

Our Challenge in Witnessing Romans 10:1-21

Growing up in Fairview driving wasn't much of a challenge. For the most part, roads were laid out in mile increments. During cross-country season we often ran the four-mile block around the school. For those of you who have driven through Fairview, you start at the blinker light in the center of town, run a mile and turn right. Run another mile and turn right. Run another mile and turn right. Run another mile and you are back at the blinker light. When it came time to get our driver's license, there wasn't much traffic on M-33 to worry about. You might be more likely to meet a tractor than you would a car.

Fast forward and I've done lots of driving in places like St. Louis, Washington D.C., Chicago, and Atlanta each requiring lots of patience, time and a full tank of gas. A knowledge of where you are going also helps to navigate the challenges of entrances and exits, highways and secondary roads that intersect throughout those cities. Before the days of cell phones and GPS, someone gave me good advice. Carry a map of the city and remember that you are never lost, just out exploring.

I readily admit that I don't particularly like driving in large cities, but those aren't the worst places in which to drive. I Googled some roads around the world that are not for the faint of heart with multiple lanes and more cars than you might find in all the State of Rhode Island. Even an aerial view makes it appear that roads don't really connect or lead anywhere but around in circles. They look like a nightmare to navigate.

Like some roads around the world, witnessing has its challenges, which is our topic this morning as we conclude this series from **Romans 10**.

It's been estimated that there are over 4,000 different religions in the world. **Which one is right? Why should one have prominence over any other?** Navigating the religions of the world to determine which, if any, are viable to lead someone to eternal bliss or paradise can be a challenge, even confusing, much like trying to navigate some of those roads.

There are essentially three views regarding religion. The first view is called **pluralism**. Pluralism is simply the belief that there are many gods and therefore many ways to god. It doesn't matter your belief so long as you believe something. Pluralism is on the one end of the religious spectrum.

At the other end, is what we call **exclusivism**. That simply means there is One God and only one way to God. In a conversation with His disciples while talking about His departure, Jesus stated that He was the only way to the Father. There are those who hold to other religions that find the supposition of this being the only way to heaven to be untenable and quite arrogant. But Jesus said that no one can come to the Father except through Him (**Jn. 14:6**).

Now to be clear, Christianity isn't the only religion that holds to a position of exclusivism. Islam believes that to get to heaven you need to follow their beliefs. Judaism would also hold to an exclusivist position as well.

For Christianity, the exclusivity of our belief is that a person can only get to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ who died, was buried, and then rose again for the benefit of all who believe, providing them with a righteousness not their own.

There is one additional view to mention and that is **inclusivism**. Inclusivism is simply the belief that there is One God, the God of the Bible, but that He is big enough to have many ways to get to Him. Now, to be fair, it's quite a bit more complicated than that, but in a nutshell, the inclusivist believes in the God of the Bible, even in salvation through Christ, but people of other religions can find God through their own religious beliefs not necessarily through belief in Christ as Savior.

You can see why witnessing is both confusing and challenging. In his letter to the Romans, Paul speaks of some challenges in witnessing. This chapter is written to the Jews and the reasons they didn't believe, but we will broaden it to include challenges why many don't believe in Christ as Savior. And like other world religions, he provides reasons for their rejection.

I. THE REASONS FOR THEIR REJECTION

– vv. 1-8

Notice first, Paul's heart desire.

A. Paul's Heart Desire – v. 1

Paul's driving passion was for his own people, the Jews, to be saved. More than anything else he wanted them to cast off their pride and ignorance and join him in embracing Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Everywhere he traveled on his missionary journeys his practice was to go to the synagogue first and reason from the Old Testament about Jesus being the Messiah and their need to accept Him by faith for salvation. He further argued that the law was only a means of showing man's inability to provide salvation by his own efforts. Paul described the law as a tutor revealing that we are sinners.

Paul himself, before his Damascus Road conversion, believed the same thing – that the law had to be observed to the letter in order to be saved. When it came to his religious practice, He made sure every 't' was crossed and every 'i' was dotted.

Philippians 3:4-9

He understood their abject blindness to the law which was all the more reason for him to burn with desire that his fellow Israelites also know the truth of salvation in Christ.

Though stated differently, Jesus had the same desire. In **Luke 19:10** we read that Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

Matthew 9:35-38 “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’” (emphasis added)

Psalm 126:5-6 “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping,

carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”

Friends, let's check our heart and see if our desire is for those we love come to know Christ. If we are not concerned about the eternal, spiritual well-being of others there is something fundamentally wrong. Let's be on our knees petitioning the Lord of the harvest for that soul to be saved.

Paul's heart desire was that his fellow Jews would be saved. But many of them continued to remain blind and lost. In these verses Paul also shares his honest dismay.

B. Paul's Honest Dismay – vv. 2-8

Here Paul lays out several challenges that made it difficult to witness to the Jews. You may find these among the reasons why people reject the gospel today. In **verse 2** he mentions first their zeal for their religion.

1. Their zeal for their religion– v. 2a

This was something Paul knew about himself all too well. He could identify with their zeal. Again, back to **Philippians 3:5-6** “Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.”

His Jewish lineage ran deep. His father and his grandfather were Pharisees. He received the best religious education. Everything about his upbringing and his very lifestyle oozed his Judaic roots including his adherence to the law. It was through its observance that Jews attempted to earn God's favor. When it came to the law, he says he was faultless. No one could boast more than he could about the kind of zeal he had for his religion. His zeal was so strong he persecuted the church.

Paul could testify about their zeal not only because he could see it firsthand, but also because he had been just like them. Zeal for one's belief can blind them to the truth. They were steeped in their religion zealous about adhering to it. Blinded by

such zeal they were unable and unwilling to see any other truth about the gospel. That made it a challenge to witness to them.

Proverbs 19:2

Paul mentions a second challenge in **verse 2** regarding their rejection of the gospel.

2. Their lack of knowledge about Scripture – v. 2b

Paul says their zeal was not based on knowledge. For centuries they had been taught misinformation about the truth regarding the Messiah and so when He finally showed up they didn't believe it. There were some like Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, and most of the disciples who knew the truth about the Messiah and recognized Him when He came. But for the most part, the Jews as a whole were stuck in the belief that the law could save them and therefore didn't believe they needed a personal Messiah Savior. Because of that they missed His coming for lack of knowledge about Him. They missed what Jesus revealed.

There are primarily two ways God has revealed Himself to humanity. The first is called General Revelation.

a. General Revelation

Psalm 19:1-4

As we observe the universe, God's power and presence are clearly visible. People look out into the vastness of space and conclude that there must be a master designer.

Romans 1:18-20

Like **Psalm 19**, **Romans 1** teaches us that God's eternal power and divine nature are "**clearly seen**" so that man is without excuse. The evidence of God is obvious.

A definition of general revelation would be "**the revelation of God to all people, at all times, and in all places that proves that God exists and that He is intelligent, powerful, and transcendent.**" (GotQuestions)

Creation reveals and declares God. It's a visible megaphone blasting God's existence.

The second way God has revealed Himself to humanity is through Special Revelation.

b. Special revelation

This refers to God revealing Himself through miraculous ways which include the physical appearance of God as we see when He visited Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or when He appeared in the garden to walk with Adam and Eve before their fall. He revealed Himself through dreams and visions like when He spoke with Jacob. He reveals Himself through His Word. But the greatest way God has chosen to reveal Himself is through Jesus Christ.

John 1:1, 14, 18

Hebrews 1:1-3

Because the Jews had chosen not to believe God's revelation of Himself through Jesus Christ, their choice was not out of ignorance, but out of arrogance. They had all the knowledge needed to discern who the Messiah was and why He was coming both from what was written in the Old Testament and from the sacrificial system, all of which pointed to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, but their pride kept them from seeing the truth and therefore could not understand it. Men perish for lack of knowledge.

Their sincere but wrong beliefs kept them blinded to the truth. They were sincere in their beliefs, but sincerely wrong.

I have mentioned our dogs before. What if one day I came in and told you I wanted to show you a picture of my cat and whipped out a picture of Blaze. After all, he has a nose, ears, four legs, a tail and fur. Sometimes, not often, but sometimes he'll put his head in my lap. And there are days when he doesn't listen very well. He has the features of a cat and sometimes acts like a cat so he must be a cat and no matter what you say, I won't be convinced otherwise from my passionate belief that he is a cat.

There are many today, and we may know someone, who zealously hold on to their beliefs, but have an inaccurate knowledge of the truth of what God's Word says about salvation. They misunderstand.

One day the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question about the resurrection and marriage. Just as a side note, the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection but wanted to catch Jesus in a doctrinal trap. According to the law, if a man died leaving his wife without an heir, a brother was to then marry his brother's widow to carry on the deceased brother's name through an heir. In their scenario, the Sadducees said there were seven brothers all who died after having been married to this woman. They wondered whose wife she would be after the resurrection. Jesus responded by saying **"You are in error not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God."** (Matthew 22:29)

The point I want to make from this in regard to our passage is that the Jews to whom Paul is writing had the Scriptures, but they didn't have a true understanding of it in regard to the Messiah or salvation. And that's the third challenge to witnessing Paul points out as to their rejection of the gospel. Their confusion.

3. Their confusion about God's righteousness – vv. 3-5

Look back at 9:30-33.

In that passage and in **verses 3-5** we see that the Jews were trying to obtain salvation through good works by keeping the law. They interpreted what Moses wrote in **Leviticus 18:5** that obedience to the law would result in life. And so when it was taught that only through Christ could a person become righteous and not by keeping the law, they stumbled or fell over Him. They didn't see that Christ was the object that the law pointed to and so rejected Him.

They were unwilling to accept the righteousness God provides through faith in Christ, believing that their righteousness came through their obedience to the law. That Christ is the end of the law doesn't mean He came to do away with the law. He made

that clear when He said that He didn't come to do away with the law but to fulfill it. That He is the end of the law substantiates that He in fact did fulfill it. He fulfilled the law by perfectly obeying its demands and in so doing became the perfect sacrifice to atone for sin. So that His righteousness is then credited to those who by faith receive Him as Savior. With His fulfillment of the law, the believer is freed from having to keep the law under which there is condemnation. Remember that **James 2:10** says that anyone who keeps the law but breaks even just one of the commands is guilty of not keeping the whole law. But Jesus' fulfillment of the law frees us from the law's condemnation.

Romans 8:1 tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. It doesn't say those who have kept the law, but those who are in Christ. In other words, those who by faith accept Christ who took our place and received our punishment for not keeping the law are not found guilty because of that faith we have in Christ. **Romans 5:1** further states that we have been justified or made right with God, by faith. It doesn't say we have been justified by keeping the law, but we are justified by faith.

The Jews believed that keeping the law made them righteous. But God's Word tells us that righteousness only comes through faith in Christ. **I Peter 3:18** **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."** In other words, Christ took our place of condemnation even though He was guilty of no sin so that we could be made right with God.

These Jews made their own way of righteousness by trying to keep the law and wouldn't accept the righteousness God provided for them.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that no effort on our part will bring us eternal life, only God's grace through faith as God's gift to underserving sinners.

And in **Romans 3:10** we are told that there isn't anyone who is righteous, not even one, inferring that even those who try to keep the law are not righteous, but still guilty in their sin.

The Jews were confused from their reading of Scripture as to how a person receives true righteousness. That can be a challenge when witnessing.

Those are the three primary reasons these Jews rejected the gospel. Their zeal about their religion, their misunderstand about what Scripture taught, and their confusion about God's righteousness and how a person becomes righteous. They are some of the same reasons people reject the gospel today.

A person can also reject the gospel because they don't want to admit they're a sinner in need of a Savior. That's pride. They may have held their beliefs for so long that to change their mind would have to admit they were wrong.

A person can reject the gospel because of passivity. They don't care to know the truth. They like living in their sin and ignorance. They somehow think that by burying their head in the sand they can avoid the truth of their sin and their need of salvation and the eternal judgment to come.

They can reject the gospel out of stubbornness. My college Theology professor told of a man in his church who was not saved but came to church every week with his wife. Each week during the invitation he could see the man under tremendous conviction by the Holy Spirit. He would grip the pew in front of him to keep him from going forward to receive Christ. One week the conviction was so great the man literally clenched his fists in resistance and paced in a circle. After that day, the man only stood there with a blank look. The conviction of the Holy Spirit no longer present.

We all know people who for one reason or another reject the gospel, much like these Jews. Like Paul, let's make it our desire to pray for them earnestly and urgently to be saved.

But Paul isn't finished. He also has some thoughts about the results of rejecting the gospel. For that I want to jump ahead to the end.

II. THE RESULTS OF THEIR REJECTION – vv. 16-21

Some translations use the word **“heed”**, others use the word **“obey”** while others use the word **“accept”**. The idea is the same. The basic meaning is to listen attentively resulting in submission or obedience. Paul is saying that not everyone who heard the gospel accepted or believed it. In other words, they rejected it. While salvation is solely the work of God, man's role in salvation is to believe it. While it is God's will that all men be saved, and the gospel is the message of God's love for the whole world so that they believe, He will not force anyone to accept His provision of salvation.

Paul quotes Isaiah here and asks who has believed our report? Who has accepted the message of salvation?

He continues in **verse 17** by asking a rhetorical question. **“Did they not hear?”** Of course, they did. He then quotes from **Psalm 19** which says that the message has gone out to the whole world so that no one is without excuse. Remember, the Psalm begins by David stating that the heavens declare the glory of God.

He continues with another question. **If they heard it, did they not understand it?** Again, **Romans 1:20** says it was clear. From these verses I see two results of their rejection. The first is that the rejection by the Jews of the gospel results in their own guilt.

A. Their Own Guilt – vv. 16-18

They heard but refused to accept it, therefore they have condemned themselves. I want to be clear about something. Let's look at this issue from two different angles.

First, let's realize that there is a real place called hell. Hell was created as a place of punishment for Satan and fallen angels. This is a place of punishment for their rebellion against God. Because God is both just and holy, any person who also dies will end up in hell prior to the Great White Throne judgment after which they will be banished for eternity to the Lake of Fire. They are there because they too have rebelled against the holy standard of God and not received His atoning gift through Jesus

Christ. **John 3:16** states that all who believe in Christ will have everlasting life. From that we can infer that those who do not believe in Christ will receive everlasting punishment. John puts it another way in his epistle – if you have Christ, you have life; if you don't have Christ, you don't have life (**I John 5:11-13**). Those are the only two options.

Another way to look at is that while God is both holy and just and must mete out punishment on those who refuse His gift of salvation by faith, there is no one to blame but us if we end up in eternal punishment because the message has been clearly given, but we refused it. In that sense, we send ourselves to hell. By not accepting His free gift of salvation, we essentially are choosing to live for eternity separated from God. If we say we can live just fine in this life without God, we'll have all of eternity to live without Him as well. The Jews had no one to blame but themselves for rejecting God's righteousness offered through Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection – all to atone for sin.

Paul points out a second result of the Jews rejection of the gospel and this is of benefit to us. The Gentiles heard the gospel.

B. The Gentiles Heard – vv. 19-21

Paul fills these verses with quotes from the Old Testament pointing to the fact that the Gentiles would also be given the message of redemption. In the covenant God made with Abraham, He said that through Him all the nations of the world would be blessed. This would in effect make the Israelites both angry and jealous.

Jesus told a story that spoke the same truth. In **Matthew 21** He spoke about a landowner who planted a vineyard and built a wall around it and a tower to protect it. He rented it out and then left on a journey. The landowner later sent servants to get the profits from his vineyard only to have the tenants beat and kill them. Eventually he sent his son, but they killed him too. The owner then tossed them out and rented it to other tenants who would give him the profits earned from his vineyard. The story was to point out that the Jews were the

original tenants who refused to receive the truth and they were subsequently punished. The new tenants were the Gentiles, making it clear that they would be given the same opportunity to hear and receive the gospel message because the Jews had rejected it. We stand as those blessed.

In spite of their obstinance and disobedience, God still has a desire for His people. He continues to hold out His hand of grace to them to accept the gift of salvation by faith through His Son, their Messiah.

In another parable, Jesus relays the tragic consequence of their unbelief. In the parable, a wedding feast had been prepared, but when it was time for the banquet none of the invited guests came because they had various excuses. So the master sent his servants out to the highways and byways to bring in whoever would accept the invitation to be his guest.

John MacArthur writes “**What monumental and tragic failure! Unbelieving Jews misunderstood and rejected God, Jesus Christ, and saving faith because of their self-righteousness, and they misunderstood the extent of salvation because of their proud prejudice. They therefore failed as God's witness nation.**”

People today reject the gospel for any number of reasons and we have only listed a few. It is a challenge to witness to those who have dug their spiritual heels in refusing to hear and believe and in so doing receive eternal life.

I would like to close by speaking to the verses we passed over. In these verses we see the remedy for rejection.

III. THE REMEDY FOR REJECTION – vv. 9-15

The reality is, I may have been speaking to you. You may be one who for one reason or another have rejected the gospel. It may be out of willfulness, or it may be out of ignorance. But these verses provide hope and help for you to know today that you are loved by God. To know that He has provided the

means by which you can be sure you are saved with eternal life in heaven as your reward.

vv. 9-13

Paul mentions two things.

We are to **call** on the name of the Lord to be saved.

We are to **confess** that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead.

The heart refers to your whole being: body, mind, spirit; soul, will and emotions. Every part of you is engaged in the action of believing and accepting Christ as Lord of your life. You are then clothed with His righteousness. You must also believe that God raised Him from the dead. His resurrection is the assurance from God that His sacrifice was accepted, our sin was atoned for, and our debt paid in full. It is received by grace through faith alone.

Verse 11 says that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, accepting the free gift of salvation will never be disappointed. This gift is for both Jew and Gentile alike. This gift is received the same way by Jew and Gentile alike. There is not one way for the Jews and another way for the Gentiles. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. That offer is universal in that it is for all people. That offer is universal in that it is for any period in history. The way to be saved was the same in Old Testament times as it is today and conveyed in **Habakkuk 2:4** **“the just shall live by faith.”**

The NIV says **“the righteous shall live by faith.”**

Maybe you're here today and have had any number of reasons why you have refused or rejected the gospel. You may think they are legitimate reasons, but in the end, there is only one destination for refusing this gift. Perhaps right now the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. Here's what He may be saying.

Hebrews 3:7-8 **“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’”**

The writer ends the chapter with these morbid words: **“They were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.” (Hebrews 3:19)**

Don't let that be you. Don't harden your heart.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.” Trust Christ today for salvation.

As a believer in Christ, you may face many challenges to witnessing as we have discussed today. Be like Paul whose **“heart's desire and prayer to God was for [your friends and family] that they might be saved.”**

In spite of the challenges, let's be bold witnesses for the sake of the gospel.