

The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity
What about those who haven't heard?
12-5-10
Scripture Reading - Romans 10:5-17

We've been answering some difficult questions the past two weeks

- How can Jesus be the only way?
- How can God be good and send people to Hell?

We have another difficult one today

- What about those who haven't heard?

What makes these questions difficult is NOT *figuring out the Bible has to say about them*. The Bible is pretty clear about them all. What makes them difficult is *accepting what the Bible has to say*. With tough questions like these it is VERY tempting to answer with our own thoughts, feelings, and emotions rather than with the Word of God. We think to ourselves, "God is good and God is fair and thus He would never condemn someone to Hell who has never heard of Jesus," and we go with it, regardless of what the Word of God says.

But no matter how tempted we are, we have to let *the Word of God*, not our own thoughts, feelings, and emotions, determine our answer to these difficult questions because the God's Word is *always true* and our own thoughts, feelings, and emotions are not. Then, once we've found the answer in God's Word, we have to pray and ask Him to help us to understand it, accept it, and submit to it, rather than reject it, ignore it, or twist it, so that we can develop a *right understanding* of Him, of ourselves, and of the world we live in.

So what does the Word of God have to say about those who haven't heard?

There is no better place to look for the answer to this difficult question than the book of Romans, so that's where we'll be spending most of our time today.

Three important truths from Romans...

- 1) Because of our sin, all mankind needs to get right with God

a. **Romans 1:18-32 (ESV)**

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God *is plain to them*, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been *clearly perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. *So they are without excuse.* ²¹ *For although they knew God*, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore *God gave them up* in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ *because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator*, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ *And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God*, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² *Though they know God's decree* that those who

practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

b. **Romans 2:1-5 (ESV)**

¹ *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges.* For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

c. **Romans 2:12-15 (ESV)**

¹² *For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.* ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. ¹⁴ For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ *They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts,* while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

d. **Romans 3:9-20 (ESV)**

⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged *that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,* ¹⁰ as it is written: "*None is righteous, no, not one;* ¹¹ *no one understands; no one seeks for God.* ¹² *All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.*" ¹³ "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips." ¹⁴ "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." ¹⁵

"Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known." ¹⁸ *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to *those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* ²⁰ For by works of the law *no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

So, because of our sin, all mankind needs to get right with God.

2) The only way to get right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ

a. **Romans 3:21-26 (ESV)**

²¹ *But now* the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

So, because of our sin, all mankind needs to get right with God, and the only way to get right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ.

3) The only way to put your faith in Jesus Christ is to hear of Him

a. **Romans 10:5-17 (ESV)**

⁹ ...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches

on all who call on him. ¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

¹⁴ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

So when we add it all together, here's what we get. Because of our sin, all mankind needs to get right with God; the only way to get right with God is through faith in Jesus Christ; and the only way to put your faith in Jesus Christ is to hear of Him. Thus, the Bible's answer to the question, "What about those who haven't heard?" is this, *unless God does something out of the ordinary (which He certainly has the power and the right to do), they will not be saved.*

Two wrong conclusions and one right one that can be drawn from this difficult truth.

Two wrong conclusions

1) It's not fair

- a. God determines what is fair, not us
 - i. **Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)**
⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- b. God is fair
 - i. **Revelation 15:3-4 (ESV)**
³ "...Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! *Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!* ⁴ Who will not fear, O Lord,

and glorify your name? *For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.*"

ii. **Revelation 16:5-7 (ESV)**

⁵ And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "*Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments.* ⁷ ..." "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, *true and just* are your judgments!"

iii. **Revelation 19:1-2 (ESV)**

¹ ...Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ² for his judgments are *true and just*;

c. Paul never questions God's fairness

i. **Romans 3:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) ⁶ By no means! For then how could God judge the world?

ii. **Romans 11:33-36 (ESV)**

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

d. What isn't fair is that *God saves ANY*, not that He doesn't save all

A second wrong conclusion...

2) Anyone who would believe in Jesus will be missed (or passed over)

In other words, EVERYONE who will respond positively to the Gospel *will have an opportunity to hear it*, no matter where they are, and ONLY THOSE who *will not respond positively* will miss out.

a. **Romans 8:28-30 (ESV)**

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he *foreknew* he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also *called*, and those whom he called he also *justified*, and those whom he justified he also *glorified*.

b. God always gets His man, and none of His men will be missed

i. **Acts 8:1-5 (ESV)**

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. *And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.* ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. ⁴ *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* ⁵ *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

ii. **Acts 8:26-39 (ESV)**

²⁶ *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place.* ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ *And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."* ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he

said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁷ ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

One right conclusion

1) We need to go!!!

a. **Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)**

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ *Therefore go* and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

b. **Romans 10:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How

beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

- c. Fueled Paul
 - i. **Romans 15:20-21 (ESV)**
²⁰and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, ²¹but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."
- d. Fueled missionaries throughout the ages
 - i. William Carey (to go to India), Hudson Taylor (to go to China), Mary Slessor (to go to Africa), Jim Elliot (to go to Ecuador)
 - ii. See resource table for their stories and much more
- e. Fuels missionaries today
 - i. Chad and Charity Peterson (to go to "River City")
 - ii. Matt and Stephanie Cushman (to go around the world with the Jesus Film and now to Rome)
 - iii. Nathan and Patrice Richmond (to go to a far off land to translate the Bible for a people group who doesn't have it in their own language)
 - iv. Jonathon and Heather Hankin (to leave FedEx, uproot their family, and go to Jordan)
 - v. Farms International (to go to places like Rwanda, Bangladesh, and Nepal)
- f. Will you allow it to fuel you to GO???
 - i. WE are the *primary means* by which God draws people on to Himself. WE are His ministers and messengers of reconciliation. WE are God's ambassadors here on earth. He wants to make His appeal THROUGH US! (2 Cor 5:17-20)
 - ii. **Romans 10:15 (ESV)**
¹⁵..."How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

The good news about Jesus is so good that it fuels radical action. It is that good news that we celebrate today.