

WHY DO PEOPLE GO TO HELL?

Romans 10

Adam Chiappalone, College and Singles Pastor

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Note: The following are the pastor's notes used in preaching this message. This is not a complete, word-for-word transcription of what was preached. These notes serve as a companion to the complete message, which is available by listening to the audio version. Bible quotes are primarily from ESV.

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to Romans 10; the Story of Lazarus and the rich man and the horrible reality of hell. The question that arises in my mind: Why would anyone in their right mind want to go there? Romans 10 explains why Israel failed to be saved. Romans 10 expounds on how Israel is humanly responsible in light of God's sovereignty; and in principle Romans 10 gives us three reasons why people go to hell.

I. THE LOST ARE BLINDED BY SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 10:1-4)

Let's look at a few ways self-righteousness blinds a man.

A. By appraising religious zeal over an objective faith

Paul could personally testify that Israel had a zeal for God - Romans 10:2 - "*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God...*" - But Romans 10:2 also says their zeal was "*...not in accordance with knowledge.*" People often justify themselves with good intentions, good desires. But being zealous or on-fire for God has never saved anyone. Zeal has not covered one's sins. Personal intensity does not atone for rebellion. One's external devotion does not necessarily indicate one's internal commitment to God.

B. By making a man willfully ignorant of the truth

Look at the text in Romans 10:3 - "*For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God...*" - then look at the last phrase in Romans 10:3 - "*...they did not submit to God's righteousness.*" So the Jews had the truth, but they were ignorant of it. The truth is externally visible but not internally comprehensible. They are ignorant of the truth though it lay right in front of their faces.

C. By satisfying a man that alternative paths will reach righteousness

Jews as Romans 10:3 says "*...seeking to establish their own...*" righteousness became content with their progress. Jews were gratified and even satisfied by their spiritual efforts. That is part of the blinding effect of self-righteousness; you do something morally upright and you feel good about yourself. But really, if you have a proper perspective, the work we do for God is not redemption worthy.

D. By overlooking the end of the law which is Christ

Romans 10:4 - "*For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*" There are different ways you can take Christ being the "end of the law", but the most likely understanding of this phrase is that Christ satisfies the demands of the law and keeps the law perfectly on believer's behalf. Christ perfectly kept the law and offers righteousness through

faith. In a sad and dramatic irony, the self-righteous think they are saved but they are not. Those who are deceived cannot self-diagnose the problem. What can we who are saved do? We can pray. That is what Paul does on behalf of unsaved Israel. Romans 10:1 - *“Brothers, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.”* Paul's heart bleeds for the lost people of Israel. They are his heart's desire which literally means “the good pleasure of his heart.” Also, notice the contradictory nature of Paul's prayer; Paul prays for what seems to be contradictory to God's will (see Romans 9 and 11). Paul knows God answers the prayers of the righteous. Prayer is not just a lesson in futility; prayer works. E.M. Bounds says “Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer move God.” [Edward M. Bounds and Harold J. Chadwick, *E M Bounds, The Classic Collection on Prayer* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2001), 1]

II. THE LOST ARE DECEIVED BY SCRIPTURAL DISTORTION (Romans 10:5-13)

Three clarifications elucidating this distortion

A. A faulty interpretation (Romans 10:5)

The emphasis in the text is placed on “doing” the commands of God. Legalists would embrace this passage as their life verse, but this verse was placed in the Bible to help us understand the exact opposite truth. It is impossible to enter heaven through keeping the law. - James 2:10 - *“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”* While the law is good, the law does not provide the power to achieve its demands. Moses intended them to learn not to trust in themselves but in the Lord.

B. A fragmented quotation (Romans 10:6-8)

Romans 10:6 - Faith personified speaks, *“...the righteousness based on faith...”* It speaks and freely quotes Deuteronomy 30:12-14. God is not asking them to do the impossible and climb to heaven or cross the sea to discover the will of God. They just need to observe and obey what Moses has told them. Keep in mind the command of God also contained promises of grace (Deuteronomy 30:6). Paul offers some editorial comments on this Old Testament quote in Romans 10:6-7. It is hard understanding the nuanced ways Paul is using this fragment, but the main point is clear in Romans 10:8. Just as Moses made the command clear to the Israelites, so the apostles have made the gospel clear to the Jews and Gentiles. You don't have to bring Jesus down from heaven or resurrect Him from the dead. The work of Christ is not in God's secret treasure chest. These truths have been revealed and belong to the children of God.

C. A gospel explanation (Romans 10:9-13)

Notice the use of your mouth and your heart which plays off of the Deuteronomy passage. The gospel is near mankind through the apostles teaching. The gospel made clear: Faith in the resurrection results in Lordship which equals salvation

1. Faith in the resurrection

Why the resurrection and not the crucifixion? – A quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones - “The resurrection is the proclamation of the fact that God is fully and completely satisfied with the work that his Son did upon the Cross.” [Miscellaneous Quotes (91). Web log post. *Effectual Grace*. John Samson, October 9, 2013, Web]

2. Faith in the resurrection results in Lordship

At the core of this statement is an admission to the fact that Jesus is Lord. This is enhancing the quality of one’s faith. It affirms the Lordship of Christ. Confession is so closely tied to belief that it leads to salvation. Belief is what saves; confession is what confirms that you are saved. Faith is the means of salvation; confession is the manifestation of one’s faith. Salvation is not a matter of doing but believing which results in confessing.

3. Faith in the resurrection results in Lordship which equals salvation

One Greek word which translates to one English phrase completes the conditional “if” clause. If you confess and believe... then you will be saved (future passive). God will save you. What does all this have to do with deception through scriptural distortion? The command of God was made clear in the Old Testament, but Jewish legalists created a culture of law keeping which bred generations of Pharisees who were twice the sons of hell as their predecessors. Legalists led Israel away from the truth that God had put in their heart and in their mouth, and this is exactly what has happened to the gospel in our day and age. Christian culture has distorted the Good News and reduced the gospel. What is conveniently left out is that your faith must result in a confession of Jesus as Lord. True belief in Jesus does not leave me revolving around myself but kneeling before God. I am not espousing sinless perfection. We still sin; any man who thinks he doesn’t is a liar. But I am saying that if you truly believe that the Lord Jesus saved you, you don’t wake up the next day willfully walking in the ways you once did before you were saved. To separate the work of Christ from His person and only accept Him as Savior and not Lord is a scriptural distortion that has infiltrated the walls of the evangelical church, and if you have fallen prey to this deception; history has repeated itself. Our religious culture has muddied the waters of what Scripture made crystal clear. We need to do what Paul has done here; strive for gospel clarity.

III. THE LOST ARE HARDENED BY SELF-WILLED UNBELIEF (Romans 10:11-21)

Stott summarizes Romans 10:14-15 - “Christ sends heralds; heralds preach; people hear; hearers believe; believers call; and those who call are saved.” [John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2001), 286] - Romans 10:15 is used to show the apostles are the heralds who made the gospel known, and the reason why Israel was not saved is because they failed to believe. Jews would make excuses that

they did not hear and understand so they could not believe. Paul rebuts them in three ways showing that they did hear and understand the gospel.

A. The apostles had made the gospel well known in the Roman Empire (Romans 10:17-18)

Paul quotes Psalm 19:14 which is a phrase about general revelation; just as God is universally known through creation so, Jesus Christ was generally known in the apostles' day through their preaching.

B. Jews were jealous over gentile converts showing they understood the gospel (Romans 10:19)

Paul quotes the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:21 where God punishes unfaithful Israel. Israel made God jealous because they worshipped "what is no god". Now God would make Israel jealous with what is "not a people". God was converting Gentiles which was making the Jews jealous. The Jews demonstrated their comprehension by their jealousy.

C. If gentiles can understand the gospel surely Jews should have understood it (Romans 10:20)

Not only did the law anticipate the Jews negative reaction so did the prophets in Isaiah 65:1. Even untrained Gentiles in their secular learning and philosophical thinking understood the good news; so surely Israel should have understood. So why did Israel not get saved? The apostles preached; they were fully read into the gospel of the new covenant. Their ears were working and they understood the content, but wait; they did not believe. The book end of Romans 10:21 comes to the same conclusion as Romans 10:16 - Paul received the same response Isaiah expected in Isaiah 65:2; they don't want to believe. Douglas Moo - "...Israel's situation is the result not simply of a relatively passive unbelief, but of a definite and culpable refusal to respond to God's gracious initiative." [Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1996), 665] (Romans 10:3, 21) - These verses come in the middle of Romans 9 and Romans 11, which is the pinnacle of God's sovereignty over salvation, and in the same breath, Paul can say that man is responsible for their unbelief but human responsibility does not just hold the hearer liable, it holds the messenger accountable. The unbeliever rejects the gospel; that's on them, but you fail to give them the gospel; that's on you; that's on me; that's on us. God is sovereign over salvation but we are not hyper-Calvinists; we are not called to sit on our hands, but have been mandated to preach the gospel, and to not do that is to be derelict of our responsibility. If you do not preach, the lost will not hear which short-circuits the entire process of Romans 10:14-15. You have effectively removed the secondary means of evangelism which is God's primary means of saving people in these last days. Look closely at Romans 10:14 NASB rendering. The text is literally saying that people will not believe unless they hear from Christ Himself and through the preaching of the apostles Christ was heard. Cranfield says this about Romans 10:14 - "The thought is of their hearing Christ speaking in the message of the preachers." [C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 534]

As you faithfully proclaim the gospel that the apostles preached, unbelievers are hearing the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17)

CONCLUSION

Are you praying for souls, striving for gospel clarity, and boldly sharing Christ? As Christians, we can't do everything, and even though we're saved by grace, we still falter in keeping the commands. But let us not fail in this area. We make time for what is important and this is important. Let us not busy ourselves, even with spiritual things to the neglect of making God known. As individuals let us make sure we prioritize 'Witness' in our 'Worship' and 'Walk' and cast the life-line of Christ to a lost and dying world so people don't go to hell.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Evaluate your prayer life. How much time do you spend praying for the lost? What can you do to develop this aspect of your prayer life?
2. What is the gospel? What are some critical Scripture texts that define the Good News? How can we guard this message?
3. Think about the last time you shared the gospel. What inhibits and motivates you to share the gospel? In what ways can you be held accountable and encouraged in reaching the lost?
4. Spend some time praying for those who do not know the Lord and for opportunities to share the gospel with specific people in your life.