

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

Number: 597

Verses: Romans 10:18-21

Topic: But... Have They Not Heard?

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Romans 10:18-21 MKJV *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes indeed, their voice went out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. (19) But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses says, "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you." (20) But Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became known to those who did not ask after Me." (21) But to Israel He says, "All day long I have stretched forth My hands to a disobeying and gainsaying people."*

The question that started off this whole section since the beginning of Romans chapter 9 is the question of the lack of salvation of the Jews - which leads Paul to discuss the question of the efficacy of the gospel. It looks as if "the Word of God has failed" (Romans 9:6). So this is the burning question: *Does the unbelief of the Jews indicate that the word of God has been ineffective in producing salvation?* In other words has the word of God "returned void" ?

Isaiah 55:10-11 MKJV *For as the rain comes down, and the snow from the heavens, and does not return there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring out and bud, and give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; (11) so shall My Word be, which goes out of My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall certainly do what I sent it to do.*

So Paul goes through a long series of arguments to show that God's Word has not been ineffective and useless.

1. Not all who are of Israel are "the true Israel" but only a holy remnant called "the children of promise" (Romans 9:1-8)
2. Salvation is not an automatic entitlement of the Jews but is God's covenant initiative and choice and He has mercy on whom He has mercy and compassion of whom He has compassion. (Romans 9:9-18)
3. God is the Potter and Israel has no right to question His working or impugn the effectiveness of His Word. (Romans 9:19-26)
4. Those called of God are extracted as a remnant out of all nations, some are saved among the Jews and some are saved from among the Gentiles (Romans 9:24-29)
5. Israel did not obtain God's righteousness of faith because they sought their own righteousness by works (Romans 9:30-10:8)
6. Israel was not saved because it did not believe, and it did not believe because it refused to "hear" the Word of God (Romans 10:9-17)
7. Therefore the problem is not with the word of God but with those who refuse to listen to it and believe it!

The only refuge left by which Israel can defend its unbelief is to say "but we never heard in the first place - so how can we be blamed for not believing?" So Paul puts the question as

a rhetorical device and then convincingly answers it:

Romans 10:18 MKJV *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes indeed, their voice went out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

The last part of this verse is a quote from Psalm 19 and refers to the revelation of God that is contained in nature - and in particular in the Heavens:

Psalms 19:1-4 MKJV *To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the expanse proclaims His handiwork. (2) Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. (3) There is no speech nor are there words; their voice is not heard. (4) Their line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun,*

There is a natural feeling for God we get when we observe the night sky or ponder the works of God in nature. This natural sense of awe is God speaking to us in our inner self and in fact it is so loud and clear that sinful mankind has had to actively repress it:

Romans 1:18-23 MKJV *For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because the thing which may be known of God is clearly revealed within them, for God revealed it to them. (20) For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being realized by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, for them to be without excuse. (21) Because, knowing God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were thankful. But they became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools (23) and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things.*

Note the emphasis Paul puts on this clarity of natural revelation: "clearly revealed with them", "for God clearly revealed it to them", "the unseen things...are clearly seen..even His eternal power and Godhead", "for them to be without excuse". There is no excuse for anyone because God testifies to use both in nature and within our souls, about His eternal power and Godhead. Revelation calls this the "eternal gospel" which will be preached in Tribulation times when all other access to the gospel seems to have been prevented:

Revelation 14:6-7 MKJV *And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those dwelling on the earth, even to every nation and kindred and tongue and people, (7) saying with a great voice, Fear God and give glory to Him! For the hour of His judgment has come. And worship Him who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.*

All people everywhere are called to respond to God's self-revelation in nature and in their conscience and to: "Worship Him who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." and to refrain from idolatrous worship of the works of their hands. There is enough light available for a spiritually sensitive person to have faith in God and forsake idols (as Abraham did without a Bible, a church or any other help). The answer to the question "But what about the people in the jungle who have never heard of Jesus" is that God has revealed Himself through nature and in their conscience.

It seems that it is somehow possible that they can follow God in an Abrahamic fashion and worship the one true Creator God with reverence and awe and at least believe the 'eternal gospel' proclaimed by the angel.

I am *not* taking a 'universalist' position here and saying that all are saved, nor am I saying that missionary work is not necessary. Jesus clearly tells us that the Harvest requires laborers (Matthew 9:37,38). However I am saying that enough light is available in nature for an honest seeker to connect to God by faith as Abraham did. Paul makes that very clear in Romans 1 as we saw above. Mankind is "without excuse", because they have all had the gospel proclaimed to them "by the things that are made" and it is "clearly revealed within them" by God's inner work in each sensitized human conscience. No one will be able to stand before the throne and say " I had no idea that there was a Creator God that I was supposed to worship".

Back to the Jews.. Paul is saying that the Jews had every chance to believe and simply chose not to do so! Paul then turns to the difference in response between the Jews (who did not believe) and the Gentiles (who believed in large numbers). He uses three different Old Testament quotes to show God's purposes in this:

1. God was using the Gentiles to make Israel spiritually jealous (Romans 10:19); and even in their unbelief God was still trying to reach them by using the faith of the Gentiles to make them jealous so they might repent. (Romans 11:11-14)
2. God was able to save even those who did not seek Him and to make Himself known to those who did not ask after Him – such as the Gentiles. (Romans 10:20)
3. God had given Israel plenty of chances and 'all day long' had stretched out His hands to a stubborn and disobedient people (Romans 10:21)

So the Israelites were without excuse. God had done everything to help them understand, and God was still trying to reach them (via the Gentiles) yet they were hardening their hearts and still not believing. The word of God had *not* failed. The failure was with the sinful human heart that 'suppressed the truth in unrighteousness' (Romans 1:18).

Questions about the efficacy of the gospel such as: "Why are not all the folk in so-called Christian nations saved?" Or "Why is the church growing so fast in the global South and dying out in Europe?" Or even "Why isn't the whole world saved by now?" all boil down to the following basic answer:

The gospel is still powerful to save all who call upon the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13) and the gospel has gone out to the ends of the world (Romans 10:18) but it has not often encountered faith, instead it has often encountered unbelief.

The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way:

Hebrews 4:1-2 MKJV *Therefore, a promise being left to enter into His rest, let us fear lest any of you should seem to come short of it. (2) For also we have had the gospel preached, as well as them. But the Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*

Blessings,

John Edmiston (johnd@aibi.ph)

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