

# Why People Reject Salvation

## Romans 9:30-33

This morning I want you to think about someone you know. I don't know their name, but you do. This person has heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He has seen it lived out in the lives of people close to him. Maybe she grew up going to church and had the advantage of Christian parents and good Bible teaching. But this person is still lost. He has rejected the gospel. She has turned her back on the Savior. Why?

Why would someone reject salvation? Have you ever thought about that? Why would someone turn away from being delivered and set free? That's the issue that Paul is dealing with in these last few verses of Romans 9. Even more to the point Paul is asking, "Why would a religious person reject salvation? Why would the Jews who were God's covenant people, who knew God's law and the prophecies of the Old Testament, who worshipped God at His Temple, why would they reject salvation in Jesus Christ?"

Spurgeon points out that Paul had two facts that stared him in the face every time he preached the gospel. First, wherever he went preaching Jesus Christ many pagan Gentiles believed the gospel and were saved, their lives being marvelously transformed by faith in Jesus Christ. Paul had preached Jesus in Gentile cities like Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth and Philippi. When he preached of the word of life, heathen sinners and idolaters believed in the Lord Jesus, and the proof was how their lives were now characterized by purity, love, joy, and peace.

On the other hand, there was the sad fact that even though Paul had usually preached the gospel first to the Jews in the synagogues, yet almost everywhere, most of them rejected the Messiah and refused the grace of the gospel, even persecuting those who brought them the good news. There were a few Jews who believed, but very few, only a remnant.

Listen to how Paul writes about this issue in Romans 9:30-33

**30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;**

**31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.**

**32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.**

**33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."**

So in these verses Paul explains to us why the Jews rejected salvation in Jesus Christ. It seems that those who follow religious ritual and rules may have the biggest struggle, while those who know they are sinners often embrace the Savior far easier. There are different reasons why people reject salvation. And the reason this passage is important to us today is that many people today are rejecting the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ for the same reasons that the Jews did back then. Today we will examine three things that people stumble over in rejecting salvation. (I am indebted to Brian Bill for this outline).

**Some people reject salvation because:**

**1. They don't want to admit they are a sinner.**

Look at verse 30: **“What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith.”** The word **“pursue”** means to run swiftly after something or to earnestly seek a goal. Remember that a Gentile is anyone who is not Jewish. Paul described the Gentile world in Romans 1,

***Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.***

The result this idolatry is,

**being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**

These same people, who are a lot like each of us, according to Romans 9:30 have obtained righteousness, even though they weren't pursuing it. One thing they did have figured out was that they were sinners. They knew that their behavior would never qualify them as righteous; the only way for that to happen was **“by faith.”** They received something they weren't even looking for, much less striving to attain, but they got it because of faith. Don't miss this. Having a right relationship with God can only be attained when you admit you need a righteousness that you do not have and cannot earn. Righteousness is a gift of God's grace, and He only gives that gift to unrighteous sinners. Isaiah 65:1 says, **“I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me”** (NASB).

In Matthew 9:13, Jesus says: **“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”**

One reason people reject salvation is they won't admit they are sinners, and Jesus only saves sinners—not the righteous.

A second reason why some reject salvation is:

## **2. They don't want to receive God's righteousness by faith.**

Many stumble because the way of salvation is simple. Look at Romans 9:31-32:

**31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.**

**32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law...**

The Jewish people struggled to admit their sinfulness and as a result didn't see their need for a Savior. Even though they pursued the Law, they couldn't reach the Lord behind the Law, because they somehow thought they could attain righteousness on their own. They were grasping but could never reach the goal of righteousness.

The Jews tried to keep the law scrupulously, they offered gallons upon gallons of animal blood on the altar; they followed the dietary laws and did whatever else they thought they should do. Why did they not find what they were looking for? Because righteousness is never a result of work; but comes only by faith. God wants more than just ritualistic rule-keeping; righteousness comes out of a relationship with Him by faith.

That is what Paul has been teaching throughout this whole book of Romans.

Robert Haldane said, "A free salvation becomes an offense to men on account of their pride – men's desire is to do something...to merit their salvation, at least in part."

The requirement is simple – it's faith. It's simple trust. In John 6 the Jews asked Jesus, ***Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"***

Listen to how Jesus shows that their question is flawed. **Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."**

This is similar to what we read in Acts 16:30-31 when the Philippian jailer asked this question: ***"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*** The answer was simple: ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved."***

### **3. They stumble over Jesus as Savior and Lord.**

At the end of verse 32 Paul says, ***"For they stumbled at that stumbling stone."*** And in verse 33 he combines quotes the Old Testament to explain this stumbling stone,

**33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."**

Paul is combining parts of two passages from Isaiah into one statement. The first of these is Isaiah 8:14-15:

***He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense To both the houses of Israel, As a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble; They shall fall and be broken, Be snared and taken.***

The second passage is Isaiah 28:16: ***"Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; Whoever believes will not act hastily."***

Paul combines these two passages to show that Jesus is either a Sanctuary who is precious as the Rock of Refuge or a He is a Stumbling Stone on which people are broken.

Paul wants every one of us to look to the stone in Zion that causes some to stumble and also to the rock that will trip up those who are filled with pride.

How is Jesus Christ a stumbling stone to unbelievers? Perhaps the best commentary on this is Paul's explanation in 1 Cor. 1:18-31. I don't have time today to read and explain that entire passage, but the main idea is that the cross confronts human wisdom, human strength, and human pride. A crucified Savior confounded Israel's idea of what the Savior should be. Israel was looking for a powerful king, the Son of David, born of nobility, who like him would conquer all her enemies. They thought He would not be a common man, born to a lowly carpenter who lived in the despised city of Nazareth. Surely His followers would not be the despised tax-gatherers and prostitutes!

Paul's assertion is that Jesus Christ and His gospel is this stumbling stone or, as we could translate "a rock of offense," 'a scandalous rock.' The gospel is scandalous to the

unbelieving. The scandal, of course, is not the personality of Jesus or the idea of His existence or His sayings (edited, of course) or His miracles or His motivation to help others. Rather it is the offensive nature of Christ revealed in the gospel. That God the Son would become Incarnate in order to bear His own wrath at the cross, offends!

The necessity of His perfect obedience and bloody death at the cross for our salvation, offends. It offended the multitudes that followed Jesus after He fed them. So He used the imagery, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves" (John 6:53). You must find your satisfaction in Christ alone. Many left when they heard this. Jesus asked, "Does this cause you to stumble?" Or "Does this scandalize you?" Why is this scandalous?

Paul writes (1 Cor. 1:23), "**but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.**"

Why would God give the world a lowly, crucified Savior and a way of salvation that causes many to be offended? This does not seem like a great way to market salvation! The world would want to package salvation as something attractive. How people how Jesus will help them succeed at work and have happy families. Show them how Jesus will help them reach their full potential. Minimize all that negative stuff about sin and judgment. What people need is a positive, uplifting message to build their self-esteem!

But the reason the true gospel inherently offends is that it offends our sinful pride (1 Cor. 1:29). If God shows mercy to whom He desires and hardens whom He desires (Rom. 9:18), then I can't boast in why I was shown mercy. In fact, the very idea that I need mercy is offensive. Sure, I'm not perfect, but why can't God just give me a little boost? How about a few helpful hints for happy living? Mercy implies that I'm a spiritual basket case, unable to do anything to gain God's favor! Precisely!

Michael Card wrote the song Scandalon referring to the word "offense" in verse 33, listen to the lyrics

### **Scandalon – Michael Card**

The seers and the prophets had foretold it long ago  
That the long awaited one would make men stumble  
But they were looking for a king to conquer and to kill  
Who'd have ever thought He'd be so meek and humble

#### *Chorus*

*He will be the truth that will offend them one and all  
A stone that makes men stumble  
And a rock that makes them fall  
Many will be broken so that He can make them whole  
And many will be crushed and lose their own soul*

Along the path of life there lies a stubborn Scandalon  
And all who come this way must be offended  
To some He is a barrier, To others He's the way  
For all should know the scandal of believing

#### *Chorus*

It seems today the Scandalon offends no one at all  
The image we present can be stepped over  
Could it be that we are like the others long ago  
Will we ever learn that all who come must stumble?

## *Chorus*

And so to approach God through our good works will cause us to stumble over Christ. To come in faith to Christ, God must humble our pride. Salvation is simple because Jesus did all the work. It's free because He paid the price for your sins. And it's a gift because all you need to do is receive it. Because we are sinners we can trust Him for our salvation and we can also trust Him with the stresses of our lives.

Now let's go back to where we started and think of that person again who is rejecting salvation. Is that person you? May God enable you today to come to Him by faith, to trust in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for you.