

## Lesson 25: Presuming on God, Israel Misunderstands the Role of Faith, part 2

### Romans 10:4-21 (12-21)

<sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to **everyone** who **believes**.

#### I. The Principle of Law: You Must Do

<sup>5</sup> For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.

#### II. The Principle of Faith: You Must Receive

##### A. Faith requires believing in the revelation God has given (the principle of Deut. 29:29 and 30:11-14).

<sup>6</sup> But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows:

“DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down),

<sup>7</sup> or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

##### B. The word of faith given that must now be believed is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:17; 3:21)

<sup>8</sup> But what does it say?

“THE **WORD** IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART”—that is, the **word of faith** which we are preaching,

<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup> for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”

← Lesson 24 Faith, part 1  
↙ Lesson 25 Faith, part 2

##### C. Faith makes salvation open to all without distinction.

<sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; <sup>13</sup> for “WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.”

##### D. Faith requires proclamation.

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

##### E. Faith is not understanding the good news but receiving the good news.

<sup>16</sup> However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?”

##### F. Summation: Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ.

<sup>17</sup> So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

#### III. Objection and Response

##### A. First objection and response

<sup>18</sup> But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; “THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD.”

##### C. Second objection and response

<sup>19</sup> But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?

First Moses says, “I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU.” <sup>20</sup> And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.” <sup>21</sup> But as for Israel He says, “ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”

NASB

### Introduction

Paul delivers a stark reality check for the people who claim to be the people of God by insisting that the people of faith do not have faith. Here in Romans we are talking about Israel, the people of God, who base their pursuit of righteousness on their Old Testament Bible and their traditional understanding of the Bible. Listen to that. The people of God, Israel, who uphold biblical morality in the midst of a pagan culture, who insist on the worship of the only true God Yahweh, who pursue their religion with zeal, these people of God are excluded from the people of God.

Is that true today? And I am not asking about Israel. I am asking about the people who claim to be the people of God, who claim allegiance to the Bible, who hold on to a long tradition, who uphold

biblical morality in a modern pagan world. If it was true that the Jews misunderstood faith in Paul's day, is it possible that Christians misunderstand faith in our day? This passage is a reality check. We need to pause and pay attention to make sure we understand what Paul is saying about Israel, so that we can evaluate ourselves, our churches our movements our denominations by the same measure. It is possible for the people of God to be zealous for their way and yet miss the main thing. How can the people of faith, the people of God, not have faith? We are continuing with that question, which started in Romans 9:30 and goes through the end of chapter 10. We got half way through in our last lesson. We are able now to consider the larger argument. I will set up the whole and then we will focus in on the part we did not get to yet.

At the end of chapter 9, we can paraphrase Paul's question like this, "How can it be that Gentiles who were not even trying were let in and called the people of God, while the Jews who were the most biblically moral and religious people around were shut out?" Paul's answer is quite simple. The Gentiles accepted by faith God's plan of salvation while the Jews, the people in the know, rejected that plan of salvation, holding stubbornly to their own understanding of the Bible. They understood the Bible requiring the pursuit of righteousness that centers on or has its locus in Israel. They would say that it is fine to let in Gentiles as long as they pursue righteousness in the Jewish way. Paul says, "They stumbled over the stumbling stone – Jesus."

Then in the beginning of chapter 10, Paul admits about the Jews that they have an impressive zeal. They are very religious. Sadly, that zeal is not based on knowledge but on their own theological system. They have decided how it ought to be. And simple faith in Jesus is not at the center of that system. We are reminded here as Paul speaks that the Christian faith is a truth-based faith. The Jews do not get to define their own way. God's way exists. The post-modern idea of "my truth" does not hold before God. It is not enough to sincerely run in the wrong direction. If you drink poison instead of medicine, it does not matter how sincerely you believe you are drinking medicine. Sin is a cancer and there is one treatment that works. Jesus. If you reject that treatment and come up with your own treatment based on whatever combination of ritual or morality or theology or spirituality, your cure will be no cure. At best you may succeed in mollifying or hiding some of the symptoms of sin. But your way is not based on knowledge of spiritual reality.

There must be a payment of sin. Jesus. There must be a victory over death. Jesus. There must be reception of the gift of grace. Jesus. There must be submission in trust to your Savoir and Lord. Jesus. God's plan of salvation is Jesus. No matter how sincerely or faithfully or successfully or painfully you pursue another way of righteousness, that way will not cure the disease of sin and death. Paul says that they sought their own way, rejecting God's way. So, what is God's way? Verse 4:

"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

That's the hypothesis, that's the central statement that Paul develops through the rest of chapter 10. In our last lesson, we interpreted the word "end" with its double meaning of a goal and of completion. At the end we reach the goal. We are done. Imagine God's plan of salvation as a relay race. Abraham and his descendants ran the first lap and then he handed the baton over to Moses and the nation Israel. And in the Old Covenant Israel ran the second lap, running the whole way towards Christ. When they came to the exchange zone and passed the baton to Jesus and the church, the law came to an end. It completed its purpose to bring us to Christ who is both the goal and the completion of the law. That lap is over. Now we should be running together, Jew and Gentile, as the body of Christ.

I also argued that the best way to read the word "for" in that verse is as a logical connector, like you find in the NIV translation. Verse 4 then means this. Christ is the end of the law, the fulfillment and completion of the Mosaic covenant, so that there might be righteousness for everyone who believes; for those who believed before Jesus and those who believe after Jesus; for those who are Jews and for those who are Gentiles. Jesus makes righteousness possible. It is the righteousness that comes by faith. And it is available to all.

Now in verses 5-21 Paul develops this statement about Jesus that Jesus is the fulfillment and true source of righteous for all who believe. First, Paul looks back to what the law of Moses says then he brings us forward to the time of Christ. And by way of introduction, in verse 5, Paul points out from the law of Moses that righteousness based on the law is accomplished by actually doing the law. This was his argument back in chapter 2. If you choose the way of law, if you pursue a righteousness of law, you must succeed in doing the law to live. But he argued before that no one succeeds in doing the law. So, is that all Moses has for us, a call to do the law that we cannot fulfill? No. And now we get into the main development of Paul's case for faith. The Law says that you must do. Faith says that you must receive.

**The Principle of Faith: You must receive.**

Of Paul's six points about faith in this chapter, we addressed two in the last lesson. Now we are really ready to go. The people of faith have missed faith. What does it look like to get faith? Or what does the kind of faith God approves of look like? We have six points. Two from the last lesson. Four for this lesson and then we are going to end the chapter with a couple of objections. You are familiar with these points, so we can keep it moving.

The first point comes in verses 6-7. Faith requires believing in the revelation God has given.

*Point 1: Faith requires believing in the revelation God has given (10:6-7).*

Paul took this point from Moses in Deuteronomy. Don't go up to heaven to get it or down below. The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart. The first point from Moses that if you pursue righteousness based on law, you must do the law, is not the last word from Moses. Moses also taught the requirement of faith. God kept some things secret. He gave Israel what she needed to know. Faith requires trusting in the revelation that God has given. The Jews had to trust God's grace that they would be forgiven of their sins as they trusted him and performed the symbolic acts of sacrifice. God took away their sin as a result of their faith. They had that word in their mouth and in their heart.

The next point came in verses 8-11. The word of faith given that must now be believed is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*Point 2: The word of faith given that must now be believed is the gospel of Jesus Christ (10:8-11).*

Paul brought the word of faith up to date in accordance with the new revelation we have from Jesus. The word in Egypt had been cover the door with the blood of the lamb and the angel of wrath will pass over you. "How does that work? How does the blood of the lamb take away our guilt and the wrath we deserve?"

"That is not for you to know, not until the coming of Jesus, not until now! Now the secret things are revealed. Jesus is the true lamb. His blood takes away our sin as he died in our place!"

This is the word that Paul says we must now believe. This is the new word in our mouth and in our heart. And as that baton is passed from Moses to Christ we ought to have a positive aha moment. "Aha, that's what it all means. That's how it works. I see now!" Faith in the salvation plan of God seamlessly transitions from Old to New as Jesus fulfills what was pointed to and what was left lacking in the Old. So, now the believer who confesses with their mouth and believes in their heart that Jesus is Lord is the one who will be saved.

Those two points were in our previous lesson.

1. Faith requires believing in the revelation God has given.
2. The word of faith given that must now be believed is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now we move on to Paul's third point about faith in 10:12-13. Faith makes salvation open to all without distinction. Let's read the verses.

*Point 3. Faith makes salvation open to all without distinction (10:12-13).*

<sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; <sup>13</sup> for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

This principle gets us back to the Jewish problem with the Gentiles. “How can they who have not tried be let in.” It brings to mind Jesus’ story about the landowner who hired workers throughout the day and payed them all at the end of the day the same wage. Now that’s not fair. The ones worked from the beginning get the same as these late comers. It also brings to mind Jesus’ story of the king sending servants out to the lanes and ditches to bring into the wedding feast anyone who will come, so long as they dress themselves in the wedding clothes the king provides. It also brings to mind the wicked thieving man who trusted Jesus as the last breaths were forced from his crucified body and was promised by Jesus paradise. Fair or unfair, faith levels out the whole playing field. Everyone at any time can come in, everyone. The gospel is exclusive. It is exclusive in this way, only through Jesus. Jesus is the only way. But the gospel is also inclusive. Education does not matter. Wealth does not matter. Gender does not matter. Ethnicity does not matter. Previous lifestyle does not matter. “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved!” No ifs, ands or buts. The gospel is offered to all who will come and trust in Jesus. That’s the word of faith.

This leads us to a fourth point. Faith requires proclamation. Let’s read 10:14-15.

*Point 4. Faith requires proclamation (10:14-15).*

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? <sup>15</sup> How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!”

The universal welcome of the gospel to every person on earth who will believe compels the mission of the church. If we have a cure for the disease of sin and death, how can we not make it our central mission to proclaim that good news to every man, woman and child who suffers from the disease?

The great commission at the end of Matthew 28:18-20 was not a last minute add on. It was not an, “Oh by the way.” It was the commission to the church. The mission of the church on earth. As Jesus communicated that mission, it came down to one central imperative, “Make disciples of all nations.” The imperative is not to grow your church or your denomination. It is not to spread your traditions and your distinctives. The imperative is to invite people from every ethnic group, without distinction, to come to Jesus, to trust Jesus and to follow Jesus. That’s the beautiful, good news.

For Paul, the logic of missions and evangelism is integral to the message of faith. If Jesus has died for everybody, and made it possible for everybody to enter into the family, shouldn’t we go tell everybody? You see, a lot of people do not call on Jesus for salvation. They do not call on Jesus because they do not believe that Jesus is Lord and Savior. But a lot of people do not believe Jesus is Lord and Savior because they have not heard about Jesus. And a lot of people have not heard about Jesus because no one has explained Jesus to them. And it is possible that no one has explained it to them because no one was sent. The good news compels proclamation.

There is a challenge here. Paul has obviously taken his own message to heart, dedicating his life to proclaiming the gospel. He is going to say later in Romans 15:20, “I aspired to preach the gospel not where Christ was already named.” He wants the people who haven’t heard to hear. He owned the mission of taking the gospel to those who have not heard because how can people believe if they have not heard. And how can they hear if someone is not sent to proclaim?

God has given the mission of proclamation to the church. The implication and challenge here is that if the people of God do not respond then the world will not believe. The proclamation is linked to the hearing which is necessary for faith. Now God can make the rocks cry out. That is true. But that is not his plan. And it certainly is not a justification for neglecting the gospel imperative to proclaim. God has given his people this great and solemn responsibility to make sure that everyone hears. This is our mess and our crisis. God gave humanity the commission to rule over this world. We humans are responsible. God challenges and calls us and invites us to participate in the rescue mission, in the clean up and in the rebuilding.

The body of Christ is responsible to proclaim. This proclamation must come by words. It should be supported by a life style of growth in Christ. Word and behavior need to be an integrated message. We should not have word without behavior but then we can't behavior without word. People need to hear. That is our responsibility. Even with all that said, we also recognize that proclamation is not a guarantee of salvation. That's point 5. Faith is not understanding the good news but receiving the good news.

*Point 5. Faith is not understanding the good news but receiving the good news (10:16).*

<sup>16</sup> However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"

They heard but did not heed. They understood but did not receive. They listened but did not obey. Faith requires a personal act of will by which an individual yields to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In Paul's day the Celts of England might be able to argue, "How could we have believed. We did not hear, and no one was sent." Paul's focus is not on Gentile peoples in this passage. He's not talking about the Celts. His focus is on Israel. The people of faith did not miss faith because they had not heard of Jesus Christ. They missed faith because they did not heed. Hearing is not enough. Hearing must be followed by receiving, by an act of true faith.

As we should expect by now, Paul's choice of Old Testament reference here is not simply a choice of nice phrases that fit into his argument. Paul draws from Isaiah not just to express his argument but also to support and deepen his argument.

He quoted from Isaiah 52:7 in verse 15, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring great tidings of good things." Then in verse 16 he quotes the next chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 53:1. "Lord who has believed our message?" The immediate expression works in Romans. We do not have to go back to Isaiah, and we get Paul's point. Blessed is the person who announces the gospel of Jesus. But not everyone will believe that message. It makes sense without us turning back to Isaiah.

But then we get even more when we do go back to the original context of Isaiah. The quote about beautiful feet comes from Isaiah 52. That is a chapter of joyful announcement of salvation for Israel from captivity in Babylon. God will bring the people back to Jerusalem. Blessed are the feet of the man who brings that news. We are delivered! We are going home! That's good news. Those are some beautiful feet.

That good news is followed immediately by the famous Isaiah 53 chapter of the suffering servant who will be "pierced through for our transgressions," "crushed for our iniquities," "a lamb led to the slaughter." Physical salvation from Babylon is not enough. God cannot bring back his people without addressing the curse of sin and death. He would only be reforming a wicked people, bringing them home to die in their sin. As Alec Motyer puts it, the great deliverance must be followed by the greater deliverance (*The Prophecy of Isaiah*). That greater deliverance is described as the death of the servant in Isaiah 53. This is what must happen. This is the prophecy about which Paul quotes, "Who has believed our message?"

Israel was ready to receive good news of salvation, whether in earlier days from Babylon or in present days from Rome. They were ready for deliverance from whoever was oppressing them. They were ready to receive a political savior, a miracle worker, a king who provides bread. They were not ready to receive a crucified messiah, pierced and crushed like a lamb to the slaughter. And they were not ready for a savior who opens the door to every person without making them pass through Israel as the gatekeeper. They heard the gospel of faith in Jesus. They were not ready to heed it.

Point six is a summation to this point, focusing on the idea of hearing. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ. That's verse 17.

*Point 6. Summation: Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (10:17).*

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

The word of Christ is God's plan of salvation. Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ. Paul simply makes the statement. I think that we could read a lot into this one verse. We could recognize the previous points that hearing happens when people go out and proclaim and that hearing is not enough but must be followed up with faith. We could also recognize things that Paul has not said in this passage. That faith is not a purely human act, but a work of God in the heart. And that the word is living and active, so much so that God uses the proclamation of the word in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people to true faith. That's why the proclamation of the gospel sometimes brings an immediate response.

Paul does not say those things here. The point here is a simple point aimed at Israel. Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. The people of Israel have been called to trust in God's plan of salvation. That plan has been made known. Nothing else is required. Nothing else is needed. There are no hidden secrets, special handshakes, ritual requirements. There is the proclamation of the gospel, the hearing of the gospel and the believing in the gospel. That hard. That easy.

Paul ends the section, bringing clarity to his argument with a couple of objections. We are used to this in Romans. Paul likes to object to himself and then answer his own objections. The first objection and response is in 10:18. It says this.

### III. Objection and Response

*First objection and response – Everyone (10:18)*

<sup>18</sup> But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

Paul raises the objection that they have not heard. And then he answers the objection by quoting Psalm 19. That Psalm declares that God revealed himself in the creation. It's similar to Paul's claim back in chapter 1, when he said, "His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made."

But we have got two problems here. First, who is the objection about? Who are we claiming has not heard? And second, Paul has been talking about the specific revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, not the general revelation of God as creator. So, what does Psalm 19 prove in this regard?

I am going to take a step back to Paul's larger argument. The big picture argument is that even though the majority of Israelites have been excluded from the New Covenant people of God, God's word has not failed. And here in chapter 10 the reason Israelites are excluded is that they have rejected the way of faith and pursued their own way of righteousness. Paul has said that Israel is responsible in hearing the message of Jesus to receive with faith that message as God's plan of salvation.

The objection here in verse 18 is stated generally, perhaps claiming all peoples have not heard, but our context is more specifically about Israel. How can the Israelites be responsible to believe the message about Jesus if they have not heard that message?

But they have heard. "Their voice has gone out into all the earth and their words to the end of the world." The question here is whether Paul is suggesting that the Psalm somehow argues that Israel has heard about Jesus, was that included in the prophecy of the Psalm, or whether Paul is using the language of the Psalm to make a point of the current state of affairs. I think he is using the language of the Psalm. I do not think the Psalm makes the point for Paul. I think Paul is using the familiar language of the Psalm to make a new point that connects back to his comment about preachers being sent to preach the good news. Metaphorically, the sun is sent every day to shout that God reigns in the heavens above. That is general revelation. Paul is using that language to say that messengers of the gospel have been sent out into the world. The point could be phrased this way, "Just as knowledge of God is announced throughout the world by the physical creation, God has also sent human messengers throughout the world to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ."

If this is the intent, then I have to admit that there is certainly some hyperbole or literary exaggeration. The gospel message has gone out through Paul and others into the known Roman world, but not the whole known Roman world. Paul's own plan is to head further west to the Roman territory of Spain. No one has gone there yet. But for the sake of the argument, the gospel has radiated out from Jerusalem to Gentile peoples who have responded in faith. And perhaps even more to the point, the gospel has gone out to the scattered Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire, and in Persia, and all around the Mediterranean Sea. If our main argument is about Israel, and we are asking whether the Israelites have heard, then the answer is "Yes." The word has gone from Jerusalem outwards. The problem of the Jews, in the homeland and outside the homeland, is not that they have not heard.

This brings us to the second objection in verse 19.

*Second objection and response – Israel (10:19-21)*

<sup>19</sup> But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?

Paul's response is essentially this. Knowledge is not the problem. Moses and Isaiah foretold what would happen. God planned to invite the Gentiles in. Israel would be jealous. And the Israelites would stubbornly refuse to accept God's plan. Here is how Paul says it in 19a-21.

First Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."<sup>20</sup> And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."<sup>21</sup> But as for Israel He says, "ALL DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

The problem for Israel is not a lack of hearing and not a lack of understanding. The problem is in the heart. The problem is a refusal to accept the way things have turned out. They do not want the Messiah to be a crucified Messiah. They do not want Gentiles invited in without coming through Israel. And they do not want a righteousness that you do not have to work to obtain. The image of stubborn disobedience takes us back to Paul's original thesis in Romans 1:16-17 which includes the statement from Habakkuk, "The righteous will live by faith." Remember way back in lesson 3 Habakkuk rejecting God's plan of salvation at that time for Israel, a plan of cleansing wrath through Babylon with only a remnant being saved. Habakkuk took his stand on the wall, planting both feet firmly, challenging God and God's plan. In the end Habakkuk's heart changed. He saw the coming army as God's justice and eventual deliverance. Finishing his prophecy Habakkuk wrote these words of faith, "I must wait quietly for the day of distress...yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he has made my feet like hinds' feet and makes me walk on my high places." That's a heart of faith.

The challenge was voiced anew in the day of Jesus. This is the way of salvation. Will you accept Jesus Christ as the end of the law and the answer to your cry for deliverance? Israel ascended as a people on to the wall, firmly planted their feet in opposition to God's plan and still obstinately waits for God to change his mind.

### **Conclusion**

That ends the chapter, but let's conclude with our own reality check. First our six points:

The principle of faith says that you must receive.

Point 1: Faith requires believing in the revelation God has given.

Point 2: The word of faith given that must now be believed is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Point 3. Faith makes salvation open to all without distinction.

Point 4. Faith requires proclamation.

Point 5. Faith is not understanding the good news but receiving the good news.

Point 6. Summation: Faith comes from hearing the word of Christ.

Here is a simple but important observation. Faith is not something expressed by a group. If we say a group has believed, what we mean is that many individuals have expressed personal faith in Jesus Christ. These individuals were either already part of some group, like the Samaritan village that responded to the woman's testimony and came to Jesus. Or these individuals were separate but because of their common faith joined together as a group, like a local church. The group does not have faith. The group is made up of individuals who must have faith.

I also want to make a correction from my lesson on chapter 9. Chapter 9 speaks about both corporate groups and individuals. Looking back over my notes, I see that I said the vessels of wrath are groups: Israel and Gentiles. There is a sense where that may be true. That was true in Jeremiah's potter analogy is about Israel as a people. But in 9:24 Paul says that we are the vessels of mercy. He is talking about individuals. Each individual who has received by faith the gospel of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, is a vessel of mercy.

When we talk about corporate Israel or the corporate body of Christ, we are talking about groups of individuals. We can speak of the groups we belong to, of our denomination or our movement or our local church fellowship. And as we speak of our group or our community, we also recognize that at the most basic level, faith is intensely personal and individual. My reality check starts with me. I must first ask myself, "Have I heard the gospel of Jesus Christ like Paul teaches it here?" And then I must ask myself, "Have I received by faith this gospel, this good news. Have I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and my Lord? Has hearing the word become faith in my heart? Is Jesus my one and only hope? My one and true Lord?"

Having asked this question of myself, we now ask it of our group. Have our brothers and sisters in Christ understood this gospel message? Does everyone know that righteousness is by grace? Have we each heard? Have we each been challenged to receive that message personally and individually? And having asked this question of ourselves and our group, we then ask, "Who else needs to hear? With whom can we share the good news? Who can we tell? Who can we send?"

## Reflection Questions

1. What stands out to you as important, confusing, interesting or strange in Romans 10:12-21?
2. Paul asks in verse 14, "How will they hear without a preacher?" Does your Bible use the word preacher or another word? The original Greek means one who proclaims and should not be associated with the role of the preacher in a modern church. It was not a technical word describing a position in a church but a practical word describing the action of proclamation.
  - a. Who proclaimed the gospel to you when you first believed? Was it primarily one person or several people? (Did you ever tell them they have beautiful feet?)
  - b. Who should proclaim the gospel? List a variety of situations or environments in which a Christian might proclaim the gospel.
3. How does your local fellowship of believers help people within your church understand the gospel and respond in faith to the gospel? What are one or two positive steps you could take to help strengthen the gospel proclamation in your own local fellowship?
4. How does your local fellowship of believers help people in your community understand and respond in faith to the gospel? What are one or two positive steps you could take to help strengthen the gospel proclamation in your own community?
5. How does your local fellowship of believers help people beyond your community understand and respond in faith to the gospel? What are one or two positive steps you could take to help strengthen gospel proclamation beyond your community?