



**Sermon Text:** Romans 10:16, 18-21

*Sermon Date:* January 3

In our passage this Sunday, Paul firmly establishes the point that Israel is culpable for their disobedience and rejection of the gospel. Having established that saving faith is dependent upon hearing the “word of Christ” (10:17), Paul demonstrates that Israel has heard (10:18) and should have understood (10:19-20). Instead, however, Israel has been persistently disobedient and contrary, even as God had held out His hands to them with a real offer of saving grace (10:21).

From this passage, we learned a couple of important points about the nature of human unbelief.

1. **Unbelief Isn't Merely an Information Problem:** In 10:16, Paul interrupts his flow of thought to stress that even though the gospel has been preached “not all” have obeyed. Israel had the right information and yet they overwhelmingly rejected it. In quoting Psalm 19:4, Paul is showing that just as the word of general revelation was easily accessible, so now the word of God's special revelation was accessible to them. It had gone out to the ends of the known world. And yet, it was disobeyed. Clearly then, unbelief is rooted in something much deeper than ignorance. A Christian education cannot conquer a rebel heart.
2. **Unbelief Isn't Merely an Understanding Problem:** Paul also shows that Israel didn't receive a cursory hearing; instead, they should have clearly understood God's purposes. God made it plain to them in both the Law (10:19) and the Prophets (10:20) that He had purposed to bring Gentiles into the Kingdom. Unbelief then isn't uprooted by simply hearing the right information or even understanding that information. Instead the sin of unbelief is only remedied by a special work of God by which He graciously and sovereignly transforms our hearts so that we embrace the gospel as good news. It was this sovereign work of God that Paul stressed in chapter 9.

From this passage we were also plunged into the inexhaustible mystery of **God's sovereignty and human responsibility**. In 10:21, Paul heightens Israel's culpability by stressing that “all day long” God has held out His hands to them with a real offer of saving grace. He was truly willing and eager to save them, and yet they were a “disobedient and contrary people.” The point is this: God really offered salvation to Israel and they rejected Him. They are responsible. And yet, in Romans 9 (as we saw) Paul highlighted God's sovereign freedom in election—that “he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (9:18). In Romans 9, God sovereignly chooses some for salvation. In Romans 10, God genuinely invites all to be saved. How do we resolve the tension between these two biblical truths?

In a sense, we cannot resolve the tension. Thomas Schreiner says, “The resolution of the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom lies beyond our present rational capacities.” We are simply called to uphold both as true, refusing to allow one side to suppress the other. This is exactly what Paul does in Romans 9-10, and what we too must do.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1) **What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from this Sunday?**
- 2) **How does this passage, particularly v.16, give us a realistic understanding of missions & evangelism?**
- 3) **What are some ways we act like unbelief is primarily an information/understanding problem? How would our understanding & practices of evangelism change if we grasped that conversion is ultimately a supernatural work of God?**