

Romans 10, Israel's Hardened Hearts, 11/8/20

Last week we began our next section of our study in the book of Romans 9-11 which is all about God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will in salvation. There are two truths Scripture teaches that we hold in dynamic tension: God sovereignly chooses those who will be saved (called the doctrine of election) and yet man is free to choose Him or reject him and is held accountable to his choice (called the doctrine of free will). It's a paradox- something that seems contradictory but is actually not.

There are paradoxes in our nature world, can you think of any? Quantum Mechanics have observed that light [Picture] sometimes behaves as particles and at other times as waves. We don't understand how that can be- it is an apparent contradiction of physics.¹ How about the bumblebee paradox [Picture]. For a while, physicists couldn't understand how the bumblebee could fly. Based on what they knew about wingspan and velocity- they should not be able to fly.² My favorite paradox- How the Philadelphia Eagles took out Tom Brady and the Patriots in the 2017 Superbowl with backup QB Nick Foles [Picture]. Now that's a paradox! Now, some paradoxes we have yet to understand...but some, through time, science and technology we have now solved. In 2005 the bumblebee paradox [Picture] was resolved using high-speed photography that revealed imperceptible things happening in the stroke of their wings that enabled them to overcome the odds and fly. Now, I'm not saying that the bumblebee holds the answer to the mysteries of God's sovereignty. However, if apparent contradictions in nature can be resolved with expanded knowledge, how much more should we expect eternity to be filled with "aha!" moments when we have the capacity to understand God's mysteries

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

I wish more pastors, theologians and Christians took this verse to heart. We would have far fewer church splits, unnecessary fights on social media and fewer people drifting into false teaching if people allowed the mysteries of God to stay mysterious and would not attempt decode, catechize or reinterpret every ounce of the Bible when we don't understand it. That's why one of our values is "Bible-Centered, Generously Orthodox". Where the Bible is clear, we are emphatic. Where the Bible is not clear, we encourage grace and freedom. Now much of God's Word is clear- clear on who God is, his character, who we are, clear on what God values, clear on the way of salvation, and a number of other important issues. But how sovereignty and freedom work together is something of a mystery to us.

Now this is all set up because last week we focused on the sovereignty of God in Romans 9 [Title Slide]. If you missed that message it's important to go back and listen/watch it because it will be the counterbalance to my message today which is all about man's freedom and responsibility to

¹ <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-particle.html>

² <https://www.livescience.com/33075-how-bees-fly.html>

choose or reject the offer of salvation. Remember, the context of this discussion is God's relationship with Israel's past, present and future. And for Paul this was not some intellectual debate, this was personal. **Romans 10:1** *Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.* He said in chapter 9 that he was take a divine bullet for them if he could. So these conversations always must involve our heads and our hearts.

From Israel's rejection of Jesus as Messiah we learn **three essential truths about our role in salvation.**

#1 Faith NOT Works (A quick point- see part one and two of this series)

Romans 9:30-33

³⁰ *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.*

³² *Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. ³³ As it is written (quoting Isaiah): "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame."*

A growing majority of the early church was Gentile. The Gentiles were far more responsive to the gospel than the Jews. You would think the opposite was true. The Jews had the knowledge about God and His promises, you would think that they would have been far more likely to receive salvation in their Messiah, Jesus. But ironically or maybe in God's providence the Gentiles who lived such morally wicked and godless lives are the ones who received salvation in Jesus. How can that be so upside down? Because the Jews stumbled over the stone while the Gentiles stood upon it. The Jews wanted and longed for their Messiah. But they wanted their Messiah to come to reward them for all their good works and obedience by overthrowing the Roman empire. Instead, when their Messiah, Jesus came, He showed them the sinful reality of their hearts, how incapable they were to obey the law perfectly and call them to repentance and trust in His perfect life and sacrificial work. They were looking to their works for their righteousness. Meanwhile many of the Gentiles already knew how jacked up they were and saw their need for a savior! Salvation is by faith alone. Faith requires that we lay down any idea of self-righteousness and accept His. **"Jesus is either a rock we found our lives upon or a rock we stumble over."**³

#2 Truth NOT Zeal

Romans 10:2-3

² *For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

³ Tim Keller, *Romans for You*

If anyone was zealous for God, it would have been the Jews. Of course, Paul knew this firsthand since he himself was a Jew and extremely zealous about his faith. The Jews had 613 written OT laws they strictly adhered to, but they also developed a whole set of traditional customs to help ensure they didn't break any of the 613. They called these the "hedge about the law." One example: they have 39 different rules about Sabbath-keeping, including the literal number of steps you could take before you were considered to be "working."⁴ So the Jewish people were counting steps before you ever got your Fitbit. This is true today if you go to Israel especially Jerusalem, sabbath elevators. No one could accuse them of being ambivalent in their faith. Let's be honest, they are probably more devoted in the daily life to their faith than most of us. Paul says that the reason Israel went astray is because zeal doesn't save. Zeal must be based on truth. *Proverbs 19:2 Zeal without knowledge is not good-- how much more will hasty feet miss the way!*

This is the opposite of a common proverb of our day- *"It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere."* Sounds nice, like a good bumper sticker or maybe what you would find on the church sign down the road. But is zeal and sincerity all you need? What if I sincerely thought that if I flap my arms hard enough I could jump off my roof and fly. I would be sincerely mistaken, and sincerely injured. *Zeal FOR God is only valuable if it is attached to the right truths ABOUT God.* Otherwise your zeal is misguided and will wreck your life.

Listen to Paul expand on this point using quotes from Deuteronomy 30.
Romans 10:6-8

⁶ But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim.

Religious zeal tries to ascend a ladder to heaven through morality and good works to get to God. Or religious zeal attempts to descend to the depths of self-sacrifice and self-abasement to get God's attention and acceptance. Ray Steadman once quoted a Jewish Rabbi's letter to a young man trying to convince him why he didn't need Jesus.

"Judaism is all about how to elevate man and bring him closer to God. We believe that God revealed to us in the Torah how he wants us to live so that we can be in harmony with his divine purpose. Our role and religious purpose is to obey God's laws...having done the good deeds we are elevated..."⁵

⁴ Thanks to J.D. Greear for this phrasing.

⁵ Quote from Ray Steadman

But Paul says, that's not how God works. The righteousness of God doesn't require you to ascend the ladder. Jesus Christ, came down the ladder from heaven for you. He descended into the abyss of self-sacrifice and suffering for you. You are not saved by your zeal for Him, but His zeal for you!

Don't let anyone tell you all religions are the same. There are only two approaches to God. One where you attempt to establish your own righteousness--**religion that is spelled D-O**. Do these prayers, these behaviors, travel to these holy sites, follow this eightfold path. In the other approach to God is that righteousness is given to you as a gift, **spelled D-O-N-E**.

⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. He has done it, obeyed perfectly, fulfilled the law perfectly for us. Our DO is fueled by His DONE.

#3 Humility NOT Hardness

Paul closes this chapter going back to the question, was it sheer ignorance or lack of information that led Israel to miss out on salvation through Jesus Christ? Is it God's fault for not giving them enough information? Listen to the answer.

Romans 10:21

But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Matthew 23:37

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

Israel did not lack information. They didn't need more proofs of God's love, more prophecy, more signs and wonders, more explanations. They needed a new heart. They needed humility to receive. There are some people that will say, I'll believe when...you'll believe when you open your heart. There's another important principle at work here. Sometimes we think that sharing our faith means that we must have all the answers to every objection, the presentation has to be flashy and articulate, our testimony has to be wild and entertaining and emotional...we really have to help God out if people are going to receive Christ. I have found from Scripture and personal experience that the simple message of the gospel is more than enough if a heart is ready to hear it.

I grew up in the church. I heard every argument for Christianity, knew every method of evangelism, memorized Scripture, I listened to gifted preachers, and participated in incredibly powerful worship, I went on missions trips and witnessed amazing signs and miracles. But it all bounced right off my hardened heart. It wasn't until I was broken, humbled, when God made me encounter and confront my deepest fears and insecurities and my need, until he softened my hardened heart. That's when simply reading the Gospel, in an actual Bible...no special effects, in silence alone that Jesus came breaking into my heart in a way that was undeniable.

Salvation, for any of you, is as close now as your mouth and heart--no matter how dark your circumstances, or how far you feel from God, how much shame you feel over your past, how overwhelmed you are with confusion, how bleak your prospects, it's as close as your mouth and your heart. ***9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*** Salvation is simply acknowledging that Christ did what he said he did: he came down to earth for you. He went into the grave and back, for you.

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