

Romans: The Good News of God

Israel's Inexcusable Unbelief

Romans 10:14-21

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Israel's Inexcusable Unbelief

Scripture

Today we continue our study in Romans 10. Let's read Romans 10:14-21:

¹⁴How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

¹⁸But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for

**"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."**

¹⁹But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

**"I will make you jealous of those
who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make
you angry."**

²⁰Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

**"I have been found by those
who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those
who did not ask for me."**

²¹But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." (Romans 10:14-21)

Introduction

The Apostle Paul has at this point in Romans presented very clearly the freeness of our salvation through Christ. He has emphasized the principles expressed in the important texts, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame,” and “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:11, 13).

The truth is most plainly expressed in the famous text, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

“But, Paul,” someone might say, “what is this faith that you keep talking about? How can I obtain it?”

Floyd Schneider, in *Evangelism for the Fainthearted*, wrote about a college student who was a Christian and shared a room with a Muslim. As they became friends, their conversation turned to their beliefs. The Christian asked the Muslim if he had ever read the Bible. He said that he had not, and then the Muslim asked the Christian if he had ever read the Koran.

The Christian responded, “No, I haven’t, but I’m sure it would be interesting. Why don’t we read both together, once a week, alternating books?”

The Muslim accepted the invitation. Their friendship deepened, and during the second term he became a believer in Jesus.

One evening, late in the term, he burst into the room and shouted at the long-time Christian, “You deceived me!”

“What are you talking about?” the Christian asked.

The new Christian opened his Bible and said, “I’ve been reading it through, like you told me, and I just read that the word of God is living and active [cf. Hebrews 4:12]!” He grinned. “You knew all along that the Bible contained God’s power and that the Koran is like any other book. I never had a chance!”

That is the power of the Bible as well as the message of the gospel.

Lesson

In the section of Romans which we are now studying the Apostle Paul continues his stress on our responsibility to respond to the sovereign grace of God.

He has explained that salvation has been prepared for the elect of God, but Israel had forgotten that there must be a response of faith to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the gospel.

So, in the section we are to study Paul develops three themes, and they may be called:

1. Israel and Believing,
2. Israel and Hearing, and
3. Israel and Knowing.

I. Israel and Believing (10:14-17)

First, let's look at Israel and believing.

A. *Five links in the chain of evangelism (10:14-15)*

The thought of Israel's necessity of calling upon the Lord for salvation turns the apostle's mind to the steps by which the evangelistic program of God is carried out.

There are five links in the endeavor, Paul says, and in his development of them he moves in each of the steps from the effect to the cause. Since he uses this methodology it will be good for us to follow his plan as we begin at the end and move to the beginning.

Thus, we begin with verse 15, where Paul writes, **“And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!””**

The *first* step in the chain of evangelism is the necessity of sending of the messenger. Paul cites Isaiah 52:7 and comments on the beauty of the work of evangelism. Every believer agrees with that sentiment. But, first, God must send the preacher.

The *second* link in the chain is found in the word “**preach.**” The evangelist must not only be sent; he must preach. The word **preach** is a Greek word that means simply “to proclaim.” It reminds us of an important fact. Those who are God’s messengers are to proclaim God’s truth.

Pastor and commentator Donald Grey Barnhouse says, “The only diversity that is allowable is that of the man who shows one single diamond but turns the facets so that new and flashing lights may reveal the depth of the stone.” In gospel preaching there can be no innovating with the truth, although there may be varied ways of offering the message.

We often fail right here. We do not preach, even though we have the message of God. Years ago I attended an Evangelism Explosion Teacher’s Clinic in Columbus, OH. The clinic was held in a large Lutheran Church. At some point during the clinic the pastor of the church shared the testimony of his conversion with us.

The pastor, whose name I forget, told us that he went to college on a basketball scholarship. He was not good enough for the NBA, and so after college he had to figure out what to do. Since his college had a seminary, he decided to continue his studies, which allowed him an additional year of basketball eligibility.

He eventually graduated from seminary. The Lutheran Church sent him to Columbus, OH, to go and start a church. He did get a church started, which became quite large, but after several years he began experiencing tremendous stomach pains. He went from doctor to doctor, but no doctor could diagnose his problem. Finally, one doctor said to him, “Pastor, I cannot find anything physically wrong with you. I believe your problem is spiritual. You are riddled with guilt. That is why you have stomach pains.”

Amazingly, the pastor realized that he was indeed riddled with guilt. He cried out to God for forgiveness, and received it. Not only did the stomach pains go away, but he also rejoiced in God’s forgiveness and love toward him.

As I said, we often fail right here. We do not take our opportunities to “**preach,**” or proclaim, the good news that we have re-

ceived. May God help us to take advantage of the opportunities that his providence gives us.

The *third* step is hearing. The Apostle Paul writes, “**And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?**” (10:14). Christ is heard through his message, the text points out, but the main stress is upon the necessity of hearing.

And the *fourth* link is belief. “**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?**” Paul asks (in 10:14a). It is not enough to hear; one must believe.

And, *finally*, we must call upon him. Paul says in verse 14, “**How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?**” (cf. 10:13). This is *the* invitation. Its content is found in Romans 10:9-10, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

One notices that the chain of evangelism, the divine program of saving people, begins with God and ends with him. It is he who *sends* his messengers, and in the end his people call upon him for salvation. The process that begins with the divine initiative ends in the divine saving of the soul. What a magnificent illustration of the great truth that “Salvation belongs to the Lord!” (cf. Jonah 2:9).

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson, my Systematic Theology professor, used to say, “The doctrines of grace make sinners sad, saints glad, and pretenders mad.”

That is true. It does make the saints glad to hear grace preached; in fact, we never tire of it. The idea that God is sovereign in our salvation from beginning to end does make pretenders mad. It ferrets out their secret trust in themselves and in their insistence, if not in word, at least in fact, that they do have a meritorious part in their salvation by the exercise of their “free will.”

B. Israel's failure in the fourth link (10:16)

Paul places the failure of Israel squarely upon their unbelief.

As he said earlier in the chapter, in Romans 10:3-4, “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Romans 10:16 expresses their unbelief, and it is linked to Scripture. The apostle writes, “**But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’**” Two things are to be noted here.

In the first place, the text from Isaiah is the lament of the nation Israel when they shall discover at the Second Advent of Jesus Christ that they crucified their Messiah. The tenses of Isaiah 53:1-9 make the verses that open that chapter a confession on their part of how they treated him at his First Advent. They confess and mourn over their unbelief and rejection of him.

In the second place, the citing of Isaiah 53:1 in support of the claim that they did not believe is very appropriate, of course, but in the use of the text here it also becomes clear that to Paul obedience *is* faith. Notice what he says in Romans 10:16, “**But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’**”

The second statement is designed to confirm the first, and thus obedience is linked with faith. The apostle in other places in Romans identifies the two (cf. 1:5; 16:26). To obey is to believe, and to believe is to obey. Thus, the claim of some that salvation consists in merely believing in Jesus as Savior but not obeying him as Lord is patently false. To believe is to obey and to be saved.

C. The summary of the links (10:17)

Paul’s summary statement is in Romans 10:17, “**So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**” Faith, he says, comes *from* hearing the message *through* the word of Christ.

Faith, then, follows from the study of the **word**, not through prayer, reading the prayer book, music, plaques on the wall, even

reading the Bible through, or memorizing its texts, in spite of the fact that these are good things. Faith comes through reading and hearing the Bible.

D. L. Moody once put it this way, “I prayed for faith and thought that someday faith would come down and strike me like lightning. But faith did not come. One day I read in the tenth chapter of Romans, ‘Now faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.’ I had closed my Bible, and prayed for faith. I now opened my Bible and began to study, and faith has been growing ever since.” It could hardly be put better.

Let me also say that faith does not come by hereditary descent, or simply because my parents were believers (cf. John 1:13). It does not come through the sacraments (cf. Titus 3:5). Aqueous processes won’t do. As Spurgeon said, “Faith cannot be washed into us by immersion, nor sprinkled upon us in christening; it is not to be poured into us from a chalice, nor generated in us by a consecrated piece of bread. There is no magic about it; it comes by hearing the word of God, and by that way only.”

Faith may come by the simple statement of the gospel in a text such as John 3:16. It may come as we hear the word and note its suitability to our need, as happened to the Ethiopian Eunuch, when Philip preached Christ to him from Isaiah 53.

Or, it may come to us through others, as it did to Peter, who learned of the Messiah from his brother Andrew. Andrew did for him the greatest thing that one person can do for another: He brought him to Jesus (cf. John 1:35-42).

We do not make the Bible an end in itself; it is the Bible’s message about Christ that is important.

II. Israel and Hearing (10:18)

Next, let us briefly examine Israel and hearing.

Paul asks in verse 18: **“But I ask, have they not heard?”** One cannot say that Israel has not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. The gospel was first preached in Jerusalem, then in all Ju-

dea and Samaria, before it went to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Paul uses the words of Psalm 19:4 (“**Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world**”) in a rhetorical, or figurative, way. One may refer to his later words in chapter 15 (vv. 19, 23) for his conviction that Israel has been the recipient of a wide-ranging testimony to Jesus as the Messiah.

Paul’s point is simply that Israel has heard the gospel proclaimed to them.

III. Israel and Knowing (10:19-21)

Finally, let’s look at Israel and knowing.

A. *Refutation from the law (10:19)*

In the final verses of Romans 10 Paul deals with the remaining excuses to the effect that Israel did not know what was going to happen, if they rejected the message from the Lord. Paul asks in verse 19: “**But I ask, did Israel not understand?**” A question exists over the proper object of the verb **understand**.

Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21, “**I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.**” He predicts that God will provoke Israel to jealousy “**with a foolish nation,**” that is, the Gentiles, who were not the chosen people, as Abraham’s descendants were (cf. 11:11, 14). Thus, if they had read Moses correctly, they would have understood their fate, if they rejected the Word of God in Christ.

B. *Refutation from the Prophets (10:20-21)*

Isaiah is bolder than Moses, Paul says, for he frankly predicts that those who did not seek Jehovah and did not ask after him will find Jehovah. The text is from Isaiah 65:1, where Paul says in Romans 10:20, “**I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.**” This refers

to the Gentiles, rather than the Jews. It is a prophecy of the future reception of Gentiles, and Israel should have known its force.

Isaiah 65:2 is now cited as referring to Israel. It gives the reason for the reception of the Gentiles, referred to in the immediately preceding verse in Isaiah and in Romans. It is a remarkable text, and in a sense it sums up the idea of the whole chapter, **“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people”** (Romans 10:21).

The picture is of the unwearied love of God for his people. There is a great emphasis on the words **“all day long.”**

Have you ever tried to hold out your arms for five minutes? I remember when I was in basic training in the South African Air Force. At one time our instructor did not think we were performing as we should, and so he simply had us stretch out our hands parallel to the ground. I was amazed at how quickly my arms got heavy. Holding out our hands was a tiring experience.

Now think of the picture Paul gives us by citing Isaiah. It beautifully points to the incessant pleading love of God for Israel. And, further, when we see that the figure of God, with arms outstretched, is a vivid reminder of Jesus hanging on the cross with arms outstretched in crucifixion, it becomes a beautiful expression of the mighty love and compassion of the Master of the Universe. It reminds us of Jesus' words, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”** (Matthew 23:37).

Conclusion

The universality of the gospel stands out here plainly (cf. vv. 11, 12, 13), as well as the availability of the good news to all continually (cf. v. 21, “all day long”).

But we also think of the responsibility to respond personally to the glorious grace of the blessed God (cf. vv. 12-13, 14-15). His grace is to end in our “calling on him.”

And that was essentially Israel's failure. Even though they had tremendous spiritual privileges, they had taken them for granted and forgotten to respond personally to the grace of God.

You and I have tremendous spiritual privileges today. We have God's word freely available. We are able to worship without fear of harassment and persecution. We have preachers who proclaim the good news of the gospel in all of its glory and beauty.

And yet, do we take it all for granted? Do we zealously pursue the things of God? Is our highest priority to glorify God? Or do we place God along a spectrum of other priorities?

Oh, dear friends, let us never take God for granted. Let us call on him as our highest and continual priority.

There is a wonderful account of J. J. Jowett's ministry in Spurgeon's Tabernacle that I would like to pass on to you. He was preaching about the woman who came and pushed her way through the crowd, saying, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well" (Matthew 9:21).

He exhorted the great congregation, and said, "Touch him—touch him—touch him, and you shall be healed."

Then he anticipated someone saying, "But I do not know how to touch him. He is not here, and I cannot see him."

Then the great preacher cried out, "Tell him that you do not know how to touch him, and *that will touch him.*"

It will, if you will. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Taken from Ray Ortland's *A Passion for God*:

O Lord God, how comfortable we are. How exquisitely complacent. How deliciously at ease. We, your church, loll drowsily amid our privileges. We treat our spiritual treasures cheaply, as if possessing them in abundance were a natural state of affairs, always to be expected. We do not understand that they were developed for us out of the keen spiritual vitality and self-denial of past generations. We do not understand that we have no guarantee whatever that our privileges will always remain in our possession, for ourselves and our children after us. We do not understand that having the gospel preached in our churches, having Bibles in our hands, having worthy Christian literature, having faithful Christian schools and colleges and seminaries, having missions organizations and family counselors and all the many other avenues of grace that in fact we do possess—we do not understand that living amid abundant, God-given opportunity for richer spiritual life is not something to be taken for granted but something to be eagerly exploited. And if we do not exploit it, then why *shouldn't* you take it away and give it to others who will appreciate it? You watch us. You judge us. You evaluate our responsiveness to your gifts. You decide, accordingly, whether you will bestow more gifts upon us or remove what we have and turn it over to others—perhaps to others even less deserving, to shame us into repentance. O God, revive us again! Strip away our worldly distractions. Break the spell of our idolatrous affections. Infuse within our sinful hearts a vivid sense of the infinite worth and succulent pleasure of spiritual things. Let a new affection for you expel from within us our swinish preference for the earthly, the material, the sensate—as if you, *you*, were a colossal bore. *Whatever it takes*, make us a responsive people, before it is too late.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.