

Romans 10:14-18

- (14) (a) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?
 (b) and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?
 (c) and how shall they hear without a preacher?
- (15) And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
- (16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
- (17) So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
- (Romans 10:14-17 KJV)

I. The Context

- a. The whole section in Romans from chapter 9-11 deals with the question of the Jews. Why did so few Israelites believe in the promised Messiah when He came? The question is profound. There should have been no mistaking His coming since He fulfilled so many prophecies in His first coming. Daniel 9:25 even gives a general timeframe – projecting 69 weeks of years (483 years) from around 450 BC when Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah written order to rebuild Jerusalem. So, this should have led them to believe the Messiah would be crucified around somewhere around 30 AD. Yet, amazingly we read, that “He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11).
- b. Paul turns the question over to examine it from every angle. And, in so doing, he opens up some very profound insights into the nature of God and the nature of the gospel.
 - i. In Romans 9, as Mark covered, Paul considers God’s sovereignty in election and redemption. He chose the elder to serve the younger. And, as Mark has recently covered, God has mercy on whom He will have mercy and whom He wills, He hardens. So, we have to understand that, if God had intended to save the Jews at that time, then He would have done so. And so, Paul reveals toward the end of his analysis that a “blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Romans 11:25).
 - ii. Here in Romans 10, Paul examines the question of partiality, whether in the gospel, the preaching of the gospel, or in God Himself, and clears all of any partiality. The gospel message went first to Jew and then to Gentile. The message is the same for all – “For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 10:11) and “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Romans 10:12). Verse 13 promises that “whoever calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved” -- so, there is no partiality either in the gospel or in God. And the gospel went first to the Jews!
 - iii. “The name of the Lord” in verse 13 is a quote from Joel 2:32 which is there stated as Jehovah God. Here and in Acts 2 is clearly applied to Christ – and is a proof text of His Deity which is necessary in terms of His Mediation, to bring us to God.
 - iv. It is important to understand that this portion of Scripture absolutely presupposes the necessity of calling upon the LORD for salvation. That is, the assertion “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” must be viewed against the backdrop of the general lostness and culpability of

mankind. Paul spent the first few chapters of Romans and “proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin” (Rom 3:9). And so, men who do not call upon the LORD – the LORD as He is revealed in the gospel of the LORD Jesus Christ – are not going to be saved.

1. That is, because the word Jehovah is Joel 2:32 is given its full trinitarian significance by virtue of the application to Christ as He is the God-man.
 2. It is not sufficient to call upon the name of God in some vague conception apart from specific knowledge of Christ as Mediator. Jews and Muslims, Mormons and JWs, whoever may call upon the name of God in denial or ignorance of the God-man as Mediator cannot be saved.
- v. We will go over verse 17 later but I want to bring it up here just to state the conclusion as part of the contextual framework, so that we can keep it in mind as we go through this passage. Paul’s argument here must proceed toward the target of v. 17. And the interpretation of this text, which has long fascinated me, is: faith comes by hearing, hearing through the word of Christ, that is, the word of which Christ is both author and subject.” Men need to hear about Christ in detail, about Him, His Person, His nature and His atoning sacrifice, Christ crucified in order to be saved.
- vi. Nothing else will do – mad views notwithstanding.

II. The syllogism of v. 14 – three rhetorical questions

a. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?

- i. This rhetorical question demands the simple answer, “they can’t.” No one can call on someone in whom he does not believe. Calling on someone for help requires the belief that the person called upon (a) is able to provide the needed help; (b) is willing to provide the needed help; and (c) is trustworthy to provide the needed help. The idea of belief is not one of mere intellectual assent, but of a firm trust.
- ii. Imagine your car broke down in the middle of the night in a remote place, that the weather was brutally cold and that you had neglected to charge your phone and you only had 1% of battery left. You realize you can only make one call and that you might well freeze to death if you don’t get help. Who do you call?
 1. Would you call a random number?
 2. Would you call your neighbor who barely speaks English?
 3. Would you call your neighbor who hates your guts?
 4. Would you call your neighbor, an auto mechanic with a tow truck, yet who is liable to stop in for a beer along the way and who may lose track of time?
 5. No, no, no! You call 911 to get someone who is able, who is willing to help, and who is reliable. You call upon one in whom you are sure you can trust.
- iii. The word about Christ is that He is able, He is willing, and He is altogether trustworthy. “And in his name shall the Gentiles trust” (Matthew 12:21) for “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” We must

believe this word about Christ before we will call upon His name. And those who do not believe in Him will not call upon Him to be saved. If you do not believe in Him, as Jesus said, “ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

b. and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

- i. This rhetorical question demands the simple answer, “they can’t.” No one can believe in someone about whom they’ve never heard. It doesn’t even make sense to suggest it. Men must hear about Christ before they can believe in Him. This seems simple and obvious.
- ii. Nevertheless, there is a question that we sometimes hear in evangelism – maybe you’ve heard it or asked it yourself. Normally, I think it is posed as a sort of deflecting objection to the gospel – “what about those who have never heard?” It is generally a distraction from the fact that whoever considers this question has heard the gospel and will be judged in that light. I usually answer it with the simple faith of Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen 18:25) So, bring it back to the gospel. What will you do with the light you’ve been given? What say you of Christ? Whose Son is He?”
- iii. The main false view to be considered is called “inclusivism,” which is the idea that people may be saved even if they have never heard the gospel and don’t know anything about Christ. This view appeals to the emotions but is impossible to defend from Scripture. In addition to being taught by men like John Sanders, the Roman Catholic church has also adopted an inclusivist view. In fact, though, this is terrible theology because, “this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). But let’s take a quick look.
 1. Both the so-called *Lumen Gentium* (*promulgated* by Pope Paul VI in 1964), and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*promulgated* by Pope John Paul II in 1992) affirm that “Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience - those too may achieve eternal salvation.”
 - a. Wow! This is at best semi-Pelagianism, a compromise with Pelagianism, the antithesis of Christianity. If a little leaven leavens the whole lump, then what about this lump of leaven to which is added a little flour.
 - b. What does “no fault of *their own*” mean? Shouldn’t *one* be so troubled by *his* conscience over the least sin to travel over land and sea to seek out how one may be reconciled with the Holy God? If a man is not willing to seek the Lord with his whole heart, he cannot be said to have no fault in his failure. Whose fault else? It is *each man’s own fault when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed* (James 1:14). It is always our own heart which is at fault because the heart is naturally self-serving and self-deluding.

- c. As Paul wrote in Romans 3, There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no, not one. (Romans 3:11-12)
- d. Calvin wrote that “Man’s mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God. [...] Therefore, the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth.” (I.xi.8)
- e. Furthermore, though the RC doctrine mentions grace, they confuse common grace with special grace. Truly, the goodness of God ought to lead men to repentance. But it does not because that which is born of the flesh is flesh and they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Being dead in trespasses and sins they are alienated from the life of God and are, by nature, children of wrath, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. For the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.
- f. This RC doctrine is contrary to Scripture which states that “by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). We are saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth (2 Th 2:13).
- g. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). Indeed, in the very passage before us, “**how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?**” (Romans 10:14) – all this points out the impossibility of inclusivism.

2. Exclusivist

- a. Therefore, the Scriptures confirm that an explicit belief in the Christ of the gospel is essential for salvation. All men suppress the knowledge of God and have fallen short of God’s glory. All men are on their way to hell unless God, by His grace, calls them both externally with the gospel and inwardly with the grace of regeneration. We understand that the inward effectual call works with the outward call and that God ordinarily works through the means of preaching the gospel to call men to Himself.
- b. The fact that so many depart this life without having heard the clear sound of the gospel ought to inflame us to zealous evangelism rather than leading us to pervert and downgrade our theology in order to excuse our miserable indolence.

- c. Certainly, the false doctrine of inclusivism is a device of Satan to suppress the proclamation of the gospel, to set the church back on her heels, to excuse the complacency in the work! I just present this so that we won't be ignorant of his devices but to press on in the mission more zealously.

c. and how shall they hear without a preacher?

- i. This rhetorical question also demands the simple answer, "they can't." How can anyone hear without a preacher? Ultimately, we understand that preachers must preach from the written Word of God, and so it also opens up a couple areas of controversy.
- ii. Inclusivism must hold that general revelation is sufficient for salvation since they assert salvation without knowledge of Christ. But, as Calvin says, "it appears that if men were taught only by nature, they would hold to nothing certain or solid or clear-cut, but would be so tied to confused principles as to worship an unknown god." How can anyone believe in an unknown god?
- iii. The second issue regards the source of the revelation. The question is debated in our day as to whether there are on-going prophetic revelations given to men. The question is normally raised by charismatics and Pentecostals who believe in on-going spiritual gifts, especially tongues and prophecy. These debates can become "colorful", but we ought to let the Scriptures to speak for themselves, as John writes at the close of the NT canon, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Rev 22:18).
- iv. And so, let's be thankful for the Word of God and rejoice in the preachers whom God has planted among us. These are the men who preach Christ crucified, not the doctrines of men. We rejoice in those who go out on the streets to share the gospel with the lost. We rejoice in everyone who shares a word glorifying to Christ with his neighbor. Let us do so more and more with great boldness.
- v. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest. (Matt 9:38)

III. The Sending – How Beautiful are the Feet!

(15) And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

Here is some interesting background to this verse: The story of David and his son Absalom is one of the most poignant stories in the Bible, in 2 Samuel 13 – 19. To put it mildly, David had some very ugly family problems which he sadly brought upon himself. In this tragic story, King David's son Absalom tried to overthrow his kingdom and usurp the throne. But it ended tragically for him, in spite of David's wish that he be spared. However, when he was killed, the word had to be sent back to the king. And so we read –

Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushi bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. [...] And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, if he be alone, there is tidings in

his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. ... And, behold, Cushite came; and Cushite said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. (2 Samuel 18:21, 24-25, 31 KJV)

What we see in this account is the idea behind the feet on the mountains. The messenger Cushite was sent by Joab to deliver the message of his own eyewitness account, "Go, tell ... what thou hast seen." And because he is alone, it is understood that he brings good news, "if he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth." So, how beautiful are his feet upon the mountains – *because he brings glad tidings of good things*, "for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee."

With this as the picture in our minds, we next observe that the Romans 10:15 echoes two different contexts in the OT, Nahum 1:15 and Isaiah 52:7. These two OT references add a depth of significance to Romans 10 because Isaiah 52:7 is itself an echo of the oracle given by Nahum promising the defeat of Nineveh and the Assyrians (cf. Commentary on the NT Use of the OT, Beale and Carson, pp. 660-661). So, we will examine them in temporal order, beginning with Nahum and then on to Isaiah, to appreciate the weighty significance which is brilliantly leveraged by Paul.

a. Nahum 1:15

- i. The prophet Nahum wrote concerning the burden of Nineveh. Jonah had been sent to Nineveh about 150 years prior to Nahum and they had repented at the preaching of Jonah, and God had relented into his judgement. But, in the interim, the Assyrian empire had grown, and Sennacherib had built Nineveh into a truly magnificent city with a massive palace called "the palace without a rival." Sennacherib filled the city with very great wealth from the spoils of war and an even greater wickedness.
- ii. Sennacherib's arrogance is highlighted in how he defied and blasphemed the Living God during the reign of Hezekiah. In Hezekiah's 14th year, Sennacherib sent his army against Jerusalem with the words in the mouth of his Rabshekah, his chief cupbearer saying, "Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?" (2 Kings 18:33) Thus, he blasphemed the Living God and equated Him with the idols of the nations. His assertion, "if the gods of the other peoples did not save them, then neither will your God save you" is a dreadful mental error – Sennacherib said, "Who are they among all the gods of the countries that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (2 Kings 18:35)
- iii. But God had foretold all this to Isaiah, as we read in Isaiah chapter 10, one of the most glorious revelations of God's absolute sovereignty in all of Scripture.
 1. "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6 KJV).
 2. The Rabshekah's argument is exactly as prophesied in v. 11 of Isaiah 10, "Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to

Jerusalem and her idols?” But God’s reply is devastating – should “the rod [...] shake itself against him that lifts it up?” (Isaiah 10:15)

3. God’s absolute sovereignty over men does not in any way excuse the wickedness of men’s hearts – though God wields men like rods according to His good pleasure, nonetheless we all, each of us, freely choose and are wholly responsible for the wickedness of our hearts and our subsequent actions. This is a mystery -- we are free agents whom God wields like rods – but if we continue in wickedness, God will hold us responsible, as he held Sennacherib responsible.
4. In brilliant, poetic language, Isaiah prophesies the coming devastation of the Assyrian army – “And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his [Sennacherib’s] thorns and his briars in one day;” (Isaiah 10:17) and, as Nahum prophesied, “For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry” (Nahum 1:10).
5. And, as we read in 2 Kings 19, the LORD said, “I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 -- and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses (2 Kings 19:34-35).
6. So, Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. (Isaiah 37:37 KJV)
7. This is an amazing historical event for which historians have struggled to come up with explanations. How can they explain the Angel of the Lord slaying 185,000 men in a single night? They have no way to explain it! Nevertheless, it is clear to historians that Sennacherib sent his army against Jerusalem, but that his army utterly failed to even make a siege against Jerusalem. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote that "there swarmed by night upon [the Assyrians] mice of the fields" in a very creative attempt to provide a natural explanation of what happened to them in the middle of the night. Herodotus wrote that “great numbers [of the Assyrians] fell.”
 - a. First, let’s be thankful for the Word of God because, without Divine revelation, we would be left in the dark with no explanation for Sennacherib’s inexplicable failure to even mount an attack against the city.
 - i. But now we know that he was the rod of God’s anger which turned to exalted itself against the one who wields it,
 - ii. God foretold what was going to happen in glorious detail in high poetry. Let us stand in awe of the wondrous God who rules and reigns!

- iii. God fulfilled His word against Assyria – the army was devoured as stubble fully dry. Let us rejoice in the wondrous God who triumphs gloriously over His enemies.
 - b. Second, let's also be thankful for the witness of secular historians like Herodotus who, even by their foolishness, testify to the fact that something devastating happened to the Assyrian army.
 - 8. Now, lest we overlook the obvious, and lose track of where we are – this is incredibly good news for God's people!!! Hezekiah and the other men in Jerusalem had been in deep distress over the impending siege of Jerusalem. Yet Hezekiah chose to trust in the LORD and the LORD delivered him, as we just read, for the sake of His own Holy Name. This is tremendously good news for God's people!! Because the people of Jerusalem did not at all deserve God's favor, yet it was shown to them anyway, in God's mercy. This is why Nahum says
 - a. Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! (Nahum 1:15 KJV)
 - b. Surely a spy came across the bodies early in the morning, as it says, there they were, all dead – 185,000 corpses. And so, they went or sent someone to run with the news to Jerusalem. And how beautiful upon the mountains were the feet of him who brought such glorious news!
 - iv. Here is a pretty picture of salvation by grace through the victory of Christ, who “having spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in His death” (Colossians 2:15). The Lamb of God spoke of His astonishing victory over our enemies by bearing our sins in His own body on the tree, when He says, “I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment” (Isaiah 63:3 KJV). Because “lo, in the midst of the throne [...] stood a Lamb as it had been slain” Nahum could write, “The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him” (Nahum 1:7) And how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet that bring this good news to men!

b. Isaiah 52:7

Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! (Isaiah 52:6-7 KJV)

- i. Note that in Isaiah, who here echoes Nahum, the singular is used “the feet of him” –

1. truly it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who brought the good news to us. “For he is our peace ... and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh” (Eph 2:14,17).
 2. This is “the word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)” (Acts 10:36 KJV).
 3. Truly “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17) as He said, “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63)
 4. How beautiful were the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ on the mountains – who published salvation by grace alone through faith alone and reconciliation with God through His own precious blood. Never have the feet of anyone ever been more beautiful.
- ii. Back in Romans 10, Paul uses the plural “the feet of them” when he writes, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace” so we have to understand that this work of the proclamation of the gospel is for all of us, as we each discover the good news for ourselves, and know that we are sent to spread it – our feet become beautiful on the mountains. Imagine yourself a spy who snuck out and discovered the Assyrians army, all dead. You would not wait even one instant – you would run to tell the news of God’s extraordinary victory over the enemy. This sort of news will burst you if you do not tell it. So, run and tell the story!

IV. But who hath believed our report?

(16) But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

- a. In this verse, Paul returns to the central question about the Jews. The words “not all” in “not all obeyed” might lead one to believe that most did believe, however the second part “Who hath believed our report?” makes it clear that those who believed were very few.
- b. The word for ‘report’ in “Who hath believed our report?” v.16 is the same exact word in the Greek as the word for ‘hearing’ in v. 17. The report is “the gospel of peace, and the glad tidings of good things” and that is what is heard as well.
- c. The Apostle quotes from Isaiah 53:1, the preamble to the glorious prophecy of the sin-bearing Suffering Servant. The idea of that verse is that there can be no belief without prior divine revelation; on the basis of human observation alone, there is no discernment of who the Servant really is” (Motyer). And the report is specifically about the sin-bearing Substitute – the Suffering Servant who bears sin vicariously is, as is clearly obvious to Christians, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- d. The report, Paul says elsewhere, is of “Christ crucified, which is unto the Jews a stumbling block.” Jesus Christ is “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1 Peter 2:8).

V. The Necessity of Preaching Christ Crucified

(17) So then, faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

- a. Given that 'hearing' in this verse is the exact same Greek word for 'report' in the previous verse, the hearing is of the report about Christ, explicit in Isaiah 53 of the vicarious atonement. It seems impossible not to see Christ in Isaiah 53!
- b. Nevertheless, a Jewish Rabbi in the middle ages, around 1100 AD, wrote a highly influential and authoritative commentary among the Jews. On Isaiah 53:3, "He is despised and rejected of men" Rashi says, "So is the custom of this prophet: he mentions all Israel as one man" and so identifies the Suffering Servant as national Israel.
- c. On verse 6, "all we like sheep have gone astray", Rashi comments, "here it is revealed that all the heathen nations had erred" – because, naturally, if Israel is the Suffering Servant" then it must be the heathen nations for which Israel bears punishment. This is, needless to say, the common explanation of the Jews to this day.
- d. As Paul wrote in Romans 11, "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25). The message is what it is and cannot be changed or watered down. As we've already noted, Paul preached "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor 1:23); and "determined not to know anything among [them], [except] Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). And to the Galatians he wrote that "Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth as having been crucified among you?" (Gal 3:1)
- e. This passage in Romans 10 sets forth Christ crucified – by the brilliant use of several OT references -- as the heart and soul of the preaching of the gospel. So, let us each boldly proclaim Christ as He is the Word of reconciliation committed unto us. We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech [men] by us: we [plead with men] in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).
- f. So, those who are in Christ are all called to become the beautiful feet on the mountains to some poor, lost sinner. Think of the wonderful news that Christ has crushed your mortal enemies – sin and death – in His death on the cross and He has set you free from the bondage of fear. May your feet be beautiful on the mountains as you preach peace and bring glad tidings of good things to the people that you meet!