

No Excuse Romans 9:30-10:21

Why are the vast majority of Israelites separated from God? According to Romans 9, because God did not choose most of them (election). According to Romans 10, because most of them did not choose God (free will). Paul proves that God's election does not invalidate our responsibility to believe by systematically dismantling the three most common excuses a Jew, or any person, might give for rejecting the gospel. When all is said and done, we have no excuse!

Excuses are basic to human nature.

When we fail, we grasp for an excuse, even if ridiculous

It is human nature to make excuses when we fail

- whether for small things or big things
- we look for anyone or anything other than ourselves to blame
- we make excuses to absolve ourselves of guilt

Romans 10 is all about excuses.

Romans 9-11 – Paul is looking at a relationship that has gone south

- relationship between God and His Old Testament people, Israel
 - o Almost the entire OT is about Israel
 - o Jesus, Peter, Paul – all Jews; early church – all Jews
 - o But by **56 AD** when Romans was written, the church had become predominately Gentile.
- **The vast majority of the Jewish people had rejected the gospel**
 - o Paul summarizes that problem - READ 9:30-31
- **That sad reality presents a potential problem for Paul's theology**
 - o **Promise at end of ch8:** I will allow nothing to separate us, not even you.
 - o **But what about Israel?!?!**
 - They were God's people – most are now separated
 - Did God lie? Was God unable to keep His Word?
 - Calls into question God's faithfulness & righteousness
 - Can He be trusted to be faithful to us if He wasn't to them?!

How does Paul answer the question: Why are the vast majority of Israelites separated from God?

- **Answer from ch9: because God did not choose most Jews**
 - o the promises were only ever meant for the elect
 - o election – review:
 - all of humanity running from God in rebellion
 - God gives mercy to all
 - Jesus died for all
 - God desires all to be saved
 - But all would freely choose to reject His offer
 - So in love, God chose particular individuals... over-the-top mercy
 - o God did not elect all of Israel, just a remnant (including Peter, Paul)
 - To them, God had been perfectly faithful
 - o So God's faithfulness is intact because of election.

But that's just part 1 of Paul's answer. In chapter 10, he provides the other side of the coin – the balance to election...

- **Answer from ch10: because most Jews did not choose God**
 - o they chose to reject God's gift of righteousness
 - o they had the choice and so they are responsible
 - o so election does not negate human responsibility
 - God makes a free choice and humans make a free choice
 - I can't explain how both are simultaneously true
 - Paul just lays them right next to each other
 - Raises theological red flags for us
 - But that's not where Paul wants us to go
 - o **Ch10 is about dismantling excuses**
 - Despite election, Israel is still responsible for their choice
 - Just like all people – we all have a choice to make
 - **We have no excuse**

Paul proves that by systematically silencing the excuses Israel might make

- in so doing, silences the most common excuses any person might make

Excuse #1: We're good people

- This is the excuse of self-righteousness – "I am good enough. I don't need the gospel, I don't need Jesus."
 - o Israel's primary excuse for rejecting the gospel.
 - o It's the excuse of most people today
 - God will weigh my good deeds and my bad deeds
 - compared to most, I'm in good shape.
- **Read 9:31-10:4**
- **Paul affirms that the Jews had a lot of things to be proud of...**
 - o Believed in the One True God
 - o Had zeal for God (10:2) – not just academic belief
 - o Were seeking to be right with God (9:31) – pursuing righteousness
 - o Doing so through God's Law - not through some other religion
- **So what was their problem? One word: PRIDE**
 - o **10:3 – they pursued salvation in the wrong way: through their works rather than through humble faith**
 - "not knowing" – not innocent ignorance
 - willful blindness – chosen not to submit to God's truth
 - o **IN PRIDE:**
 - **Convinced they could earn salvation on their own through Law**
 - 9:32 – a "law of righteousness" = a "legal righteousness" = a righteousness based on adherence to the Law.
 - They believed they were good enough to earn God's favor by keeping the Law.
 - **Therefore, they saw no reason for a Savior**
 - Jesus came offering deliverance to all who would come to Him
 - "But we're good, so no thanks!" – reject Him; crucify Him
 - **They stumbled over Jesus**
 - What God warned them about – v33 – combination of 2 quotations from **Deuteronomy 8:14 and 28:16**
 - o if you trust the rock (Christ) you will not be put to shame
 - o if you don't, you will fall
 - **Sadly, the vast majority of Jews chose to stumble.**
 - o **SAD IRONY: In rejecting Jesus, missed the whole point of the Law**
 - v4 – He is the end, goal, finish-line of the Law
 - Gal 3:24-25

- **Rejected gospel because they thought they were good enough**
- **And so do most people today!**
 - o If you ask most people, "Why should God let you into heaven when you die?" most people will point to their works:
 - I'm a good person; I don't lie (much); I don't steal – I go to church, synagogue, mosque – I give to the poor – I treat others the way I want them to treat me
 - That's the religious answer – earn God's approval by what I do or don't do
 - o That's religion's answer; it's not God's answer.
 - o God's answer is, "You can't earn it! It's a gift!"
 - That's grace – you get something good you don't deserve.
 - You don't earn it; Jesus earned it for you. You just say, "Yes!"
 - o **Religion says "DO," Jesus says "DONE"!**
 - o He's done it for you. Just humble yourself enough to accept it!
- Being a good person is no excuse for turning down the gospel.
- Neither is the next excuse...

Excuse #2: God expects too much

- **Read 10:5-13**
- Salvation by faith is not hard; it's salvation by works that's hard!
- **He starts with the latter: Salvation by works is hard! v5**
 - o quotes **Lev 18:5**
 - o Point: life through law is hard – it requires constant obedience.
 - o Paul made that point back in chapter 2:
 - **the standard:** Rom 2:7,13
 - **the bad news:** Rom 3:10-12
 - **result:** Rom 3:20a
 - o Not just hard – impossible!! You can't keep the Law well enough to earn life.
 - o Salvation by works is a dead end!
- **In contrast, salvation by faith is easy...**
 - o **v6-8 – quotes Deut 30:12-14**
 - **v6:** You don't have to work your way to heaven where Christ is to get salvation – He's already brought it to you (incarnation)
 - **v7:** You don't have to do some great, supernatural thing to secure your salvation - Christ has already done it for you (resurrection)
 - **v8: Result:** the word of salvation is near you... **it's right here – you can have it right now...**
 - o **All you have to do is believe!! v9-10**
 - *believe and confess* – not separate steps – mirroring the parallelism of Dt 30:14 in v8.
 - All you must do to receive eternal life is simply say "Yes" to God's gift in Christ.
 - Confess = agree with God that Jesus is Lord = God
 - o what the Jews stumbled over
 - Believe that God raised Him from the dead
 - o Why not "died for your sins"?
 - o Because the resurrection is the proof
 - 1 Cor 15:17
 - o the resurrection is the proof that our sins are paid for and death is conquered.
 - So, just agree with God that Jesus, His Son, died for your sins and then rose victorious from the grave – eternal life!
 - o **Available to all on the same terms – v11-13 – just ask for it!**
 - That's what God promised in the OT:
 - v11: quotes **Isa 28:16** again
 - v13: quotes **Joel 2:32**

- Salvation is available to all who will simply believe.
- Not nearly as hard as trying to earn it!
- Contrast between the “way of works” and the “way of faith” reminds me of **rappelling...**
 - Sumer after freshman year – ran a rappelling station at camp
 - Learned there’s 2 ways to rappel down a cliff – an easy way, and a hard way
 - The hard way: you try to go down on your own 2 feet
 - often the most athletic kids that tried to do this
 - didn’t rely on the rope – they’ve got it covered
 - face plant
 - That’s the hard way
 - The easy way: you let the rope do the work
 - get to the edge and lean back, way back
 - once all your weight’s on the rope – it’s easy. You cruise down the cliff at your own pace.
 - all you have to do is trust the rope
 - that rope can hold 6000 pounds!!
 - you don’t have to help it out!!
 - Rappelling’s easy – you just have to trust.
- So it is with salvation:
 - there’s a hard way, the way of works, that only ends in defeat
 - there’s an easy way, the way of faith, salvation as a free gift
- God does not expect too much from us. His way of salvation is easy and available to all who will simply accept it.
- So, 2 excuses down... time for the 3rd...

Excuse #3: We never heard

- “We didn’t know” – “No one told us that we could be saved by faith in Jesus”
 - The classic question, “What about the Aborigine...”
 - How can God hold him responsible?
- **Read 10:14-21**
- **v14-15 – 4 steps that must all occur if you’re going to be saved**
 - presented in reverse order
 - chronologically:
 - 1) God must send a messenger with the gospel to you
 - most important step – God must take initiative
 - crucial – why Paul quoted **Isa 52:7**
 - 2) the messenger must come to you and preach
 - 3) you have to hear them speak
 - 4) you have to believe
 - First 3 steps: not my responsibility – God & messenger’s responsibility
 - **If any of first 3 weren’t true, then Israel would have an excuse**
- **But that’s not the case:**
 - **v16 – quotes Isaiah 53:1**
 - What is Isa 53 about? Suffering Servant
 - Clearest OT revelation about Jesus’ sacrificial death
 - In other words: Isaiah had already preached about Jesus to Israel
 - Isaiah was sent by God
 - Isaiah preached the good news
 - And he did so in a way that all could hear
 - So God had already met the first 3 conditions!
 - So why were they still separated? Because they chose not to believe
 - It was their fault – no excuse!!
- **That’s a crucial point, so Paul circles back around to prove it in detail**
 - **v17-18 – they have heard**
 - v17 – reemphasizing that faith requires hearing
 - v18 – quotes **Psalm 19** – read 19:1-2

- **Creation reveals the greatness and goodness of God**
- Rom 1:20 – God has revealed His power and goodness in Creation
 - All who can perceive that are responsible
 - Not talking about infants or mentally handicapped
- We see God in Creation – even if we don't admit
- **Wait: Doesn't say anything about Jesus – can't save**
 - Correct
 - BUT – if you respond rightly to what you have, God will always provide more
 - *Proof* – Mt 7:7-8
 - by missionary, angel, or vision... they will get gospel
- **So, Creation told the Jews about God**
- **So did the Law and the Prophets...**
 - **v19 - Dt 32:21**
 - **v20 - Isa 65:1**
 - Warned them ahead of time that if they don't respond in faith, God will turn to others – Gentiles
 - IRONY: compared to Jews, Gentiles were spiritual idiots
 - If dumb Gentiles can understand the gospel, so can the Jews!
- **v21 – conclusion: they have no excuse**
 - quote from **Isa 65:2**
 - **God is continually merciful**
 - *stretched out my hands – in Heb: open arms, ready to welcome, embrace and bless.*
 - **But they continually reject**
- **So they have no excuse. It was their choice.**
- **Implication:**
 - No Jew, no Gentile, will end up in hell because they were not elect or because they never heard.
 - They heard, they understood, they made a choice

Application

- **Don't get hung up over the election vs free will**
 - An antinomy – two truths that seem mutually exclusive to us, but aren't to God
 - God doesn't want you to try to logically reconcile them
 - I don't believe you can
 - Every attempt short-changes one of them.
 - Arminians – God did not choose them because they did not choose God
 - Many staunch Calvinists – they chose to reject God because God chose to reject them.
 - Neither are correct
 - God did not choose them by His own free choice
 - They did not choose God by their own free choice
 - I cannot explain how both are true – they just are
 - Paul puts them side-by-side in Rom 9&10

During his days as guest lecturer at Calvin Seminary, **R.B.Kuiper** illustrated election and human responsibility like this:

"I liken them to two ropes going through two holes in the ceiling and over a pulley above. If I wish to support myself by them, I must cling to them both. If I cling only to one and not the other, I go down. I read the many teachings of the Bible regarding God's election, predestination, his chosen, and so on. I read also the many teachings regarding 'whosoever will may come' and urging people to exercise their responsibility as human beings. These seeming contradictions cannot be

reconciled by the puny human mind. With childlike faith, I cling to both ropes, fully confident that in eternity I will see that both strands of truth are, after all, of one piece.”

- We're not going to reconcile them in this life
- We may never!
- After all, we're finite. Why should finite creatures expect to ever fully understand the ways of an infinite God?
- So, don't worry about trying to reconcile these.
- Paul's goal in Rom 10 is not to try to answer our theological debates
- His goal is to emphasize our responsibility to believe

So...

- **If you have yet to believe: what's holding you back?**
- **If you have believed: What's your excuse for not praying and sharing?**
 - **10:1** – election does not invalidate need to **pray** for the lost
 - **10:14** – election does not invalidate need to **share** our faith
 - we are a NECESSARY means in their salvation!
 - God can use other means, but He chooses to use us

Questions for Romans Sermon #23 – 9:30-10:21

Note: these questions have been written for small groups studying Romans together. You can also adapt these questions for your family or for personal study.

REVIEW & OVERVIEW

1. What primary question is Paul trying to answer in Romans 9-11? Why did this question come up at this point in the book?
2. Briefly, what was Paul's answer in 9:1-29?
3. Read Rom 9:30-10:21. What is Paul's answer in this passage?
4. Summarize in one sentence Paul's point in each major section of this passage. (*Hint: each section deals with an excuse that Israel might have made for rejecting the gospel.*)
9:30-10:4

10:5-13

10:14-21

OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

5. What does the word "righteousness" mean in this passage? (*Hint: "justify" is the verb form of the noun "righteousness" in Greek*)
 - a. How were the Israelites pursuing this righteousness and why did they fail to attain it? Was their failure an innocent mistake or are they at fault?
 - b. Why did the Gentiles succeed where the Israelites failed (how did they attain righteousness)?
6. What's Paul's point in v4? How exactly does Jesus relate to the Law of Moses? How does a Jew's relationship to the Law change as a result of placing his faith in Christ? For help, see Matthew 5:17-18, Romans 7:1-4, and Galatians 3:13, 19-26; 4:4-5; Jeremiah 31:31-33.

7. In 10:9-10, “confess” and “believe” are not two separate steps (*Paul is simply mirroring the literary parallelism of the quotation from Deuteronomy quoted in Romans 10:8*). They both refer to our belief and agreement with God concerning certain facts about Jesus.
 - a. What facts about Jesus do we need to believe in order to be saved? Why does Paul focus on these two facts and not others?

 - b. What does Paul mean by confessing Jesus as "Lord" (Master, the One in charge of my life, or Yahweh, the One true God)? (*Hint: What aspects of the teaching and ministry of Jesus caused the Jews to "stumble" over Him? Cp. Luke 5:21; John 10:33*)

8. According to this passage, if a person ends up eternally separated from God, whose fault is it (cf. John 3:16-21)? How does Paul prove that point?

APPLICATION

9. What objections or excuses have you heard people make for not accepting the free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection? How would you answer each objection or excuse?

10. Based on this passage, what is our responsibility towards those who don't know Christ? What does God expect us to do for them?

Additional Review Questions

11. What is the big idea of the book of Romans?
12. Sketch a quick outline of Romans chapters 1-8. What is Paul's primary point in each section of your outline?

Additional Interpretive Questions

13. What questions came to your mind during this sermon? Write them down and bring them up with your group.
14. According to this passage, what had the Jews done well? Spiritually speaking, what did they have in their favor?
15. Jesus is the "stone of stumbling" Paul mentions in v33. Why did the Jews stumble over Jesus? Think through the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Can you think of situations in the Gospels when the Jewish leaders or the nation as a whole stumbled over Him?
16. Paul's quotation of Deut 30:12-14 in Rom 10:6-8 sounds quite confusing, but his point is simple. What is he saying in these verses?
17. In Rom 10:14-15, why does Paul chronologically list out the steps required for a person to be saved?
 - a. Which of these steps have been fulfilled for Israel according to Paul's argument?
 - b. Which of these steps have been fulfilled for the hypothetical Aborigine adult man who's never heard the gospel? Can God hold him accountable according to Paul's logic in 10:14-21? Why or why not? (*See also Romans 1:20-21 and Psalm 19:1-4 [quoted by Paul in v18]*)
18. Romans 10:16 is crucial to Paul's argument. What OT verse does Paul quote? Look up that verse and read the verses that follow. What is that passage about? With that information in mind, what exactly is Paul's point in Rom 10:16?
19. What point is Paul making in 10:19-20 by quoting Deut 32:21 and Isa 65:1? How do these quotations support his argument?