

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME X
PERSISTENCE OF THE GOSPEL
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GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: What does a person need to understand of the Gospel in order to be saved?

Key Text: *“But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.’²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, ‘I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.’²¹ But of Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”* (Romans 10:18-21)

The story is told of a young man who saw for the first time in his life a water fountain for drinking water. He couldn't figure out how to make it work—it had no tap, no knobs to turn, or buttons to press. He became frustrated and angry. He was about to turn away when somebody pointed out a little sign on the bottom of the fountain that said simply, “Stoop, and drink.” When he stooped over, he discovered that an electric eye detected his presence, and the water automatically came flowing out.

Spiritually speaking, if we are to drink of the water that Christ offers—the water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life, water that causes us to never thirst again (Jn.4:14)—we must stop our efforts at trying to earn God's favor through self-righteousness, religious rituals, or good works. We must humble ourselves and trust in Christ's work on the cross on our behalf. To be saved, we must stop, stoop, and receive.

In today's text, Romans 10:18-21, Paul argues that the Jewish people had heard and understood the Gospel, but they refused to stop their efforts toward earning their own salvation or to kneel before Christ as Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

1. Has Israel not heard?

“But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.” (v.18)

First, Paul argues in verse 18 that the Jews had, indeed, heard the Gospel. In Romans 1:16, Paul says the Gospel went to the Jews first and then to Gentiles. Paul uses wording here in 8:18 from Psalm 19:4 to assert that the voice and words of the Gospel messengers has spread “to the ends of the world” (v.18). Paul's point is not that every person on earth has heard the Gospel, but that the message was not obscure. The followers of Jesus had been preaching and sharing the Gospel around the known world—beginning among the Jews in Jerusalem— for more than twenty years by the time Paul wrote this letter. Some Jewish people may wish they had heard the Gospel more times, but Paul states they had heard enough to be able to respond if they wanted to.

Discuss: Was your exposure to the Gospel more like a light switch – as soon as you heard it, the light came on, and you accepted it, or more like a sunrise—the light of the truth slowly dawned on you, and you eventually accepted it? Explain.

2. Has Israel not understood?

"But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.'²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.'" (v.19-20)

Paul further argues in v.19-20 that the Jews had not only heard the Gospel (v.18), but they had also understood it. He emphasizes that the Jews' own Scripture (Old Testament), which was full of teachings and prophecies about the coming of Jesus as Messiah, should have led them to Christ. Paul quotes from Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21 and Isaiah in Isaiah 65:1 to reinforce his point: Since Israel, God's chosen people, had rejected God, He would allow the Gospel to go to non-Jews—the Gentiles. The Jews believed the Gentiles had no understanding of God, and yet, the Gentiles who did not even seek God would have the opportunity to hear and receive the Gospel and experience a relationship with God (v.20). God would show Himself to those who didn't even ask, to people who had not tried to become righteous by their own works or by following the law (Rom.9:30-31)! Through this action, God's intention was not to reject His chosen people but to cause them to turn to Him.

Discuss: How could the Gospel going to the Gentiles provoke the Jews to want to turn to God by trusting in Christ?

Discuss: According to these verses (called the Romans Road), what basic truths must a person understand in order to be saved: Romans 3:23; 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10, 13?

3. Has God been impatient with Israel?

"But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" (v.21)

Finally, in v.21, Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2 to argue that God had shown plenty of patience toward the Jewish people. Israel had been "*disobedient and contrary*" (v.21), but God was patiently outstretching His hands ("*held out my hands*" v.21) to welcome them if they would turn to Him. Israel had heard and understood the Gospel, but they stubbornly refused and ignored what God had told them. God's patience is perfectly balanced with His justice. God allows time for repentance, but unforgiven sin must be punished. God's great patience should motivate us to humbly obey Him.

Discuss: According to Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, why is God patient with sinners?

Discuss: How can we demonstrate patience toward people who are resistant to God and the Gospel?

For Further Study:

Free online commentary of the Book of Romans at www.enduringword.com

"The Problem of Those Who Have Never Heard of Christ?" video on YouTube

"As God's Chosen People, Are Jews Automatically Saved?" at www.compellingtruth.com