

THE FREEDOM OF MAN

Romans 10:1–21

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Between Romans 8 and Romans 12, Paul has this section of three chapters which are a theology of God's dealings with Israel. Romans 9: God's past dealings. Romans 10: His present dealings. Romans 11: His future dealings. In proclaiming this section, I realize you might inwardly say, "Pastor! I've come here not to hear about Israel or theology. I have come to hear about me and what God has to say to me." I think that is the great feature of the Bible, by the way, that wherever you turn to in the Scripture you will hear a Word for yourself. For as we look at God's ancient dealings with His people, we see His contemporary relationships to our own living. Last week in looking at Romans 9, we examined the theme, "The freedom of God." We said that God is free to select the method of salvation. God is free to select the means that He will use to bring that salvation and make it available. And we also looked at the objector's response to God, the feeling of, "Has God failed? Is God fair? Is there some moral flaw in God? If God indeed knows everything, as Romans 9 is saying, and purposes things, can God be trusted? Is God fair?" We looked at the response to that and said, "There is a tremendous difference between an honest heart that brings to God the question "Why?" and the skeptic's heart which, in an accusatory way, begins relating to God and asks the question "Why?" from the standpoint that is already saying, "God, You cannot be trusted to be fair. I demand of You an answer." It is the difference between a child coming to a parent with an honest question, and a child coming to a parent with a question that indicates that there is disrespect in the heart. So we looked at Job as an example of the right to question God. And indeed Job presents to us the understanding that it is all right to come to God with our questions. But when it is all said and done and God shows up on the scene, He says to Job, "Job, before I answer you, I have a few questions to ask you. Where were you when the world was made? Where were you when things

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were being formed? Where were you when I made the snow and the winds and the oceans? Can you understand all this? Can you understand how life operates?” For about two whole chapters, God just goes on and on asking Job question after question that he can’t answer. Finally, Job says, “God, enough! I didn’t know what I was getting into when I took You on. So I’ll just be content.” And he winds up in a contented relationship with God. And he never does get all of his questions answered. But God is free to ordain. Free to know. Free to choose the method of salvation.

As we look at the Scripture tonight in Romans 10, we see, on the other side, that man is free. There are these two circles of operation, which appear to us to be contradictory in form. How can God be free and I be free? Or how can I be free and God truly be free? Yet, side-by-side in Romans 9 and 10, we have these fundamental truths being taught. Man is free.

In the first four verses, Paul teaches that Israel’s rejection of the Lord was the result of its own choice. He is praying that their choice will be changed: “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Romans 10:1-4, NIV).

Here Paul is articulating the characteristics of a decision on the part of men and women that choose not to embrace God’s freedom—but choose to say to God, “God, we’ll go ahead and relate to You the way we choose rather than the way that You have chosen.” The characteristics are ticked off, verse-by-verse.

The first characteristic in verse 1:

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I. When we choose to relate to God in a way other than God's way, it is a way which cannot save.

Thus, Paul is praying for the salvation of his own people. Why? Because they're not saved in their own insight and wisdom and will. How do you relate to that word "saved." Is it a cliché? Datsun uses it now, you know. "Datsun saves." When Datsun first began using that commercial, I thought it was blasphemous. After hearing it for so long, Madison Avenue sort of gets to you after a while.

Jesus saves! When we save something as human beings, the opposite of saving is spending. I'm good at that. My checkbook bears testimony to that that. I'm better at spending than saving. But when the Scripture speaks of saving, the opposite is not spending. The opposite is lost.

If I am down here swimming off of Newport Pier and having a great time and someone sees me from the pier and, all of a sudden, becomes very concerned about me, and begins running down the pier, and dives off the pier and into the water and grabs hold of me and says, "I'm here to save you!" If I'm capable, I'd say, "What kind of a nut are you? I'm doing fine swimming here in this water. I'm safe and secure. You can stay on that pier. I don't need to be saved." But if, on the other hand, I'm down at Newport Pier and swimming and I get in trouble and I go down once, twice, and the third time. I'm going under, and someone on the pier sees the predicament that I am in and races off the pier and jumps in, their offer to save me will be gratefully accepted. This seems to me the idea that is bound up in the understanding of being saved. If you do not feel as though you need to be saved, how can you be saved? The whole act of Christ, in giving His life, seems so utterly senseless. Yet the Scriptures teach us very clearly we must be saved from sin. We must be saved from the power and possession of the devil. And we must be saved from hell. And for that salvation to be effective, there must be an instantaneous salvation. Process is no good, if I am drowning. It does not do any good for you to come by with a book and say,

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“Here’s 250 pages of how to swim effectively when you are going under. It takes three months to learn it.”

“I don’t need to be saved.” That is the attitude of human response that is rejecting the freedom of God to choose the way whereby we relate to Him. Paul is praying for those who have this attitude. “My heart’s desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1). It is all right. It is proper. God wants us to. The apostle gives us an example of it, that we should pray. And we have a right to pray for those who do not know the Lord, who are near to us—our friends and family. As we pray for another’s salvation, we recognize that God will not violate their freedom of choice. But on the other hand, prayer is the way of keeping our witness alive. It means that we’re continuing to be concerned. It means we’re saying, “I haven’t given up and neither has God.” As Ezekiel 18:32 states, “‘I have no pleasure in the death of anyone,’ says the LORD God. ‘So turn and live.’” When we quit praying for someone, then we can become careless and unconcerned and uncompassionate.

II. The second characteristic of an attitude which turns away from the freedom of God: A religion that chooses to go its own way is not enlightened (verse 2).

A real insult to the tremendous works of theology that are out today written by people of every religion in the world and cult and sect within Christianity. One can’t keep up with the literature that’s being produced. It’s impossible. Everything which attempts to propose a way of relating to God other than the way of the Cross, Paul declares flatly that it is not an enlightened way. It may be a way of zeal. There may be much effort in it. No one could fault, in Paul’s day, the concerned orthodox Jewish person for having zeal for his faith. When you are so concerned to keep the Law that you argue whether or not you can eat an egg laid by a hen on the Sabbath—the theological point being did or did not the chicken work when it laid the egg—one has to have zeal. Paul says of all human zeal without Christ, “It’s not enlightened.”

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Orr has in one of his books the story of an occurrence that happened to him during the battle of Manila in World War II. He said, "I was trying to sleep in a miserable tent which contained twenty-five army cots. There were twenty-three other officers in that tent, and there's always one frog to start the croaking. And too soon, all twenty-three men were snoring—some base, some baritone, some tenor. I tried hard to sleep, but I could not succeed. I tried to count numbers, but sleep alluded me. I quoted verses of poetry, but I was still wide awake. I recited verses of Scripture to no avail. The barrage of snoring was more bother than the barrage of artillery in the distance, pounding the old city section of Manila into rubble.

"At two in the morning, I heard a step on the gravel path. It was a pilot looking for a bed. He was tired and hungry. As he came under the tent, he heard the barrage of snoring and let out a string of words of an improper sort. Then he said, rhetorically, 'Where is that light?'

"He did not expect an answer, for when my voice struck his ears in the darkness, he jumped.

"If you stand right where you are," I said, "and reach out your right hand, you'll find a cord.'

'Just tell me where it is!' he barked, and added a stream of profanity.

'Don't swear at me,' said I. 'I'm trying to tell you, and you won't even listen to me.'

"He could have sworn all night and it would not have helped him. He could have asked me how the tent was wired electrically, and I could not have told him. He could have asked me to explain how a current of electricity, passing through filament in a vacuum, could radiate light, and I could not have told him. All he needed to do was take my word for it, pull the suspended cord, watch the light come on, and find that there was enough illumination to show him all he needed to see. The answer to his problem was within reach."

So in the gospel, it is a question of enlightenment. One can raise questions all the time and still remain in the dark when what is needed is to pull on the cord. Pull the cord, and let the sun shine in.

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III. A third characteristic of going one's own way is that this life, Paul says in verse 3, does not submit to God's righteousness but seeks to establish its own righteousness.

In Paul's day, the major thinking of Jewish theology held that there are 3 classes of mankind.

There are those who are good. That is the balance is on the right side, if you were going to put a scale out. And there are those who are bad, and the balance is on the wrong side. But there are those who are kind of half-and-half, equally canceling out. Ever feel this way? One more good work is needed, therefore, to become good. So the effort and stress. Yet Paul says when we seek to come before God in our own righteousness, we will always fail.

And, may I say, that this is not only a problem of Jewish legalists. It is the problem of the sincere believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the sincere Pentecostal, charismatic believer who has a keenly-developed sensitivity and consciousness to the presence of sin. That it is so possible for us to come under condemnation because we have done wrong, even as a Christian, that we begin to think that our salvation is a matter of always doing everything right. God help us to always do everything right. But we recognize when we do not that that does not take away our salvation. Even as one righteous act did not make me a Christian, so one unrighteous act does not un-Christianize me. I'm held by grace in relationship to God. It is His gift. So I do not look at my own righteousness.

Lately, I've taken up the game of golf. I've realized the therapeutic value of golf in our culture. Now I know why so many people are crazy about it. All the time living here in southern California, whether you're living in a car or working in a building or living in a house or an apartment. What man makes—no matter how beautiful—it is it is never as nice as what God makes. So you get out on the golf course, the green and the trees and the water. Everything is great but the golf ball. I've been out practicing, trying to better my game. When I shoot in the low hundreds, I'm really doing well! It does me no good, however, to continue to compare

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myself to myself. Or even to compare myself to my partner, who is a little better than I am. Because, while I may feel good comparing myself to myself or to my partner, when I compare myself to the pros, I feel terrible. There is this—embedded in the understanding—the righteousness of man versus the righteous of God. If you compare your righteousness with someone else, I'm sure you can score fairly well. But to compare one's self to the righteousness of God is to come utterly short. The fall of our human nature in sin is such, as the children's classic says, "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Humpty Dumpty together again." That's our nature apart from God. Nothing again can put us together. No matter how holy and righteous we are and how well we've done, if, like Isaiah, we stand in the presence of God, we have to cry out, "Woe is me. I am undone" (Isaiah 6). Our own righteousness does not do it. Are you seeking to become a good person without being a debtor to God? God will have none of it.

IV. A fourth characteristic that Paul gives of a life that is, in its own freedom, walking away from God's freedom to choose the way we must be saved is that life that is not seeking to be justified by God.

What it means to be declared justified is to be declared righteous. It's to be approved. It's to stand as innocent and acquitted in God's presence. It is like what Jesus heard three times in His ministry, the voice from heaven speaking, "I am well pleased." It is what will always happen, and it's only happened once in the history of earth, when a perfectly sinless life has been lived in obedience to the Law. That life has such merit before God that God himself cries out from the heavens, and His voice is heard on earth: "With thee I am well pleased." The totally justified person.

If the Law could save us, or we could save ourselves, there is no need for the Messiah, or Christ. But Paul says that Christ is the end of the Law. As one comes to the end of the Old Testament,

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the end of the Law of Moses, one recognizes an incompleteness. That deeply-embedded in the fabric of the Old Testament itself is the recognition that something yet is lacking. There must be something to complete it. One who will act on our behalf with power.

Paul writes of that facet of justification. In verse 5, he declares: “Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them’” (NIV). If you seek to govern yourself by good works, then God will hold you by that standard.

There’s a phrase in the Book of Revelation that when there is the Great White Throne of Judgment at the end of Millennium, and all the wicked dead are raised, they appear before Christ and the books will be opened. Everyone will be judged by the deeds which they have done. We look at that and say as Christian persons, “I thought we would be judged on the basis of our faith in Christ? What is this about being judged on the basis of the deeds we have done?” Forgetting to realize that there is a sequence that all those who are with Christ have missed that judgment altogether, but have already entered into His presence. What God is really saying through that Great White Throne Judgment, when the books are opened and it will be rendered to every man according to what he has done, God is saying, “If you prefer to relate to Me on the basis of what you have done rather than on the basis of faith in My Son, then there will come a day when I will let you face the test of whether you can totally meet My approval.”

The Psalms recognize the character of the Law in saying: “If thou, LORD, should mark iniquities, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee” (see Psalm 130:3-4). If we live by the Law, we will either have pride or insecurity. We will have pride in saying, “I’ve attained.” Or we will have insecurity in feeling like we’ll never be able to make it with God. But instead, in verses 6 through 13, we see the freedom that is ours to accept, God’s freedom of choosing for us the way of salvation. A freedom that is ours in having a righteousness which is based upon faith.

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The thrust of this entire passage, verses 6–13, centers upon our relationship to Christ, which is the Greek word meaning “Messiah.” Paul takes over Moses’ words found in Deuteronomy 30 and adapts them and applies them to Jesus rather than to the Law. Moses said about the Law, “Who will ascend to heaven and bring it down? Who will descend into the abyss to bring it up?” (see Romans 10:6-7). But Paul, then, takes these words and relates them to Jesus. He says there’s a higher fulfillment. What Paul is saying in verses 6 through 8 is God has acted decisively to save you. No longer should you say, “Where is salvation going to come from? Who’s going to go into heaven to bring God down? If I could just materialize God!” I had a friend of mine once say to me, “If God would just appear to me in my room, I would believe in Him.” This is a way of saying, “Who will ascend to heaven to bring God down?” Or “Who will go down into death, the abyss, and bring him up?”

What does the Word say instead? “‘It is in your mouth than in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming” (Romans 10:8, NIV). This is Paul’s way of saying, “Don’t go looking as though God is going to do anything other than what He has already done in Jesus Christ.” As the hymn goes, “What more can He say to you than He has said to you who, for refuge, to Jesus have fled?”

About a year ago, my three nieces, my brother’s daughters, all came here and spent some time with us. Their mom and dad went back ahead of them to New Orleans, and the three girls stayed for a few days. Then they flew back. They got off the airline, they told my brother, “We starved that whole flight! Would you please get us something to eat?” My brother looked at them and said, “Didn’t they serve any food on the plane? Didn’t you eat any?” They said, “We didn’t have any money!” An illustration of the fact that here were three girls that did not know provision had already been made. They even thought you had to pay for the Cokes, so they hadn’t even gotten anything to drink.

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How tragic it is, in a theological sense, to live with the assumption that there is yet something more that God must do in order to for us to believe in Him when provision, full provision, has already been made. So, therefore, since God has acted decisively to save you, (verses 6–8) Paul calls upon us in the Spirit to act decisively in response (verses 9–10). Because “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10, NIV).

Most surgeons I know anything about will not operate without permission from the patient. That’s malpractice. So, also, God does not operate on us without our permission. It was just a year ago now that I went into the hospital for the first time for surgery. It is a scary thing to face surgery. What’s an appendectomy? It’s as common as a tonsillectomy. But I was sure that something would go wrong with me. I’m going to the hospital for the appendectomy, and I’m giving my wife directions for my funeral. That’s one thing I’m not going to leave to chance. The doctor, as a skilled physician, laid down the conditions for me. I had an unusual sort of a problem with my appendix because it wasn’t hurting me all that bad. After he had got done testing me, he came to the conclusion it was probably my appendix, but he couldn’t be sure. He said he needed to act decisively. My response? Would I let him act decisively by acting decisively myself by saying, “Yes”? I could have looked at that situation and said, “I’ll try to fix it myself.” But the doctor was telling me, “You can’t fix it yourself. Only I can do it.”

So God is saying to us in regard to sin, “You can’t fix it. It’s too far gone for that. Only I can make you righteous. Will you act decisively?” Like my medical doctor took all that training to make himself ready to be a surgeon, so God has taken every step through Christ to make himself ready to save us. He’s gone through the experience, and all we need to do is reach out and take

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advantage of His skill as the Great Physician—the only physician of His kind, who can heal the wounded heart and the sin-sick life.

Paul says you must believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead. The heart is not just some biological organism in the body. It does not mean that the ancients had a false view of anatomy so that they thought one thought with his heart. The “heart” stands for the center of one’s existence. Jesus was in the heart of the earth. That means He was in the center of things. To believe that Jesus is risen from the dead is to believe everything. To deny it is to deny everything. When I say, “I believe in my heart that Jesus is risen from the dead,” I then am able to say, “I believe that He died for my sins.” I’m then able to say, “I believe He was born of the Virgin Mary.” I’m able to say, “I believe everything He ever taught.” I’m able to say, “I believe in the trustworthiness of Scripture because Christ himself gave His authority to it.” That question is the central question. When you believe that Jesus is raised from the dead, everything else will fall in line. That belief brings justification.

If I had said to the doctor, “I’d prefer to try to solve this one myself.” So I’d just lay around for a while. That appendix, by the time they got it out, was just at the point of beginning to rupture. If I had let it go, my decision having been tested by time, would not have stood the test, and my act would not have been justified. It would have been a wrong decision—therefore, unjustifiable. But by putting my fate in the hands of the physician, it is a justifiable act. And I am declared righteous. I’m declared well now for trusting myself to the doctor.

And I’m declared well and justified for trusting myself to the hands of my Redeemer. “Believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord.” To “confess” literally means “to say the same thing as”—it’s to say the same thing that Jesus is saying about himself. The same thing that the apostles are saying about Jesus. The same thing as the Scriptures. “Confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord.”

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In biblical times, there were four ways that word “Lord” was used. It was a title that was used in normal, everyday life. A title of respect like we use the word “sir.” It was also used as a normal title for the Roman emperor: “Lord Caesar.” It was used by the Greeks as a title for their gods or by other Mediterranean peoples for their gods. It was used by the Hebrew people, in a sacred sense, to refer to the unmentionable name of their God, whose name was so sacred it could not be pronounced—Yahweh. So every time that word “Yahweh,” which we translate with capital letters in our English by “LORD” was read in a synagogue service (and even this day, the word “Yahweh” will not be said, but rather the word “Elohim,” another name for God, will be substituted because the covenant name for God is too sacred to say) that is the word LORD, Yahweh. All that now is bound up in saying Jesus is Lord. It’s to confess Him as God. To say that He’s Master over everything. He’s Master over the past. That means He has power to take care of my sins. He’s Master over the present. That means there’s an available supply of His grace to help me now. And He’s Master over the future. He has dominion over my life so that I can sing with full assurance, “Where He leads me, I will follow,” and mean every word. “He is Lord.” It is a permanent confession. You call him Lord every moment of your life. You call Him Lord even when all the evidence suggests that He is not Lord. He’s not lost control because you’ve lost control. We make this one-on-one association that if we’ve lost control of the situation, God, therefore, has lost control.

I think the classic rebuttal of this is at Stephen’s death in Acts 7. And it is at the place of his death that he says, “Lay not this sin to their charge,” he says, “Lord, receive my spirit.” At the very moment when it seems like God was not acting like Lord, because Stephen was dying and breathing his last, he is confessing Jesus is Lord. It’s a permanent confession. When we make that kind of free choice in the Lord, we have the promises of God.

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“Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Romans 10:11, NIV). Disgrace is something we’d all want to avoid. The devil wants to dig up everything he can to find on you. But the Lord is saying, “The person who has put his faith in Me shall never be disgraced, never put to shame.”

Verse 12 says: “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him” (NIV). That is, there is no discrimination with God. No one is excluded. And in verse 13, no exception: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (NIV). Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord. Even if you don’t feel that that’s true—that you’re too worthless for God to really hear you and love you. Such could never be the case.

I was eating lunch with a friend this week. There was a stuffed monkey on the table. I was sort of feeling down, I confess. I said, “That looks like a pastor that I know,” referring to myself. My friend had the wisdom to buoy me up and say, “That doesn’t look like the pastor I know.”

Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved, even if you feel like God somehow has favorite kids and you’re not one of them. Such could never be the case. There’s freedom to be saved.

Paul kind of wraps this passage up, and we’ll do that quickly by looking at verses 14 through 21. There is the freedom to be lost. Verses 14 through 18 are often used in missionary conventions. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But

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I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: ‘Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world’” (Romans 10:14–18, NIV).

While we use this in a missionary setting, Paul has in the original setting much different context. For he’s coming at the problem of Israel’s rejection of Christ. And he is facing this imaginary objector who has said in chapter 9, “Is God fair?” And is repeating that again by, in essence, saying to Paul, “You’re saying that this way of relating to God by faith is the only way that one can be saved, and whoever calls upon the Lord will be saved. But how can this be so? Can they indeed respond if they have not heard? And can they hear unless a preacher has been sent to them?” And Paul is saying of the Jewish community of his day, of the persons whom he had witnessed to, “The problem is not in their hearing. They indeed have heard. The problem, rather, is in their willful disobedience to the gospel.” It is not even a problem of, “Did they understand?” Verses 19–20 (NIV): “Again I ask [the objector speaking]: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, ‘I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.’ And Isaiah boldly says, ‘I was found by those who did not seek me; I have revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.’”

The quotation from Moses is significant because Moses has warned the people that if they ever get to worshipping other gods, whom Moses calls “no gods,” then God will not regard them as His people. And here it is being re-emphasized by Paul. The people who have sought “no god,” in turn, have had the real God say, “You’re not a people.” And the Gentiles, therefore, have been included. Those who were not part of the religious community are seeing and perceiving and understanding. Why couldn’t those who sat in the synagogue (or, may we say in our generation, in the Church) all their life understand what God is doing? Is it not readily available? Yes, it is. Have you ever watched a little kid playing with his toy, and then he quits, gives it up for a while? Then another kid comes over and starts playing with the toy. You know what happens to the first

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kid? He gets the toy! Paul says, “Now that the Gentiles are receiving the gospel, it’s stirred you up to envy. It should evoke this kind of response in you.”

We’re not only talking about Jewish persons in Romans 9 through 11. We’re talking about any time a religious institution begins to adopt the characteristics of an organization that is apart from God. God is going to skip outside of that and start pouring forth His grace and His Spirit on someone else. It is going to then evoke either a harder reaction against God—so that the organization, the institution, or the person becomes more self-satisfied and more clinging to their own righteousness—or it’s going to evoke a response of, “God, if You can do it for that person who is a no-name, who comes from no church, then surely You could do it for me.”

The sum of Paul’s argument is that Israel’s rejection is not due to ignorance, nor due to a lack of understanding, but disobedience. I’d say that I realize the message this evening has attempted to put forth clearly the doctrine of salvation. If you’re a person attending this church and have not believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you will never have the excuse, standing before God, and saying, “I did not know,” or, “I did not understand.” That option has been taken away from you. Paul says of God: “Concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people’” (Romans 10:21, NIV).

In chapter 9, the objector was concerned, “Will God be fair? Maybe God really wants to damn people. He wants to elect some to be saved and others to be damned.” Does this verse, verse 21, sound like a God who was like that? “All day long I have held out my hands to a contrary and disobedient people.” The figure of holding out one’s hands is an invitation. It’s like the father of the prodigal. “If you will return, I will embrace you. My hands are held out that you might come back. The fists are not clenched, the arms are not folded, passively and defensively, but they are open for you to return.”

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I would suggest an experiment if you don't think this is difficult to hold out your hands all day long. Try it. Yet God, in a very tender way, is saying to everyone who is not relating to Him, "All day long I have held out My hands to you, and My heart is open towards you. Will you come to Me and find peace and life?" It is the freedom of God to hold out His hands, and it is the freedom of man to say "no" or "yes."

Closing Prayer

Our gracious heavenly Father, we marvel again at Your Word, which says to us that You are not willing that any should perish, but that all should have everlasting life. You've given us this marvelous freedom, a freedom which supersedes our environment, which means that we are not what the past has made us. We can even be something other than what we have made ourselves. In You, we can really be free—free from sin, free from the hurts, and the hostilities from the past. Forgiven and cleansed. Made righteous through believing that You are risen from the dead. That eternal truth. And by confessing with our lips, "Jesus is Lord." When that confession is upon our lips, how very difficult, and impossible even, it is to say that which would be contrary to the character and kind nature of our Lord. We know that to believe in our heart and to confess with our lips is to be radically changed, to be made like You. Lord, our heart's cry is that there would be, for anyone here who has never made that confession, a whole-hearted turning to You. And no longer a reliance upon self, or rebellion against You, but a willful surrender to You. Lord, we ask this in Your Name. Amen.