

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE ROMANS  
*Commentary by Rev. Msgr. Gregory Mikesch*  
*Lesson 14 - Romans 10:6-11:4*

**Romans 10: 6-15**

Verses 6 and 7 give a clear example of **Substitution** in Paul's theology (from Lesson 1). Paul quotes a passage from Deuteronomy 30:12-14 which originally concerned the Torah, or law. In a loose paraphrase of these verses, Paul interprets the text in reference to Jesus. Moses says that the law is very near and that no one must ascend to heaven to bring it down. Paul uses this text to speak of Incarnation. The Word of God is near in the person of Jesus. Paul changes Deuteronomy 30:13 by speaking of going down into the abyss rather than crossing to the other side of the sea. Paul wants to make reference to Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Paul continues his **Substitution** theology in verse 8. In Deuteronomy 30:14, Moses says that the word of the law is "in your mouth and in your heart." As Paul interprets this text, the "word" is now the word of the Gospel, the word of faith which is offered to all who believe that Jesus is Lord.

Paul carries the theme of "lips and heart" into verse 9. In the opening part of this verse he gives the basic creedal statement of the early Church - Jesus is Lord! Christians of all ages of history have proclaimed this truth as the core of the faith. But for this statement to be an expression of faith, it must originate from the very depths of the individual. The presence of the Spirit within the person brings about this faith. The heart of the person must be so moved as to have the complete conviction that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Paul has absolute trust in the promise of God's love. If a person confesses with the lips and believes in the heart, then Paul can say with certainty "You will be saved."

Verse 10 basically repeats verse 9. But at this point, we might take a moment to listen with our hearts. Verse 10 is so simple. We can almost hear Paul say to this Jewish people, "Please trust. Trust that what I am telling you about Jesus and faith and righteousness is true. Trust that God is a loving Father, not a harsh judge. Trust that you are loved." Paul is opening his heart to his people and he longs for them to be willing to receive the love God wishes to give them.

In verse 11, Paul repeats the quotation from Isaiah 28:16. This is a lead-in for the next two verses. Paul wants to show that salvation is open to all people. The universality of God's love means that race or national origin make no difference. Quoting the prophet Isaiah, Paul says, "No one who believes in him (Jesus) will be put to shame." God will not betray the promise he has made that faith in the death/resurrection of Jesus brings righteousness.

Verse 12 is a continuation of this theme of universality. But it is also a reminder to us of the close relationship between Paul's letter to the Romans and his letter to the Galatians. Paul says that there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. If we look at Galatians 3:28, we see that he repeats and even expands this theme. In Galatians he adds "slave or free, male or female." The major themes of Romans are repeated in Galatians.

In verse 13, Paul quotes a passage from the prophet Joel. This scriptural text is part of the same passage which Peter uses in his address to the people at the Pentecost event (Acts 2:17-21). The statement is clear, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Let me mention a small point in case anyone is using a New American Bible. This quotation from Joel is listed as 2:32 in the NRSV, but in the NAB this verse is found in 3:5. The NRSV and the NAB do not follow the same chapter and verse divisions in the book of Joel. The NRSV follows the division in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is helpful to be aware of this if you try to locate this particular text.

Verses 14 and 15 form the first of four sets of questions pertaining to Israel's unbelief. Paul responds to each question with a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul imagines an objector saying, "What you are saying is fine Paul, but how can people call on one unless they believe? And how can they believe if they have not heard? And how can they hear if no one proclaims? And how can anyone proclaim without being sent?" The implication is that the Jews cannot be held responsible for not believing in Jesus. But by quoting Isaiah 52:7, Paul says that the messengers have been sent. Isaiah has already revealed that the good news has arrived. For Paul and for all believers, the good news is that salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

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**Side Note: The Book of the Prophet Isaiah**

Paul quotes Isaiah numerous times in his letter. It is helpful to know the major divisions in this book. The book of the prophet Isaiah is not one book. It is three separate books, written by three different authors at three different times in Jewish history. First Isaiah, or simply Isaiah, covers chapters 1-39. This is the actual prophet named Isaiah who lived in Jerusalem, cir. 750-700 B.C. The main theme is as follows: Reform your lives and return to true worship of God or there will be punishment and destruction.

Isaiah witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom. The southern kingdom, including Jerusalem, was captured in 597 B.C. by the Babylonians. Second Isaiah, or Deutero-Isaiah, covers chapters 40-55. This book was written during the time of the Babylonian exile, 587-537 B.C. He had one main theme: Do not give up. Have hope. God will release you from this exile and carry you back to your own land and Jerusalem.

Third Isaiah, or Trito-Isaiah, covers chapters 56-66. This book was written after 537 B.C. when the Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem. The main theme is as follows: The city of Jerusalem may be in ruins but have faith, a glorious future awaits you. Rebuild the city and the Temple. God is with you.

### **Romans 10:16-21**

Today's commentary opens with Paul addressing the second of the four objections to Israel's unbelief. The objections are found in the following verses: First, 10:14-15; Second, 10:16-17; Third, 10:18; and Fourth, 10:19-21.

Before we look at verse 16, let us clarify a point. We have seen that Paul often quotes the Hebrew Scriptures, particularly the prophet Isaiah. What might catch our attention is that Paul is not opposed to slightly changing the text, or combining diverse texts, to fit his purpose. This was an accepted practice in his day. The Jewish rabbis would find texts in the scriptures which they would use as proof texts to support their teachings. The borrowed passage might even be reinterpreted and given a meaning which was the opposite of its meaning in its original setting. The scriptural word was considered open to a multitude of interpretations.

In the second objection, the fact is stated that not all of the Jews have obeyed the good news. The implied message is, "If not all of the Jews have obeyed, then maybe what you are telling us, Paul, is not true." Paul responds by quoting Isaiah 53:1, "Lord, who has believed our message?" By using this passage, Paul is saying that Isaiah foretold long ago that many would not accept the gospel. The fact that many Jews do not accept the gospel is not a sign that the gospel is not true.

Since verse 16 has to do with preaching, Paul carries this idea into verse 17. He says that "faith comes from what is heard" implying the need for proclaimers of the word. He says, "What is heard comes through the word of Christ." This phrase "the word of Christ" can mean either "word" or "message" which Jesus brought from the Father, or it can mean that Jesus himself is the Word. Either interpretation is acceptable.

In verse 18, the third objection asks if the Jews have had an opportunity to hear the message of the gospel. Maybe the preachers of the word have not done their job. Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 to show that the message has been proclaimed. If we go back and read the psalm verse in its original setting, we see that it is the voice of the heavens and the firmament which is being heard throughout the world. Nature is singing the praises of God. But Paul accommodates this text to the preachers of the gospel. This is an example of the use of scripture in Paul's time.

The fourth objection and response are found in verses 19 through 21. The question can be paraphrased, "Maybe the message was proclaimed in a way which was too difficult for Israel to understand." And Paul's response would be, "If it was so difficult, then why were the Gentiles able to grasp it?" He supports his response with three quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures. The first passage is from Deuteronomy 32:21.

Again, as we look at the original setting of this text, we see that God is angry because Israel has been worshipping false gods. God responds by telling Israel that he will give his love to a people who are not a nation. This will make Israel jealous. Paul interprets this text to mean that God plans to give his righteousness to the Gentiles. This too will make Israel jealous. Paul believes that it has been part of God's plan all along to bring the Gentiles into the faith before the majority of the Jews.

In verse 20, the second response is from Isaiah 65:1. With this text, Paul adds fuel to the fire. He says that not only does God call the Gentiles first, but he reveals himself to a people who were not even looking for him. The third response, Isaiah 65:2, says that God is not doing all this out of spite. He has continuously held out his hands to his people, longing for them to respond to his overtures of love, but they would not listen.

There is one final point on these last two responses. In the original text of Isaiah 65:1-2, both verses are addressed to unfaithful Israel. But notice what Paul does. He turns verse 1 around and makes it apply to the Gentiles who, through no fault of their own, did not seek God. Paul applies verse 2 to the Jews, those who had been in contact with God but turned away from him. Scripture has a multitude of interpretations.

#### **Romans 11:1-10**

Chapter 11 begins with the question "Has God rejected his people?" The answer is **No!** In this chapter Paul explains how God's plan is in motion.

Paul has responded to each of the objections showing that Israel has no excuse for its unbelief. The natural question to ask is, "Does this mean that the Jews are forever separated from God?" and Paul cries out, "Unthinkable!" He himself is a Jew and he is proud of that fact. He is an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and a Benjaminite, just like King Saul. The fact that Paul and other Jews have come to a belief in Christ is a sure sign that God has not rejected his people. Even if Paul was the only believer this would still be sufficient.

The thought of being the only believer reminds Paul of the prophet Elijah. The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:10-18 describes how he escapes from Jezebel. In his prayer, Elijah tells God how he is the only one left who has been faithful. God responds by telling Elijah that he will protect him and that he is not alone. There are seven thousand in Israel who have remained faithful. Throughout Israel's history, there has always been a remnant. There was never a time when the whole nation of Israel was true to the covenant. Once again Paul draws his readers' attention to the theme of the remnant.

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