

Romans 9:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

Analysis

But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness—the tragedy: Israel pursued *nómon dikaiosynēs* (νόμον δικαιοσύνης, 'law of righteousness') but didn't reach it. The double use of 'law' emphasizes their goal: to achieve righteousness through law-keeping. But *ouk ephthasen* (οὐκ ἔφθασεν, 'did not arrive/attain')—they failed despite zealous pursuit (10:2).

The reason: they sought righteousness as achievement rather than gift, by works rather than faith. The law was never meant to save (Galatians 3:21) but to drive sinners to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Israel used it wrongly—seeking to establish their own righteousness (10:3) rather than submitting to God's. This is the essence of religion vs. gospel: earning vs. receiving, works vs. grace, self-righteousness vs. Christ-righteousness. Election operates through the gospel, not the law.

Historical Context

First-century Judaism was largely works-oriented—Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes all sought righteousness through torah-obedience (though with different interpretations). Jesus condemned this (Matthew 23). Paul, the ex-Pharisee (Philippians 3:4-6), testifies that law-pursuit is futile for justification. Only faith-righteousness saves.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How can pursuing righteousness (a good thing) become a fatal error if done through works rather than faith?
2. What is the difference between 'law of righteousness' as God's standard vs. as a method of justification?
3. Why does religious zeal without faith in Christ result in failure to attain righteousness?

Interlinear Text

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|---------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------|
| Ἰσραὴλ | δὲ | διώκων | νόμον | δικαιοσύνης, | εἰς |
| Israel | But | which followed | after the law | of righteousness | to |
| G2474 | G1161 | G1377 | G3551 | G1343 | G1519 |
| νόμον | δικαιοσύνης, | οὐκ | ἔφθασεν | | |
| after the law | of righteousness | not | attained | | |
| G3551 | G1343 | G3756 | G5348 | | |

Additional Cross-References

Romans 11:7 (References Israel): What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded

Romans 3:20 (Righteousness): Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.