

Romans 10:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Analysis

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God—Israel's failure was epistemological (agnoeō, ἀγνοέω, "be ignorant of, not understand") and volitional (ou hypetagesan, οὐ ὑπετάγησαν, "did not submit"). Agnoeō indicates not mere lack of information but culpable ignorance that refuses truth (Acts 3:17; 1 Cor 14:38). Israel ignored dikaiosynē theou (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ, "God's righteousness")—the divine provision of right standing through faith—and pursued idian dikaiosynēn (ἰδίαν δικαιοσύνην, "their own righteousness") through law-works.

The verb zēteō (ζητέω, "seek, go about establishing") implies diligent effort, echoing Romans 9:31-32 where Israel "pursued" the law of righteousness but stumbled over the stumbling stone. Human autonomy—establishing one's own righteousness—is the essence of sin, the project of Genesis 3. Submission (hypotagē, ὑποταγή) to God's righteousness is the opposite: receiving, not achieving; believing, not earning. This is the Reformation doctrine of sola fide—faith alone, Christ's righteousness alone.

Historical Context

Paul's Pharisaic training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) gave him insider knowledge of Jewish soteriology. Rabbinic Judaism emphasized merit through Torah-obedience,

good works, and the "righteous remnant" concept. The Mishnah (compiled c. AD 200 but reflecting earlier oral tradition) speaks of righteousness earned through deeds. Jesus' parables of the Pharisee and publican (Luke 18:9-14) and the elder brother (Luke 15:25-32) illustrate self-righteousness as older than first-century Judaism—it is the default human religion.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Where are you "going about" to establish your own righteousness through performance, even in Christian discipleship?
2. How does submission to God's righteousness free you from the anxiety of self-justification?
3. What would it look like to preach the gospel to yourself daily about this one issue?

Interlinear Text

ἀγνοοῦντες	γὰρ	τὴν	τοῦ	θεοῦ	δικαιοσύνη	καὶ	τὴν
they being ignorant	For			of God	righteousness	and	
G50	G1063			G2316	G1343	G2532	
ἰδίαν	δικαιοσύνη	ζητοῦντες	στῆσαι	τῇ	δικαιοσύνη		
their own	righteousness	going about	to establish		righteousness		
G2398	G1343	G2212	G2476		G1343		
τοῦ	θεοῦ	οὐχ	ὑπετάγησαν·				
	of God	not	have				
G3588	G2316	G3756	G5293				

Additional Cross-References

Luke 16:15 (Righteousness): And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Philippians 3:9 (Righteousness): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Romans 1:17 (Righteousness): For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (Righteousness): For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Romans 5:19 (Righteousness): For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Romans 3:22 (Righteousness): Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

Isaiah 51:8 (Righteousness): For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.

Isaiah 57:12 (Righteousness): I will declare thy righteousness, and thy works; for they shall not profit thee.

Isaiah 64:6 (Righteousness): But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Isaiah 56:1 (Righteousness): Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.