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WHY SOME ARE LOST AND SOME ARE SAVED

Romans 10:16-21

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Romans Lesson 66

Why Some are Lost and Some are Saved Romans 10:16-21

Perhaps you've seen the TV commercial where some people from the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes knock on someone's door to tell him that he has just won \$5 million. The winner is delirious with joy, leaping in the air, crying, laughing, and hardly believing that this could be true.

But imagine that when the folks from Publisher's Clearinghouse tell the guy that he's won \$5 million, he pulls out a gun and says, "Get off my property or I'll blow your brains out!" "What? But, sir, you don't understand. We're giving you good news! You've just won a fortune!" But he belligerently snarls, "I said, 'Get off my property now!'"

That's the contrast between Romans 10:15 & 16. In verse 15 we read (citing Isa. 52:7), "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" The good news is the message of salvation. Even though you've sinned against the holy God and deserve His judgment, He offers a complete pardon to anyone who will receive it. As verse 13 says, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." But in verse 16 we read, "However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says [citing Isa. 53:1], 'Lord, who has believed our report?'"

It's staggering! God sends messengers with the best news in the world, that God is ready to pardon any sinner who will receive His offer of grace and kindness. Not only that, but God paid a great price to provide this pardon. As Isaiah 53 goes on to reveal, He sent His Messiah, the suffering servant, who would be "pierced through for our transgressions," and "crushed for our iniquities." "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (53:5, 6). But a suffering servant didn't fit with Israel's idea of a Messiah. They wanted a conquering king to defeat all their enemies and provide a comfy life for them. They didn't like all this talk about them being sinners who needed a Savior to die in their place. So they slammed the door on the best news in the world.

In Romans 10, Paul is still dealing with the subject that caused him great sorrow and unceasing grief (9:2), namely, why are most of the Jews rejecting Jesus as their Savior? He is expounding on what he wrote in 9:30-33, where he explains that the Jews were rejecting Christ because they were pursuing righteousness by works. But the Gentiles, who had not even been pursuing God, were being saved because they welcomed Christ by faith.

He builds his case from the Old Testament, citing Scripture in 10:16, 18, 19, 20, and 21. He wants to show that the Jews' rejection of Christ, as well as the Gentiles' reception of Him, should not be surprising, since it was predicted centuries before in the Scriptures. He's explaining why some people are lost and some are saved:

Because of disobedient, hard hearts, many do not believe the gospel and are lost; because of God's sovereign grace, others believe the gospel and are saved.

When the good news is preached, some hear it, believe it, and call upon the Lord to save them (10:14). But sadly, others stumble over the stumbling stone (9:32), reject Jesus Christ, and head toward eternal judgment.

What makes the difference? I'm going to state what the Bible plainly teaches, although I cannot explain how both statements are true: *If someone is saved, it is totally due to God choosing him before the foundation of the world, effectually calling him to Christ, and saving him by His grace alone* (Rom. 8:30; 9:11-23). *If someone is lost, he is totally responsible for his disobedient, hard heart that rejects God's grace* (10:21; Prov. 1:24). In other words, if you believe in Christ, it is only because God had mercy on you. If He had not intervened, you would still be in your sins, headed for eternal judgment. But if you do not believe in Christ and reject His gracious offer of salvation, you are completely to blame. You cannot blame God for not choosing you. Your sinful unbelief is totally your own fault.

C. H. Spurgeon put it (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* [Pilgrim Publications], 4:337): "That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment." He goes on to say that these two truths

will be welded into one in eternity, when we see that both flow from God's throne.

1. Because of disobedient, hard hearts, many do not believe the gospel and are lost.

Paul jumps back and forth in these verses between unbelief (10:16), belief (10:17), unbelief (10:18, 19), belief (10:20), and unbelief (10:21). First we'll look at the verses dealing with unbelief and then we'll look at those that describe faith in Christ.

- A. Not obeying the gospel is the same as not believing the gospel (10:16).

Romans 10:16: "However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" *They* refers to the Jews, as verses 19 & 21 specify. By extension, it applies also to unbelieving Gentiles, but Paul's focus here is on the question of why most of the Jews were rejecting Christ. When Paul says that "not all" heeded the good news, he is using understatement to mean, "most" did not obey the gospel.

Heed means to submit to or obey (Paul used this word in Rom. 6:12, 16, & 17). Since Paul goes on to cite Isaiah 53:1, "Lord, who has *believed* our report?" why doesn't he say, "However, they did not all *believe* the good news"? Why does he say, "They did not all *heed* [obey] the good news"? Is he teaching salvation by works?

Of course not! He has just indicted the Jews because they pursued righteousness by works and not by faith (9:32). Rather, Paul understood and taught the same thing that James taught (James 2:14-26), that genuine faith by its very nature *always* results in good works. If someone claims to have faith, but lives in disobedience to God, his claim is false. Genuine saving faith is the root that necessarily bears the fruit of godliness. Many will claim, "Lord, Lord," but they do not obey Jesus as Lord. He will condemn these hypocrites on judgment day (Matt. 7:21-23). Thus Paul begins and ends Romans (1:5; 16:26) talking about "the obedience of faith." Or, as 1 John 2:3 explains, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments."

Also, it's important to realize that the gospel does not come to us as a nice suggestion that you may want to consider. It comes to us as a command from God Himself. Mark 1:15 summarizes Jesus'

message: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." *Repent* and *believe* are commands. Or, as Paul told the Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:30-31), "God is now declaring to men that all *people* everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

So if you have not repented of your sins, believed in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and submitted to Him as your Lord, you are in disobedience to the God who is the Judge of the living and the dead. If you were to die in this state of rebellion against God, you would face His eternal judgment.

B. Many hear the gospel but do not respond with faith and obedience (10:18).

Skipping 10:17 for a moment, where Paul twice mentions "hearing," he goes on to respond to a hypothetical objection (that stems from 10:14 & 17) that perhaps Israel has not heard. Romans 10:18 says, "But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; 'THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.'" Paul cites Psalm 19:4 to show that the Jews have heard the good news.

But this raises two problems. Psalm 19:1-6 extols God's glory through creation (natural revelation), whereas 19:7-11 goes on to extol God's Word (special revelation). The first problem is: How does a verse about God's revelation through creation demonstrate that Israel has heard the gospel, since creation doesn't proclaim the gospel? Is Paul using that text out of context to prove what it does not say? Most commentators explain this by saying that Paul is using an analogy. Just as God's natural revelation proclaims His glory to all the earth, so now the gospel has been proclaimed over all the earth, especially with reference to the Jews (Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], pp. 665-666).

I agree, but I would go a bit further and suggest that Paul may have used this verse on natural revelation to say that if people ignore God's general revelation of His glory through His creation, then they will be prone to ignore His special revelation through the preaching of the gospel. (We saw this in Romans 1:18-23.)

To apply this to our times, if people deny God by believing the myth of evolution, they are not going to be inclined to submit to Jesus as Savior and Lord. Evolution is the most preposterous myth ever foisted on the human race. Otherwise intelligent people latch onto it because it gives them a supposed escape from the uncomfortable truth that hits you between the eyes in the first verse of the Bible (Gen. 1:1), "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." If that verse is true—and the Bible doesn't put it out there as a theory to be debated or discussed—then God is God and you are not God! It means that you had better get reconciled to this Almighty Creator before you meet Him in judgment!

But, if Paul is using Psalm 19 as an analogy, to say that just as the creation universally proclaims God's glory, so the gospel has now been universally proclaimed, then there is a second problem: How does this text establish that *all* the Jews have heard the gospel? Surely there were many Jews who had not yet heard about Christ. Even Paul knew that not everyone had heard, or he wouldn't be trying to go to Spain to proclaim the gospel there (Rom. 15:24, 28).

Probably Paul was speaking generally and with some hyperbole. In other words, the gospel has been proclaimed sufficiently among even the Gentile world to such an extent that almost all of the Jews have heard the message. (Paul uses the same kind of generalization and hyperbole in Colossians 1:6, 23.) It would be the same as if I said that everyone who speaks English has heard the gospel. Conceivably, there may be some English speakers who have not heard, but it would be their own fault. The gospel has been so widely proclaimed in English through so many different media for such a long time that any English speakers who have not heard must be deliberately avoiding it.

So Paul is saying that the problem with the Jews' widespread rejection of the gospel was not that they had not heard the message. The problem was that they had rejected the message because they loved their own sin. Like the Gentiles, they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (1:18). Their pride caused them to try to establish their own righteousness, rather than to subject themselves to God's righteousness (10:3).

When you share the gospel, you often will hear the objection, "But what about people who have never heard? Will God judge the person who lived 500 years ago in Afghanistan, who lived and died without hearing about Jesus?" The way to respond is to ask, "If I can resolve that difficulty, are you saying that you would repent of your sins and believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord?" Almost certainly the person will answer, "Well, there are a lot of other questions, too!" In other words, this is just a smokescreen so that he can dodge the issue of his own sin before the holy God. You can press him by saying, "Well, you have heard the gospel and God will hold you accountable for the light that you have received." And that applies to *you!* You have heard the gospel. Have you responded with obedient faith?

- C. Many know God's way of salvation, but they still reject the gospel (10:19).

Paul raises and responds to another hypothetical objection by citing Deuteronomy 32:21 (10:19), followed by Isaiah 65:1-2 (10:20-21). He is providing witnesses from the Law and the prophets to build his case that the Jews were responsible for their sin and unbelief. Romans 10:19: "But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, 'I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU.'"

In the context, Moses predicted Israel's apostasy through idolatry. The full verse reads (Deut. 32:21), "They have made Me jealous with what is not God; They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation." Paul is applying this to the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles, which he will expand on in 11:11-14. Just as Israel provoked God to jealousy and anger by their idolatry, so God will provoke Israel to repentance and faith when they jealously see those whom they would despise as being a "no-nation" or "a foolish nation" coming to know God. This means that in His grace, God is not through with Israel, in spite of her unbelief and sin (Romans 11 develops this theme).

What is it that Israel did not know? In verses 19 & 20 it is that the gospel would go to the despised Gentiles. In verse 21, it is that

most of the Jews would reject the gospel in spite of God's kindness and patience. Going back to verses 11 & 13, it is the gospel itself. All of these verses are quotes from the Old Testament, which shows that Israel should have known all of these things through reading their own Scripture. Paul wasn't making them up.

But why did Israel not see these things? Why were they blind to the plain teaching of the Scriptures? Martyn Lloyd-Jones (*Romans: Saving Faith* [Zondervan], pp. 372-374) observes that the quotes Paul picked hit the Jews with three of their national sins that blocked them from the gospel. First, they were proud nationally: "We alone are God's chosen people!" So God provokes them by those who are not a nation. Second, they were proud of their knowledge of the Scriptures (John 5:39): "We alone have God's law!" So God provokes them to anger by those who are a nation without understanding. Third, the Jews were relying on their works to gain righteousness (9:31-32; 10:3). So God confounds them by saving those who didn't even seek Him (10:20).

We can apply this by asking ourselves, "What national or cultural tendencies may be blocking us or those we share the gospel with from repentance and faith?" We Americans are self-reliant people, but to be saved we must cease believing in ourselves and cast ourselves upon God's mercy. We're a materialistic people, but to be saved, we must give up our pursuit of the American dream, and seek first God's kingdom and righteousness. We're a hard-working people who demand equitable pay for proper work. But to be justified by faith, we must stop working and believe in Him who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5).

D. Those who reject the gospel reject God's patient love and are accountable for their disobedient, hard hearts (10:21).

Romans 10:21: "But as for Israel He says, 'ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.'" This verse deserves an entire sermon, but I can only comment briefly. It pictures God as the rejected lover. He continually reaches out towards sinners whom He loves, but they reject Him with disobedient, hardened hearts. Unbelief is seldom, if ever, an intellectual problem. Rather, unbelief almost always stems from a disobedient, hardened heart that loves sin more than it loves God.

Thus, those who reject the gospel cannot blame God for not choosing them. They are fully responsible for their own damnation. But I must briefly touch on the other side:

2. Because of God's sovereign grace, others believe the gospel and are saved.
 - A. Those who believe were not seeking God or asking for Him, but He graciously revealed Himself to them (10:20).

Romans 10:20: "And Isaiah is very bold and says, 'I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.'" Most commentators think that in its context, Isaiah 65:1 refers to God's allowing Himself to be found by Jews who were not seeking Him, but by way of analogy, Paul here applies it to the Gentiles. This ties back into Romans 9:30, "That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith."

By Isaiah's boldness, Paul is referring to the astonishing nature of God's grace. He pursues and saves those who were not seeking after Him, but were content in their pagan ways! This shows that salvation is not due to a good streak in sinners, but totally to God's sovereign grace. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ today, it is not because it was originally your idea to seek Him and find Him. Rather, He intervened in your life to reveal Himself to you. His Spirit convicted you of sin and showed your need for the Savior. He moved in your heart to respond in faith to the gospel.

- B. Those who believe heard the gospel and responded with faith because God graciously opened their ears to hear (10:17).

Romans 10:17: "So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Some manuscripts read "God" instead of "Christ," but "Christ" is the better attested reading. This verse seems out of context here, but it is probably a brief summary of verses 14-16 before Paul moves on to focus on the Jews' unbelief.

"Hearing" is the same Greek word translated "report" in 10:15, and could refer to the message heard. Or, it can refer to the act of hearing. It doesn't make much difference. Paul's point is that people can't believe something that they have never heard (10:14).

The message that they must hear is the word of Christ, which is the gospel. So faith comes from hearing the gospel preached.

But, as we all know, not all who hear the gospel preached respond in faith. The quote from Isaiah (Rom. 10:16), plus the ministries of all the prophets, of Paul, and even of the Lord Jesus Himself, show that many hear the good news but reject it.

So what makes the difference? Why do some hear and believe, while others hear and reject the message and sometimes attack the messenger? In John 8:43 Jesus asked His hostile Jewish listeners, "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word." They heard the sound of Jesus' words, but they were incapable of hearing in the sense of understanding and obeying Jesus' words, because as He went on to say, they were of their father, the devil.

Jesus explained (John 5:25), "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Or, as Acts 16:14 explains, as Paul spoke the gospel to the Jewish women who gathered by the river in Philippi, "the Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." That's the difference. Jesus speaks the life-giving word and the spiritually dead come to life. Paul speaks the gospel and the Lord opens hearts to respond. If people are saved, it is because of God's sovereign grace. If they are lost, it is because of the hardness of their disobedient hearts.

Conclusion

So what is your response to the greatest news in the world? That news is *not* that you have just won the Publisher's Clearing-house Sweepstakes! It is that God has sent the Savior to die for your sins. If you will believe in Him, He gives you eternal life as a free gift. If you receive that good news, you will praise God who opened your heart to the truth. If you reject the news, you have no one to blame but yourself.

Application Questions

1. How do we find the balance between presenting the gospel in a winsome way and yet not dulling the offense of the cross?
2. Some say that if you preach the necessity of repentance and obedience to Christ as Lord, you are adding works to faith. Your response? What Scriptures would you use?
3. I mentioned several national sins that may keep us from welcoming the good news. Can you think of any others?
4. What Scriptures teach (in the same context) that God is sovereign and yet at the same time, people are responsible?

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