

Romans 9:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

Analysis

Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law—Paul answers his question: dia ti (διὰ τί, 'for what reason?'). The contrast: ouk ek pisteōs all' hōs ex ergōn (οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως ἀλλ' ὡς ἐξ ἔργων)—'not from faith but as from works.' The phrase hōs (ὡς, 'as it were/as if') suggests treating the law as though it were a merit-system, which it never was. The law demands perfect obedience (Galatians 3:10) but provides no power to obey. Faith receives Christ's perfect righteousness as a gift.

For they stumbled at that stumblingstone—prosekopsan tō lithō tou proskommatos (προσέκοψαν τῷ λίθῳ τοῦ προσκόμματος). The verb suggests striking one's foot against an obstacle. The 'stone' is Christ (v. 33)—the very one meant to save became the occasion of their downfall. Because they approached by works, not faith, Christ's demand for unconditional surrender offended them. They wanted a Messiah to validate their righteousness, not expose its bankruptcy.

Historical Context

The stumbling-stone imagery comes from Isaiah 8:14, 28:16 (quoted in v. 33). Jesus identified himself as the rejected stone (Matthew 21:42). Peter echoed this (1 Peter 2:6-8). The stone that should be a foundation becomes a stumbling-block to those approaching in unbelief. Israel's tragedy was not ignorance but hardness—they had the oracles but rejected the Word made flesh.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does approaching God 'by works' rather than 'by faith' turn Christ from Savior into stumbling-block?
2. What is the relationship between works-righteousness and being offended by Christ's gospel?
3. Why does religious performance produce pride that makes submission to Christ (justification by faith alone) repugnant?

Interlinear Text

διατί;	ὅτι	οὐκ	ἐξ	πίστεως,	ἀλλ'	ώς	ἐξ
Wherefore	Because	they sought it not	by	faith	but	as	by
G1302	G3754	G3756	G1537	G4102	G235	G5613	G1537
ἔργων	νόμου·	προσέκοψαν	γὰρ	τῷ	λίθῳ		τοῦ
the works	of the law	they stumbled	For	G3588	at that stumblingstone	G3588	
G2041	G3551	G4350	G1063		G3037		
προσκόμματος,							
	G4348						

προσκόμματος,

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 1:23 (Parallel theme): But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

Luke 7:23 (Parallel theme): And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

1 Peter 2:8 (Word): And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Luke 2:34 (Parallel theme): And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

Romans 4:16 (Faith): Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Romans 10:3 (Parallel theme): 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.

Romans 11:11 (Parallel theme): I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

Matthew 13:57 (Parallel theme): And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.