

**ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO ATTAIN RIGHTEOUSNESS IN  
ROMANS 9.30-10.3  
TOM SCHREINER**

BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

*I. INTRODUCTION*

A pivotal text for understanding Paul's theology of law is Rom 9:30-10:8. In this article I shall focus particularly on Rom 9:30-10:3. Although it is artificial to make a break between Rom 10:3 and 10:4, since a γάρ joins these two texts, the question of what Paul means when he says "Christ is the end of the law" is too complex for an adequate discussion in this article. Locating the precise reason why the Jews failed to obtain righteousness via the law is the most controversial issue in Rom 9:30-10:3. Is Paul accusing the Jews of a legalistic works-righteousness in that they are attempting to secure their salvation by meritorious works? A polemic against legalism has often been detected in this passage. Many scholars today, however, question whether there is a critique of legalism in this text. It is claimed that Paul is merely saying that no one can obey the law, or that the problem with the Jews is their failure to believe in Christ, or that the Jews are too nationalistic, limiting the covenant to those who observe Jewish cultural norms. The goal of this article is to determine why the Jews failed to obtain righteousness according to Rom 9:30-10:31

There are also other difficult and controversial issues in this passage. The purpose of this article is to interpret the meaning of this text in order to gain a clearer perspective on the Pauline theology of law. My intention is not to provide a full commentary on this text. Certain questions that emerge from the text which demand greater attention will not be treated here. For example, the text form of the OT citations in 9:33 will not be investigated, nor

---

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of these issues in relationship to Paul's use of the phrase "works of law" see my "'Works of Law' in Paul," *NovT* 33 (1991) 217-244. In this article I am investigating the contribution that Rom 9:30-10:3 makes to this discussion.

will Rom 10:1-2 receive any sustained attention. What I am interested in ascertaining is what Rom 9:30-10:3 contributes to our understanding of Paul's view of the law. To establish a sharper profile of his theology in this area, I shall examine this text and interact with the major interpretive views of scholars.

## II. ROM 9:30-31: GENTILES, JEWS, AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The phrase τί οὐ ἐροῦμεν in v. 30 delineates this pericope from the previous one. Paul uses this phrase (Rom 6:1; 7:7; 9:14) or a similar one (9:19) earlier in the letter in diatribe style<sup>2</sup> to anticipate and then deny false inferences which could be drawn from his preceding comments. He also uses a similar expression as a transitional device to move to the next stage in the argument (4:1) and to draw conclusions from what has been said previously (8:31). In 9:30 Paul is asking what conclusions can be drawn from what he has just said. He probably has vv. 24-29 particularly in mind, where he has just argued that God elected to save a people for himself out of the Gentiles, while only a remnant of Jews are being saved.

We can paraphrase Paul as follows: "What then shall we say about the election of Gentiles unto salvation, while only a remnant of Jews are experiencing the same blessing?" The first part of Paul's answer to his question follows immediately in v. 30. Gentiles<sup>3</sup> have obtained a right relation (δικαιοσύνην)<sup>4</sup> with God, even though they have not pursued such a status before him.<sup>5</sup> It is surprising

---

<sup>2</sup>For an analysis of the diatribe in Romans see S. K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans* (SBLDS 57; Chico: Scholars, 1981).

<sup>3</sup>Paul is not speaking of all Gentiles here, but of some Gentiles from the larger group. So, e.g., W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902) 279; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh T. & T. Clark, 1975-1979) 2.506; J. D. G. Dune, *Romans* (2 vols.; WBC; Waco: Word, 1988) 2.580; H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1977) 306; O. Kuss, *Der Römerbrief* (3 vols.; Regensburg: Pustet, 1957-78) 3.744.

<sup>4</sup>The meaning of δικαιοσύνη in Paul is hotly debated, and the issue cannot be examined in detail here. The most satisfying explanation of the term in texts which speak of the "righteousness of God" has been given by D. Moo (Romans 1-8 [WEC; Chicago: Moody, 1991] 65-70, 75-86) who sees God's righteousness both as a saving activity and as a divine gift in which people have a right status before him. This means that God's saving activity of making people right is forensic, and it does not denote the moral transformation of human beings. The literature on righteousness is enormous. Besides the bibliography given in Moo the following two surveys are particularly helpful: M. T. Brauch, "Perspectives on God's Righteousness in Recent German Discussion," in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 523-42; J. Plevnik, "Recent Developments in the Discussion Concerning Justification by Faith," *TJT* 2 (1986) 47-62.

<sup>5</sup>Paul's point is not that no Gentile is interested in morality. His point is that they did not pursue a right relation with God (so Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.506-7; Dune, *Romans*, 2.580; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1957) 193; J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.;

that those who have not pursued a right relation with God would obtain it. Paul's point here is that they have obtained it precisely because of God's election (cf. vv. 24-26).<sup>6</sup> Paul has not forgotten the previous context in v. 30. The only explanation for the inclusion into the people of God of those who have no interest in being right with God is the electing word of God, which cannot fail (cf. 9:6), for God's election is not based on the will or effort of the one chosen (9:16).<sup>7</sup> Paul goes on to say in v. 30 that those Gentiles who are right with God are right with him by faith, for he believes that human response is important. It seems clear, however, that for Paul the origin of the human response of faith can be traced to the electing work of God. For it would not make much sense to say in v. 30a that the Gentiles were *not* pursuing a right relation with God if the faith which they exercised had its ultimate source in their own wills. Thus, the point of v. 30 as a whole is that even though the Gentiles did not seek a right relation with God, nevertheless because of God's merciful election they have exercised faith and obtained right standing before him.

Now in 9:31-10:21 Paul draws the second conclusion from 9:24-29. He has concluded in v. 30 that the Gentiles have obtained righteousness, even though they have not pursued it. Now he says in v. 31 that the Jews did not attain righteousness, even though they pursued "the law of righteousness." The connection between v. 31 and 9:24-29 should not be missed. The fact that only a remnant of Jews believed (9:27-29) is ultimately ascribed to the mysterious outworking of God's purpose. Nevertheless, 9:31-10:21 clearly reveals that Paul thought Israel was responsible and guilty for failing to believe. Nowhere in these chapters does Paul attempt to resolve philosophically the tension between divine election and human responsibility. They are both trumpeted as true, and although Paul was aware of the problem that would be posed for the human mind (cf. 9:14, 19), he continues to assert the truth of both without providing a final solution to the dilemma.<sup>8</sup>

---

NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-65) 2.43. The word δικαιοσύνη in 9:30-10:6 does not (contra J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* [TPINTC; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989] 251-52) refer to maintenance of covenant status. The obtaining of righteousness by the Gentiles in v. 30 involves *entrance* into the covenant, since the Gentiles were previously outside the cycle of God's people. The close relations between the calling of the Gentiles (9:24-26) and their obtaining of righteousness (9:30) provides further evidence that righteousness here refers to entrance into the people of God.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. on this point J. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (ed. D. W. Torrance & T. F. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 8.217; E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 277-78; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer* (3 vols.; EKKNT; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978-82) 3.211; O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (MeyerK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966) 250.

<sup>7</sup>For convincing and detailed exegesis of the previous context in chap. 9 see J. Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

<sup>8</sup>Cf. here the comments of P. Althaus, *Der Brief an die Römer* (NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959) 106. See also C. K. Barrett, "Rom 9:30-10:21: Fall

It has often been pointed out that the precise expression νόμου δικαιοσύνης in v. 31 is surprising. John Calvin thought this was an example of *hypallage*, making it equivalent in meaning with "righteousness of law."<sup>9</sup> The problem with such an interpretation is that it ignores the specific wording of the text, and rewrites the grammar.<sup>10</sup> Paul could have easily written δικαιοσύνην νόμου (cf. Phil 3:9) if he had so desired. The interpreter must take seriously the genitive δικαιοσύνης in explaining this phrase. Thus, Calvin's solution should be rejected as grammatically improbable.

A number of other interpretations have been suggested for the genitive δικαιοσύνης in this verse. Is Paul speaking of a "righteous law," a law which promises righteousness, demands righteousness, results in righteousness, or a law which is falsely understood as a way of righteousness?" It seems unlikely that Paul is using δικαιοσύνης with an adjectival meaning ("righteous law") in this context, for in v. 30 the righteousness which the Gentiles have obtained is a right relation with God. Doubtless Paul is using the word δικαιοσύνη in v. 31 with the same meaning as in v. 30, since Paul's point is that the Gentiles have obtained the very thing (a right relation with God) that Israel sought. Moreover, the word δικαιοσύνη in the subsequent context (10:3-6) continues to refer to right standing before God. I conclude that the adjectival translation "righteous law" in v. 31 can be eliminated.

It also seems to me that the ideas of promising righteousness, demanding righteousness, resulting in righteousness, or a false understanding of righteousness read more into the text than is warranted. All of these definitions add words to the phrase in order to elucidate the meaning. It is extremely difficult to ascertain which of the proposed meanings is correct since the context does not provide any clear evidence to show why one interpretation should be preferred over another. I suggest that the interpretation which should be accepted is that which will add the least meaning to the phrase. Probably the simplest option is to translate νόμον δικαιοσύνης as "law for righteousness," taking δικαιοσύνης as an objective genitive. Verse 31a would then be saying that Israel was

---

and Responsibility of Israel," in *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 136.

<sup>9</sup>Calvin's *Commentaries*, 8.217. For a view that is similar to Calvin's see W.

Schmithals, *Der Römerbrief Ein Kommentar* (Gütersloh Gerd Mohn, 1988) 363. The RSV adopts the same interpretation by translating νόμον δικαιοσύνης as "the righteousness which is based on law."

<sup>10</sup>Cf. on this point Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.507; R. Badenas, *Christ the End of the Law: A Study of Rom. 9:30-10:13 in Pauline Perspective* (JSNTSup 10; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985) 103; F. Refoulé, "Note sur Romains IX, 30-33," *RevBib* 92 (1985)174-76.

<sup>11</sup>For a survey of the options see especially the discussions in Badenas, *Christ the End*, 103-4; C. T. Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law* (SBLDS 55; Chico: Scholars, 1981) 99-101; B. L. Martin, *Christ and the Law in Paul* (NovTSup 62; Leiden: Brill, 1989) 135-37; J. E. Toews, *The Law in Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Study of Rom. 9:30-10:13* (PhD. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1977) 132-35.

pursuing the law for righteousness, i.e., for right standing with God.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation fits well with v. 31b, where Paul says that "Israel did not attain with reference to the law" (Ἰσραὴλ ...εἰς νόμον οὐκ ἔφθασεν). This last phrase probably means that Israel did not attain *righteousness* with reference to the law. In this interpretation εἰς νόμον is an adverbial accusative of general reference. And that δικαιοσύνη is the implied object of the verb φθάνω in v. 31 is supported by v. 30, for in the latter verse Paul says that the Gentiles "pursued righteousness" (κατέλαβεν δικαιοσύνην). Now the verb καταλάμβανω in v. 30 is parallel to φθάνω in v. 31. In the antithetical parallelism of the verses Paul is explaining that the Gentiles *obtained* righteousness, while Israel did not *attain* righteousness. The reason the word δικαιοσύνη is not repeated in v. 31 as the object is because it is obvious in the context. The implications of this analysis for the phrase νόμον δικαιοσύνης in v. 31 should be delineated. The whole of v. 31 can be paraphrased as follows: "Even though Israel pursued the law for right standing with God, she did not attain such righteousness with reference to the law." To conclude this point, v. 31 is not saying that the law demands, promises, or results in righteousness. Paul is merely saying that Israel pursued the law for a right relation with God, and that she did not attain it with reference to the law.<sup>13</sup>

### III. ROM 9:32-10:3: WHY DID ISRAEL FAIL TO ATTAIN THE LAW OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Verse 31 ends on a negative note. Even though the Jews pursued the law for righteousness, they did not attain righteousness with reference to the law. The word φθάνω is used here in a racing context to express the idea of attaining or gaining a certain object.<sup>14</sup> The object specified here is a right relation with God. When Paul says that Israel did not attain righteousness with reference to the law, he is most likely suggesting that Israel *did not obey the law*. Such an interpretation accords well with the racing illustration being used here. One who does not attain the goal or the finish line in the race fails to win the race. The Jews did not attain righteousness by

---

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 137.

<sup>13</sup>S. Westerholm (*Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 127-30) understands the word νόμος in v. 31 to refer to Sinaitic legislation and not the OT scriptures or the revelatory law. For a similar view see Barrett, "Rom 9:30-10:21," 141-42. Even though Westerholm is correct in saying that νόμος in Paul primarily refers to its commanding or prescriptive nature, it is a false dichotomy to separate this aspect of the law from the OT scriptures or OT revelation Murray's view (*Romans*, 2.43) that νόμος means principle, rule, or order in v. 31 is quite improbable given the close relation between 9:30-33 and 10:1-8.

<sup>14</sup>For this point see Toews, *The Law in Romans*, 129; Badenas, *Christ the End*, 105. Note also the use of τρέχω in v. 16 and διώκω in w. 30-31.

law, not because the law is contrary to God's nature, but because they did not perform the requirements of the law.

The importance of v. 32 is evident because here Paul elaborates on why Israel failed to attain the law of righteousness. The answer given in v. 32 makes it clear that pursuing the law was not itself wrong. Paul does not say that they were pursuing the wrong object. His objection is that they pursued<sup>15</sup> the right object in the wrong way. They should have pursued the law in faith, but instead they sought it "as from works." To put it another way: if the Jews had sought the law from faith, then it follows that they would have obtained righteousness. Pursuing the law, then, is good and noble. The OT law, including its commands, contains the revelation of the God of Israel. The implication of vv. 32-33 also seems to be that if the law were pursued in faith, then one would inevitably believe in Christ, for the law pursued in faith would naturally point to Christ. The line of thought in v. 32 is probably as follows: 1) The Jews did not attain righteousness by pursuing the law because they pursued it "as from works" instead of by faith. 2) *Therefore*, they stumbled on the stone of stumbling. If the Jews had pursued the law in faith, then they would not have stumbled; they would have believed in Jesus as Messiah.

Verse 33 is a conflation of two texts from Isaiah (28:16 and 8:14), which Paul interprets messianically in accord with some other Jewish tradition.<sup>16</sup> These quotations demonstrate that Israel's stumbling did not take God by surprise; it was predicted all along. The stone over which Israel stumbled is Jesus the Messiah. Some scholars have recently suggested that the stone here refers to the Torah, but the citation of Isa 28:16 again in Rom 10:11 makes it plain that Paul is thinking of believing in Jesus here.<sup>17</sup>

At this juncture we shall widen our discussion to include chap. 10, for 10:1-8 focus on the same topic as 9:30-33, and the issues raised

<sup>15</sup>The verb that seems most natural to supply in v. 32 is διώκω. So Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.509; Rhyne, *Faith Establishes*, 167, n 41; Dunn, *Romans*, 2.582. Käsemann (*Romans*, 277) wrongly inserts the word 'live;' even though it is more natural to supply a word from the preceding verse. More plausible is Wilckens's suggestion (*Römer*, 2.212) that the supplied word should be ἐφθάσεν. Nevertheless, the word "pursue" fits more naturally than "attain"

<sup>16</sup>Cf the Isaiah Targum, quoted in Str-B, 3.276. For an analysis of Paul's use of the OT text and the original meaning of the citations see Cranfield (*Romans*, 2.511-12) and Dunn (*Romans*, 2.583-85).

<sup>17</sup>For the view that the stone refers to Torah see L. Gaston, "For All the Believer: The Inclusion of Gentiles as the Ultimate Goal of Torah in Romans," in *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987) 129; Barrett, "Romans 9:30-10:21," 144; P. W. Meyer, "Romans 10:4 and the 'End' of the Law," in *The Divine Helmsmen: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, Presented to Lou H. Silberman* (ed. J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel; New York: ICTAV, 1980) 64; Toews, *The Law in Romans*, 146-203. Most scholars think the stone refers to Christ. For some recent support see Badenas, *Christ the End*, 106; E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 60-61, n 98; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.511-12; Dune, *Romans*, 2.583-84; Ziesler, *Romans*, 254.

in 9:31-33 are examined again from another angle in 10:1-8.<sup>18</sup> 10:1 hearkens back to 9:1-5, where Paul expressed his ardent concern for Israel's salvation. 10:2-3 parallel 9:31-32 in a remarkable way, i.e., Israel's "zeal for God" (v. 2) is another way of describing her pursuit of "the law of righteousness" (9:31)<sup>19</sup> Paul does not criticize the Jews for their zeal; he criticizes them for zeal without knowledge. Both zeal (10:3) and pursuing the law (9:32) are commendable; the problem comes with the way their zeal and pursuit of the law is conducted. 10:3 informs us as to the nature of their ignorance,<sup>20</sup> viz., the Jews have not submitted to the righteousness of God because they were ignorant of God's righteousness and tried to establish their own righteousness. The charge leveled against the Jews in v. 3 is strikingly similar to 9:32, where the Jews' pursuit of the law is faulted because they did not pursue the law "from faith" but "as from works." To pursue the law "as from works" is described in 10:3 as "seeking to establish one's own righteousness." The stumbling of the Jews over the stone of stumbling (9:32) is parallel to not subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God (10:3). The Jews stumbled over believing in Christ (9:32-33), and failed to submit themselves to the saving activity of God which was revealed in Jesus Christ.

Scholars cannot agree, however, over precisely what Paul is faulting Israel for in 9:30-10:8. What does it mean when Paul says that Israel pursued the law as from works (9:32), and that the Jews were seeking to establish their own righteousness (10:3)? The following survey sets forth some of the main interpretations suggested and offers a critique.

1) Some scholars think that Paul is not criticizing works-righteousness or legalism here, nor is he implying that the law is unfulfillable. The only problem with the Jews is that they did not believe in Christ.<sup>21</sup> The real key to the passage, according to E. P. Sanders, is 9:32b-10:13, and the focus in these verses is on failure to believe in Christ. What Israel failed to attain in v. 31 was faith in Christ; the text is not emphasizing that the law was not obeyed.<sup>22</sup> In other words, Paul argues from solution to plight, not plight to solution; since salvation comes through Christ, it is not available through the law.

---

<sup>18</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 2.579; Badenas, *Christ the end*, 108. H. Räisänen (*Paul and the Law* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 54) sees a break at 10:1, but even in this case Räisänen's point seems to be that the race imagery of 9:30-33 should not be imposed on 10:1-4 in order to interpret the word τέλος in v. 4. I think Räisänen is correct regarding the specific point he makes, but that does not negate the similarity of subject matter in 9:30-33 and 10:1-8.

<sup>19</sup>The parallel here suggests Martin (*Christ and the Law*, 136-37) is wrong in seeing a criticism of the Jews in 9:31 for pursuing the law.

<sup>20</sup>Note the γάρ connecting v. 2 to v. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 36-42. Cf. also Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 174-75.

<sup>22</sup>Sanders, *Paul, the Law*, 42.

The assertion that Paul's *only concern* is that the Jews failed to believe in Christ is an example of a one dimensional reading of a text, when at least two dimensions are visible. It is evident that failure to believe in Christ was a problem (cf. 9:32b-10:13). Such unbelief, however, is rooted in disobedience (9:31), for the failure to "attain with reference to the law" is most naturally interpreted to say that Israel failed to obey the law. Moreover, a Jewish preoccupation with their own righteousness is sounded in v. 32. Israel failed to attain righteousness via the law because (ὅτι) they pursued the law "not from faith but as from works." The antithesis here suggests that Israel's problem was a focus on *doing* instead of *believing*. Rom 10:3 informs us regarding the nature of this doing. It was an attempt to establish their own righteousness (τὴν ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην),<sup>24</sup> and the contrast between 10:5 and 10:6-8 also shows that there was a contrast between *doing* and *believing*. Of course, Rom 8:4 and 13:8-10 show that Paul expects believers to obey the law, and that he has no quarrel with doing *per se*. What troubles him in 9:30-10:8, though, is a focus on doing the law which ends up trying to establish one's own righteousness. Thus, it seems that Paul is opposing a sort of legalism in this text, viz., an attempt to obey the Law in order to merit or secure right standing with God.

2) James Dunn locates the central problem in works, but not legalistic works by which the Jews were trying to earn salvation.<sup>25</sup> No; the issue here, says Dunn, is particularly the works done within the covenant, the works which marked off Jews from Gentiles. The Jews were erecting boundary markers, by focusing on commandments like circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath, to separate Jews from Gentiles. The root sin, according to Dunn, was the exclusion of the Gentiles from the covenant, the erection of covenantal barriers by the Jews. Israel had fallen into a nationalistic view of the Law.<sup>26</sup> Dunn says that ἰδίαν and not subjecting oneself to God's righteousness in 10:3 do not refer to Israel's meritorious righteousness. Rather, the focus is on Israel's

---

<sup>23</sup>For a sustained critique of Sanders on this point see R. H. Gundry, "Grace, Works, and Staying Saved in Paul," *Bib* 66 (1985) 1-38. And Sanders's theory that Paul argues from solution to plight has also been effectively countered by F. Thielman, *From Plight to Solution: A Jewish Framework for Understanding Paul's View of the Law in Galatians and Romans* (NovTSup 61; Leiden: Brill, 1989).

<sup>24</sup>Sanders's (*Paul, the Law*, 38) understanding of this phrase is similar to Dunn's. We shall examine Dunn's position below.

<sup>25</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 2.581-83, 593, 595. Cf. also his two articles, "The New Perspective on Paul," *BJRL* 65 (1983) 95-122; "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3:10-14)," *NTS* 31 (1985) 523-42.

<sup>26</sup>For a view similar to Dunn's see Gaston, "The Inclusion of Gentiles," 128-30; Ziesler, *Romans*, 251-54, 256-57, 259; Toews, *The Laws in Romans*, 138, 141-45, 203-4, 218-19, 244-45, 283; G. E. Howard, "Christ the End of the Law: The Meaning of Romans 10:4ff" *JBL* 88 (1969) 333, 335-37; M. A. Getty, "Paul and the Salvation of Israel: A Perspective on Romans 9-11;" *CBQ* 50 (1988) 467. Cf. also F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 165.

nationalistic righteousness which excludes Gentiles, with the result that Israel tried to maintain a monopoly on God's covenantal blessings.<sup>27</sup>

The weakness of Dunn's position is that it wrongly restricts the works to those which specifically separate Jews and Gentiles. The idea that Paul is speaking only against nationalism here is not persuasive, for there is no indication in the present context that Paul is thinking particularly of those rites that separate Jews from Gentiles. The word ἔργα in 9:32 is used in a general sense, and there is no warrant in the context for assigning a more limited denotation to the word.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Sabbath, circumcision, and purity laws are not mentioned at all! The burden of proof is on those who want to assign a more specific meaning to the word ἔργα in this context, since semantically the broader meaning of the term is preferred unless there are decisive reasons in the context for limiting it.

In addition, to distinguish between nationalistic righteousness and works-righteousness is a false dichotomy. The nationalistic righteousness of the Jews was firmly wedded to the performance of the law. Pride in Jewish heritage cannot be separated from pride in Jewish performance (cf. Rom 2:17-24). Jews of the Second Temple Period distinguished themselves from the Gentiles precisely because they obeyed the law.<sup>29</sup> Thus, it is not persuasive to say that since Paul stresses the inclusion of the Gentiles in Romans 9-10, then he must be focusing on the particular laws that sociologically separated the Jews from the Gentiles. Instead, the text says that the Jews were *excluded* because they thought they could be righteous by works in a general sense, and Gentiles are *included* because they exercised faith in Christ.

Lastly, to see ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην in 10:3 as referring to works-righteousness in a broad sense is confirmed by a parallel text in Phil 3:9 where Paul speaks of μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ. This latter text cannot be restricted to nationalistic righteousness, for the list in Phil 3:4-6 goes beyond boundary markers that separate Jews from Gentiles. For instance, Paul says he was blameless in law-righteousness (Phil 3:6) which cannot be limited to the practice of rites which separated Jews from Gentiles. No Jew who adhered to Torah would think that Paul was blameless in his practice of the law if he were referring only to those laws which distinguished Jews from Gentiles. Doubtless Paul was thinking here of his blamelessness in relation to *the whole law*. Thus, in both Phil 3:9 and Rom 10:3 Paul is speaking of law-righteousness in a broad sense. And this suggests that Paul is

---

<sup>27</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, 2.587-88.

<sup>28</sup>For an analysis of ἔργα in Paul which supports this thesis see Westerholm, *Israel's Law*, 106-21; D. J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law'; and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 (1983) 90-99.

<sup>29</sup>This is evident in the writings of the Qumran Community, and in a book such as *The Wisdom of Solomon*.

opposing a legalistic perspective which expects right standing with God based on good works. But this conclusion needs to be defended further.

3) Other scholars claim, however, that the reason Israel did not attain righteousness was solely because she could not keep the law perfectly.<sup>30</sup> Righteousness could be gained by works *if* someone could perform adequately all that the law demanded. But when Paul says that "Israel did not attain with reference to the law," (9:31) he is saying that Israel has not obeyed the law sufficiently. And the same theme, according to these scholars, is being sounded in 10:5. Moses says that the one who does the righteousness of the law will live by doing the law. The problem is no one can obey it. Thus, the central problem Paul attacks here is that salvation cannot come via the law since no one can keep it perfectly.<sup>31</sup> Scholars who advocate this interpretation maintain that there is no polemic against legalism in Romans 9-10; Paul is only faulting Israel for failure to practice the law.

4) Before a critique is offered of the above view, we shall outline another interpretation, since these two views can be analyzed together. Many scholars think that in this pericope Paul is *only* opposing a legalistic attitude in which works are done in order to gain merit before God.<sup>32</sup> When Paul specifies the problem with Israel, he locates it in their works (9:32) and the establishment of their own righteousness (10:3). The specific fault identified here is not disobedience, according to these scholars, but a works-righteousness which attempts to earn God's favor.

<sup>30</sup>Westerholm *Israel's Law*, 128-29; Martin, *Christ and the Law*, 137-40; Thielman, *From Plight to Solution*, 112-15.

<sup>31</sup>Wilckens, *Römer*, 2.213-16, 220-24; idem, "Was heisst bei Paulus: 'Aus Werken des Gesetzes wird kein Mensch gerecht?'" in *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit: Paulusstudien* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974) 100-102; A. van Dülmen, *Die Theologie des Gesetzes bei Paulus* (SBT 5; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968) 125-27, 177; M. A. Getty, "An Apocalyptic Perspective of Rom 10:4," *HBT* 4-5 (1982-83) 109-10. Cf. also F. Refoulé, "Romains X, 4. Encore une fois," *RevBib* 91 1984 321-50; idem, "Romains IX, 30-33;" 161-86.

<sup>32</sup>So Rhyne, *Faith Establishes the Law*, 100-101, 103; Cranfield, *Romans*, 2.50811, 515; Käsemann, *Romans*, 277, 281, 285; Schmithals, *Römerbrief*, 363, 369, 371-72, 374; A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949) 376; Meyer, "Romans 10:4," 63; Althaus, *Römer*, 107-8; Badenas, *Christ the End*, 105; H. W. Schmidt, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (THKNT; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1963) 172-75; Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 307, 310; Michel, *Römer*, 250-51, 254; G. N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4* (JSNTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990) 180-82, 186-87; R. Bring, "Paul and the Old Testament: A Study of the Ideas of Election, Faith, and Law in Paul, with Special Reference to Rom. 9:30-10:13," *ST* 25 (1971) 44-46; idem, *Christus und das Gesetz: Die Bedeutung des Gesetzes des alten Testaments nach Paulus und sein Glauben an Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1969) 41, 46, 49; D. P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 70-71, 77; A. Lindemann, "Die Gerechtigkeit aus dem Gesetz: Erwägungen zur Auslegung und zur Textgeschichte von Römer 10:5;" *ZNW* 73 (1982) 243-44; F. Flückiger, "Christus des Gesetzes τέλος," *TZ* 11 (1955) 154-56; R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols.; New York: Scribner's, 1951, 1955) 1.267.

Against views three and four I think Paul is faulting the Jews *both for legalism and inability to obey the law* in this text.<sup>33</sup> Ulrich Wilckens and Andrea van Dülmen locate the problem in disobedience, and in the failure of the Jews to perceive a salvation-historical shift. In fact, Wilckens's exegesis suggests that salvation could come by the law previously, but *now* it is only available through Christ. The Jewish sin does not lie in the performance of the law, but in trying to obey the law at the wrong period of salvation-history. Günter Klein rightly points out the inadequacy of such a solution,<sup>34</sup> in that it suggests that there is a sudden shift in the way of salvation.

That Paul is criticizing the Jews only for disobedience is called into question by the specific wording of the text, which suggests that there is also a polemic against legalism. Israel's fault is that they pursued the law "as from works" instead of "by faith" (9:32). The phrase "as from works" is most naturally interpreted as saying that the Jews thought they could gain righteousness by their works. And since we have already seen that "works" here refers to what the law demands in a broad sense, it seems fair to conclude that Paul is faulting the Jews for thinking that they could obtain righteousness by the good works which they did. To think that one could gain righteousness by such works is legalism. Moreover, the antithesis between pursuing the law from faith and pursuing it "as from works" also suggests that Paul is attacking the view that one could merit right standing with God by good works. For, to pursue the law from faith is to trust God for righteousness, but to pursue it "as from works" is to look to one's own efforts for salvation. The idea that Paul is speaking against legalism in Rom 9:31-32 is confirmed by Rom 10:3, for there he faults the Jews for wanting to establish "their own righteousness" (10:3). The connection between 10:3-4 (γάρ) makes it plain that the establishment of their own righteousness was based on the law. The point we want to make here is that the use of the law to establish one's own righteousness is the very heart of legalism. Those who put their faith in Christ give God the glory for their salvation, but those who attempt to establish their own righteousness by their good works are seeking their own glory.

---

<sup>33</sup>So Gundry, "Grace," 17-19; L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 375, 382; C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1900) 519, 530-31; F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Lutterworth, 1961) 262-63, 267-70; Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 280, 285-86; M. Black, *Romans* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 136, 138; Barrett, *Romans*, 193, 197; idem, "Rom 9:30-10:21," 141-118; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 201; Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 8.218, 221, 222-24; J. Huby, Saint Paul, *Épître aux Romains* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1957) 360, 364-67; Kuss, *Römerbrief*, 3.750, 755, 757.

<sup>34</sup>G. Klein, "Sündenverständnis and theologia crucis bei Paulus;" in *Theologia Crucis-Signum Crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. C. Andresen und G. Klein; Tübingen J. C. B. Mohr, 1979) 277-80.

Is it correct to say, then, that Paul is opposing pursuing "the law of righteousness" in the passage solely because it leads to legalism? If the comments above are correct, Paul is opposing legalism in Rom 9:30-10:8, but he also seems to be saying that righteousness cannot be gained via the law because no one can obey it perfectly. This is implied in 9:31, which states that Israel "did not attain with reference to the law." In a passage containing race imagery the word  $\phi\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$  suggests that Israel did not reach the finish line via the law. Or, another way of putting it is that the Jews did not do all that the law commanded. Such an interpretation is strengthened by 10:5, which says that the person who does the law will live. The problem is, however, that Israel did not attain the law; the law was not perfectly obeyed. No one can obtain life by works because no one can do the requisite works. I conclude that righteousness does not come via works because no one can obey the law perfectly. Nevertheless, even though Israel failed to obey the law, she still fell prey to the illusion that her works were good enough to obtain righteousness, and this is the essence of legalism.

#### *IV. CONCLUSION*

I see the flow of thought in vv. 31-33 as follows. The Jews pursued the law in order to obtain right standing with God, but they failed to attain that righteousness with reference to the law because they did not obey the law perfectly. Why is it that Israel did not obtain righteousness by pursuing the law? It is not because pursuing the law, properly understood, is evil or misguided, but because the law was pursued "as from works" instead of by faith. To pursue the law from works is to use the law as a means of establishing one's own righteousness, but employing the law to establish one's own righteousness is a delusive enterprise precisely because no one can obey the law perfectly. To pursue the law in faith is to recognize that the law cannot be obeyed sufficiently to obtain salvation, and that salvation can only be obtained by believing in Christ.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>This is not a different way of salvation (cf. Rom 4:1-8; Gal 3:6-9) from the OT. OT believers in their pursuit of the law would also recognize that life could not come via law obedience, and that faith in God and His provision for atonement was the only path of blessing. The new element here is, now that the fullness of time has come, it is clear that salvation is specifically through Jesus the Messiah.