

WHAT UNBELIEVERS NEED TO BE SAVED
ROMANS 10:1-4

Unbelief is not unusual.

Unbelief is — and always has been — far too typical and too common. Accounts of unbelief are well-known:

- ✓ French philosopher Voltaire is reputed to have said, “If a miracle occurred in the market place of Paris and in the presence of 2000 men, I would rather disbelieve my own eyes than the 2000.”
- ✓ Twenty-five years ago George and Tina Rollason gave birth to a daughter and believing that God had nothing to do with her birth, named her Atheist Evolution Rollason. “There [are] so many people named Christian or Christine...This is just one person named Atheist. What’s...the difference?”
- ✓ A little over a decade ago there was much excitement when noted Atheist philosopher Anthony Flew rejected his atheism. A reporter for a Christian journal interviewed him: “Flew has had to assure former students that he does not now believe in revealed religion. ‘Even one of my daughters asked if this meant we were going to say grace at meals,’ he said. ‘The answer is no.’ Flew is also quick to point out that he is not a Christian. ‘I have become a deist like Thomas Jefferson.’... To make things perfectly clear, he told me: ‘I understand why Christians are excited, but if they think I am going to become a convert to Christ in the near future, they are very much mistaken.’ ‘Are you Paul on the road to Damascus?’ I asked him. ‘Certainly not.’” Flew died in that unbelief.

You know people just like that — people who are closed to the gospel and refuse to believe. What will it take for them to believe? If we only read Romans 9, we might be tempted to say, “They need to be elected by God and there is nothing we can do about that...” But that’s not what Paul says. Paul says the unbelief of unbelievers — particularly unbelieving Israel — is their responsibility. In Romans 10:1-4, Paul says,

FOR UNBELIEVERS TO BE SAVED, THEY MUST BELIEVE — AND THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE TO BELIEVE.

What do unbelievers need to be saved? Paul identifies four components that lead to salvation...

1. Unbelievers Need **OUR** Joyful, Compassionate **PRAYERS** (v. 1)
2. Unbelievers Need Zeal — and **KNOWLEDGE** (v. 2)
3. Unbelievers Need **GOD’S** Righteousness (v. 3)
 - They need to learn God’s righteousness
 - They need to rid themselves of self-righteousness
 - They need to submit themselves to God’s righteousness
4. Unbelievers Need **CHRIST** (v. 4)
 - Christ is — and always has been — the goal
 - Christ is available to everyone

1. Unbelievers Need OUR Joyful, Compassionate PRAYERS (v. 1)

- When Paul uses the word *brethren*, as he often does (19x in Romans), he typically does it for two reasons:
 - ✓ To mark a transition in a section or the letter (e.g., 12:1; 15:14)
 - ✓ To remind the readers of their familial relationship, in spite of something difficult he has to say (7:1; 11:25) — what he has to say is said in love and not in anger or resentment.
 - ✓ Both those ideas seem to be part of Paul's use of the term here. But as he pursues this topic of Israel's unbelief, he also seems to be asserting that he (and his readers who are in the faith) also have a responsibility to those who do not believe. Their unbelief is their responsibility, but the believer also has a responsibility to the unbeliever.
 - ✓ Later he will affirm the responsibility to speak (10:14ff); here he points to another responsibility.
- Paul himself is an example of our responsibility to unbelievers:
 - ✓ When he says *my heart's desire* (v. 1), he is echoing what he said in 9:1-3 and anticipates 11:1ff.
 - ✓ This is Paul's way of expressing his warm affection and love for the Israelites. He has good will toward them and he acts on their behalf by praying for them. Just as God had compassion and good will toward him, Paul has compassion toward the Israelites, desiring their salvation.
 - ✓ He *prays* for them — he persistently asks and pleads to God on their behalf.
 - He prays because he believes that God can (and will) save all Israel. While they stumbled (9:32) he did not believe that stumbling was final, and so he petitioned God's grace.
 - ... He prays for them *to God* because God is the source of their salvation; they will only be saved if He produces and graciously gives salvation to them; so Paul prays for that.
 - ... He prays for them because if they are not saved, they will be accursed (9:3).
 - He specifically prays *for their salvation*. He does not believe their situation is hopeless. They can yet be saved.
 - He believes that His prayers play a role in their salvation — just as Jesus (Lk. 23:34) and Stephen (Acts 7:60) prayed. This is part of the mystery of how God's sovereignty and man's actions work together. He believes his prayers have a role, so he prays.
- Do you and I long for and pray for the salvation of the unsaved? Do we pray for the redemption of Israel? Do we pray for unbelievers to believe? Do our prayers indicate we believe there is hope?
 - ✓ Pray.
 - Pray for the salvation of Israel. God will culminate history with Israel's salvation. He has not rejected His people and has not forgotten His promises. Pray for Israel's belief.

- Pray for the salvation of other lost people. We don't know how, but our prayers do play a role in the salvation of the lost. And as we pray, it will also give us greater boldness to speak, because our hearts will have an increasing desire for their salvation.

"Jesus saw in the huge crowds an inviting harvest for God. What do we see in the thronging masses around us? We will see very largely what we are looking for. The keen businessman sees in the crowds an inviting commercial harvest for rich financial gain. The forces of sin and lawlessness find in the crowds an inviting harvest for sinful exploitation. What do you see?" [Hiebert, *Working with God*, 27.]

- ✓ When you pray, be hopeful and confident. It's tempting to say, "It's no use — she is hardened and will never believe." You don't know that. Until the final breath is drawn, there is always possibility of conversion (the thief on the cross is a primary example). Keep praying and keep speaking.
- ✓ Can you agree with Horatius Bonar?

"He that saved our souls has taught us to weep over the unsaved. Lord, let that mind be in us that was in Thee! Give us Thy tears to weep; for, Lord, our hearts are hard toward our fellows. We can see thousands perish around us and our sleep never be disturbed; no vision of their awful doom ever scaring us, no cry from their lost souls ever turning our peace into bitterness." [*Words to the Winners of Souls*, 37-38.]

2. Unbelievers Need Zeal — *and* KNOWLEDGE (v. 2)

- In spite of their unbelief, there *was* something commendable about the Israelites. They had *a zeal for God*. They were enthusiastic and zealous for God. They pursued God. They wanted God.
 - ✓ Paul could *testify* to the truthfulness of this because that was his own experience (Acts 22:3; 26:4-5; **Gal. 1:13-14**; Phil. 3:3-6). Paul knew what it was like to have zeal for God.
 - ✓ That zeal for God is commendable. It's necessary. Even Jesus was zealous (Jn. 2:17).
 - ✓ But unless it has the right object and pursued in the right way, it's useless. And that was Israel.
 - ✓ It has been rightly said, "It is better to limp in the right direction than to run with all our might in the wrong direction."
- For all their zeal, Israel's longing was *not in accordance with knowledge*.
 - ✓ He has already brought up this shortcoming (9:31-32).
 - ✓ This is what was wrong with the Pharisees — they were pursuing God, but doing so ignorantly (without knowledge, e.g., **Mt. 12:5-7**; **Lk. 11:52**; 12:56-57; **Lk. 23:34**; **Jn. 7:26, 28**)
 - ✓ Passion and energy and zeal will only benefit one if that passion terminates on Christ. A Christ-less zeal is as worthless as a gold-plated, but empty water bottle for a thirsty man in the desert.

- Unbelievers need knowledge. They need correction. They need to be taught.
 - ✓ We cannot convince (we can't change their hearts), but we can teach and instruct. We can correct.
 - ✓ This was Philip with the Ethiopian (**Acts 8:30**). "Do you understand?...Can I show you?..."
 - ✓ The gospel begins with a set of objective facts about Christ; before we can call men to believe, they must know and understand those facts; once they have been known, then they can believe...
 - ✓ What has Israel not known and believed correctly? That's what Paul answers in v. 3 —

3. Unbelievers Need God's Righteousness (v. 3)

- The word **for** provides the explanation why they did not have knowledge of God: 1) they did not know about **the righteousness of God**, and 2) they attempted to **establish their own** righteousness. The result was that they did not **subject themselves to the righteousness of God**.
- So we can say from this verse that unbelievers —

• They need to learn God's righteousness

- ✓ **Not knowing about God's righteousness** does not mean that they did not know God is righteous. It does mean that they did not know that righteousness is imputed by God through Jesus Christ (**1:17**). This is very much the same problem that Martin Luther had — they did not understand that the righteousness God demands is provided by God through Christ (**3:21-22, 24-26**; 5:17):

"I hated that word 'righteousness of God,' which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically of the formal or active justice, as they called it, by which God is righteous and punishes sinners and the unrighteous. Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt I was a sinner before God with a most disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, indeed, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. Secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.

"...I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith....Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of all Scripture showed itself to me. And whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven." [Martin Luther]

- ✓ This provision of righteousness was always granted by God by grace through faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:5ff). They were not wrong in understanding that God was righteous; they were wrong in thinking that they did not need the righteousness God also provided for them. That led to another problem.

- They need to rid themselves of self-righteousness

- ✓ Instead of appealing to God for his righteousness (Lk. 18:13), they supposed that they could be righteous enough to appease God.
- ✓ The Israelites were **seeking to establish their own** (righteousness).
 - Each Israelite repeatedly sought to establish a righteousness of his own. They pursued individual self-righteousness. This is the very thing Jesus addressed in **Mt. 5:21-48**.
 - Their pursuit of that righteousness was not enough. Their zeal for self-righteousness was a one-way ticket to Hell.
 - I have thought many times about the 19-year-old woman who in November 1988 fell asleep while driving on an East Los Angeles freeway. She woke up when her car plunged through a guard rail and was left hanging by its left rear wheel from falling to the road below. Several motorists immediately stopped, tied ropes to the back of her car and hung onto it until firemen arrived. They stabilized the car by raising a ladder from below the car and then pulled the car to safety with chains and cables. In all, it took 2-1/2 hours and 25 workers to bring her to safety. LA County Fire Captain reported after it was over: "It was kinda funny...she kept saying, 'I'll do it myself.'" That deluded self-sufficiency is the same kind that produced self-righteousness in the Israelites and self-righteousness is so many people today.
 - "Religion blinds people to the truth of their sin, makes them self-righteous, feeds pride, fuels vanity, and produces skilled hypocrites." [MacArthur, *Shepherd Leader*, 168.]
- ✓ What the Israelites needed and what all men always need is to give up and rid themselves of self-righteousness. "The first step to obtaining the righteousness of God is to renounce our own righteousness." [Calvin]
- ✓ We need to help unbelievers soak in Romans 3:8-20. There is none that is righteous. Salvation will only come when they realize their unrighteousness and give up pretending to be righteous.

- They need to submit themselves to God's righteousness

- ✓ Because they did not know and understand the righteousness God provides and because they kept attempting to assert their own righteousness, the result is that they **they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God**. They refused to place themselves under God's righteousness. Their pride kept them from submission to God.
- ✓ Faith in Christ requires submission to God — an acknowledgement "I can't..." — that is something the flesh is reticent to do **(8:7)**. That rebellion can only result in God's wrath **(2:17, 25; 9:31-32)**.
- ✓ It has been noted that "It's not for lack of evidence that people turn from God; it's from their pride or their will." That was true of Israel, and that is still true today. Why do people persist in unbelief? It is not because they are not elect. It is because of their rebellious pride.
- ✓ One of the greatest examples of that reality was Judas —

“Judas went to hell on purpose. He knew there was a hell, and he made the choice to send himself there. It’s as if he said, ‘The agony is too great. I want relief. I’m going to send myself to hell.’ His downfall came because he loved himself too much, he rejected salvation too easily, and he resented Jesus too strongly” [MacArthur, *The Shepherd as Preacher*, 222.]

- ✓ God provides a perfect righteousness for imperfect men, but the reception of that gift demands humility by the recipient, which is often (as was the case with Israel) the stumbling block for the unbelieving. It takes no work to be righteous before God, but it does demand a humble heart that is willing to extend one’s hand to receive the gift of grace.
- ✓ That act of humility is too much for some to contemplate; they are unwilling to acknowledge their dependence on God to receive that gift.
- ✓ If someone is going to be saved it is only because he is willing to acknowledge his need and dependence on God. This was true in the OT, in Christ’s day, in Paul’s day, and in our day. The Israelites were not so different than people are today; the deceptiveness of the heart will always lead one to self-righteousness, and only when that is destroyed will a man reach out to God for God’s righteousness. If an unbeliever will be saved, he needs God’s righteousness. As Luther rightly noted, the righteousness of God is the only “gateway to Heaven.”

4. Unbelievers Need **CHRIST** (v. 4)

- Christ is — and always has been — the goal

- ✓ Verse 4 might be the most succinct statement in Scripture about the role of the Law and Christ’s relationship to it. And that succinctness has led to much debate about what Paul means.
- ✓ The primary question is, in what way is Christ **the end of the law**? There are two primary options:
 - Christ is the termination point of the Law. That is, when Christ came, the Law ceases to function; it comes to an end. It’s effectiveness in providing righteousness is over.
 - Christ is the purpose of the Law — He is the goal toward which the Law is always pointing.
- ✓ This word cannot mean that Christ was the end of the Law in that Christ terminated the Law as a means of righteousness, for righteousness was never accessible through the Law. The Law was the means of demonstrating man’s inability to be righteous; the Law demonstrated man’s dependence on the righteousness of God which must be imputed to him (e.g., Gen. 15:6; **Rom. 4:1ff**). The Law always pointed to an external righteousness as the means of salvation — a righteousness which always was always and only found in Christ, who completed and fulfilled the Law that we could not keep (**Mt. 5:17**). The Law always looked to Christ as the goal for righteousness.
- ✓ Christ is the consummation of the Law and the intended object of the Law. The Law was a “signpost to faith in Christ.” [C. Ash] And Christ then becomes the end — the One for whom we live (**8:29**).

- ✓ Only Christ is righteous, people can only be declared righteous and then made righteous in Glory through Christ, and the Law was given to point Israel and the nations to that truth.
- ✓ And with this truth of Christ's righteousness is another astounding reality —

- **Christ is available to everyone**

- ✓ Christ is the goal of the Law for righteousness — **to everyone who believes**. Everyone. There is in that small word a broadness of possibility. Everyone who believes will receive this righteousness.
- ✓ When Paul says **everyone** we should note that he doesn't say, "every Israelite." He says "everyone." This is for Jews. And it is for Gentiles. It is for everyone who believes.
- ✓ But we should also note that while it is for everyone — it is only for everyone **who believes**. To receive the righteousness of God demands that one must believe in Christ alone for the provision of a righteousness that will be pleasing to God. You must believe. Faith is absolutely necessary. And this belief is a "continuing" belief — it persists and continues (it's not a decision without transformation). It continues to lean on Christ for salvation and life and joy.
- ✓ Friends, as we think about evangelism and engaging in conversations with the intent to persuade, this is a primary focus of what unbelievers we know need (and what we need to communicate):
 - They need our prayers
 - They need knowledge
 - They need God's righteousness
 - They need Christ (they need to *believe* in Christ)
 - As we evangelize, let's make it clear — no self-righteousness is enough; Christ-righteousness is always enough and always satisfying to both God and man.
- ✓ If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, this passage is good news for you. You can believe. If you believe, God will count you as righteous as Christ is, even though you are not righteous yourself. But you must believe. Will you believe?
- ✓ This passage is also a warning, because it points out "how not to be saved." How can you avoid salvation? It's a four-step process:
 - If you don't want to be saved, ignore the pleas and prayers of godly people (v. 1)
 - If you don't want to be saved, be zealous for what you want and ignore what God demands (v. 2)
 - If you don't want to be saved, keep trying to be righteous on your own (v. 3)
 - If you don't want to be saved, reject (don't believe) the singular goal of God's Law (v. 4)
- ✓ God chooses and elects to salvation (that's chapter 9); but all are responsible because anyone can believe, and anyone who believes will be imputed with the righteousness of Christ.

CONCLUSION: A pastoral prayer for salvation

- We confess our prayerlessness. Specifically, we confess our prayerlessness for the salvation of the unbelieving.
 - ✓ That prayerlessness speaks of an unbelief of Your ability to save.
 - ✓ That prayerlessness speaks of a lack of compassion and love for those who need saving (as we used to need it). We have become smug and complacent and uncompassionate.
- With Paul, we pray for the salvation of Israel. They are Your people. They are Your priority. We long for them to come to salvation as a nation so that Your promises will be shown to be true and so that You will be made glorious in Israel and among the nations.
- We also pray for the salvation of those whom we know who are lost. We pray for the salvation of fathers and mothers, grandparents, and children (how many of our children have rejected You!). We pray that You would save our bosses and supervisors, our employees, our neighbors, and the people with whom we regularly conduct business (barbers and hair stylists, grocery clerks, mechanics, home repairmen, house cleaners, yardmen, and more). Give us eyes to see those who are perishing without You — and compassion to pray and boldness to speak for their salvation.
- We pray that those whom we know who are passionate for religion will be made to see their need for your righteousness. Give them dissatisfaction with religiosity and desire for Your righteousness.
- We ask that the unbelievers we know will give up self-righteousness. Help them to realize the futility of what they are attempting to accomplish. Help them to comprehend the provision of what You give in Your righteousness.
- Most of all we ask that they might apprehend Christ. We long that the One who is a stumbling block to Israel will become the joy and end for which they live.
- Would this gospel message be clear in our own minds as we communicate it? And might You, again, give us passion for You and for the completion of Your gospel purposes in Israel and all those who do not believe?

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36