

August 28, 2010 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Romans 9-11 Pursuing the Law and Missing Jesus by Andy McDonald

To miss Jesus is to miss everything.

There is nothing the enemy of everything good wants more than for us to miss Jesus. It is Satan's steady purpose to separate humanity from God and Jesus is all about the very opposite.

Satan's steady purpose is to drive a wedge between us and God. From our record of his very first conversation with our primal parents, he has intimated that God wants to keep something from us. That God wants to limit us.

But what God knew is that there are only two choices:

- A life of reliance on God, trust in God, making God #1 or
- A life of self reliance, trust in self, making self #1

Wrapped up in our text for today, Romans 9-11; woven in among talk about God's sovereign choice, his rights as creator, his merciful nature, Israel's unbelief, the identification of a remnant, the grafting in and ungrafting of limbs in a tree, and a wonderful doxology we can discover one of the greatest risks of religion and of being religious.

We can whole heartedly, with good motivations and great intentions, and with a strong desire to be more and more like God we still today can pursue the law and miss Jesus. And I'm very very serious—to miss Jesus is to miss everything.

Paul has already established that the law of God is holy and just and righteous. Scripture supports that it is an eternal law, the very essence, the written description in a human form of who God is. But the challenge comes in our relation to that law. What it is for!

In Exodus 24:3 after the 10 commandments have been given, and Moses has met with the Lord it says in this verse, "When Moses went

and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice; EVERYTHING THE LORD HAS SAID WE WILL DO!"

Here's this group of recently freed slaves. Used to simply conforming to the will of their masters, they unwittingly pledge their obedience.

The reality is that blessings come with obedience of God's law. The law is just and holy and good. Similar to how life works better when we act in harmony with the law of gravity, when we recognize our boundaries and acknowledge the reality of governance, life just works better.

If God is our only God, and we don't make idols, and honor his name, observe the Sabbath, honor our parents, not murder one another, and honor our spouses, respect personal property by not taking what isn't ours, and only giving honest testimony and not lusting after other peoples stuff—life will just work better. We are working with not against reality just as real as the law of gravity in nature.

But as law pursuers, there is risk in being right. There is risk in holding truth and that is that our confidence with regards to righteousness can slip away from the one who is behind it all to the thing revealed. We can, in our pursuit of holiness and righteousness and God begin to think we are better than we really are, and this spiritual pride can really mess us up!

Paul knew all about this from his own spiritual journey. He wasn't writing theoretically—he had lived this stuff. Paul had pursued the law. In fact he had gone after it with his whole pedigreed person. Here's what he said about himself.

Philippians 3 I was circumcised on the eighth day just as the law required. I am of the people of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regards to the law, a Pharisee. (Remember the Pharisees were the preeminent religious people of the day. They committed their whole life to following every rule of the law.)

Paul said he had zeal that evidenced itself in persecuting the early Christian church; Listen now to his self-affirmation: “As for legalistic righteousness, (law keeping) faultless.”

Like all of Israel Paul relied on the wrong things for holiness for being in sync with God.

There was a reliance on selection—he was part of the chosen people
 There was a reliance on the promise to his ancestors
 There was a reliance on performance of human work as in
 circumcision
 There was a reliance on offering the right sacrifice
 And above all it was a reliance on following the rules, keeping the
 commandments, holiness by law keeping.

When we pursue God through performance if we have any Pauline like success in appearing to keep all the rules it will produce in us a self condemning spiritual pride.

Paul, who could claim that he was legalistically perfect was the one who stood by and held the coats while Stephen was stoned and Acts 8:1 says that Paul was there, giving approval to Stephen’s death.”

Paul claims legalistic righteousness, and he goes about persecuting the church.

When we think our group is right and that we are right and that we are a cut above this pursuit of law living drives us towards sectarianism and exclusiveness. And it can drive people to ignoring the very law they claim to keep in order to protect their illusion of personal holiness by performance.

It is amazing to think about a group of religious men sitting in a council plotting murder because they are the elect of God!! But that’s exactly what the Pharisees and followers of the law did with regards to Jesus.

That's what Paul did with early Christian church. The pursuit of righteousness by law deceives us into thinking we are okay even when we are plotting murder.

It enables the law keeper to think of sin only in terms of moral character and ethical behavior. That as long as there is moral behavior and no overt evil that means there is no sin problem.

This was the condition of the guy we call the rich young ruler. He had been watching Jesus. He saw him bless the children and he wanted a blessing from this teacher. And he came and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life."

Jesus told him that the way to get into heaven was to keep the law and he quotes several of the ten commandments when the young man asks which law. The audacity of the young man is Paulish, it is Pharisaic. He claims life-long obedience! But then Jesus opens a window into his soul. Jesus challenges him. It is like Jesus says to him, REALLY! You've kept the whole law and perfectly? What about the very first commandment? Let's dig down into that one a bit. No other Gods! You want to be perfect? Go sell your stuff all your stuff and come and follow me." And the young man went away sad because he couldn't let go of his God, his stuff.

Here's God in the flesh standing there inviting him to become a disciple of the kingdom. And this young man chooses to trust himself and his performance over God!

Andrew Juke wrote: Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law which God gave to prove us sinners. There's the purpose of the law. Paul writes to the Galatians that the law is our school master, our tutor, to drive us to Christ. It is the Law that proves our need of Jesus.

Self-righteousness is the danger of this age no less than in every age. It is Satanic. It separates us from Jesus. It creates an illusion and a delusion in our thinking.

Pursuing the law and righteousness by our performance can bring us to a place like the Pharisee in the temple praying to himself. We too, if pursuing the law can pray words of thanksgiving that we are not like other people, those immoral types. WE are part of the true church, even identifying the invisible remnant as the visible us.

In the book Christ's Object Lessons it says, "There is nothing so offensive to God or so dangerous to the human soul as pride and self-sufficiency. Of all sins it is the most hopeless, the most incurable.) p. 154

Paul knew what he was writing about in these important and confusing chapters because when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus he found himself to be a sinner and Jesus to be the savior. He found grace. And God's grace has a very different effect than pursuing law. Instead of murderous to protect our bastion of self-righteousness there is a willingness to even lay down our lives for others benefit. Paul writes that he wished he were cursed and cut off from Christ if that would benefit his fellow Jewish brothers."

Paul's point is that Jew and Gentile, everyone is lost outside of Christ, no matter how good they might appear, and God is anxious to show mercy to all. Sure he Abraham (could have been anyone of his choosing) to start the family tree for Jesus. He chose Jacob for the family tree for Jesus, he selects people to move the salvation story along, but that doesn't make them "better" or more saved.

Paul recognizes that our eternal destiny isn't determined by our heritage, our pedigree, our denomination, religion or our performance.

He writes in Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. And in vs. 13 "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Pursing the law is really good if we do it for the right reason, for it's purpose to prove us guilty and in need of Jesus. Don't get caught in Satan's trap. Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law which God gave to prove us sinners!"

Near the close of these three chapters in Romans 11:32 Paul gives a short summary. "For God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience so he could have mercy on everyone."

Pursuing the law is a literal dead end if we miss Jesus.

I think Juke is right Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law, which God gave to prove us sinners, who need a savior named Jesus. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. He is the one who is the author and the finisher of our faith.