

- f. The prophets had promised that, in the day of Yahweh's triumph in His Servant, His salvation would go to the ends of the earth. God's saving mercy in Christ – which, according to the promise to the fathers, had come first to Israel – was being extended to all the nations. Yahweh had poured forth His Spirit with the enthronement of His Son at His right hand, and now the Spirit was being given to *all* who called upon the name of the Lord. In the age of fulfillment, “*there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him*” (ref. vv. 11-13).

Paul's core emphasis in the preceding section was on the opposing principles of *righteousness by faith* and *righteousness by works*. His intent was to show that Israel's pursuit of the latter was the reason for its stumbling and failure to obtain righteousness. At the same time, He made it clear that the Jews' pursuit of righteousness by works was fully culpable, for their own scriptures – and even Moses himself – insisted that Israel's righteousness would come through Yahweh's work and provision and their trusting faith in Him (10:1-8). And since it is obtained solely and entirely through faith, righteousness before God is equally accessible to the Gentiles; all who will call upon God, believing Him regarding the salvation He has wrought in Jesus, will be saved (10:9-10).

In the present section (10:14-21), Paul further develops this same train of thought, continuing his overall emphasis on the problem of Israel's unbelief. The flow of his argument may be outlined as follows:

- The heart of the gospel is that righteousness before God is a matter of faith, not works. Therefore, Israel's condemnation has resulted from the Jews' insistence upon establishing their own righteousness by conformity to the Law of Moses.
- Yet even the Law itself condemned this pursuit of works righteousness, for the Sinai Covenant – interpreted for Israel by Moses and the prophets – testified that their hope of righteousness lay in God's promise of transforming grace. The covenant law they so tirelessly sought to keep called them to live by faith; it condemned their “uncircumcised” works and called them to cling to Yahweh and find their confidence in His promise and power (ref. again Deuteronomy 30:1-10).
- But if God's word to Israel through the Law of Moses (and later through the prophets) acted to promote and advance the promise of righteousness by faith, and yet the Jews continued to pursue righteousness by personal and national works, *then is it possible that they simply had not heard Yahweh's word to them?* If this was indeed the case, then their rejection of Christ becomes less culpable.

This question and its answer are the crux of Paul's argument through the end of chapter ten. And what Paul will demonstrate is that the Jews' predicament – both in the first century and throughout their history – was never due to a lack of disclosure or clarity on God's part. Neither did it result from their inability to discern where true righteousness was to be found. The promise to Abraham, the Law of Moses, the testimony of the prophets, and even God's ongoing interaction with His covenant people all provided the same witness. Israel's condemnation was the product of willful *unbelief*, not ignorance.

- 1) The first part of Paul’s proof consists of a summary “chain” of rhetorical questions (10:14-15). This chain provides an important framework for his subsequent further discussion of Israel’s circumstance. This observation is crucial, for these two verses are commonly plucked out of context and used as a point of exhortation to preachers and missionaries. Sometimes they are even used as a biblical proof-text for the doctrine that pastors must be recognized and sent out by a local church rather than be self-commissioned. While there are universal principles that can be derived from Paul’s statements, they must be governed by the context, and his concern was not with missionary activity or the way in which pastors are to be commissioned. Paul provided this chained sequence in order to show the process by which men come to faith, *and how that process, when held up against Israel’s history, leaves them without excuse for their unbelief.*

Paul presents this sequence in the form of a series of conjoined rhetorical questions, and several key observations are immediately apparent from it:

- The first is that all of the rhetorical questions are conjoined by means of the same grammatical construction. As well, each question necessitates the same response. In this way the sequence is formed into a cohesive unit.
 - Second, in keeping with the nature of a chain, each item in the sequence presupposes its predecessor and points forward to its successor.
 - The third observation proceeds out of the second, namely that each “link” is indispensable to the chain. In other words, every item in the sequence is necessary to the whole.
 - Fourth, the sequence proceeds in reverse order. That is, in keeping with his contextual emphasis, Paul began with the matter of faith and worked backwards to the act of sending a messenger with the news to be believed.
 - Finally, Paul drew once again from the Old Testament scriptures in order to punctuate his overall contention concerning Israel and its unbelief.
- a) The first matter to be considered, then, is Paul’s *sequence* itself. He concluded the previous verse (10:13) with the scriptural promise that salvation is promised to all who call upon the Lord. This “call” arises from the heart of those who have become enlightened to and convicted by the truth of God’s promise in Christ, and is therefore expressive of faith.
1. Thus the first link in the chain: “*How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed?*” The expected response to this first question is obvious and will be repeated with each of the successive questions: *They can’t.* No one will ever call upon God to save him unless he first *believes* in God, and specifically that He will keep His promise of salvation to all who so call to Him.

2. *Response* presupposes *faith*; belief must precede a person's cry to God, but belief has its own antecedent: "*How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?*" Again, they can't; faith in God and His promise presupposes that the person has been informed of them. No one can believe something he is unaware of.
3. Likewise, hearing this good news presupposes that someone has come along to declare it: "*How shall they hear without a preacher?*" If a person hears a message, it is because it has been brought to him.
4. Finally, Paul observes that the presence of a preacher presupposes that he has been dispatched by someone else: "*How shall they preach unless they are sent?*" As noted, Paul has been reasoning backward, and this last question is the foundation for those that precede it. As *faith* is the end point in the sequence, so a *commission* is the starting point.

Of all the questions in the chain, the fourth one is the most important to Paul's contextual argument. At the same time, it is the least clear, for its expected answer – *they can't* – is the least obvious. This answer was indisputable in the case of the previous questions, but it does not seem to be so here. For certainly a preacher can preach without being sent; he can go out and proclaim his message entirely on his own initiative. *This fact is the very reason people use this passage to argue against the practice of self-commissioning.* But the appearance that this question does not necessitate the same response as the others merely proves that Paul's argument is being misunderstood. Once he is accurately understood, it will become obvious that the answer here is just as certainly, *they can't*.

The first thing that needs to be recognized is that Paul was not using the term "preacher" in the contemporary sense. He was not referring to the local church pastor who stands in a pulpit and delivers a message drawn from the Bible. Such preachers are not sent as a matter of necessity; probably more often than not they have dispatched themselves into the pastoral ministry. Rather, Paul was speaking of a *herald* – a person who goes out with a message and commission given to him, usually by a superior such as his master or king. *The role of this "preacher" is to proclaim the message entrusted to him to the audience prescribed to him.*

This understanding highlights an issue that is crucial to Paul's argument in this context: *the message proclaimed by the preacher is not his own.* As the herald is commissioned by someone else, so his message is given to him by that same person. He goes and speaks on behalf of another. And so, to the question, "How shall they preach unless they are sent," the same response follows, and with the same necessity as before: *they can't*.

- b) Paul's understanding of a "preacher" as a dispatched herald is affirmed and made more specific by his supporting citation from the prophet Isaiah:

"Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (10:15b)

This statement is taken from verse 52:7, which is located in a key section in Isaiah's prophecy. From the broadest perspective, this verse falls within the last of major section of the book (chapters 40-66). This section takes the messianic promise developed throughout the overall prophecy and brings it into sharp and glorious focus as it introduces the Servant of Yahweh and His work and shows Him to be the promised regal seed of David (cf. 11:1ff with 42:1-44:23), the fulfillment of Israel as Yahweh's true servant/disciple (49:1-13), the messianic, royal deliverer typified by Cyrus (44:24-48:15), and the self-sacrificing redeemer (52:13-53:12).

More narrowly, this verse falls within a context spanning six chapters (50-55). This passage is a continuous discourse marked by the introductory declaration, *"Thus says the Lord."* It importantly follows upon God's presentation of His true Israel – His Servant/Savior through whom He would save a Jewish remnant along with the Gentile nations. This "Israel" would be what national Israel failed to be, namely Yahweh's faithful and devoted servant/disciple; the seed of Abraham appointed to bring God's blessing to all the earth's families (49:1-13).

At the outset, the context focuses on God's rejection of His unfaithful people. Notably, Israel is here treated as a **covenant kingdom entity**; thus Isaiah's use of the epitomizing titles *Zion* and *Jerusalem*. And as God's covenant nation, Israel was preeminently the *wife of Yahweh* and therefore the *mother* of the Israelite people (cf. Hosea 2:1ff). This terminology is fundamental to the context and God's prophetic pronouncements in it.

Israel, Yahweh's wife, is introduced here as disobedient to her covenant vows, and therefore justly rejected. This sending away, however - which has reference to the coming captivities – is not a divorce. Yahweh, the committed husband, will one day restore His wife (*Zion/Jerusalem*) to Himself after she has been purged and brought to repentance (50:1-52:12).

The next section reveals the mechanism and process by which this work would be accomplished: *Zion* was to be purged, restored, and perfected through the vicarious sacrifice of Yahweh's Servant, the true Israel (52:13-53:12). As promised earlier (49:1ff), His self-sacrifice would secure the salvation of all nations, not just Israel. *The Servant's work was to be the point of Zion's transformation, not merely her recovery to her former state.* Thus *Zion* was to rejoice in and prepare for the abundance of children she would bear for her Husband in her restoration (54:1-8).

Zion had been made barren by her Husband's hand, but now, through His anointed Servant, the sons of the *desolate one* (that is, restored Zion as she comes out of her desolation) were to be more numerous than the sons of the *married woman* (that is, Old Covenant Israel – ref. 50:1-3, 51:17-20). And so the context concludes appropriately with God's call to *all people* to come and partake of this great salvation wrought by His Servant (55:1-13). Zion has been instructed to lengthen her tent cords and enlarge the curtains of her dwellings to make room for the ingathering of the nations (54:1-3), and now the call goes forth to the ends of the earth to come and enter in. Despite the alienation caused by sin and unbelief, all who thirst and hunger are urged to come, and are assured by Yahweh Himself that He will receive them with abundant pardon and compassion (55:6-11).

This is the context from which Paul drew his citation. Though Isaiah's larger prophecy pointed to a near-term fulfillment in Judah's recovery from Babylonian captivity (ref. again 44:24-48:15), this redemption was not ultimate, but only typological. Like the Exodus that preceded it centuries earlier, restoration from Babylon served merely to portray, advance and further certify the enduring promise of eternal and comprehensive redemption in Yahweh's Servant. From the time of His oath to Eve, God continued to reiterate His promise to purge and restore the world from the curse. This coming kingdom – first portrayed in Eden – would be defined by God's perfect, unending communion with His image-bearers. This was Yahweh's grand goal, and it ever stood on the horizon of history.

Theocratic Israel had also manifested this goal in typological form. Israel, as the kingdom of God, was epitomized in the title, *Zion*, and, given the nature of God's kingdom, was appropriately spoken of by God as His beloved wife. But typological Zion had failed; her marital relationship with her covenant Husband had been marked from the beginning by adulterous lust. Devoted to herself rather than to her Husband, Zion pursued innumerable lovers, confident that she would find gratification in them. For all this, Yahweh would not divorce her; rather, He would purge, renew and restore her to Himself (51:9-52:6). God's promise from the beginning was that He would take a people to Himself forever, and the calamity brought about by human autonomy could not overthrow it. This promise was Yahweh's "preached" word, first to Israel, and then to the world of men – the glad tidings that He would prevail through the redeeming work of His Servant.

“Therefore My people shall know My name; therefore in that day I am the one who is speaking, ‘Here I am.’” How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who announces peace and brings good news of happiness, who announces salvation, and says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’ Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices, they shout joyfully together; for they will see with their own eyes when Yahweh restores Zion. Break forth, shout joyfully together, you waste places of Jerusalem; for Yahweh has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem. Yahweh has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God.” (Isaiah 52:6-10)