

# Israel's Religious Zeal Without Knowledge - Part 1

By David Harrell

**Bible Text:** Romans 10:1-3

**Preached on:** Sunday, May 27, 2012

It is always a wonderful privilege to be able to minister the Word of God to you and I would like for you to join me by taking your Bibles and turning to Paul's epistle to the Romans, Romans chapter 10. We continue to make our way through this amazing letter that has so much rich doctrinal truths, so much practical truths that we can apply to our life. And we find ourselves this morning in Romans 10 and we want to look at the first three verses. Let me read this to you.

Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.<sup>1</sup>

If you hunger for the greatness of God, if you long to know him more intimately and serve him more fully, you are in for a real banquet this morning. And if that does not describe your heart, then my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will use his Word to create that kind of hunger for you.

God's gift of grace to every believer is absolutely astounding. And Paul has gone to great lengths, thus far in this epistle, to explain this wonderful gift called justification, that divine gift whereby God imputes the righteousness to Christ or the righteousness of Christ to all who place their faith in him and then declares them to be righteous and even treats them as righteous. What a staggering reality.

However, in the first century church and certainly in the church today many were confused about this doctrine, especially Jewish believers. They were wondering especially how it related to Israel as a nation and to individual Israelites. You see, the Jews believed that because they were Abraham's descendants, because they kept the law, because they kept the rabbinical traditions that their salvation was guaranteed. And so Paul has spent about nine chapters now correcting this errant theology which he continues to do in chapters 10 and 11. In fact, in Romans nine through 11 we have a section of Scripture that is filled with much practical doctrine pertaining to salvation, but it focuses primarily—and you need to understand this—on the unique place of Israel in God's plan of redemption. If you don't understand that, you are going to miss what Paul is really addressing here. Even today Israel is at the center of world conflict. It is always in the news, isn't it? And, of course, this makes sense. As God's chosen people they are also going to be Satan's chosen enemy. But God is not finished with them yet, even though today they are God's beloved enemy. And although the gospel of Jesus Christ has now been extended to the Gentiles, God has not forsaken his people, his ancient chosen people as many today erroneously teach.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:1-3.

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But as we examine this text this morning, we are going to discover some very practical things that we can apply to our life. These are not obscure issues relevant only to first century Jews or first century Christians for that matter, because the same deceptions, the same errors in the first century are alive and well today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because they are all spawned by the same creature, Satan, the father of lies. In fact, I am sure that as we examine some of these deceptions you are going to see yourself there. So I trust you have prepared your heart to receive the truth with humility and are willing to conform yourself to it.

Now I wish to examine these three verses under three headings. First of all, number one, we are going to look at Paul's passion and prayer for his kinsmen. And here we will learn much about the relationship between sovereign election and evangelism, something that many people get confused about. And we are also going to learn more of what real love looks like in a mature saint.

Secondly, we are going to examine Israel's religious zeal without knowledge. Here we will learn much about the difference between a man who knows about God versus a man who knows God personally and intimately and loves him above all else and serves him with all of his heart. And this will speak directly to many of you.

And, thirdly, we are going to examine Israel's ignorance of God's righteousness. And here the Holy Spirit will confront each of us concerning our view of God. How do we really see God? And that, of course, will determine how you really see yourself.

So in each of these three categories we will see not only the ignorance and the failure of the Jews, but also of ourselves. And what testimony of God's love to reveal these great truths to us that we might be sanctified by the truth.

Now I want to give you some context regarding Israel. I tend to do this a great deal, especially regarding this issue because there is so much errant teaching on this today. And I really want to make sure you understand these things. I have a responsibility before the Lord to teach these things to you. So listen very carefully.

Five hundred years after the flood the Bible tells us that God set his uninfluenced love upon a particular ethnic group of people, the Jews, later called Israel. And with them he made a unilateral, unconditional, irreversible covenant with Abraham whereby he would, according to Genesis 12 raise up a great nation through Abraham and all of the nations of the earth, he says, shall be blessed by him. And, of course, the Messiah would come from Abraham's seed. And, secondly, he promised that he would give them a special land where God would one day dwell with them in a holy and intimate union. And he also told them that he would ultimately bless them and preserve them. These great promises are reiterated all through Scripture.

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Six hundred years later God made another covenant with one of the sons of Abraham, one given to Moses. However, this one was not an eternal covenant, it was a temporal one in nature. It was not unilateral, but bilateral. It was not unconditional, but conditional and it was called the Mosaic covenant. On Mount Sinai God gave his law to a chosen group of people to Israel to demonstrate their utter sinfulness and their inability to save themselves and also their desperate need for a Savior and for a King. Moses became the first mediatorial ruler in the theocratic kingdom of history. He was authorized to stand before Israel instead of God according to Exodus 4:16. In fact, Moses is presented in Scripture as a type of Christ, Christ who alone will eventually be the perfect embodiment of God's mediatorial ruler in the messianic kingdom. The Lord establishes that when he returns some day.

But this historical kingdom was also broadened at Mount Sinai to include the people of Israel. Exodus 19:6 tells us:

“...you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”<sup>2</sup>

So at Mount Sinai God commissioned Israel to be the ones to mediate blessing to the whole world, a witness nation, the custodians of divine truth to proclaim the one true God, to be God's priest nation, to preserve and transmit divine revelation and to be a testimony of the coming Messiah.

So God had a missionary purpose for Israel, his chosen people, not necessarily just for the purpose of salvation, although many of them have been and will be saved, but primarily to reveal to the world his character and his will. And so the history of Israel would literally be a living illustration of God's love, of his mercy, of his grace, his hatred of sin. He did not choose the Egyptians. He did not choose the Persians. He did not choose the Greeks, the Swedes, the Germans, the Russians, the Chinese or any other ethnic group of people. He chose the ancient descendants of Abraham.

In Deuteronomy chapter seven and verse six he says this.

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers.<sup>3</sup>

So, as promised, the Lord brought them into the Promised Land, not because they deserved it. Deuteronomy nine verse six he says:

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 19:6.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6-8.

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“Know, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the LORD your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stubborn people.”<sup>4</sup>

Again, what a picture of all of us. And despite their repeated rebellion, God remained faithful to his covenant. In fact, the writer of Hebrews described his oath and pledge in relation to his promise to Abraham in Hebrews six beginning at verse 13. There we read:

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, "I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU." And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.<sup>5</sup>

And, of course, those two unchangeable things were, number one, his promise made to Abraham and, secondly, his oath which rested upon his very being. Even as God's promises to Abraham can never fail, so, too, his promise to save all who trust in Christ can never fail. They are secure forever. But Israel failed miserably. But God knew that this would happen. He predicted it. Again, a perfect picture of each of us.

In fact, in the last seven chapters of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 28 through 34, God provides a prophetic overview of Israel's history, what some have described as a matrix out of which the great prophecies of the Old Testament regarding Israel emerge. For example, there we learn about the conditions of blessing as a result of obedience. It speaks of the coming apostasy, the affliction that God would bring upon Israel while still in the land because of her apostasy. It speaks of how Israel will be taken captive, the enemies of Israel will possess her land for a time. It tells us how the land itself will remain desolate, how Israel will be scattered among the nations and how a time will come when Israel will be, quote, few in number. It goes on to tell us though punished Israel will not be destroyed if she repents. It speaks of Israel's repentance in her tribulation and how Israel will be gathered from the nations and brought back to her divinely given land, chapter 30 verses three through 10.

Now, beloved, the apostle Paul understood all of this. He also understood that after 400 years of prophetic silence, John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah heralding the long awaited Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ who was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and the bridge of continuity between the Old Testament and the

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<sup>4</sup> Deuteronomy 9:6.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 6:13-18.

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New. But the Messiah came into his own and they refused him. They said, "We will not have this man reign over us, oh, no."

Now what is interesting is for centuries the Jews studied the Old Testament, but you must understand that its purity was contaminated by all manner of ridiculous Jewish traditions and misinterpretations by numerous rabbis. So their theology was a mess. But since the Jews were convinced that the rabbis had mysterious powers of spiritual discernment, they believed virtually everything they said.

Now, Satan is the father of lies, the Word of God tells us. And we know that Satan doesn't care what you believe as long as it is not the truth. So he interjected at the very core of Jewish theology this deception that they believed that basically said, "Look, because you are God's chosen people, because you are keeping the law, your salvation is guaranteed." And so the Jews were convinced that they knew the truth. But they had been deceived. And they happily deceived themselves.

Now I might add, dear friends, whenever a man rejects the truth he will unwittingly walk into a parallel universe of irresistible deception and he will not even know that he is there. In fact, Paul speaks of this in 2 Timothy four beginning in verse three. He says:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.<sup>6</sup>

"Turn away their ears from the truth" is interesting. It is in the active voice. It means that there will be a willing choice to do this, but then when it says they will turn aside to myths, that is in the passive voice, which speaks of an unwitting takeover. In other words, they will be unwittingly taken over by myths that are simply irresistible to fallen flesh having been designed by the mater counterfeiter himself. My friends, how else can you possibly explain the massive followers of false religions and charlatans like we see today?

Well this is precisely the type of thing that happened with the Jews. And for this reason God spoke through is prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter one beginning in verse two. He said this:

Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand." Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

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abandoned the LORD, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him.<sup>7</sup>

There is the deliberate choice. In similar fashion, some 700 years later the Lord Jesus Christ confronted the Jews in Matthew chapter 15 beginning in verse eight saying:

THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.<sup>8</sup>

Peter declared to them in Acts chapter three verse 14:

“But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead.”<sup>9</sup>

And then in verse 17 he goes on to say:

“And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.”<sup>10</sup>

So, indeed, the Jews rejected the gospel of grace. They despised the Lord Jesus Christ. The builders rejected the chief cornerstone. They turned aside to deceptions, the deceptions of Legalism that took them over. And for this reason Jesus said in Matthew 21:43:

“...the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.”<sup>11</sup>

Of course, that speaks of the Gentile church that became the new custodians of the truth. But only temporarily, not permanently as is subsequently proven in Matthew 23 verses 37 through 39.

In the language of Romans chapter 11 verse 17 Paul says:

“But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree...”<sup>12</sup>

Literally he is saying that the Gentiles will be partakers also of God’s covenant blessings to Abraham along with the remnant of Israel that by grace through faith in Christ they,

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<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 1:2-4.

<sup>8</sup> Mathew 15:8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 3:14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 3:17.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 21:43.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 11;17.

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too, would become spiritual heirs of Abraham. Aren't you thankful that that is the case? Most of us here are Gentiles that have been saved by God's grace.

So, my friends, in the context of all of this history, in the context of all of this theological chaos, maybe you can better understand why Paul would say in verse one of chapter 10:

“Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.”<sup>13</sup>

So may I first draw your attention to Paul's passion and prayer for his kinsmen? What a testimony of Christian love, to pray for people that had not only rejected the Savior, but also had relentlessly persecuted the apostle Paul. The term prayer here in the original denotes a persistent pleading, a begging God for something that is urgent. It would be a term that we would use, for example, if we were on our face before the Lord begging him for our child who had been seriously injured and was on the brink of death to recover.

Paul obeyed Jesus' command to pray for those who persecute us. Remember in Matthew 5:44 Jesus said:

“I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”<sup>14</sup>

Dear Christian, I would ask you. Does this describe your attitude in prayer? Do you plead with God on behalf of your enemies that they might be saved? Frankly, most don't beg God to save anyone, not even their own loved ones, much less those who mock the Savior and persecute them. I would humbly ask you. When was the last time you begged God to save someone, much less made this the habit of your life? This was Paul's habit. He did this, the text says, because it was his heart's desire.

We must understand that a lack of prayer always betrays a selfish heart, a heart that desires to seek the will of the flesh rather than the will of God. We are too busy chasing after all of the pleasures of the world to be bothered by the souls of men. Herein, beloved, lies the malignity of sin. Herein lies its ability to produce evil within us, to somehow darken our eyes to understanding and turn us into fools that live only unto ourselves. Sin is such a wicked thing.

I would ask you. Where is your compassion for lost sinners? Where is it? What a dreadful thing to have a hard heart. My friend, I would ask you right now. Does your conscience condemn you? Probably for most of you the answer is yes. And isn't it interesting that your conscience only sees a fraction of your sin in comparison with God who sees it all? We sing our hymns. We read our Bibles. We attend our meetings. We enjoy sweet fellowship and then we turn a blind eye to our friends and loved ones who will soon endure the horrors of hell lest they repent.

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:1.

<sup>14</sup> Mathew 5:44.

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Can we not at least beg God occasionally for their salvation? Better yet, can we not at least beg them to repent and warn them that God is a consuming fire? Would to God that we show even a fraction of the zeal we spend defending our own petty preferences on prayer and evangelism instead? Men and women, boys and girls slipping into the flames unaware while we bicker, while we gossip, while we complain or while we twitter and fritter away our time texting, telling people when we are going to be at Walmart on Facebook or the countless hours we spend watching television?

Paul said in Ephesians five verse 15:

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.<sup>15</sup>

Beloved, may I ask you to target someone for evangelism today and begin to pray for them?

Well, yes, pastor, I will pray for them, but I have a hard time talking with them, because I fear that they will somehow reject me if I warn them that somehow the wrath of God abides upon them.

Well, then, go ahead. By all means, I would encourage you to please man rather than God. And let them pass into everlasting misery as your friend. See how ridiculous that is? Beloved, will we not see our sloth and passionate prayer and evangelism as more heinous than the sins of others that we love to accuse? I long for the day when I can go back into that corner and rather than having a handful of men praying with me on Wednesday night, I will have to come up here because there is 100 men. What a day that would be. Are we really any different than the hypocritical Jews that Jesus described in Matthew 15:18?

“THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.”<sup>16</sup>

So here we see the passion of Paul’s soul that resulted in his heartfelt supplications, begging God for the salvation of those who were persecuting him relentlessly. But we also learn here much about the relationship between sovereign election and evangelism. It is interesting that the apostle has just spent much time explaining the doctrine of sovereign election, that God has chosen to save some and not all. He has made this very clear. Chapter nine verse 16 he says:

“So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 5:15-17.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 15:8.

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So people will say, “Well, if that is the case, why evangelize?”

And the answer, real simply is because god uses his people as instruments of righteousness to save his elect. Paul will elaborate on this later at the end of verse 14. He says:

“And how will they hear without a preacher?”<sup>18</sup>

Literally without a proclamation. Verse 17.

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”<sup>19</sup>

Now, as Paul ministered to the Jews and to the Gentiles, there were many who were still apart from Christ that were among God’s elect, but he didn’t know who they were. He was fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission. Remember that Great Commission just before Jesus ascended back into heaven? We read in Acts 1:8.

“...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”<sup>20</sup>

Beloved, it is because we love Christ in our heart that we long to see others come to a saving knowledge of him to the praise of his glory. And so for this reason we pray for the lost. We beg God to save them. And we beg them to repent and to be saved like Paul did in 2 Timothy two and verse 10. He says that:

“I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.”<sup>21</sup>

What a fascinating verse. He is literally saying, “I am going to endure all things to preach the gospel to every man that God might save his elect.”

What a tremendous motivation for evangelism. What a tremendous motivation it is for me when I preach the Word of God. I know that the Word is going to do one of two things. It is either going to soften or harden the heart and I never know who it is among the elect that will hear the truth and be saved.

For this reason the apostle Paul would say in Romans 1:18:

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 9:16.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 10:14.

<sup>19</sup> Romans 10:17.

<sup>20</sup> Acts 1:8.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Timothy 2:10.

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“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”<sup>22</sup>

I might add that any man whose theology eliminates the need for passionate prayer and evangelism holds to a false theology and, likewise, any believer who is lacking in prayer and evangelism has a very superficial love of Christ and is forfeiting blessing in his life.

So first we see Paul’s passion and prayer for his kinsmen. Secondly we see Israel’s religious zeal without knowledge. Notice verse two. He says:

“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.”<sup>23</sup>

Again, the Jews were loyal to the law of God. They believed that Jesus was trying to replace that law rather than fulfill it. So they were convinced that God was on their side. Their misguided zeal, therefore, made them bitter enemies of Christ, bitter enemies all who follow him. No doubt Paul remembered his preconversion days when he wrote this. Paul, you might say, was the poster boy for one who had zeal without knowledge. He described himself in Acts 26 verse five as, quote:

“...a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.”<sup>24</sup>

And in Galatians one beginning at verse 13 he described himself as one who used to persecute the Church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Now, that was part of the problem. He was more extremely zealous for ancestral traditions than the truth of the Word of God. And this was true for all of the Jews who rejected Christ. Unfortunately they missed all of the signs and symbols and prophecies that pointed to the Lamb of God that were right there in the Old Testament that we have studied earlier. They missed how a Messiah must come and first suffer that they might be saved from their sin. Likewise, many people today are very spiritual. Many people today have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge, as Paul says here. The term knowledge here in the original language is a term that denotes full knowledge, full spiritual discernment, frankly, one that is only available to those who have been born again, who have entered into a living and loving relationship with him. These are the people that know him intimately. All others simply know about him. They have a superficial contrived understanding of who he is.

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<sup>22</sup> Romans 1:16.

<sup>23</sup> Romans 10:2.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 26:5.

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Do you want to get a definition from some of these people? Go down to the honkey tonks in Nashville and everybody there has got their definition of who God is. Or you can go over to Vanderbilt Divinity School and you will hear all kinds of the same types of definitions. The Mormons believe God is himself a created being. They would deny the trinity. They deny that Jesus Christ was the eternal Son of God. They believe in millions of Gods. They don't even know how many. The Muslims believe that God is unknowable and that he does not reveal himself to anyone, that he is not a triune God. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus, for example, was created as the archangel Michael billions of years ago and is a lesser God than the Father. The also would deny the trinity. In fact, all religions other than biblical Christianity have some distorted false understanding of who God is. Paul described them in Romans chapter one verse 18 as those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. In verse 21 he says:

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. Professing to be wise, they became fools.<sup>25</sup>

Now, I want to say kindly and humbly that some of you listening to my voice today know about God, but you do not know God. You do not know him intimately. In fact, Jesus tells us that this is going to be true of most who fill Christian churches. Jesus described this very clearly in Matthew seven, that there will be those who are self deceived, who live for themselves, not for the God they claim to know. He says there will be those who will call me Lord, but they will never enter the kingdom. In fact, in that great chapter, Jesus described the man who truly knows God is one who will love the truth of the gospel. He will love the doctrines of grace and faith and they will love the Lord Jesus Christ. They will be submissive to Christ as Lord. They will willingly obey his will and his Word. In fact, he says in verse 21 of Matthew seven he will be a man who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

My friends, this is the stuff of genuine Christianity. Does it describe you? Like Paul the Pharisee, the Jews knew about God, but they did not know him personally as their Savior. They did not serve him as Lord. This is what I crave for you. This is what Paul craved for his fellow Jews. This was what Paul begged God for, all who were lost in their sins. He is begging for them or begging God to save them. We see this, for example, in his prayer in Ephesians one verse 17. He prays:

“...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.”<sup>26</sup>

There is that same term, *ἐπιγινώσκω* (ep-ig-in-ocē'-ko). It is a term that comes from *ἐπιγνώσις* (ep-ig'-no-sis). It literally means, again, that ... that full knowledge, that rich

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<sup>25</sup> Romans 1:21-22.

<sup>26</sup> Ephesians 1:17.

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intimate understanding of him. I pray for this revelation in the knowledge of Him. He says:

“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, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”<sup>27</sup>

And isn't it a wonderful thing to witness a genuine believer who has a zeal for God with knowledge, with understanding to see a man whose vision of God is no longer darkened by the futile speculations of the heart nor somehow obscured by all of the smog of false teachers or the blinding storms of satanic deception. But this was precisely the problem of the Jews. They had a wrong view of God. And this leads to Paul's concern regarding number three, Israel's ignorance of God's righteousness. Notice verse three.

“For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”<sup>28</sup>

The idea here is that they refused to understand that God's purpose in the law is to lead them to Christ so that they can be justified by faith, Galatians 3:24. Paul has already explained in Romans chapter nine, if you will recall, verses 31 through 32 that this was a willing failure on the part of Israel. This is something they chose to do. It was a failure in faith. Instead they pursued the righteousness by works, not by faith. This was how they stumbled over the stumbling stone as Paul said.

Now to make this practical for each of us, let me put it this way. They had a low view of the holiness of God which produces a high view of the righteousness of man. If you can lower God, you kind of raise yourself up, then you {}, oh, there we go. I am going to be good. That is what they did. If we have a low view of God we will have a high view of self. If we have a high view of God we will have a low view of self. One perspective produces self righteousness, the other self denying humility.

Beloved, the very heart of idolatry is to perceive God falsely, to entertain thoughts of him that are untrue and self serving, to create him somehow in our likeness. What a monstrous wickedness this is.

Verse three. They sought their own form of righteousness. It says

“...they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.”<sup>29</sup>

They were convinced that by their good deeds and religious rituals they could themselves be pleasing to God. God is not really all that holy and we are not really all that bad.

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<sup>27</sup> Ephesians 1:18-19.

<sup>28</sup> Romans 10:3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

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Rather than seeing God as infinitely holy, making the chasm between his holiness and our sinfulness absolutely inconceivable, one that can only be bridged by the grace of God through Christ.

So their boast was in themselves. We are the chosen people of Israel. Their boast was not in the righteousness of God. You see, they saw, therefore, no need for a Messiah to save them from their sin. They were looking for a Messiah to save them from Rome. Much of evangelical Christianity today is no different. It is no different. Most people who go to church don't see Jesus as their Savior, someone, the holy God who will save them from their sin. That is not why people come to Jesus these days. People come to Jesus to be saved from their poor self esteem. They come to Jesus so that they can be saved from their unfulfilled life. They can... they come to Jesus so that they can be saved from their lack of success. And on and on it goes. You see, people today just like then, they want to be happy, not holy. . That is what the real issue is. We see this all the time. I have been to some of these churches. People who think this way tend to go to church and they look like they are going to the beach. You can tell what they do in the morning is grab their favorite flip flops and dress up as grungy as they possibly can and with coffee in one hand and a cell phone in the other, because, after all, you don't need a Bible. They go into a worship center, why? To be entertained. There is no sense of the transcendence of God, the holiness of God. There is no respect for the holiness of God. After all, everything is awesome today except God. Have you noticed that? There is no heart preparation to worship him in Spirit and in truth. There is no conviction to somehow humble yourself before the Word of God so that you can hear it and submit yourself to it. No, no. The church is show time, it is fun time, make me feel good time.

Why? Why do people have that? Why do people think this way? Because a low view of God will result in a high view of self. All you have to do is listen to the watered down gospel of our day. The evangelist will typically describe God as being the God of love, the God of mercy, the God of grace, which is all true. But very seldom will you hear one describe him as infinitely holy, as totally righteous, as a God who will not allow sin to go unpunished. Very seldom will you hear him say that God sees sinful man as so toxic, so wicked, that we could never do anything good enough to enter into his presence. You will not hear him say that all that man is and all that man does is fundamentally offensive to a holy God. You just won't hear that. you won't hear the evangelist say, "Dear friends, the wrath of God abides upon you and you will perish in everlasting torment unless you repent."

Oh, no, we can't say that. That is too offensive. So the emphasis ends up being on the mercy and the love of God rather than his holiness and judgment. Butt, my friends, a man will never be saved unless he first fears God. It is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. And how can a man know that he needs to be saved unless he understands that from which he needs to be saved from?

Let me quote one of the most prominent evangelical pastors in America. He said this to his huge congregation, quote, "If God can raise a dead Son of God, he can raise a dead

# Israel's Religious Zeal Without Knowledge - Part 1

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marriage. He can raise a dead career. He can raise a dead dream.” He went on to say, “When you come to God and you say, ‘God, I have blown it. I have made this mistake. I have done this wrong, God doesn't rub it in, he rubs it out. Some of you have been afraid to come to Jesus Christ because of things in your life you know are wrong and you think God is to scold you or God is going to scold you, but God isn't mad at you, he is mad about you. He is mad about you,” end quote.

No, my friends, there is much to think about here even in these first three verses. And I pray that you will have a proper view of God, that you will see him as Isaiah saw him as high and lifted up, glorious and so infinitely holy that immediately when he found himself in the presence of the glory of God he said, “Woe is me. I am disintegrating. I am a man of unclean lips.” A true view of God will produce that kind of a response. I pray that if you have never asked God to save you, that today will be the day that you do that, before it is too late.

And, finally, I want to challenge all of us who know Christ to pray that the Spirit of God will give us a deeper compassion for the lost and more boldness when it comes to evangelism. And may I ask you to do this? Would you target just one person? Think about it right now in your mind. I would imagine for most of you the Spirit of God will instantly give you a person. I am just saying one person, target one person for evangelism. And then today commit yourself before the Lord to pray for that person, to beg God for that person's salvation just five minutes a day. Is that too much? Can you commit that to the Lord, that, Lord, I am going to begin to beg you for this person's salvation five minutes a day. And do you know what will happen? As you begin to do that, you will find that five minutes isn't near enough. Thirty minutes won't be near enough. The boldness will begin to come and as you begin to recall reach people with the gospel, preaching the gospel message, yes, there is going to be people who will stick in your face, but there will be people just like you who will respond in faith and obedience and, my friends, as that happens, you will find yourself wanting to tell more and more people about Christ. Don't fear man. Fear God. Will you ask the Lord to help you with this? Commit yourself. One person, target them. pray for them. Five minutes a day. Will you all do that? I hope you will.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for these great truths. Apply them to our hearts to the praise of your glory. We pray in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.*

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