

Romans
Human Responsibility (Part 7)
Romans 9:30-10:21
April 28, 2019
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Romans 10. Now let me just warn you to put on your seat belts because this morning we're going to cover as many verses as we've ever covered in our four plus year study of the book of Romans, six verses. So here we go, Romans 10.

We are studying Paul's explanation of why it is that so few Jewish people had come to embrace their Messiah. He gives several answers in chapters 9 through 11 of Romans. The first answer we looked at together is the answer of divine election. The second answer is where we find ourselves, and its human responsibility. The second answer begins in chapter 9 verse 30 and runs through the end of chapter 10. His point here is, when people hear the gospel but don't believe in Christ, don't believe the gospel message, they are personally responsible. They can't blame divine election. They are personally responsible for that rejection.

Now Paul's focus in these chapters is on why more of the Jewish people didn't believe, but the application is far broader than that. In fact, it's universal. What Paul teaches here applies to everyone who hears the gospel but doesn't believe the gospel. In fact, if you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, you've heard the gospel. You're going to find yourself in this passage because this is Paul addressing your specific situation.

Now, what are the primary factors that contribute to the human responsibility for not believing the gospel when we hear it, when we're exposed to it? We've already looked at a couple of them, but let me just remind you. First of all, a factor in that human responsibility is a failure to understand the purpose of God's law. The end of chapter 9, verses 30 to 33, Paul says the Jewish people misunderstood God's law. They saw God's law as a way to build their own self-righteousness and make themselves acceptable before God. A lot of religious people do that who have some relationship to the God of the Bible, to the Bible itself. They wrongly conclude that the law of God is there to establish our own righteousness by our own efforts. Rather, it's there, as we learned, to show us our spiritual bankruptcy, to bring us to the place where, as Galatians 3 says, we're driven to Christ, who Paul describes at the end of chapter 9 as the cornerstone against which our lives and everything is to be shaped and measured.

A second factor that contributes to human responsibility for not believing the gospel, we've looked at this as well together, is an unwillingness to accept salvation by faith alone. We saw this in the first 15 verses of chapter 10. You find people who are so committed to that idea that they can earn their own way into God's favor through their keeping of God's law, that they simply refuse to receive God's gift of righteousness, the righteousness that Paul describes in the early verses of chapter 10 as "the righteousness based on faith," that is, based on the work of

Christ but which is received by faith alone. They simply refuse to do so, an unwillingness to accept God's way because the other way, the way of works, appeals to our pride.

Now today we come to a third factor that contributes to human responsibility, let's call it a refusal to believe and obey the message of the gospel, a refusal to believe and obey the message of the gospel. This is really the focus of the last part of this section on human responsibility. It begins in verse 16 of chapter 10, it runs down through the end of the chapter. Let's read it together, Romans 10 beginning in verse 16.

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

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."

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."

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."

But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS
TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

Now the theme of these verses is quite clear, it's simply this, those who hear the gospel are personally responsible for refusing to believe and obey its message, those who hear the gospel are personally responsible for their refusal to believe and obey its message.

Now Paul begins to explain this refusal to us by identifying what we'll call in verses 16 and 17, the core problem, the core problem. Notice verse 16, "However, they did not all heed the good news." Now notice, first of all, "not all," that is an intentional understatement. He's talking, by the way, the they here is the Jewish people, he's later going to talk about Israel, he's going to name them by name later in this passage, but he says, "not all," an intentional understatement. In the context of this passage it's clear that he means most of the Jewish people would reject the gospel and only a remnant would be saved.

Go back to chapter 9 verse 6, as he begins this whole idea he says, “it is not as though the word of God has failed,” it’s not like God’s promises to Israel have somehow failed, “For they are not all Israel,” that is, they are not all spiritual Israel, “who are descended,” physically, “from Israel.” And then he puts it plainly in verse 7, they are not all true children of God simply because they are Abraham’s descendants. And that’s clear from the beginning, because starting with the first generation it was ““THROUGH ISAAC,”” not Ishmael that, ““YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE NAMED.”” It was never God’s intention to save every physical descendant of Abraham. From the very beginning He chose Isaac and not Ishmael, and he only goes on to give examples from a couple other generations. This was God’s plan.

But it’s worse than just not saving all, go down to verse 27,

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL,” the physical descendants, “BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS THE REMNANT,” [*small number,*] “THAT WILL BE SAVED; FOR THE LORD WILL EXECUTE HIS WORD ON THE EARTH, THOROUGHLY AND QUICKLY.” Just as Isaiah foretold,

“UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOTH HAD LEFT TO US A POSTERITY,
WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WOULD HAVE
RESEMBLED GOMORRAH.”

He says listen, just a small number of the Jewish people are going to be saved. And that’s only because God intervenes. If God had left us alone we would have been completely destroyed just like Sodom and Gomorrah, but God intervened in mercy and grace and chose some for Himself. Paul comes back to this in chapter 11, go to chapter 11 verse 5, we’ll see this, Lord willing, beginning next week. “In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God’s gracious choice.”

So go back to our text then in chapter 10, when Paul says “not all” he means most, “most did not heed the good news.” Now look again at the beginning of verse 16 because, let me read it to you literally from the Greek text, it says, “they did not all obey the gospel.” The word heed is really the Greek word obey, the common ordinary word for obey. That’s a strange way for Paul to speak. Why does he speak of obeying the gospel?

Well, when you survey the Scripture, as we discovered when we began this letter, we discover that the gospel is presented in different ways. The gospel is presented as an announcement to be believed. You remember, on the night of Jesus’ birth in Luke 2, the angels arrive and they announce to the shepherds the good news of the gospel, ““there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”” It’s a simple announcement to be believed. The gospel is also presented, however, as an invitation to be accepted. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul says, we represent Christ, we’re “ambassadors for Christ” and “we beg you” to “be reconciled to God.” It’s a gracious invitation to come.

But there's a third way to describe the gospel in the Scriptures, not only is it an announcement to be believed, an invitation to be accepted, but the gospel is also a command to be obeyed. Paul introduces this idea at the very beginning of his letter to the Romans. Go back to chapter 1 verse 5, he says, "through Jesus Christ our Lord we have received grace and apostleship," notice how he puts it, "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake."

The obedience of faith, that is, the obedience which is faith in the sense that you respond to the gospel message by obeying its commands, and the obedience which faith produces when it's genuine. He says, we're "to bring about the obedience of faith." Paul comes back to the same way of expressing it in the last chapter of Romans, chapter 16, notice verse 25, as he brings his letter to a close he says,

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God,

Now watch the ending of verse 26,

[*the gospel*] has been made known to all the nation's, leading to obedience of faith, obedience of faith;

The gospel is a command. In fact, our Lord made this clear in Mark's gospel. The very first sermon of Jesus that Mark records, he says, Jesus came preaching the gospel and here's how he quotes Jesus, "repent and believe the gospel." Notice, those are commands, those are imperatives, so Jesus came preaching the gospel and the gospel was two imperatives, "repent and believe the gospel."

In Acts 6:7, as the early church in Jerusalem was growing, we read "a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith." They heard the Christian faith. They heard the truth of the gospel and the truth that Christ brought and they became "obedient to the faith." In 2 Thessalonians 1:8, taking the other side of it, Paul says that judgment will come on, listen to this, "those who do not obey the gospel," "those who do not obey the gospel." So understand, that the gospel is an announcement to be believed, it is an invitation to be accepted, but it is also a command to be obeyed.

Now go back to our text in chapter 10 verse 16 of Romans because here Paul focuses on this last expression of the gospel, the gospel as a command. And notice in verse 16, Paul uses obeying, remember the word heed is the Greek word to obey, he uses obeying and believing as synonyms and he says that most of his Jewish brethren simply refused to obey the command of the gospel

to repent and believe. The point is, and this is a very important point to get, Israel's rejection of the gospel, and frankly any person who hears the gospel and rejects it, it's not a passive thing.

Maybe you're here this morning and you've heard the gospel many times and you never received it, and you haven't thought of that as a particularly negative thing. Well understand, that's not a passive decision. Instead, like Israel's, it is a deliberate and culpable refusal to respond to the commands of God's grace.

Now, you remember back in verses 14 and 15, Paul laid out what we call the golden chain of evangelism, that series of steps that have to happen before someone comes to faith. But what Paul does here in our text is he identifies the missing link in that chain for the Jews, which is his focus in these verses, but it's true for others who hear the gospel and don't respond as well. The missing link is faith, it's faith. But Paul then goes on to explain that that shouldn't be a surprise, because 700 years before he wrote his letter to the Romans, Isaiah predicted that only a remnant of the Jewish people would believe in the message of a dying Messiah. Look at verse 16, "for Isaiah says," that you shouldn't be surprised by the fact that not all, in fact most, have not obeyed the gospel, "for Isaiah says, 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT.'" That's a quotation of the first verse of Isaiah 53.

Now you remember Isaiah 53, that beautiful chapter is the fourth of what are called the servant songs in Isaiah, four beautiful poems about the coming Messiah. And the end of chapter 52 of Isaiah and all of chapter 53 comprise the fourth song. And that passage describes the response of the Jewish people in the future as they look back on their rejection of the Messiah. He's talking about what happens at the second coming, what happens at the second coming when as **Isaiah** describes it, "they will look on Him whom they pierced, they will mourn for Him as an only son, and a fountain of cleansing will be open for them." At that time the words of Isaiah 53 will become theirs. It describes the time when, as Paul will explain it in chapter 11 of Romans, "all Israel will be saved." At that time they will acknowledge that so terribly few of the Jewish people have believed the gospel in the words, "'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?'"

Now what is this report or this message? Well, it's the rest of Isaiah 53. It's the truth about the suffering Messiah and His substitutionary sacrifice for His people. It's verses 4 and 5 of Isaiah 53, that "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; He was chastened for our well-being," literally, "for our shalom," "and by His scourging we are healed." It's verse 6 of Isaiah 53, "God has caused our iniquity," our guilt, think about this, God caused your guilt, Christian, to fall on Jesus. Literally the Hebrew text says, "to strike Him." Your guilt struck Him. And then, verse 10 of Isaiah 53 says, "God was pleased to crush Him," to pay for your sins. God crushed Him as if He were you. He got what you deserved. It's the report that He offered Himself, verse 10 of Isaiah 53, "as a guilt offering" to pay for our sins.

Verses 11 and 12, that He in His death “bore the sin of many” and by His righteousness He “justifies the many.” That’s the report. And it wasn’t believed but by a few.

Now, in verses 16 and following of our text, Paul intends to show why. What exactly went wrong in the case of the Jewish people and why didn’t they believe the message? As he gets going, he first recaps what he explained in more detail in verses 14 and 15. I’m not going to re-preach those verses; if you weren’t here, you can go back and catch up with us. But in verses 14 and 15 Paul explains in reverse order the normal course faith takes. If we put it back in its chronological order, here’s what has to happen for somebody to be saved. Number one, Christ sends preachers, that is, people, his messengers, to bring the gospel. Number two, the preachers that he sends preach the true gospel.

Number three, people hear Christ in the gospel, not just about Christ, they hear Christ Himself proclaiming His truth through that gospel. Number four, some who hear him believe. Number five, those who believe, who truly believe in Him, call upon the name of the Lord, and those who call upon the name of the Lord expressing the kind of faith described in verses 9 and 10 of chapter 10, we looked at, they are saved. That’s the normal course of saving faith. He comes back to that in verse 17 and he again describes it, but in an abbreviated condensed form. Look at verse 17, “So faith comes by hearing,” or from hearing, “and hearing by the word of Christ.” Faith in the gospel comes from first hearing the gospel. You can only believe the truth you’ve heard. In fact Galatians 3 verses 2 and 5 talk about “hearing with faith,” you have to hear the gospel.

And notice specifically, the truth you have to hear here is expressed as “the word of Christ.” Now there’s a lot of debate about what that means, the kind of genitive that is in the Greek language, but I think the majority land, and I would land, on saying there’s sort of two things implied here. It’s the word or the message from Christ, remember Christ speaks in the gospel, and it’s the message about Christ. So it’s the message from Christ, it’s the message about Christ.

So here’s Paul’s shortened order of the, sort of, golden chain of evangelism. Number one, someone preaches the gospel to you. Number two, you hear the true message about Christ. And number three, then you can believe or obey that message. And you have to, the third one, you have to believe or obey that message because without that it does you no good. It’s like Hebrews 4:2, talking about the people in the wilderness wanderings who had the gospel in a sort of early form preached to them and it says, in Hebrews 4:2, “the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.” The only way for the gospel to profit you is it has to be joined with faith, you have to believe it, you have to obey those commands in the gospel. So, “faith comes by hearing” and the kind of hearing that hears the true message from Christ about Christ. That’s how it works.

Now let me just say, if you're a Christian here, this isn't the primary application of this text, but if you're struggling, if you're weak in your faith, if you just sense, I really struggle, maybe I struggle with temptation and fighting temptation, maybe I struggle in the midst of trials, and I just feel my faith is weak. Well, the same thing that works in bringing the faith that leads to salvation is the same thing that works in the faith that leads to sanctification. The only way you are going to grow in your faith is by hearing the Word. And so if you're weak in your faith, you need to feed your soul on the Scripture, not just for, you know, 45 - 50 minutes on a Sunday morning, not just in Sunday school class, but all week you need to be feeding yourself. Imagine if you just ate one meal a week for your body, how would that work out? Yet there are so many Christians who think somehow their spiritual life going to be different. I'll eat one meal a week and I'll be fine. It just doesn't happen, your faith grows with the Word of God, with hearing the Word of God.

But the main point Paul is making here in our text, the main application he's making, is here is another reminder of the need to proclaim the gospel. No one can believe unless they first hear the message from Christ about Christ. The kind of hearing that leads to saving faith can only happen when the message about Christ is proclaimed.

But the core problem in the case of those who hear the gospel and don't believe, like the Jewish people, like others, maybe some here this morning, the core problem is not in the truth of the gospel and the core problem is not in God, the core problem is the refusal to obey, that's what Paul wants you to see. If you're here and you're not in Christ maybe you're tempted to blame something else. Listen, if you've refused to believe, don't blame God, don't blame the truth of the gospel.

So why? This brings us to sort of a further question, why did the Jewish people and why do many others who hear the gospel not believe or obey the gospel? Why does that happen? Well, before explaining the real reasons, and he's going to do that for us, Paul first addresses the common excuses, the ones that aren't real reasons but that are offered as though they are, in verses 18 to 21.

Now Paul poses two questions here to address two common excuses for why more of the Jews didn't believe. Notice the questions, verse 1, or excuse me, the first excuse is found in the beginning of verse 18, "But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?" That's the first excuse. The second excuse comes at the beginning of verse 19, "But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?" There's the second excuse. Now, there's not a third question in our text but, as we will see, there is a third excuse implied in verse 21.

So let's look then at these excuses as to why people don't believe and obey the gospel that are just that, they're not real reasons, they're just excuses. Here's the first excuse, I haven't heard, I haven't heard. Verse 18, "But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?" Now just to get the flow of thought, go back to verse 17. Verse 17 speaks of the fact that hearing leads to faith,

so Paul says maybe there are some who are saying, the problem with the Jews is they haven't heard. The reason they don't believe is they haven't heard. You have to hear in order to have faith. Maybe that's the problem. Well, this is just an excuse, because frankly this excuse doesn't work even for pagans who have never seen the Scripture and who had never heard the gospel.

You remember Romans 1? Go back to Romans 1 for a moment. Paul's talking here about those who are truly pagan, who have no exposure to the God of Israel, the true God, and maybe they could say, well, we just didn't know, we hadn't heard. Verse 18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," and it's not that they don't have the truth, it's that they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness." What truth? Verse 19, "that which is known about God is evident within them;" and notice the end of verse 19, "for God made it evident to them."

In other words, God doesn't believe in atheists. He's made it evident, to every man. Verse 20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, [*how?*] being understood through what has been made," and the result of that is, "they are without excuse." Notice, it doesn't just say "being seen through what has been made," that's true, but "being understood through what has been made." And that's what leaves pagans, those who've never seen the Scripture, never heard the gospel, without excuse, because they had the truth about the true and living God through the creation. They understood, verse 20, certain things about him, verse 21, "For even though they knew," those things about God, "they did not, [*the word is*] glorify Him as God or give thanks," and so they are without excuse.

In fact, remember in chapter 2 we learned that they are also without excuse because within their own hearts God has put the substance of His law. They understand certain things that are right and wrong. In fact, look at the end of chapter 1 verse 32. Again now, remember, he's talking about true pagans, those who worship idols, who don't know about the true God through written revelation, but do through the creation. He says, they also know, because of the law written on the heart, the substance of the law written on the heart, "they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such sins," as he's just listed, "are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but they also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

So understand then that pagans who don't have the Bible, who have never heard the gospel, won't be able to use this excuse at the judgment. How much less those who have actually heard the gospel? Go back to chapter 10 verse 18, "But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?" And then Paul immediately rejects that excuse, "Indeed they have," they've heard. And Paul's defense of this comes from Psalm 19:4; he quotes it here, "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

Now, I'm not going to re-preach Psalm 19, we did that, I did that just in the fall on Sunday night last year, if you're interested you can go get more detail, but the point of the Psalm, the first half

of the Psalm, 19, is that the voice of the heavens, “The heavens are declaring the glory of God,” the voice of the heavens testify to God’s glory and that testimony “has gone out through all the earth.” There is nowhere under the sky where their message isn’t heard. Notice, “their words to the ends of the world.”

The sermon that the skies preach reach Earth’s extreme boundaries, the farthest outposts of the planet. David’s point is that the sky’s testimony to God is universal. Everywhere you go on this planet, the heavens encompass the Earth, you always see the heavens. And everywhere there are the heavens they preach the same sermon, the glory of God.

Now, here’s the problem. In context in Psalm 19:4, David is talking about the universal message of general revelation as seen in the creation, but in Romans 10 Paul applies it to the gospel message. So wait a minute, is Paul like playing fast and loose with the meaning of Scripture? Is he messing with authorial intent here? No, not at all. Think about this, the connection is not as remote as it seems. Because if God is so concerned that the general revelation of His Glory be heard everywhere, how much more must His passion that the special revelation of His grace in His Son be universally declared as well. Paul’s point is, God is not going to leave Himself without a witness, and He hasn’t.

Paul doesn’t mean, don’t misunderstand him in verse 18, he doesn’t mean that every single human being who existed on earth in the year 57 A.D. or so, when this letter was written, that every single individual had heard the gospel. That’s not what he’s saying. In fact, remember he’s writing this letter to the Romans, to a bunch of churches he’s never visited, so that he can encourage them to support his mission outreach to Western Europe and to Spain. And what’s he going there to do? Tell them the gospel they hadn’t heard. So Paul isn’t, you know, like schizophrenic here, he understands that reality.

So what is he saying? Here’s this point. Just like the message of general revelation had spread to the entire world, the gospel had spread across the Mediterranean world, and here’s the key, to both Gentile and Jews, everywhere there was a significant Jewish population. Remember, he’s talking about Jews, that they’ve heard. Well, where did the Jewish people live? In that part of the world. And the gospel had spread across that part of the world. That’s what he’s saying, they’ve heard. The Jewish people had heard the gospel and to say that they had not was an invalid excuse.

By the way, Paul makes this same sort of point in other places. Back in chapter 1 verse 8, he talks to the Romans and he says, “your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.” In Colossians 1:6, “in all the world the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing.” In Colossians 1:23, “the gospel was proclaimed in all creation under heaven.” Again, Paul was not unaware that there were other continents and other people groups. He’s making a point that the gospel is spreading just as general revelation, so that in the end it will reach across this planet. And in the

Jewish people's case, they lived in the Mediterranean world and the gospel had reached, had permeated the Mediterranean world.

Now how does this apply to us sitting here today in 21st century Dallas? If you are here this morning and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, you cannot say, either now or at the judgment, that you haven't believed the gospel because you've never heard the gospel, you've heard it. You've heard it in the songs we sang this morning. You've heard it, or you're going to hear it, in the message that I'm preaching now. You've heard it in other ways and in other occasions. That's not a valid excuse. You have heard God's announcement in the gospel. You have heard His invitation in the gospel. You have heard His command in the gospel, repent and believe. So it's not a valid reason, it's an excuse.

A second common excuse for not believing is, I don't understand, I don't understand, verses 19 and 20. Verse 19, "But I say," here's this question again, introducing this idea, this excuse, "But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?" Now notice, Paul uses the word Israel and makes it clear that's who we're talking about here in this paragraph, with an application beyond them, to all who hear and don't believe. The word no is used in the sense of understanding. It's possible to hear something in a superficial way and not genuinely understand it. And so maybe that's why the Jews haven't believed, maybe they heard it but they didn't really get it. They didn't really understand it.

Well, Paul rejects this excuse as well and he does so in two Old Testament passages. The first of them is in Deuteronomy 32:21. Notice what he writes in verse 19, "First Moses says, 'I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU.'" This is from The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 in which he rehearses God's gracious treatment of his people Israel and Israel's stubborn and sinful response to God. And in this verse, in its context, in response to Israel's idolatry, God threatened to use the Gentiles who were not His nation, who lacked an understanding of Him, to anger the Jewish people and to make them jealous. Paul argues that was fulfilled in the preaching of the gospel to Gentiles.

Look at chapter 11, chapter 11 verse 11, making the Jewish people jealous was done by preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, chapter 11 verse 11, "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?" Talking about the Jewish people. "May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make the Jewish people jealous." Why? Verse 13, "I'm an apostle to the Gentiles." Verse 14, "if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them." God was going to use this to bring some of His people to genuine faith.

Now think about it, the Jews understood the gospel. How is this verse saying they understood the gospel? Because they understood enough about the gospel to be angered and offended by it. Why? Because it attacked their self-righteousness. Do you see the problem? Both can't be

true. You can't say, I don't understand the gospel and at the same time be angered by its message. The very fact that you're angry about it shows you understood it.

So Paul answers this excuse from the law, from Moses. Now he turns to the prophets, to a second witness. Verse 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.'" This quote is from Isaiah 65:1 and it's from the mouth of God Himself. By the way, Isaiah 65:1 has one other clause, let me bring it in, because it only adds additional flavor here. In that verse, here's God speaking, "'Here am I, here am I,' I said, to a nation which did not call on My name." In this Old Testament text, Isaiah 65:1, God dramatically depicts His grace, he reverses the roles between Himself and sinners.

What should be happening? Well, sinners should be humbly coming to God and offering themselves to Him, right? That's what should be happening. But God does exactly the opposite. He comes humbly to sinners and offers Himself to them. They didn't seek Him but He allowed Himself to be found. They didn't ask for Him, but He revealed himself to them. They didn't call on Him, but He offered Himself to them. I mean, can you imagine that last phrase in Isaiah 65:1, can you imagine that to undeserving sinners God says, here I am, here I am. Paul's point is that in both of these verses, the one from Deuteronomy, the one from Isaiah here, is that the Jews not only heard the gospel they understood it, and they understood it enough to be angered by it. So this was not a valid excuse.

Again, the application is clear to today, if you're not a believer you can't claim that you haven't heard the gospel, you haven't believed because you haven't heard, and you can't claim that I heard it but I don't understand it, because the gospel has profound depth to it, but in its basic tenets it's simple to understand, so that a child can understand it, that you are a sinner and that you deserve the eternal wrath of God against your sin.

Because He is your Maker, your Owner, your Sustainer, your King, He has every right to tell you everything to do and you, like me, have disobeyed Him your whole life. And you deserve His justice. But God, in His love and grace, sent His only Son, His one of a kind unique Son, into the world. He took on full humanity. He became everything that you are except for sin. And He lived a perfect life of obedience to God's law, the life God required of you, Jesus lived. And then Jesus died the death God required of you because of your sinful life. And He died in your place to satisfy the justice of God, if you will believe in Him. And God raised Him from the dead as evidence that He had accepted that sacrifice. You see, that's not hard to understand. If you've heard it, you understand it.

There's a third excuse that's implied in verse 21 of Romans 10, it's this: it's God's fault, it's God's fault. You know, as sinners we find it easy to blame God, frankly, for everything. People even blame God for not believing the gospel. Some people say, I haven't believed and it's God's fault because He didn't choose me. You know, they read mail that isn't theirs. They

read about election and they blame God. Well, you know the real reason I haven't believed is because God just must not have chosen me. Listen, Paul's not going to let that happen. In chapter 9 we discovered that election is the only reason that anyone is ever saved, but it is not the legitimate reason and explanation for why anyone is ever lost. Let me say that again. Election is the only reason anyone is ever saved, but it's not the reason anyone is ever lost.

In fact, this entire section we're studying, from chapter 9 verse 33 through the end of chapter 10, Paul explains the reason people are lost is not God's fault, it's human responsibility. It's a self-imposed ignorance about the purpose of God's law. It's an unwillingness to abandon their own sin, and in some cases their self-righteousness, and humbly receive God's righteousness as a gift. It is a refusal to believe and obey God's gospel. If you're here this morning and you have somehow convinced yourself that the reason you haven't believed is God's fault because He hasn't chosen you, listen, you're sinning against God in even thinking that. The truth is, God says it's because you have refused to obey the clear commands of the gospel to repent and believe.

There's a second way people blame God, they say it's God's fault, not only because He didn't choose me, but because He really doesn't love me and hasn't genuinely invited me. Paul's answer to this objection is to quote the next verse in Isaiah 65, verse 2. Notice verse 21 here, "But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS." I love that line because here we see the heart of God. "ALL DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS." He has stretched out or spread out His hands.

The picture is of God, think about this, it's of God holding out His hands in an inviting or even pleading manner, that's the picture. Of course, God is a spirit, He doesn't have hands like you and I have. This is an anthropomorphism, it's a figure of speech to help us understand something that's not true about God's body, He doesn't have one, but something that's true about His heart. "ALL DAY LONG I HAD A HELD OUT MY HANDS." With Israel, God held out His hands to them as if He were a parent inviting a prodigal child to come home. And notice, he did it all day long. Have you ever tried to stand with your hands out? There's not a person in this room that can do it for an hour. God does it all the time. His hands are, all day long they're out.

You see, what God is communicating about Himself is, this is His constant attitude toward the Jewish people. This is His constant attitude toward all sinners, holding out His hands in invitation, in pleading won't you come, won't you come. This is what Scripture teaches about the heart of God. Go back to the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 18, I love these verses, Ezekiel 18 and look at verse 23, God says, "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?" God says, listen, I don't delight in hurting people. I don't delight in exacting the justice that's required. I don't delight in their eternal death. Rather, I want them to turn and live. Go down to verse 32 of the same

chapter, “‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies.’” He’s talking about now that death of rebellion, which sends a person to eternal judgment, “‘I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord GOD. Therefore repent and live.” You see God with His arms outstretched, “‘repent and live.’”

Go to chapter 33 of this same book. Chapter 33 verse 10, “‘Now as for you, son of man,’” he’s talking to Ezekiel the prophet, “‘Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel,’” this is what I want you to tell them, “‘Thus you have spoken, saying.’” So here’s what the people of Israel were saying, “‘“Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us,”” they’re on us like a stain on our souls, “‘“and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?””” Have you ever felt like that in your sin? Verse 11, God says to Ezekiel, “‘Say this to them, “‘As I live!”” declares the Lord GOD, “‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel? ””” Again, you see the heart of God, outstretched arms, inviting, pleading.

You see it in Christ in Matthew 23:37 when Jesus says, “‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who were sent to her!’” Listen to this, this is Jesus’ heart, reflecting the Father’s heart, “‘How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,’” that’s what I wanted, my hands outstretched, and then He says, “‘and you were unwilling.’” First Timothy 2:4, “‘God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.’” There is in God a genuine desire for that, we saw it in Ezekiel. In 2 Peter 3:9, “‘The Lord is not wishing for any to perish but all to come to repentance.’” By the way, this doesn’t conflict with election. They relate to each other. God still has a heart that stands all day long with a genuine openness, inviting, pleading for sinners to come, turn, repent. Listen, God is still the same God.

I can tell you, on the authority of the Scripture, because there are those in Scripture who were God’s enemies, who we don’t believe ever came to faith, who it was said of them, God loved them. If you’re here today and you’re still God’s enemy, He loves you, He loves you. If you’re not a true follower, a true disciple of Jesus Christ, the gospel is God’s genuine invitation to you. God still holds out His hands, just as He did in Christ. In fact, listen to 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul says, “‘We are ambassadors for Christ,’” we’re representing Christ, now listen to this, “‘it’s as though God were making an appeal,’” a pleading, “‘through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.’” Paul says, on behalf of Christ, we beg people to be reconciled to God. God stands all day long, with his arms spread, inviting, pleading.

The Bible ends, Revelation 22:17, with the words, “‘The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ Let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.’” God’s arms still open, spread all day long. Listen, don’t blame your refusal to obey and believe the gospel on God, that’s just an excuse. Charles Hodge writes, “‘God has extended wide His arms and urged men frequently and long to return to His love, and

it is only those who refuse that He finally rejects.” It’s just an excuse. So those are the common excuses why people don’t believe.

But then Paul goes on at the end of verse 21 to explain the real reasons. Here are the real reasons that the Jewish people and others who hear the gospel don’t believe it. It’s not that they haven’t heard. It’s not that they haven’t understood the message. It’s not somehow God’s fault. The real reasons they haven’t obeyed the gospel are in verse 21. Notice, “But as for Israel He says, ‘ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS,’” there’s God, there’s the heart of God, “‘TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.’” There are the issues.

Disobedient, how is a person who doesn’t believe the gospel disobedient? Well he’s disobedient to God. Romans 2:8 says there are those who “do not obey God’s truth.” They’re disobedient to the commands of the gospel to repent and believe. That’s why 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 says when Jesus comes back at the second coming He’s going to “deal out retribution to those,” listen to this, “who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” They’re disobedient even to the Son of God. John 3:36 says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” Disobedient, there’s the answer to why people who hear the gospel don’t believe.

The other word he uses at the end of verse 21 is obstinate. The Greek word literally means to speak against, to oppose, to contradict, In Titus 2:9 it’s translated as argumentative. They reject and they argue with God’s gracious invitation and command in the gospel. Tragically, this is the response of sinners to the constantly outstretched arms of our gracious God, to what one author calls, “the patient grief of God the evangelist,” “the patient grief of God the evangelist.”

By the way, you say, well, how does all this human responsibility stuff, how does it connect with election in chapter 9? Here’s why election was necessary for anyone to be saved. As we sang just a few minutes ago in the song, “If He had not loved me first, I would refuse Him still.” My response naturally, your response naturally, to the outstretched arms of God inviting, pleading: turn, repent, live; our response is disobedience and rebellion. And the only way anyone is ever saved is if God interjects into that and graciously chooses those He will draw to Himself and make His own.

If you’re not a Christian, you’ve heard the gospel and yet you’ve still not believed. God says, this is not me, your argument is not with me here, God says, the reason is just like with the Jews of the first century, it’s because you are disobedient to Him and you are rebellious against Him. He is standing still, with His arms spread.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the son decides, you remember, to repent and go home after he’s spent everything, as the text says, “with loose living.” He’s done everything a young man might want to do, every kind of sin, he’s pursued. In fact, his older brother accuses him of having spent his fortune on prostitutes. But when it’s all done and he’s at the very bottom of the

bottom, he decides he's going to go home. He decides to repent and return home, but he wondered how the father would receive him.

Have you ever wondered that? Maybe you're here this morning and the prodigal looks a lot like you. Have you ever wondered how God would receive you? Well, you don't have to wonder, because Jesus tells us exactly how He will receive you. Turn to Luke 15, Luke 15. Here's how he'll respond, verse 20. Luke 15:20, "The prodigal got up," from the pig pen, from his utter abject poverty brought on by his terrible lifestyle, "and he came to his father." Father, of course, in this parable represents God.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

Do you understand? This is God. He's got His arms open wide in an open invitation, pleading. And if you will leave your sin and rebellion and return and come to Him, He will run to meet you. That's the kind of gracious God that we have. His arms are open still. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for these amazing truths. Lord, we would never have presumed to describe You like this. But we thank You that You have described Yourself like this. Lord, help us who are in Christ to find hope and joy and encouragement. Help us also to open our mouths and to share the gospel, because "faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the message from Christ, about Christ."

Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not true disciples of Jesus Christ. Lord, I don't know what excuses they have used, but I pray that today You would strip those excuses away and they would see their refusal for what it is, it is disobedience to the commands of the gospel, repent and believe, and it is ultimately rebellion against You. And Father, may they, like the prodigal today, leave the pig pen of the life they've created, and run to You and find You with arms open wide to receive them. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.