

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Not All Have Believed

by Dan Trygg

“But all did not obey the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ ¹⁷ So faith comes out-from hearing, and hearing through a personal-word of Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask, ‘Did they not hear?’ Yes, they did: ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world.’ ¹⁹ But I ask, ‘Did Israel not understand?’ First, Moses said: ‘I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that lacks understanding.’ ²⁰ And Isaiah says boldly: ‘I was found by those who were not looking for Me; I became evident to those who were not asking for Me.’ ²¹ But to Israel He says: ‘All day long I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and defiant people.’” Romans 10:16-21

After the brief interlude about the nature of the righteousness of God that comes by faith (10:3-15), Paul makes the strong charge that *the majority of Jews stubbornly resisted the provision of God* for their salvation. Paul had spent some time in chapter 9, arguing that not all who were descended from Israel were ones who remained faithful to the God they once knew. *As various branches of the descendants of Abraham diverted from the lineage through which God was choosing to bring the Christ, often they became corrupted by idolatry and sin.* The consequences of their disloyalty to the God of their fathers, and their choice to embrace other gods, resulted in moral and spiritual degradation of their families. *As they departed from Yahweh, He allowed them to go their own way, which resulted in their destruction.*

This same process occurred throughout *Israel's* history, as well, ...so much so that Isaiah said that, *had it not been for God's grace preserving a remnant, they, too, would have been totally destroyed*, like Sodom and Gomorrah. *The focus of chapter 9 was to show that the departure of the majority of Jews from the faith was consistent with what had happened throughout history.* This was nothing new. This was not a failure of God's word, nor an indictment against Him, in any way. *Not everyone who is physically descended from people who know God will automatically follow in the walk of faith that their parents or ancestors did.* They cannot *presume* to have a relationship with God, simply because their forebears did. They cannot claim the promises God made to their parents, if they choose to not abide in the faith-walk that their parents had exemplified. Another way to say this is that **“God has no grandchildren, ...just children.”** This is a reality we all must recognize. It is a principle that is just as true in our day, as it was back then.

Now, however, Paul begins to turn up the heat. Before, he was kind of being indirect. He stated the principle that not all who are physically descended from the people who knew God, remained spiritually alive. **In 10:1-3, he mentioned that the Jews *did have a zeal for God*, but it was misguided. There, it seems that *ignorance was the main problem*, “and *not knowing* the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to God's righteousness.”** It would seem, on first blush, from that sentence that their lack of understanding was the issue. On a deeper level, however, there is a hint of something more. The word for “know” is experiential-knowledge, not just informational knowledge. They had not *experienced* this kind of righteousness, the righteousness that is a gift. **They were determined to make their own way, so they did not submit to or “come under” the righteousness of God.** There seemed to be more at work than simply not-knowing. *Pride* seems to be behind this.

In contrast to this independent mindset, Paul described the “righteousness of God which is by faith” (vss. 4-15). **The emphasis is that you cannot do anything to *earn* it.** It is simply available as a gift to be received by **faith, or trust.** In contrast to the independent mindset of the unbelieving Jews, who were *unwilling* to submit to or come under the righteousness of God, those who *trust* in God for their salvation do this very thing, ...they yield to or come under the righteousness God has provided through Jesus Christ. **“Trust” implies “yielding oneself to” or “committing oneself to” something or someone else.** But how could someone trust in the message of faith, unless they hear about it; ...and how could they hear, unless someone proclaims the message to them; ...and how would someone come to declare the message to them, unless someone sends a preacher to them?

This brings us up to our passage for today. Paul begins His assessment by saying, “But all did not obey the gospel” (vs. 16). Actually the original Greek is a bit more precise, “But ***not all obeyed the gospel***”, or, “not all gave-heed-to the gospel”. This is more consistent with the emphasis of Paul's argument throughout: **Not all who are physically-descended from Israel are spiritually Israel. Why? Because not all gave-heed-to or “heard-under” the gospel.** They did not respond to the message *with obedience*. **This was foretold by Isaiah 700 years prior** to Christ's coming, “Lord, who has believed our report?” (Isa. 53:1) Literally, “Who trusted-in the heard-thing?” Even in this introduction to the heart of the gospel message in Isaiah, ...the revelation about how Someone was going to take

the place of the people, bear their sins, transgressions, griefs and sorrows, pains and sicknesses..., **the question is asked, “Who has believed this?” It implies that *many*, if not *most*, will NOT believe this message.**

“So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (vs. 17). This is an interesting verse in Greek, especially in this context. **On the surface, it seems to be about *hearing the message*, ...getting a chance to hear**, as was mentioned just three verses earlier, in verse 14: “And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?” **A lot of our attempts at ministry are focused on this idea, ...namely, that *if people hear, they will believe*. However, *it is not as simple as this*.** The whole argument in this immediate context is that **the Jews *had heard*, but still rejected the message**. Note the italicized word “*comes*” in verse 17. It is italicized because it is NOT there in the Greek. The English translators felt that it was *inferred* from the Greek, so they supplied it in their translation. Normally, you would supply a form of the verb “to be”. Saying that faith or trust *is* from hearing is different than saying faith *comes* from hearing. Then, **the word “hearing” in Greek can be either an auditory experience (to “hear” with the ear), or it can also refer to “heeding” (i.e., hearing with a response to obey)**. That distinction significantly changes the thrust of this verse. **While it is necessary to “hear”, for the purpose of being aware of God’s provision in Christ, it is also necessary to give “heed” to that message in order to benefit from it.** The Greek vocabulary for “word” here is *rhēma*, which implies a “personal word” or a “directive”. **The message is not just a general message to the hearer, but is tailored to him or her at that time. It is like a moment of revelation, where God’s Spirit speaks to them a personal word which requires a response.** In other words, it is not just a message *about* Christ, but an appeal *from* Christ, ...or a directive to *choose* Christ..., that is in Paul’s mind, ...again, implying obedience.

“But I ask, ‘Did they not hear?’ Yes, they did: ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the inhabited world’” (vs. 18). **Paul clearly says that the problem was *not* ignorance.** The problem was not that the message was not reaching the Jewish majority. **Preaching “to the Jew first” was a priority for those first believers** (Rom. 1:16; 2:10; Matt. 10:1-6; 15:21-28; Acts 1:8; 13:42-48). As Paul so eloquently stated in 9:4,5, the Jews had inherited many privileges and promises that should have benefitted them. **The Jews were the ones who, by all rights, *should have been prepared, primed and ready to respond to Christ, when He came*, ...and certainly to the gospel message, when the events of Jesus’ death and resurrection were clearly explained and interpreted. Yet, they *turned away from the grace of God, which was provided for them*.** The last half of verse 18 is a quote from Psalm 19:4, which refers to the pervasive witness of God’s presence throughout all creation. Paul used this to illustrate the widespread communication of the gospel among the Jews. **They were well aware of the gospel story. They chose not to believe.**

“Rather, I say, ‘Did not Israel not understand?’”, ...or, “Not did Israel not understand.” This phrase is capable of being translated as a rhetorical question, implying that they *did* understand, ...or as a clear statement that it was not true that they did not understand. In either case, you come out to the same place. **They *did* understand.**

“At the first Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you’” (Rom. 10:19). Paul references back to Deuteronomy 32, the instructive Song of Moses, which he taught the Israelites to remind them both of their history, and to be a warning against turning away from God. When you read it, the repeated theme is how faithless, rebellious and insubordinate the nation of Israel *was*, ...and, by way of prophecy, *would be*. **The rejection of God and His provision is NOT new to Israel, in spite of many demonstrations of God’s great power and grace to them in their past.** Nearly 1500 years earlier, Moses wrote, “For they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness. They have made Me jealous by what are not gods; they have provoked Me to anger by their idols. So I will make them jealous by what is not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” Clearly, **Paul’s point in quoting this verse is to draw the readers to consider the long-term up-and-down nature of the loyalty of the Jewish people, to show that their current spiritual stubbornness is consistent with their history**, and with what God had spoken of generations earlier.

“And Isaiah says boldly: ‘I was found by those who were not looking for Me; I revealed Myself to those who were not asking for Me’” (Rom. 10:20). This is a quotation from Isaiah 65:1. **The last part of this verse is even more provocative to the Jew, “I said: ‘Here I am, here I am’, to a nation that was not called by My name.”** Certainly, God had said that He intended to reveal Himself to people who were not looking for Him, and were not living in relationship to Him. **Like a child playing “Hide and Seek”, God would *call out* to those who are not even looking for Him, so that they would find Him.**

“But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have spread out My hands to a disobedient and defiant people.’” This is a quote from Isaiah 65:2. Whereas God would be found by *others*, who knew little about Him and were not even looking for Him, yet His own people would not come to Him when He called, but were rebellious, resistant and argumentative. The word for “disobedient” is a negated form of the root word for “faith”. Here it would mean “unbelieving, untrusting, stubbornly-resistant” and the word for “defiant” means “speaking-against, contradictory”. **Clearly, God has been patient, loyal and long-suffering. The Jewish majority have resisted His many appeals.**