

Essentials for Sharing Your Faith - Part 3

Confidence in the Power of the Cross

Romans 10:16-21

We live in a time of economic uncertainty. We sense moral decay in almost every aspect of our culture. USA TODAY recently reported that every denomination in the US in decline. Only Wiccan and Islam are increasing in number, and the largest identification that people claim is “no religion.” For the first time, the irreligious outnumber Southern Baptist and Catholics, the two largest US denomination.

Understanding God’s sovereignty is vitally important during the time in which we live. It sometimes feels as if we are losing ground. Friends reject the gospel, and the culture mocks our faith at every level of the media, education establishment and in politics.

In this THIRD SECTION of ROMANS 10, we can take confidence that the GOSPEL is STILL POWERFUL. We can have Confidence in sharing the gospel.

Let’s review the three sections of Romans ten:

A Clear message (Romans 10:1-13)

A Committed Messenger (Romans 10:14-15)

Confidence in the Power of the Cross (10:16-21)

As we review Romans 10:16-21, the first thing that we notice is the strong statement in Romans 10:16 *“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”* This statement brings us right back to the opening of this section on God’s sovereignty (Romans 9:2-3) *“I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race,”*

The theme of Israel’s rejection will be raised again in Romans 11:1. So we ask, why is this theme so important? Two reasons come to light from the passage. First, Israel is central to God’s plan. Romans 11 will draw this out clearly. God is not through with the nation of Israel. Knowing that God is sovereign gives us assurance that His plan will be carried out for Israel, and His plan will be carried out for use also. Second, the emphasis on God’s sovereignty reminds us that the GOSPEL is powerful to change hearts. As we witness in an increasingly hostile world, the power of the gospel still changes lives.

Our text carries a heavy emphasis on the OLD TESTAMENT. In the NIV translation, Romans 10:16-21 includes 141 words. Only 44 of them are Paul’s. The remaining 97 are quotations from the OLD TESTAMENT, or references to the quotations. That’s over 69% of the words in this passage!

Notice the locations of the quotations in this passage:

Isa 53:1 *“who has believed our report?”* (10:16)
Psalm 19:4 *“their voice has gone out to all the earth”* (10:18)
Deuteronomy 32:21 *“I will make you envious...”* (10:19)
Isa 65:1 *“I was found by those who did not seek me”* (10:20)
Isa 65:2 *“All day long I have held out my hand..”* (10:21)

Of the five OT references, three are from Isaiah. This is significant when we remember the Christological significance of Isaiah, and the previous reference from Isaiah 52:7 that Paul included in Romans 10:15, *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

What do we learn from ISRAEL’S REJECTION?

We learn that the Gospel is FREELY AVAILABLE. *“But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”* (Romans 10:18). This quotation is from Psalm 19:4. It is a reminder of the revelation God has given humanity through his creation. A similar point was made in Romans 1:19-20. Every human is without excuse because God has revealed sufficient information through his creation to hold men accountable for their lack of faith.

But ISRAEL received more than just natural revelation. They also received the good news of God’s redemption. We were reminded of all of the blessings in Romans 9:4-5.

Israel’s rejection is further amplified in Romans 10:16. *“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”*

This quotation is from Isaiah 53:1. Isaiah 53 is a perhaps the most memorable Messianic passage in all the Old Testament! But it begins with a troubling reality about the suffering Messiah. *“Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”* (Isaiah 53:1). Romans 10:15 quoted Isaiah 52:7 and the beautiful feet of the one bearing good news. Israel rejected the good news.

Let’s consider Isaiah’s message. He wrote to Judah, the righteous line through which Christ would be born. Isaiah warned them of the coming Babylonian captivity. That warning culminates in Isaiah 39:5-7, as the prophet condemns King Hezekiah for his arrogant display of the wealth of God’s Temple to the Babylonians. Captivity would follow.

Isaiah 39 marks the end of the first part of Isaiah. The first 39 chapters of Isaiah parallel the Old Testament (39 books). Isaiah 40-66 coincide with the 27 books of the New Testament, and are more Christ centered than the first portion.

Isaiah’s prophesy to Hezekiah was given in 712 BC. This was **107 years** before the Babylonians conquered Judah in **605 BC**. But even in advance of the captivity, the

message was hopeful. God would redeem His people from captivity. Isaiah 52:7 pictures the messenger bearing this good news! It is also a picture of those who bear the good news for the Gospel. But just as messenger was rejected, so also the gospel is rejected.

This is the reality for those that preach the gospel. But we are not to despair. God is at work, and His message brings deliverance!

A story told is by Ray Seedman reminding us of how difficult it is for people to accept the good news. “A wealthy young man from California accepted Christ. He tried to reach his friends for Christ. He told them, with tremendous enthusiasm, what had happened to him, how the Lord had changed his whole life and saved his marriage. But he found that his words fell largely on deaf ears. They were not interested. His wealthy friends patted him on the back and went on their way. Finally, he decided on a rather strange and remarkable demonstration -- both for his sake and the sake of his friends. **He sat down and wrote out a check for a million dollars** (and he was good for it too!). Then he took his check around to his friends and said, **“I have always highly regarded you as a friend. I have always wanted to do something for you. Would you receive this check as a gift from me?”** People would look at the check and, when they saw the amount of it, they would hand it back and say, **“I can't take that from you.”** He tried to give that check out to a dozen or more of his friends and no one would take it, although it was a valid offer. **His Conclusion? *There is something deeply embedded in human nature that doesn't want to hear good news, doesn't want to be helped too much, doesn't want to be the recipient of great riches without having some part in it.***”

<http://www.pbc.org/files/messages/4725/3526.html>

Israel's problem was that they did not accept the message. The KJV translates this “obeyed.” The specific word is combination of two Greek words. The first is hupo which normally means “under.” The second word is akouo, from which we get the word “acoustic.” This word means “To listen under attention and respond positively.” Faith is more than just hearing. It is hearing and acting on that message.

Children are often guilty of hearing but not listening. The same can often be said for distracted husbands! But we cannot make that mistake when it comes to the gospel. The hearing must be followed by obeying. Remember the chain of responsibility from Romans 10:14-15, *sending, preaching, hearing, believing, calling*, which leads to salvation, *“for whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”* (Romans 10:13).

The following assortment of quotations remind us of the connection between faith and obedience:

Obedience is the hallmark of faith. — C. H. Spurgeon

The best measure of a spiritual life is not its ecstasies but its obedience. —Oswald Chambers

Faith must have adequate evidence, else it is mere superstition. — A. A. Hodge

True, God-exalting obedience comes from faith. Any other kind of obedience is not true

obedience at all. — John Piper

Israel failed the test “*Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the “stumbling stone.”*” (Romans 9:32).

What made the Jewish people reject the gospel? One reason stated here is that they became JEALOUS that the Gentiles had received the Gospel. *“Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”* (Romans 10:19).

This was prophesied in Deuteronomy 32:32 . The Jews saw the Gentiles turning to Christ and became jealous. When a toy is left alone, the children are not bothered. But let just one child approach the lonely toy and begin to find enjoyment, and you’ve got a recipe for an unhappy nursery program!

Israel should have rejoiced at the salvation of the Gentiles. Instead they grew jealous. Do you remember reading “The adventures of Tom Sawyer” when you were a child? Tom was bothered that he had to whitewash Aunt Polly’s fence. So he played a little game on his friends. He made the work look like fun, and challenged his friends that they were unqualified to paint. Soon, he was getting payments from his friends so they could whitewash the fence while Tom watched! Their jealous condemned them to work.

Satan works like that in our lives. He tricks us into envy, keeping us away from God. We stay angry at God, and treat respond to God’s promises as if they are a curse. And all the while, we remain in our deception and far from God.

In Isaiah 52:13-53:1, Israel rejects the good news. In reality, they were rejecting JESUS. The gospel is all ABOUT JESUS. Isaiah 53 is about Christ. He is the central figure in Isaiah.

1. He is ***“a child born, a son given”*** in ch. **7**
2. He is ***“the root of Jesse”*** in ch. **11**
3. He is ***“the King reigning in righteousness”*** in ch **32**
4. He is ***“the highway to Zion”*** in ch. **35**
5. He ***“renews the strength of the weary”*** in ch. **40**
6. He is ***“the suffering servant”*** in ch. **53**
7. He is ***“the redeemer coming to Zion”*** in ch. **59**
8. He ***“proclaims good news to the poor, and proclaims the year of the Lord’s favor”*** in ch **61**
9. He ***“extends peace like a river”*** in ch. **66**

Our needed encounter is with HIM!

Romans **10:17** “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ.” There is a rare textual difference between KJV and NAS, NIV. The KJV reads “hearing comes by the word of God.” The better texts read “the word of Christ,” and this reading fits more

accurately with the context. We cannot separate the written Word from the Living Word. The MESSAGE is **always about CHRIST**. Even in the Old Testament, the one that saved them was Christ. *"and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ."* (1 Corinthians 10:4)

Why Can Have CONFIDENCE in the POWER of the CROSS? It is because the power of the good news is CHRIST! The power is the MESSAGE, not the MESSENGER. No opponent is too strong for the WORD. *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."* (Hebrews 4:12-13).

We must keep Christ at the center of our preaching. *"but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles,"* 1 Corinthians 1:23.

The Word of God ALWAYS PRODUCES a RESULT.

(Isaiah 55:10-11) *"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

(John 12:48) *"There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day."*

(2 Corinthians 2:15-17) *"..To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."*

Sad as it is, there are times that the effect of the Word of God is to bring condemnation. It all depends on how the hearer receives the message! But we cannot hesitate to share the message, because without it, there is NO hope for salvation! Just remember, that the burden is on us to share, and the listener to believe. We never know when someone will believe, but we do know that the Lord wants us to share.

Consider the implications of Romans 10:17 *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"*

- a. Only TRUE FAITH can save
We must preach the whole gospel of Christ, not a vague "come to Jesus" alternative
- b. Let us preserve preaching!
- c. The social gospel is not sufficient to save souls
- d. No one will be saved through your lifestyle alone
- e. The Cross is POWERFUL

Even atheists recognize the power of the cross, as they seek to REMOVE it from public

view. During the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, and the collapse of the World Trade Center, a strange and powerful image remained. In the midst of the rubble, protruding from the pile of what once were two skyscrapers, a beam in the perfect shape of emerged. The workers and survivors found great comfort in this, and paused in worship, remembering God's presence in the midst of such devastation.

It didn't take long for atheists to object to the cross remaining at the edge of the devastation. David Brooks wrote an article in the Weekly Standard commenting on "the connotation being thrown by the American Atheists, the group founded by the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair (may God have mercy upon her soul). It seems that when the World Trade Center collapsed, the force of the fall, or some supernatural force, fused two steel beams into a 20-foot-high cross, which has been kept on the edge of the site. The atheists want the cross removed, of course, but in their passion to do that, as the wise OJ webmaster notes, they are actually revealing their faith in the power of the cross. If it didn't have power, why get so upset?"

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/001/384yabst.asp>

Yes, the cross has power! It's greatest power is not the power to motivate, or comfort, or calm. It is the power to cleanse sinners from their sin.

Have you turned to the cross?