

“Unless We are Sent” // Romans 10:14–17 // Romans #21

Romans 10, if you have your Bible, or **page 64** in your Romans journal.

(Before we get to that, I wanted to **make a very quick comment** about something you may have seen me post on social media yesterday. **As you may know, for the last 15 months**, I’ve been serving as the **President of the SBC**, and one of our primary initiatives involves **ensuring that our churches are places of refuge for those who have experienced abuse**.

Well, this weekend marks our nationwide launch of what we are calling **The Caring Well Challenge** which **provides churches a pathway to enhance their efforts to prevent abuse and care for abuse survivors**.

While any instance of of abuse is unspeakably tragic, we’re excited to **join churches across the nation** in committing ourselves to take all possible steps to better confront this crisis. (If you want to know more about *The Caring Well Challenge* you can find a link on the homepage of our website.)

OK, last week I explained to you that Romans 10 is the flip of Romans 9. Romans 9 was all about God’s sovereignty in the salvation process; Romans 10 focuses on our role.

For Paul, God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility exist together in a mysterious tension that we, at least on this side of eternity, may never fully resolve.

The 1st 13 verses of Romans 10 focused on how we believe. Starting in vs. 14 Paul shifts his focus on the role we play in helping others believe.

Listen, today we’re going to get at the heart of Christian mission. **The 4 verses we’re going to look at** are the culmination of Paul’s relentlessly building logic--what all this gospel theology means for how a serious follower of Jesus sees his or her life:

14 How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about him? And how can they hear without a preacher?15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news1 ... (JORDANS) 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Because there is only one way of salvation--faith in the finished work of Christ--and because we, the church, are the ones entrusted with this gospel message, we owe it to those who have not heard to **do whatever it takes to get the gospel to them**.

That makes sense, right? If there’s only one way to be saved, and we are the ones who know it, **how could we not be doing that?** If we knew the cure for cancer and did nothing to get it to others, what kind of people would we be?

But this brings up one of people’s primary problems with Christianity--Do Christians really believe they have the only way of salvation? What about people who didn’t grow up familiar with Christianity? What about those who have never heard?

¹ Isaiah 52:7; Nahum 1:15

I've heard this objection raised in gospel conversations I've had airplanes, college campuses, in my office, and even--in a Waffle House

- I'd **stopped one day at the Waffle House** to feast upon (what I refer to as) "the cuisine of the gods." I had just ordered my hashbrowns (scattered....) when I overheard a conversation taking place in the booth next to me between this guy and his waitress.
- **I caught on that they were having a discussion about God**, and so my ears perked up. They went back and forth for a while and I heard the guy say, "You know, I think the most important question to settle is whether you are right with God." I thought, "this sounds pretty good." "But the problem," he said, "is that there's all these opinions out there about God. How are you supposed to know which one is right?"
- **Well, I'm sitting there, with my mouth full of hashbrowns, thinking, "Wow, you people are so in luck!** Talk about a divine coincidence. I have my MASTER of Divinity. That makes me a certified expert on God. I have mastered the divine."
- And I actually put my hand up, and was starting to speak, when the waitress jumped in and said, "Yeah, you're right. But you know I hate? It's them born-again types. When they come in here, and you start talking about God they just take over the conversation telling you why they are right and you are wrong. They don't care about you; they just care about showing that they are right and shoving what they believe down your throat." Then she sees my hand and says, "Honey, can I help you?" And I was like, "Yeah. Could I have some more tea? "
- **The conversation actually turned out great--I was** able to explain to her that Jesus wasn't like that, and he really cared about people, so much so that he would tell him the truth.

But that's how many people see Christians: gallivanting about, forcing their religious preferences and perspectives on everyone else.

But, people say, "**But what about those who haven't heard?** How is it fair for God to condemn someone for what they haven't even heard? That sounds unfair."

Well, remember that what Paul is saying in chapter 10 is built on 10 chapters of gospel logic, and that logic goes like this:

Premise 1: All people have heard about God and rejected him

¹⁸ For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people (godlessness, we said, meant a corruption in our vertical relationship; instead of being humble, submissive and trusting, we were proud, rebellious and unbelieving; unrighteousness mean corruption in our horizontal relationships. Instead of being loving, humble, and truthful, we are self-centered, proud and manipulating.²) who by their unrighteousness (because of the unrighteous bent of their hearts) suppress the truth,

- **Suppress: suppression, we said, is not the same as ignorance.** Suppression means the truth is in there but you kept yourself from acknowledging it.
- Like a beachball

¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. TWO PLACES we pointed out that God has revealed himself to us--in them (that is, in our hearts--through things like our longing for meaning and immortality *(what you feel when a loved one/child dies...); through our sense of moral accountability). The second was to them (from what we observe in creation): ²⁰ For since the creation of the world his invisible attributes

² Tim Keller, Romans for You, 26

are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

We may not have ever heard God's name, but our hearts instinctively know he is there. **Our hearts are so corrupt, however, that rather than submit ourselves to that knowledge, and seek him**, we do one of 3 things: rebel against it, or distort it (reshaping God into a deity we can manage and manipulate--all false religions), or deny it altogether (atheism or agnosticism).

You say, "What about atheists? I know an atheist that genuinely believes there is no God." Paul would say, "They may have intellectually convinced themselves there is no God, but their hearts still know the truth, and the reason their minds convinced them that there is no God is because that's what their hearts wanted to be true."

(I don't have time to go back and build all this out, but here's what we said: They know, but they don't know, because they don't want to know.)

Paul concludes: **10 As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.**

IOW, the innocent native on a deserted island somewhere, pure in heart and spirit, doesn't exist.

All have turned away; all have become (spiritually) worthless. There is none who does good, none who seeks God, not. even. one.

Premise 2: God has rightfully condemned all

Paul reasons: That suppression of that truth deserves the wrath of God. **Right?**

If our hearts are so wicked that we suppress the knowledge of an all-powerful, ruling God, that surely would deserve his wrath.

- I mean, if you put your fist in God's face and say, "No, God, I want to be God. God, get off the throne, I belong there," we deserve his wrath.

Paul says, "That's exactly what the human race has done." We may have never uttered those words, but how we live says that to God.

That means (pay attention to this): **We are all guilty, not because of what we haven't heard, but because of what we have heard and rejected.**

- **Did you get that?** God doesn't condemn people for not hearing about Jesus or not being Christians. He condemns them for suppressing, distorting and rejecting the knowledge of God that we have. Which everyone has done.
- **All have turned away;** all have become (spiritually) worthless. There is none who does good, none who seeks God, not. even. one.

Premise 3: God has made a way of salvation for all

- Into this darkness and death, Jesus has come.
- He redeemed us, Paul said in chapter 3 (3:24), from the curse of the law.
- He lived the life we were supposed to live, and by dying on a cross, died the death we were supposed to die.
- It was an act of grace (completely undeserved favor)
- He **now offers that freely** to all who will receive it as a gift.

Premise 4 brings us back to Romans 10:

Premise 4: People have to hear the message to benefit from it

Paul reasons: ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on him they have not believed in? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

In order to receive the gift, Paul reasons, they have to hear about the gift.

- Like Luther said, “Wouldn’t matter if Jesus died 1000x...”)
- Carl FH Henry: The gospel means *good news*, but it is only good news if it gets to someone in time

You say, “Well, wait. What if someone never heard about Jesus, but they responded to what they saw of God in creation or in their conscience, or maybe the good and true parts of their religion, and they said, “GOD, great Spirit in the sky, whatever or whoever you are, I don’t know everything about you, but I want to know you and surrender to you,” **isn’t that enough?**

- Well, remember Paul’s conclusion: **None of us, apart from the grace of God, ever responds that way.**

And look at vs. 17 says the only way for faith to grow up in the heart is through what? *Hearing!* And hearing comes through the **preached Word of Christ**.

- You see, the preached word of God has a strange, life giving power to it. The Word of God not only tells you what to do; it gives you the power to do it.
- Like the words of Jesus “**Rise up and walk.**” Not only did Jesus give a command, in those words were the power to obey command.

- Here’s my analogy: **Standing on top of a building**, thinking you are Spiderman. If I had a **sanity serum** (I know that’s not how it works...) (same invitation; same words, didn’t use any new argument)
- The **Word of God heals** your heart as you hear it.
- Without the preached word of God, there can be no faith

You say, “Well, what if someone responded positively to what they saw of God in nature--wanting to know the God they see revealed there?”

- Interestingly, the book of Acts tells you just such a story like that: **Acts 10:1–3: “There was a certain man... called Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God. Now send for ...Peter. He will tell you what you must do.”**

So, Peter comes and explains to him the gospel. **And here’s what is important:** Peter concludes his sermon to Cornelius by saying, **“To Jesus all the prophets give witness, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”**

(Not: “Cornelius, God has noticed you’re a good guy and God has already accepted you because of how you responded. I’m here to announce to you that you’re already saved.” No, he says you must **now believe in Jesus** and **then you will receive** the forgiveness of sins through his name.)

What we take away from that is that it is necessary to hear the message of the gospel and believe it to get forgiveness, **but if there**

is someone out there whom God has enabled to respond in the right way to what they know, Acts indicates that God raises up one of his people to get to them.

Which leads me to...

Premise 5: We are the only ones who can preach that message to them

14 And how can they hear without a preacher? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

The gospel is only ever preached through a human instrument.

- **Search Acts:** You won't find an example of the gospel being shared apart through a human mouth or writing.
- **(Even the angel that God sent to Cornelius' house didn't explain the gospel. He told him to send for Peter who would preach to him. I mean, wouldn't it have been easier to have the angel go ahead and take care of it? Apparently, it is against the rules?)**
- The gospel can only be proclaimed through a human instrument

Do you ever think that maybe the reason God is stirring in some of you is because he is stirring in someone over there?

I say that because I once met a Cornelius. I've told you about him: Ishmael.

- *God is working in both Corneliuses and Peters...*
- **Again:** *Do you ever think that maybe God is stirring up some of you at this moment precisely because he is working in someone like Ishmael over there?*

People can only be saved by hearing about Jesus, and they can only hear about him through the witness of a believer.

Which leads to...

Premise 6: The Task is Urgent

- If all this is true--if **what Romans teaches us about the gospel is true**--what does this mean for our lives?
- **Listen: At most, 1/3 of the people on earth claim to be Christians.** That means there are at least 4.5 billion people on the planet who confess to not being Christians.
 - **The Joshua Project**, a missions research company, estimates that about ½ of those as unreached. That means as things stand right now, they have no real chance to hear the gospel before they die.
 - They say, if you **lined these people up 5 across**, they would circle the globe 5 times.
 - **You who sit under gospel privileges each weekend**, who can hear it by turning on the TV, radio, or from hundreds of podcasts: **Picture in your minds** that many people just marching to destruction with no chance to hear!
 - **I want you to reflect: Each one of those is someone just like you**, made in the image of God like you--who feels fear just like you, gets lonely...
 - **Don't turn that into a statistic: Stalin**
 - **College students: You care about suffering, oppression. One of the best things** about your generation! You want to help provide clean water in Africa, advocate for education reform and women's rights in the Middle East. You care about marginalized and suffering groups here in our own country.

- **That's great. But the worst kind of suffering is eternal suffering right?** And you are not going to hear about that at your college but that is the reality we must shape our lives around.

So, to the church, Paul says, *“How will they call on him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear unless they are sent?”*

This is an echo of what he said in chapter 1: Romans 1:14 *“I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the ignorant.”*

- **The word he uses here means debtor.** But he'd never even met them? How can he feel under obligation to people he's never met?
- **We said: there's 2 ways to be in debt:** owe someone money; be given money for someone else.
 - **Say you worked for "Feed the Children"** and had been given a huge donation of \$1,000,000. What would people think of you if you decided that you'd just stash that money away for a while? That's not YOUR money, and you owe it to others to share it. It's the very reason it was given to you!
 - **That's what God tells us about the gospel message.** You were no more worthy of it than anyone around the world. But God blessed you with it, and with the privilege of hearing the gospel comes the responsibility of spreading the gospel. And to not do that is stealing. Believing the gospel comes with an obligation to the gospel
- It was **this reality that God used when he called me.**
 - I was reading the book of Romans (the logic made sense to me. **God was right to condemn,** but he had made a way for all

people but they didn't know about it and they only could through me.)

- I knew I had 3 options (it was **a defining moment**)
- **Deny it...** this is what many Christians choose to do. Path to liberalism. So appealing. Rob Bell. Jen Hatmaker.
- **Ignore it.** Just don't think about it.. give lip service to believing but live as if it's not true.
- **Embrace it:** Or, I knew I could give my life fully to it, which I chose to do. I could say, like Isaiah, “Here am I, Lord, send me.”
- **E.g. Railroad tracks**
- I used to think it was **unfair for God to condemn those who hadn't heard.** Now I see from Romans that is not true. **What is NOT fair, however, is that those of us who have heard so much do so little** to get the message to those who have heard nothing at all (about a God who has done everything.)

So, let me conclude with:

5 Practical Steps:

(1) Pray that people in our church will say “yes” to God

Are we not right, Summit, to pray for God to raise up people from our midst for this great task? Jesus commands us: **“The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest that he will send out laborers into his harvest.”**

Matthew 9:37–38

We just need to start with prayer. Daily prayer that God will raise up messengers from our midst.

These will come in 3 varieties:

- **Leverage: Those who leverage their careers.** (What I saw overseas--people pursuing their careers in big cities, part of a thriving community good for their families and seeing people come to Jesus.)
- **Leave: Some who leave their careers**--who walk away from it to focus entirely on the work. Some of the greatest world changers of the past were like this--Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor; today, people from our church like Craig Eggleton and Jesse Snodgrass.
- **Lead:** We also need **seminary students and church leaders** who will go over to help pastor some of these international churches to help be a hub for people we send--in places like London, KL and Mumbai. **So strategic.**

(2) Give to help others go

Listen, maybe God has not called you to live overseas. But maybe he's given you the means to help send others.

Sending is a whole church process, and those who help send should be every bit as committed to the work as those who go.

PIPER: GO, SEND, DISOBEY. Those who send should be as committed as those who stay.

William Carey famously said: "I'll dangle from the rope..."

Every year, **17.3% of all the money we receive is for sending** (that's almost 1 out of every 5 dollars!). That amounted to more than \$4.3 million last year. I tell you that to say that your money here goes not only to reaching the Triangle and raising up gospel witnesses but actually getting them out.

- **We've sent out 1200 people**

Maybe you will not be one of those, but here's what we believe: SENDING is a whole church process. It's interesting that in Romans 10 Paul doesn't just say, "How can they hear unless we go?" He says, "How can they hear unless we are sent." He recognizes the whole church is involved in that process.

And so here's what we believe about that: Those who help send should be every bit as committed to the work as those who go. **They should feel the burden.**

- **One of the groups our teams works with in SE Asia,** which my family joined up with **this summer, was a** single lady who runs what she calls "the House of Peace." She's adopted 20 orphan kids who were destined to end up on the street. (**Only reason she stopped at 20...**) My family got to lead in the devotions. We have to feel the burden with her, right?
- **My family also got to visit this school started by our teams for refugees** a few years ago and participate in a health clinic there. (BTW, this school is so successful at what they do that Obama came to visit it several years ago.) We saw 500 kids in and out. **We should feel the burden...**

Maybe God hasn't called you to be there, but he's called us to be a part of the process.

- Giving radically--to the point that you give away so much you have to change your lifestyle--is how you do that.
- Why we do FIRST!

The urgency of this mission requires something of all of us, TSC.

(3) Be “sent” to the people in your life

- You may not know everywhere that God may send you, but you can be sure that you are sent to the people in your life right now. That’s **why he put you where you did**.
 - Every once in a while I hear from a guy named George that lived across the hall from me in college during my senior year. He only lived there for about 2 weeks. He had gotten kicked out of his apartment and needed a place to stay.
 - We had several long talks about the gospel. Things were really getting to him, and he came in late one Thursday night and got me out of bed and said, “Hey, I was walking around downtown tonight thinking... saw this sign... I think God is trying to speak to me.” “I do, too!” He’s now a Christian counselor.
- **God has you where you are for a reason. There are no accidents in the KoG.** The people in your life can’t hear and believe unless you speak to them.
- **Don’t fail the people in your life. Don’t fail at your post.**
 - When I was a **youth pastor there was a girl** that I had led to Christ who really wanted to see her sister come to faith. So, she had me come over and talk to her sister at their kitchen table... “And you never told me? What if I died during that time?” It was a little funny and a little awkward, but there was nothing funny about it in eternity.

(4) Start short-term

- **We believe at TSC that *almost every member*** should go on short term mission trips, and, if I don’t say so myself, we **make it ridiculously** easy for you to do so.
- It’s a way you can familiarize yourself with and share the burden of our missionaries.
- We have **trips going out at all points of the year to places** far and near--**as close as needy areas right here in NC** and as far as Nepal and central Africa.
 - We have trips that are **good for families** and mothers with sons and fathers with daughters.
 - We have **options for those of you who travel well** and those who don’t.
- There are a **small handful of you are medically hindered**. The rest of you should saddle up.
- **My challenge to all of you: Tithe your year!** One week a year? **We talk about money**--how about your time?
- **My second challenge:** Start the investigation process for this today. *As soon as we finish here, don't wait. Run, don 't walk, to the Next Steps area at every campus. You have a **campus mobilizer who oversees the missions for your campus standing there** at every service ready to help counsel you in this and get you started checking out possibilities.*

(5) Cross a boundary

Paul knew that if this work is going to get done, a bunch of us were going to have to **intentionally cross geographic and cultural boundaries.**

Sure, it's **easiest to share with your roommate**, or your co-worker, or the people on your sports team, or those in your political party, but **a bunch of us have to be willing to cross boundaries to other neighborhoods and other parts of the city where we encounter people who are not exactly like us; and, to **go to those who do not even speak our language** 1000 miles away.**

Listen, the only reason you and I are here is because past generations of Christians did this faithfully for us in the past. _

**** *Halfway through Jerusalem to RDU start music***

Challenge: Put your yes on the table and let God put it on the map

- Some of you **need to go not just on a short-term trip, but for the rest of your life.** (There's so much you can't accomplish in 2 years or 5 years or even 10 years. It takes the investment of your life.)

Invitation:

- Stand if your yes is on the table
- Now, I'm going to ask everyone to sit down, **UNLESS** you think God might be calling you to cross a boundary. Not just short term, but possibly longer. All campuses.