

# THE ROAD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

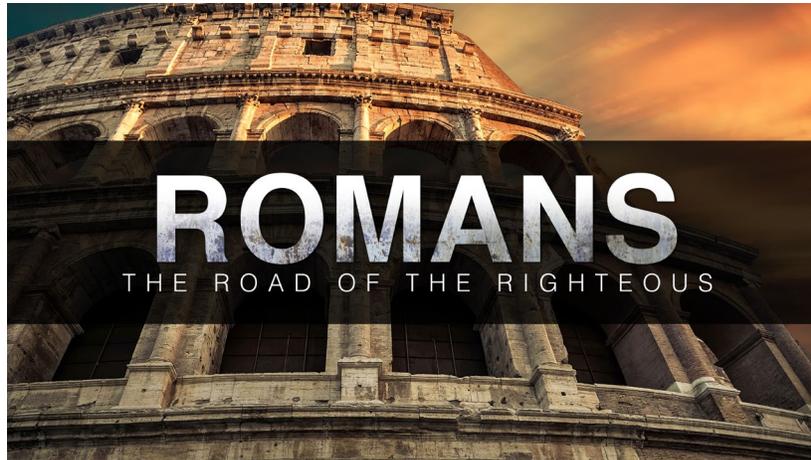
## Expositional Study Of Romans

Romans 9:30-33

Written By

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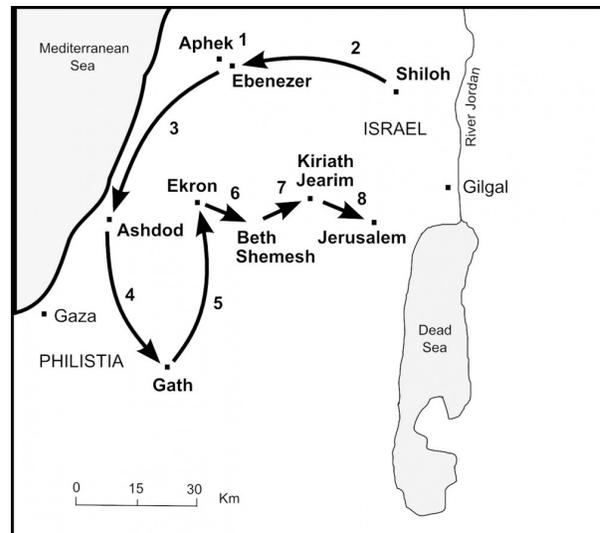
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**A**dmit it. Sometimes God says or does things in His Word you just don't quite get. The story of Uzza in 1 Chronicles 13 is a case study in the mysterious ways of God.

For nearly one hundred years the Ark of the Covenant had not been in Jerusalem. According to 1 Samuel 4, the Philistines captured it a battle with Jewish forces near Aphek (1104 B.C.) during the period of the Judges. Eventually, the Philistines brought it south to Ashdod and placed it in the temple of Dagon. While here, the idol of Dagon fell twice before the Ark. During the second fall, the false god's head and hands were divinely broken off, illustrating its ineptness before the living God (1 Sam. 5:1-5). God also struck the Philistine people with a plague resembling hemorrhoids. What did they do to alleviate their problem? What you would have done: they sent the Ark to Gath (1 Sam. 5:8). When they, also, contracted tumorous hemorrhoids, they sent the Ark to Ekron (1 Sam. 5:10). Knowing what had happened to other Philistine cities, these folks wised up and sent the Ark back to the Israelites (1 Sam. 6). Who ever said the Bible was boring? Not I.

With the Ark now at Beth Shemesh, a small Israelites town located some fifteen miles southwest of Jerusalem (1 Sam. 6:13-7:1), the



<https://www.thebiblejourney.org/biblejourney2/29-the-journeys-of-ruth-and-samuel/the-ark-of-the-covenant-is-captured-at-aphek/>

Israelites rejoiced over the victory. Unfortunately for them, they rejoiced a bit too much because some of them touched the Ark, which was verboten (Num. 4:5-20), and opened its heavy, golden lid to see if the stone tablets of the Torah were still inside. Willful sin of this nature cost them dearly as God struck down 50,070 people for daring to break His law.

After this spiritual disaster, the Israelites moved the Ark of God to Kiriath Jearim, a small hamlet some ten miles northwest of Jerusalem (Interestingly enough, this is the modern day Abu Gosh area where we have our final meal to conclude our tour of Israel). While here, the Ark stayed with the family of Abinadab until the time of David (1 Sam. 7).

Around 1003 B.C., David arranged to bring the Ark to Jerusalem after he defeated the Jebusites (1 Chron. 13). With the Ark in Jerusalem a united Israel could have a religious center per God's desire. To get the Ark to Jerusalem, they placed it on a new wooden cart and headed uphill, dancing and singing as went (1 Chron. 13:8). When the Ark approached the threshing floor of Chidon outside of the capital city, the oxen stumbled on the rocky terrain. This, of course, caused the Ark to slide off of the protective cart. Uzza, who happened to be walking next to the cart, saw the situation and reacted by placing his hand out to steady the Ark. Instantly, God struck Uzza dead (1 Chron. 13:10).

Huh? God killed Uzza for attempting to do a good deed? To employ our slang, What is up with that? Talk about something which seems completely unfair and uncalled for. Talk about something which appears to cast God in a capricious, bad light where it looks like He needs anger management. I told you there are times when, at first blush, it is hard to swallow what God does or permits. This story sure fits that bill.

Upon closer analysis, however, God does, at times, give us wisdom and insight into His complex ways. For one, the Ark was supposed to be carried by the priests on poles so it could never be dropped. For another, no one was supposed to EVER touch the Ark because it was absolutely holy. For Uzza to place his hand on it as it fell was to willfully break this inexorable law and to say, in so many words, "God cannot protect His own Ark so I will help Him." No wonder God made an example out of Uzza. When God gives us a command He expects us to follow it without question or modification. Our relativistic, pluralistic, progressive culture has not embraced this divine memo, have they?

Romans chapters nine through eleven represent an interesting portion of the inspired book where God, through the pen of Paul, stops and answers questions Jews did not understand about the doctrine of justification by faith. Does the fact God now saves Jews and Gentiles through the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17) mean He is forever finished with His dealings with Israel, especially since they were instrumental in delivering the Messiah up for crucifixion? God, who is patient and longsuffering (Jonah 4:2), loved this Jewish people enough to cause Paul to pause in his teaching and answer the questions they were either asking or were thinking.

Trust me. He will do the same for you if you are perplexed and searching for answers as to why He does what he does or permit what He permits. Yes, He does not tell us everything (Deut. 29:29), but there are times, as here, where He makes sure our questions are answered so we can move forward in the faith.

## Jewish Questions Naturally Arose From Paul's Teaching About The Gospel Of Jesus (Rom. 9)

What were those questions, which in many respects are still applicable today?

- *Question #1:* Does Israel's spiritual failure and rejection of the Messiah nullify God's

national promises (Rom. 9:6-13)?

- *Answer: No*, because God sovereignly and unconditionally chose Israel.
- *Question #2: Do God's precise choices demonstrate He is unjust because He did not choose everyone (Rom. 9:14a)?*
  - *Answer: No*, because His character pulsates with righteous purpose (Rom. 9:15-18). Remember He did not chose every family member of the Patriarchs to compose His chosen people, just select ones. In so doing, He blesses some . . . apart from their works, and does not bless others. Yet in all of this sovereign choosing, God continued to work out His purpose for mankind.
- *Question #3: Since God chooses to bless or curse, how can He hold us accountable (Rom. 9:19-21)?*
  - *Answer, No*, we freely act and God freely acts.
- *Question #4: If God Is Just, Why Does He React Slowly To Sin (Rom. 9:22-29)?*
  - *Answer #1: God Has His Purposes* (Rom. 9:22-23). He has distinct purposes toward the lost and the saved, between non-Christians (v. 22) and non-Christians (v. 23).
  - *Answer #2: God Has His Plans* (Rom. 9:24-29). He has specific and strategic plans towards Gentiles (vv. 24-6) and Jews (vv. 27-29).

After question four we encountered question number 5, which naturally arises from a reading and study of the passage at hand; namely, Romans 9:30 through 10: 21.

### Question #5: What Is The Relation Between God's Election And Man's Free Will (Rom. 9:30-10:21)?

Now, here is a question along the lines of the story of Uzza. In fact, in many respects it is even more complex and intriguing. Throughout this pedagogical hiatus in the book (Rom. 8:28ff), Paul has stressed the sovereign election of God. On the one hand, apart from no works of their own, He chose some Gentiles and some Jews to be saved. On the other hand, He, apart from no works of their own, freely and sovereignly chose some Jewish sons to form the coveted Jewish line of the nation, while neglecting others in the family line (Rom. 9:6-13). And, as Paul articulates in Romans 9:25-29, God chose to sovereignly work out His lofty spiritual plans through Gentiles (Rom. (9:25-26), and through, amazingly, only a small fraction of Jewish people, both in Paul's day and in the eschatological future (Rom. 9:27-29).

This divine choice, of course, raised Jewish eyebrows. Did God's choice of Gentiles now mean He was finished with Israel? A follow on question was certainly in order: Since God made this choice, what did that mean about Gentiles and Jews? Were they, are they, responsible for their reaction to God's sovereign choice? Does God hold them accountable for the revelatory truth of the gospel He places before them? In a word, the answer is a resounding "Yes. He holds them, and us, accountable." As I have said, in God's dimension He makes choices regarding people, and in our dimension we are responsible for how we respond to His choices. In theological circles this is called the doctrine of compatibilism. For one, God works in and through everything to accomplish His eternal purposes (Eph. 1:11; Acts 17:26). For instance, He used the Assyrians to punish the Israelites for their disobedience, but He also judged the Assyrians for how they used their military might against His chosen people (Isa. 10:5-7). These, of many verses, clearly show we *are* responsible for our actions in a divinely controlled and ordered cosmos. Hence, while God did chose to work with Gentiles, and with Jews in a remnant fashion, both groups were/are

responsible for their response to God and His gospel. This answer is broken down into two parts starting in chapter 9, verse 30.

*Answer #1: The Gentiles Freely And Favorably Responded To God (Rom. 9:30).* Contextually, Paul has just concluded, by quoting from the prophetic texts in Hosea (Hos. 2:23; 1:10) how God purposed in ancient times to sovereignly work in and through Gentiles in addition to His chosen people, Israel. Yet, even in this divine choice, God makes it clear that the Gentiles did, and do, have a responsibility to respond to His revelation regarding how a sinner can obtain an eternal relationship with Him, the Holy One. Watch how Paul masterfully sets up this answer:

<sup>30</sup>What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith;

Paul has employed this question format before in his letter to summarize various arguments (Rom. 4:1; 6:1; 8:31; 9:14). Like a skilled attorney, he guides his reader's thinking to ponder the relation between God's sovereign choice of Gentiles and their freewill. Hence, on the one hand God chose to work in and through Gentiles (in addition to Israel), but on the other hand they were, and are, responsible for how they embrace or deface, accept or reject God's redemptive plan as provided through Jesus, the Christ.

His words, as you can see, drip with irony. Many Gentiles who did not have the privilege of divine revelation through, for instance, theophanies (the appearances of God as at Sinai or in the dedication of the Temple) or through a revelatory word or words, they who did not "pursue righteousness" based on a faith relationship with the Savior, Jesus, ironically secured divine righteousness. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for "pursue" (διώκω) is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the LXX or the Septuagint) for going after an enemy like a hunter (Gen. 14:15; Ex. 15:9).<sup>1</sup> The gaming word clearly demonstrates how the spiritually blind, egocentric Gentilic world, prior to Christ, historically *never* saw the need for coming to terms with God, as sinners, by means of faith in the properly and divinely ordered sacrifice. The thought just didn't cross their carnal, polytheistic loving minds.

Did this mean they were not moral people? No. J. Budziszewski, author of *What We Can't Not Know*, writes prolifically about how God has, since the creation of the worlds, built into all mankind a common sense of moral right and wrong. Our world, of course, erroneously believes there is no such things as absolute, over-arching moral truths, and that we just make them up as we go along. This view, by definition leads to personal and cultural chaos of the first order because each person and group is free to devise conflicting views of what constitutes morality. Innate, inexorable moral truth (like lying is wrong, murder is wrong, cheating is wrong), on the contrary, creates peace and tranquility as people submit to it. Submission, however, to the concept of moral law God built into the warp and woof of the cosmos did not mean, however, that man, especially the Gentile man, pursued God on God's terms to secure a remedy for his innate sin nature. He

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), διώκω [cp. δίω 'put to flight' and Hom. δίεμαι 'chase, pursue'] the basic idea is engagement in pursuit or chase, with context determining intent. – a. in a malicious sense persecute Mt 5:10; Lk 11:49; J 5:16; Ac 9:4; 22:4; 1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 4:9; Gal 1:23; Phil 3:6; Rv 12:13; w. focus on movement chase, go after Mt 23:34; Ac 26:11. – b. in a positive sense, of zealous interest in attaining someth. important pursue Ro 9:30; 12:13; 1 Cor 14:1; 1 Th 5:15; 1 Pt 3:11; be on the chase Phil 3:12; chase/run after Lk 17:23.

had a certain amount of morality about him; however, spiritually he was, for all intents and purposes, dead, as Paul articulates in Romans 3.

Now, what is most interesting is Gentiles who did not have a clue about being saved by being justified by personal faith in Jesus, *the Redeemer and Savior*, secured eternal salvation because they, of all people, excitedly and willfully embraced that glorious gospel when God revealed it to them. Why did they run so quickly to it? For the same reason they still do today: they saw the vacuous nature of their worldview, be what it may. Along these lines, it is worth nothing that Paul says the Gentiles, “*attained righteousness*.” The Greek verb here, viz., *katalamvano* (καταλαμβάνω) is made emphatic by wedding the preposition, *kata*, to the verbal stem. It is as if Paul shockingly says, “Can you believe it? They who weren’t looking for salvation by faith, super grasped it with a grip of all grips.”

Case in point. On Mars Hill, Paul spoke with the pagan Greek Epicurean and Stoic philosophers about the identification of the idol marked “To An Unknown God” (Acts 17:22ff). After pointing the spiritually lost academicians to the great, living God who made all things (Acts 17:23-29), Paul then said the time of God being patient with their spiritual ignorance was up now that the Son of God had died for their sins and risen from the grave (Acts 17:30-31). With that bold pronouncement, the majority of the “enlightened” intelligentsia mocked Paul, but some of those Gentiles did, in fact, come to know Jesus and become justified in God’s courtroom by their faith in His person and redemptive work on Calvary’s tree:

<sup>32</sup> Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some *began* to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.” <sup>33</sup> So Paul went out of their midst. <sup>34</sup> But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them (Acts 17).

Ironic, isn’t it? These new believers had ascended the Areopagus, as they had probably done many times before, in order to worship the gods and to discover more spiritual truth about the gods, and on this one occasion they, who were not spiritually enlightened, walked down the hill full of God’s redemptive light. Yes, they walked up the hill unjustified sinners, who were probably nice, moral people, but they walked down the hill justified by their faith. This is simply amazing. These Gentiles who were not looking for righteousness by faith found it when they least expected.

Perhaps this is your story today. Right now you are asking yourself, “Ah, now I see why I am probably in church this morning. I felt drawn here because of various factors in my life, but now I see most clearly what’s going on in my life. God has drawn me here so that I, too, might be justified by my faith in Jesus.” The choice is still yours, as it was for those on Mars Hill that day. Put differently, you are responsible for making the right choice. Historically, since the birth of the Church two thousand years ago, more Gentiles than Jews have made this faith step. Will you? I’m sure that when you make it your life will also be full of irony too. You came to church clueless, and you left church clued-in, spiritually speaking. And you did it based on your own free will. This is what has happened in the Gentile world post-cross. Indeed, many Jews have been saved; however, the spiritual scales weigh heavily in favor of Gentiles being the predominant ones, of all people, who come to God on God’s faith terms.

God calls, elects, and chooses, but it is your responsibility to respond, freely, to His wooing. Again, I ask you, Will you? Many Gentiles have ironically made this step (along with a minor portion of Jews), but, for the most part, this has not been the response of God’s first chosen people. He sovereignly chose them (Deut. 7), but, for the most part, they have willfully chosen to reject Him . . . even in the face of incontrovertible evidences that Jesus was, and is, the prophesied

Savior and Christ. This, of course, forms the bedrock of Paul's lengthier second answer conceding the relation between God's sieving choice and man's freewill.

*Answer #2: The Jews Freely And Unfavorably Responded To God* (Rom. 9:31-10:4). The contrast between the Jewish response to God and the Gentile response could not be starker, as Paul tells us in the ensuing eye-opening verses:

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

In a twist of complete irony, Israel, who had limited, yet wonderful, access to God, divine revelatory events and words, did not obtain divine righteousness. They should have, but true holiness before God historically eluded them. Why? Paul explains why starting in verse 32:

<sup>32</sup> Why? Because *they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.*

Where the Jews historically zealous for God? Yes. Were they historically sincere in their quest for a spiritual relationship with God. Yes. Did they seek, as sinners, a relationship with the holy and living God on His terms, not theirs? No. He sovereignly chose them as His people (Deut. 7; Ex. 19:6), but they, for the most part, did not freely chose to approach God by means of faith in His redemptive work but in their perpetual religious works, coupled, of course, with some degree of faith. Put differently, instead of coming, as sinners, to the Lord of the Law by faith (as Abraham had done (Rom. 4), they worshipped the Law as the means to God. Leon Morris summarizes the issue at hand most clearly:

Righteousness is *by faith*, but the Jews did not come in faith. They sought the right goal indeed, though they did it in the wrong way: "but as of works" where "as" is important. Paul does not say that righteousness could be attained in this way, but only that the Jews thought so and therefore acted "as" though it could.<sup>2</sup>

Robert Mounce, a world-class New Testament Greek scholar, couches Israel's willful spiritual misstep in this insightful fashion:

Their right standing before God was based on faith. Israel, on the other hand, pursued a righteousness based on law and failed to achieve it. The reason is obvious. Their efforts were based not on faith but on personal performance. Their efforts were doomed from the beginning because God does not accept sinners on the basis of what they do. Righteousness comes by faith and faith alone. God does not allow himself to be put in debt to people and their best efforts. The approach that says righteousness can be earned fails to grasp the enormity of sin. Our separation from God is so great that only he can bridge the gap. He chooses to do it entirely on his own. Our only responsibility is to accept by faith the finished work of Christ on behalf of sinners.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 375.

<sup>3</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 205–206.

Why did they do this? Why did they think that their perpetual adherence to the Laws of Moses would enable them to garner grace points with God, thereby permitting them to gain entrance into His heaven? It's called pride. Pride says, "I'm a good person, therefore, my works must count to some degree before God." Pride says, "God needs my help where salvation is concerned." Know anybody like this right now? Don't be deceived. Religious works and religious zeal will never save anyone on Judgment Day (Rev. 20:7ff).

Why else did Israel historically reject God's concept about justification by faith alone? They willfully and freely stumbled, and still do, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 over the Messiah.

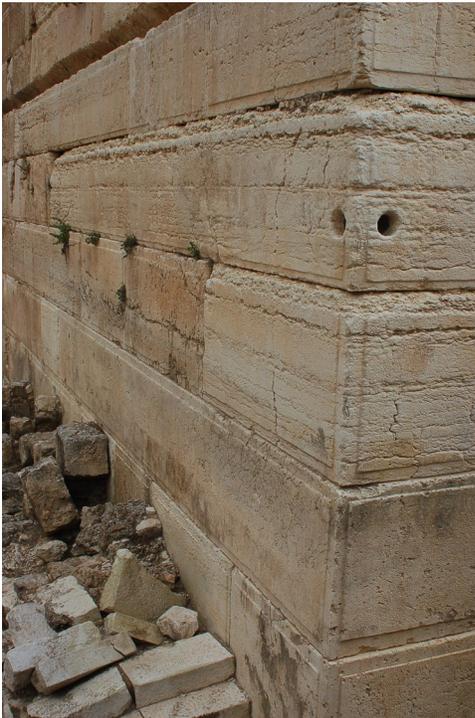
They stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup> just as it is written, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Jesus took the prophetic stone motif and repeatedly applied it to Himself:

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief corner *stone*'; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes?" (Matt. 21).

<sup>17</sup> But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER *stone*'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust" (Luke 20).

Jesus was, and is, the prophesied stone of all stones in the heavenly temple of God Almighty. For those who embrace this salvific stone by faith, they will not be disappointed on Judgment Day for they are His children, by means of faith alone in His redemptive work. For those who efface this salvific stone by means of unbelief, they will be disappointed on Judgment Day because they will discover they never were His children, and their religious/moral works pale into insignificance in relation to His superior, perfect redemptive work on the cross.



But, as Paul correctly teaches, the Jews have willfully chosen to trip and stumble over the temple stone called Jesus. Why? Let's count the reasons.

- One, Jesus called for them to believe in Him and His work on the cross and not their works (John 1:7, 12; 3:16-18; 6:29, 30, 36, 64; 8:24, 30, 45, 46; 9:36; 12:36-44; 14:1-6).
- Two, His absolutist teaching bothered them because it served to undercut the teaching of their religious leaders.

- Three, His miracles on the Sabbath trouble those who were in love with keeping legalistic laws they had devised to guard the Sabbath.
- Four, He had the audacity to befriend truly wicked people.
- Five, He met with a half-breed woman and shared spiritual truth with her (John 4).
- Six, He taught with authority, which allowed no room for opposing religious positions (Matt. 7:29).
- Seven, arrogantly claimed He, of all people, was God (John 8:58).
- Eight, healed Gentiles from the occupational Roman army (Matt. 8:5ff).
- Nine, spoke scathing judgment on their religious scholars and authorities (Matt. 23). How dare He.
- Ten, He was crucified, which was an abhorrent thought to them (1 Cor. 1:23).
- Eleven, He didn't conform to their messianic expectations.

Yes, they stumbled over Jesus then, and they stumble over Jesus today for all these stated reasons, but at the top of the list is the fact that true salvation is secured ONLY through a faith relationship with Him. They willfully and freely stumble all over the concept of justification by faith because “it deprives them of any proprietary involvement in their own salvation. It is pride that brings people down. How deeply ingrained is our rebellious self-esteem! Too proud to accept God’s willingness to forgive, sinners stumble headlong into eternity with their stubborn sinfulness intact.”<sup>4</sup>

True. God has chosen Israel to be His people and source of salvation, by means of faith in the Messiah, to the whole world; however, they also individually had the free will to resist His choice . . . and resist they did as they replaced God’s superior redemptive work with their puny, sin-tainted, inferior works.

What about you? Are you guilty of pushing back against God’s perfect provision for salvation? Yes, God does elect and choose people to be His people; however, people, like you, are responsible before God for their response to His challenge to be justified before Him by faith solely in Jesus, the Christ.

So I am compelled to ask the question of all questions: What will you do with Christ? Will you freely accept, by faith, His work to redeem you for your sins, or will you retreat into the comfortable, but tenuous, confines of your works? One thing is certain: When you finally stand before the living God, what you willfully did with this decision will be all yours and it will resonate for all of eternity.

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<sup>4</sup>Mounce, *Romans*, 206.