philippians;

Philippians 3:4-6 (AMP)

⁴ *Though for myself I have [at least grounds] to rely on the flesh. If any other man considers that he has or seems to have reason to rely on the flesh and his physical and outward advantages, I have still more!*

⁵ *Circumcised when I was eight days old, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew [and the son] of Hebrews; as to the observance of the Law I was of [the party of] the Pharisees,*

⁶ *As to my zeal, I was a persecutor of the church, and by the Law's standard of righteousness (supposed justice, uprightness, and right standing with God) I was proven to be blameless and no fault was found with me.*

As far as legalistically⁶ fulfilling the outward demands of the law, Paul was blameless.

Yet with other Jews of his day, he had no understanding of spiritual truth and genuine godliness.

He not only did not know and follow God's way but vehemently opposed it, persecuting the church of God.

Before the angry crowd of Jews in Jerusalem, Paul declared;

Acts 22:3 (AMP)

³ *I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but reared in this city. At the feet of Gamaliel I was educated according to the strictest care in the Law of our fathers, being ardent [even a zealot] for God, as all of you are today.*

Some years later before the Romans commander Festus, King Herod Agrippa, and his wife Bernice in Caesarea, the apostle gave similar testimony:

Acts 26:1-5 (AMP)

¹ *THEN AGRIPPA said to Paul, You are permitted to speak on your own behalf. At that Paul stretched forth his hand and made his defense [as follows]:*

² *I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that it is before you that I am to make my defense today in regard to all the charges brought against me by [the] Jews,*

³ *[Especially] because you are so fully and unusually conversant with all the Jewish customs and controversies; therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently.*

⁴ *My behavior and manner of living from my youth up is known by all the Jews; [they are aware] that from [its] commencement my youth was spent among my own race in Jerusalem.*

⁵ *They have had knowledge of me for a long time, if they are willing to testify to it, that in accordance with the strictest sect of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.*

By his own words, Paul had been a zealous member of the most zealous Jewish sect. No one understood better than he what it was to **have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.**

The Jews had a certain degree or kind of knowledge (*gnosis*), an intellectual awareness of the outward demands of God's law. But they did not have the discerning spiritual **knowledge** (*epignosis*) that comes only from a saving relationship to God. They had a kind of superficial religious knowledge that causes pride and arrogance;

1 Corinthians 8:1 (NASB)

¹ *Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.*

They did not have the godly, **knowledge** that both comes from and produces humility and holiness.

In behalf of the Ephesian church, Paul prayed;

Ephesians 1:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷ *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.*

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

True salvation brings with it a true knowledge of Him that opens the door to spiritual wisdom and enlightenment.

THE IGNORANT UNRIGHTEOUSNESS OF ISRAEL

Romans 10:3 (NASB)

³ *For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.*

Lack of knowledge is tied to lack of faith. Paul has already made clear that Israel's failure in righteousness was due to failure in faith;

Romans 9:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ *but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law.*

³² *Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,*

Israel's rejection by God was not due to arbitrary divine elections as though He had withheld His grace from His chosen people. The entire Jewish Scriptures are a testimony to God's calling Israel to Himself.

He called her repeatedly through the law, the prophets, and other sacred writings.
Of all people on earth, Israel was entrusted with the very oracles of God;

Romans 3:2 (NASB)

² **Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.**

She was therefore uniquely responsible for her rejection by God, who made every effort to bring her to Himself.
But as with the rest of the world, Israel rejected God before God rejected Israel.

Romans 1:18-21 (NASB)

¹⁸ **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,**

¹⁹ **because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.**

²⁰ **For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.**

²¹ **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.**

The tragedy in the history of Israel was squandering the immeasurable privilege of having directly received the very Word of God.

First His written word in the Scriptures, and even more tragically the living Word, God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

Israel was willingly and in-excusably ignorant of **God's righteousness** because she sought **to establish her own** righteousness and refuse to **subject herself to the righteousness of God.**

Now such a charge was a terrible blow to a people who prided themselves in knowing the truth about God and in being His chosen ones.

Paul makes very clear that Israel's most serious ignorance was about **God's righteousness**, the central nature of His personhood.

Considering having received the full revelation of the old Testament, it is shocking to think that the Jews would underestimate God's holiness and righteous perfection.

But they brought God's holiness and purity down to their own sinful level, and their basic spiritual and moral flaw was in thinking that God was less holy and more tolerant of sin than He had clearly revealed Himself to be.

Through Jeremiah, the Lord warned His people;

Jeremiah 9:23-24 (NASB)

²³ **Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;**

²⁴ **but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.**

Man's only cause for boasting is in **God's righteousness**, never in his own.

But most Jews of that day *did* boast in their own righteousness and considered themselves pleasing to God simply because they were His Ancient chosen people.

For that same reason they thought the many rabbinical traditions they had substituted for God's Word were perfectly acceptable to Him.

Not only were they willingly ignorant of **God's righteousness**, but they also had no understanding of their own unrighteousness.

They thought they were more holy and righteous than they were and therefore fully believed that any deficit in their own merit could be met by their own good works, measured by **their own** standard of righteousness.

Consequently, they felt no need for a Messiah to save them from sin but rather a Messiah to deliver them from their earthly oppressors, namely Rome.

That heinous misjudgment and ignorance about God's righteousness and their own un-righteousness was the basis for their whole system of legalistic self-righteousness.

Through their rabbinical traditions they had brought the infinitely holy standard of God, which no man can achieve by his own efforts, down to a man-made level which they could achieve without divine grace.

Despite the clear and unambiguous teaching of the old Testament, Jews chose to **establish their own** standards of holiness and righteousness and thereby **did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God.**

They knew that Moses declared;

Exodus 15:11 (NASB)

¹¹ "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?"

But they chose instead to **submit themselves** to the much less demanding standards of their own traditions.

Jews knew of the earnest entreaty that the godly king Jehoshaphat made to his people;

2 Chronicles 20:20-21 (NASB)

²⁰ They rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed."

²¹ When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

And they often sang,

Psalm 30:4 (NASB)

⁴ Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name.

But in their hearts, they praised themselves for their own presumed worthiness.

Thus, the failure of Israel of God's righteousness and the ignorance of their own unrighteousness.

We will take this on again next time.