

The Folly Of Israel

Introduction. The Jews regarded Paul as an apostate, a hater of their nation. Nevertheless, he feels deeply for his countrymen. He knows their plight because their condition was his own condition prior to his conversion. Although Paul had great love for them, he knew that only a remnant of Israel would be saved through faith in Christ.

As you read the history of ancient Israel, you tend to get the impression that they were very foolish people. They thought they knew God's truth (Psalm 95:10; Isaiah 1:2-4). However, before we become too arrogant, they were merely a portrait of human nature in the world today. In Romans 10:1-3, Paul sums up the condition of Israel and exposes their folly. We can learn from these four shortcomings.

I. They Had Zeal Without Knowledge

- A. This was demonstrated by two facts:
 - 1. They rejected Christ, the apostles, and their preaching in spite of the fact that the preaching was "confirmed" (Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:1-4).
 - 2. They persecuted the church by killing faithful men such as Stephen (Acts 7:60) and Antipas (Revelation 2:13).
- B. Other examples of zeal without knowledge:
 - 1. Saul (Acts 22:1-5; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13).
 - 2. Jewish teachers (Acts 15:1; Galatians 4:17).
 - 3. Cornelius (Acts 10:25-26).
 - 4. Peter (Matthew 17:4-5; 26:31-33).
- C. Zeal combined with knowledge is commanded (Galatians 4:18; Titus 2:14; Revelation 3:19). Most Jews were very religious but they were far from God. Superficial knowledge puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1), but true knowledge is discerning and produces humility and holiness (Ephesians 1:17-18).

II. They Were Ignorant Of God's Righteousness

- A. The Jews completely understood that God was righteous (Exodus 15:11). Their willful ignorance (John 7:17; 2 Peter 3:5) was in God's plan, or way, of righteousness.
- B. They had rejected the gospel which revealed God's righteousness (Matthew 13:15; Romans 1:16-17). They therefore were in a lost condition (Hosea 4:6).
- C. Ignorance is not bliss — it is the religious world's greatest problem.
 - 1. It caused Christ to be crucified (Acts 3:12-17).
 - 2. It caused early Christians to suffer persecution (1 Timothy 1:13).
 - 3. It causes people today to ignore God and His word (Acts 17:23).
- D. Multitudes today are just as ignorant of God's righteousness as were the Jews of whom Paul wrote in our text — some honestly ignorant, and some willingly!

III. They Tried To Establish Their Own Righteousness

- A. This is a natural result of ignorance of God's righteousness.
 - 1. Man is naturally religious (Acts 17:23).
 - 2. If he does not know God's way, he seeks to establish his own.
- B. How did the Jews seek to establish their own righteousness?

1. Outward show (Matthew 23:5).
 2. Proselyting to party views (Matthew 23:15).
 3. Calling attention to their own goodness and other's faults (Luke 18:9).
 4. Exalting their own ways above God's (Matthew 15:1-3).
 5. Making sure good deeds are discovered (Matthew 6:1-7).
- C. Because men think God is less holy than He is and that they are more holy than they are, they believe they can achieve acceptance with Him. They measure both God and themselves by human standards of right and wrong and are deceived in both regards (Psalm 50:16-21).

IV. They Had Not Submitted To The Righteousness Of God

- A. The Old Testament consistently shows the stubbornness and rebellion of the Jews (1 Samuel 15:23).
- B. As long as man is set on establishing his own righteousness, he will never submit to God's. Man's righteousness may consist of being saved only by morality, being saved by simply being "spiritual," being saved by grace only, being saved by faith only, or being saved by the sinner's prayer.
- C. How does the Bible say you submit to the righteousness of God?
1. Hear (John 6:45; Ephesians 1:13).
 2. Believe (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6).
 3. Repent (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30).
 4. Confess (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10).
 5. Be baptized (John 3:3, 5; Acts 22:16).
 6. Live faithfully (Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 3:6).
- D. Not surprisingly, a weakened understanding of God's righteousness brings a weakened view of His judgment. When we do not see God as He really is, we cannot see man as he really is. Because of this, a terrible eternity awaits everyone who does not comply with the righteousness of God (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 1 Peter 4:17).

Conclusion. The Law demanded absolute righteousness or perfect obedience, but could not free the transgressor of guilt. The Law could not make the guilty righteous. In Romans 10:4, the end (aim, purpose) of the Law was righteousness. The believer in Christ is made righteous (cleansed from sin via the blood of Christ) and thus the end of the Law for righteousness is reached in Christ.

May we never become victims of such folly as that of Israel! An open and honest heart, plus diligent study of God's word, are the best preventatives to such an attitude. Will you submit right now to the righteousness of God?