

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 133
Text: Romans 10:14-21
Date: November 23, 2008 (a.m.)

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PAUL'S EVANGELISTIC IMPERATIVE

The Gospel as set forth in the epistle to the Romans is developed around the Person and Work of Christ. Central to understanding this is an equally important emphasis upon what the Bible means by sin, the doctrine of God as seen in His attributes of Holiness and Righteousness as well as the reality of His judgment on sin and sinners with the fearful result of eternal punishment (Hell). Our evangelistic efforts must incorporate this doctrinal perspective or it will cease to be Biblical evangelism. We looked last week at the expression *Jesus Saves* and noted how this must be seen in light of what the Bible teaches about the terror of everlasting damnation (Rom. 5:9). Sadly this truth has become an embarrassment to many self-professed Evangelicals, especially the group that calls itself the Emergent church (led by such high-profiled individuals like Brian McLaren, Spencer Burke, Doug Pagitt, Steven Chalke and Tony Jones). Gary Gilley, writing in a book I recently co-edited, made these observations.

"So odious is the doctrine of hell to many in the emergent community that McLaren devoted his book *The Last Word and the Word After That* to the issue. McLaren introduces his subject with an exaggerated distortion of the evangelical position:

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for you life, and if you don't love God back and cooperate with God's plans in exactly the prescribed way, God will torture you with unimaginable abuse, forever—that sort of thing. Human parents who 'love' their children with these kinds of implied ultimatums tend to produce the most dysfunctional families...

If the idea of hell is so ridiculous, then why did Jesus teach it? McLaren concocts a fanciful view that the Jews during the intertestamental period wove together the mythological views of the Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Zoroastrian, and Persian religions and created the doctrine of hell. When Jesus came on the scene, the Pharisees were using hell as a club to keep the people in line. Through the threat of hell the Pharisees could motivate sinners to stop sinning, and then perhaps God would send the Messiah along with his kingdom. Jesus takes the Pharisees' club and turns it on them. Jesus didn't really believe in or endorse hell, as we understand it; he just used it as a 'truth-depicting model.' Jesus used hell 'to threaten those who excluded sinners and other undesirables, showing that God's righteousness was compassionate and merciful, that God's kingdom welcomed the undeserving, that for God there was no out group.' This convoluted argumentation leads to there being 'no out-group.' If there is no out group, does that mean McLaren is a universalist? While he flirts with this possibility stating 'Universalism is not as bankrupt of biblical support as some suggest,' he never firmly lights on it. But without question McLaren, and most of the emergent leaders, does hold to the doctrine of inclusivism, which teaches that while salvation has been made possible by Jesus Christ, it is not necessary to know who Jesus is or the precise nature of what he has done in order to be 'in.' Emergent church leaders follow the reasoning of missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin concerning Christ and salvation, which runs along these lines: Exclusive in the sense of affirming the unique truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ, but not in the sense of denying the possibility of salvation to those outside the Christian faith. Inclusive in the sense of refusing to limit the saving grace of God to Christians, but not in the sense of viewing other religions as salvific. In other words, salvation is not exclusively found in the gospel, therefore there are saved Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and so forth. Soon hell becomes a moot issue because no one seems to be going there anyway. Spencer Burke, founder of TheOOZE.com. echoes these remarks in his recently published book with his friend Charlie Wear.

Burke states, 'For me, I think that grace says we are in. We are all beloved children of God...you are in...[Jesus] comes and brings life, and everyone gets life...[but] God's love gives us the choice to choose, to opt-out.' The doctrine of hell is determined to a large degree by the all-important understanding of the gospel. The emergent leaders see a wide gate opening to eternal life. 'It bothers me to use *exclusive* and *Jesus* in the same sentence. Everything about Jesus' life and message seemed to be about inclusion, not exclusion,' writes McLaren. He adds later in his discussion, 'Maybe God's plan is an opt-out plan, not an opt-in one. If you want to stay out of the party, you can. But it's hard for me to imagine somebody being more stubbornly ornery than God is gracious.' Burke states, 'I actually think you can become a Christian and never even know who Jesus is....Many of my friends are now out in Muslim countries ministering. In the past we would have said we want people to convert to Christianity. We don't do that anymore. We invite people to follow Jesus. They are not even asking them to leave their Muslim faith, they are asking them to simply follow Jesus.'"¹ It is impossible to harmonize this mentality with the Apostle Paul's emphasis in Romans.

I. ISRAEL AND THE GOSPEL

The apostle, in the section of Romans, continues his stress on the responsibility of all humanity to respond to the Apostolic message that centers around the crucified, resurrected and ascended Son of God. Paul has also explained that salvation has been prepared for the elect of God. Here lies the clue to the failure of the nation Israel to be predominant among the elect as in Old Covenant times. Israel assumed that their covenantal status as the people of God guaranteed their relationship with God, but had forgotten that there must be response in personal faith to the invitation to receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the gospel. Paul develops his argument by working his way back in a reverse fashion – going back down a staircase.

Call upon the name of the Lord SALVATION (13)
To call, they must first BELIEVE (14)
To believe, they must first HEAR (14)
To hear, there must be a PREACHER (14)
For a preacher to preach, he must be SENT (15)
Those who are sent must GO (15)

Each of these steps is presented in the form of a question. Just as Paul's remarks in Romans 3:21-26 constitutes an Apostolic commentary on John 3:16, so here in Romans 10:14-21 provides a lens through which the Apostle gives us an expanded analysis of the Great Commission in Matt. 28:16-20. Paul has just pointed out that the Gospel is universal but it had its origins with the Jews, i.e., Israel. But Israel did not believe. This was foretold in the Old Testament. Isaiah 53:1 opens with the question, "Who has believed our message?" The implication made by the fact of the question is that most have not believed the message of the gospel. He now substantiates his case by appealing to the OT.

- A. Refutation from the Law** (Rom. 10:19). In the final verses of the chapter, the apostle deals with the remaining excuses to the effect that Israel did not know what was going to happen, if they rejected the message from the Lord. "But I say, is it that Israel has not known?" A question exists over the proper object of the verb know. Is the sense, "Is it that Israel has not known the gospel?" Would it be, "Is it that Israel has not known that there would come a time of rejection because of their unbelief?" Or, "Is it that Israel has not known that the gospel was universal in nature, comprehending Gentiles, too?" The fact that Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21 leads to the view that the second alternative is correct, although that would involve a universal gospel preaching. The apostle understands the Deuteronomy passage to predict that, since Israel will worship "no-gods," the idols, God will provoke them to jealousy by a "no-people," that is, the Gentiles, who were not the chosen people, as Abraham's descendants were (cf. 11:11, 14). Thus, if they had read Moses correctly, they would have understood their fate, if they rejected the Word of God in Christ.
- B. Refutation from the Prophets** (Rom. 10:20-21). Isaiah is even bolder than Moses, Paul says, for he frankly predicts that those who did not seek Yahweh as Israel, and did not ask after Him as Israel, will find Yahweh. The text is from Isaiah 65:1 and refers to the Gentiles, rather than the Jews. It is

a prophecy of the future reception of Gentiles, and Israel should have known its force. Cf. Isa. 42:6-7.

Isaiah 65:2 is now cited as referring to Israel. It gives the reason for the reception of the Gentiles, referred to in the immediately preceding verse in Isaiah and in Romans. It is a remarkable text, and in a sense it sums up the idea of the whole chapter, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and contrary people." The picture is of the unwearied love of Yahweh for His people. There is a great emphasis on the words "all day long." Have you, the reader, ever tried to hold out your arms for five minutes? It is a tiring experience. Then think of the picture Paul gives by citing the prophet. It beautifully and touchingly figures the incessant pleading love of Yahweh for Israel. And, further, when we see that the figure of Yahweh, with arms outstretched, it is a vivid reminder of our Lord hanging on the cross with arms outstretched in crucifixion, it becomes a pathetic, tugging appeal to the heart of the mighty love and compassion of the Master of the Universe. It reminds us of Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

CONCLUSION: The Apostle Paul has at this point in Romans set forth very clearly and ably the freeness of the divine salvation through Jesus Christ. He has emphasized the principles expressed in the important texts, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed," and "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (cf. Rom. 10:11, 13). The truth is not more plainly expressed in the famous text, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). And the salvation, Paul says, is free to all, whether Jew or Gentile. And, incidentally, we have here another of the passages in which the word all is a reference, not to all without exception, but to all without distinction. The salvation is universally available to both Jews and Gentiles, as unlikely as that might have seemed to some of the Jews of Paul's day. He writes, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). D. A. Carson in his assessment of Brian McLaren and the British emergent Steve Chalke, concludes by saying. "I have to say, as kindly but as forcefully as I can, that to my mind, if words mean anything, both McLaren and Chalke have largely abandoned the gospel. Perhaps their rhetoric and enthusiasm have led them astray and they will prove willing to reconsider their published judgments on these matters and embrace biblical truth; more holistically than they have been doing in their most recent works. But if not, I cannot see how their own words constitute anything less than a drift toward abandoning the gospel itself. Chalke does so more straightforwardly; McLaren is smoother, tying his arguments to his understanding of the postmodern and the emergent, terminology that Chalke largely avoids. It will not do to argue, though some have tried, that whereas they may be a bit weak on the cross, they are closer to what the New Testament says about ethics. Why should it be any better or worse, someone might ask, to deny one part of the gospel than another? Haven't those who have abandoned the ethics of Jesus denied the gospel as effectively as those who domesticate the cross?² The Emergents are actively promoting *another* gospel and as such fall under an Apostolic anathema (Gal. 1:6-9).

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary Gilley, "The Emergent Church," in Reforming or Conforming? Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church eds. GLW Johnson & R. N. Gleason (Crossway 2008) p. 283-84.

² D. A. Carson, Becoming Conversant with the Emergent Church (Zondervan, 2005; p. 186.