

The Elect

Memory Text: “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” (Romans 11:1)

Setting The Stage: After rehearsing the triumphant experience of those who are justified and sanctified by faith in Romans 8, Paul moves to what gives him, “great heaviness and continual sorrow” (9:2). Why is it that the Jews, God’s chosen people, have to a large degree rejected the gospel?

Paul has been preparing the way for his discussion of this very sensitive subject by stressing the fact that even though the gospel was for both Jew and Gentile, it was for the Jews first (1:16; 2:10). He has also emphasized that God is no respecter of persons (2:11), and that the Jews, specifically, have been guilty of sin (2:17-24). He has spent a whole chapter proving that the gospel of salvation by faith is well supported by the OT (ch. 4).

First, Paul affirms his love and sorrow for his own people (9:1-3). He then shares the cause of their rejection as the repositories of God’s grace is not the failure of God’s promises to them (9:6-13). Nor is there any injustice on the part of God on this matter (9:14-29). The fault lies in their own rejection of “the righteousness which is of faith” (9:30-10:21). But Paul doesn’t describe their condition as hopeless. He goes on to speak of the salvation of a “remnant according to the election of grace” (11:1-10), and of the acceptance of the Gentiles (11:11-22), all of which is the evidence of the wisdom and glory of God (11:33-36). So let’s break it all down...

Sunday – Christ & The Law

Romans 10:1-21; Hosea 10:1; Matthew 5:20; Philippians 3:9

Romans 10:1-21. The issue Paul is dealing with this in this chapter is the problem mentioned in 9:31-33, that Israel has failed to attain to righteousness because they had been seeking for a righteousness based upon the merits of their own works. But before he enters upon the painful task of pointing out the failure and guilt of his own people, Paul renews his assurance of heartfelt concern for their salvation (10:1).

Applications: This is an example worthy of following when we work with people and their salvation. Take it slow and step by step... Also, if Paul had considered Israel’s rejection as the predetermined will of God, as some have understood the doctrine of predestination, he wouldn’t have prayed that they might be saved. More on this later...

What was Israel's problem? They had a “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”

“Zealous” is a word that Paul used to describe his own fanatical enthusiasm for Judaism prior to his conversion (Gal. 1:14). But in spite of his great zeal, he didn't attain to righteousness. And neither did Israel. Their religion was painfully legal and formal. Their outward show of religiosity was a cloak for inward corruption. They looked good, but were rotten at the core.

“Knowledge.” The Greek implies a full and thorough knowledge. The Jews had knowledge, but they lacked true knowledge that could have led them to serve God in the right way. Their zeal became fanatical, as they showed more zeal for form and the letter of the law than they did for genuine religion.

Application: Can we fall into the danger of setting up our own criteria for salvation?

A person believes attending church is what they need to be righteous but at home or the workplace they are mean and vindictive. A person believes participating in the communion service is what they need to be righteous but they only invite to their dinner table those who can do them a favor. A person believes that giving tithe and offering is what they need to be righteous, but they secretly cheat on their taxes, or gamble away their hard earned money. The Jews thought that doing the right thing on occasion constituted righteousness, while they were corrupt on the inside. There are some today who mistakenly think the same way.

“Establish own righteousness.” Or “set up” their own righteousness, suggesting an element of pride in the endeavor the Jews put forth to set up their own righteousness.

Hosea 10:1: “Israel empties his vine; he brings forth fruit for himself.”

Matthew 5:20: “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Philippians 3:9: “And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;”

What happens when we look to religious forms as righteousness itself instead of looking to the righteousness of God? Could our experience be reduced one of self-sufficient formalism?

What might happen if we look to ourselves to produce the righteousness we think God expects of us instead of the One who alone can make us righteous? Could our experience be reduced to one of frustration and defeat?

The Jews prided themselves in their knowledge of God and His law, but their lives didn't conform to God's will. We could say they were confident in their own righteousness, and therefore would not yield their hearts to admitting that their own righteousness was "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), and that their salvation depended upon the merits of another. And it was this unwillingness to submit that was the cause for their ignorance and also their rejection as God's chosen people.

Application: Human beings still have a problem with this today. Some won't submit to all of God's conditions for salvation – repentance, confession, obedience, surrender, etc.

"Christ...end of the law." This verse has been interpreted several ways: (1) Christ is the termination of the law; (2) Christ is the goal or the aim of the law; (3) Christ is the fulfillment of the law; (4) Christ is the termination of the law as a means of salvation. Which one is it?

The first is the view of antinomians (those against God's law) and can't be accepted by the honest bible student (Rom. 3:31). The last three offer the truth. The law points to Christ, the Savior of the world. Christ also filled full the law with meaning in His life and teachings and met its every requirement thus becoming our perfect substitute and example. But Christ's righteousness, not our own, is the only way by which we can be saved.

The rest of Romans 10 speaks about how near God's plan of salvation had been to the Israelites in their past and present, and their unfortunate and ultimate rejection of it.

Monday – The Election Of Grace

Romans 11:1-10; 4:4

Romans 11:1-10. In these verses, Paul points back to an experience of the OT prophet Elijah when he thought that all of Israel had followed after the worship of Baal and he was the only faithful who remained (v. 2-5). But God told Elijah that although the nation as a whole had deserted Him, there were still 7,000 others who were faithful as Elijah was. This Paul refers to as the "remnant." So just as Elijah supposed the apostasy of Israel to be universal at that time, so now, the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was not so complete as some might suppose. There was now, as there was then, a faithful remnant.

In v. 7, Paul asks what conclusion is to drawn from the truths just stated. Since God hasn't cast away His people, what is their current standing? While it is true that Israel as a nation failed to reach its aim, the failure is not total. A part of Israel, the "elect" have succeeded. While Israel sought to "establish their own righteousness" they did not submit "to the righteousness of God." (10:3)

“Blinded.” In the language of the Bible, God is often said to do that which does not prevent. Vs. 8-10 don’t describe God preventing the Israelites from obtaining salvation (why would He send prophets and even His own Son to aid them if He wasn’t interested in saving them?), but God allowing Israel to experience what they insisted upon (cp. Matt. 13:13). And this is how God always operates. He doesn’t force himself upon anyone. He honors each of our choices.

“Election.” This idea of election has gotten some people in a bind. When we go to the polls and vote for a political candidate, *we* are electing that person to office. *We* do the choosing. Does God choose/decide some to be saved? If so, are they saved against their free will? Is this the meaning behind the word “predestination”? Is that what the word “election” means?

Paul has clearly shown throughout this letter to the Romans that salvation is available to all. All have been called. But sadly, only few respond to that call. Few are chosen. God chooses those who have chosen to accept His provisions of grace.

“The elect are the whosoever wills, the non-elect are the whosoever won’ts.” – D.L. Moody

Speaking of Esau, Ellen White wrote the following: *“There was no arbitrary choice on the part of God by which Esau was shut out from the blessings of salvation. The gifts of His grace through Christ are free to all. There is no election but one’s own by which any may perish. God has set forth in His word the conditions upon which every soul will be elected to eternal life—obedience to His commandments, through faith in Christ. God has elected a character in harmony with His law, and anyone who shall reach the standard of His requirement will have an entrance into the kingdom of glory.*

“Christ Himself said, ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life.’ John 3:36. ‘Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven.’ Matthew 7:21. And in the Revelation He declares, ‘Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.’ Revelation 22:14. As regards man’s final salvation, this is the only election brought to view in the word of God.

“Every soul is elected who will work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He is elected who will put on the armor and fight the good fight of faith. He is elected who will watch unto prayer, who will search the Scriptures, and flee from temptation. He is elected who will have faith continually, and who will be obedient to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The provisions of redemption are free to all; the results of redemption will be enjoyed by those who have complied with the conditions.” (Patriarchs & Prophets, p. 208)

“Grace.” This election came by grace and it is for all, including the Jew. And here Paul makes every attempt to ensure there is no misunderstanding about

justification by faith through the grace of God. If salvation is by grace, then it is no longer on the basis of what we have done. Otherwise grace would no longer be grace. If we deserve to be elected, then there is no grace in God's dealing with us.

Romans 4:4: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt."

The idea of unmerited and freely given grace is contrary to that of wages earned or reward deserved. If the gift of grace could be earned or deserved, then grace wouldn't be grace. However, all but the remnant of Israel had failed to understand this at Paul's time. Does God's last-day remnant today understand?

Tuesday – The Natural Branch

Romans 11:11-24

Romans 11:11-24. One might agree with Festus after reading this passage when he said to Paul, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" (Acts 26:24) Or you might agree with Peter when writing about Paul he said, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand." (2 Peter 3:16)

"Provoke...to jealousy." In vv. 11 & 12, Paul makes a couple of important points: (1) Many of the Jews were offended because of Christ, so they stumbled, and as a result the gospel was taken to the Gentiles (see Matt. 22:8, 9; Acts 13:46). (2) The Jews privileges had been neglected, and now the sight of others stepping into their privileges was to awaken a desire to share in the blessings now being enjoyed by the Gentiles. (3) If the loss and defeat of the Jews was overruled by God to produce riches (riches of grace) for the Gentiles, how much more would the repair of this loss mean for both Jew and Gentile? "The blessings [of salvation] are not lessened by the multitudes of the sharers."

V. 13. Paul has reached a point in his discussion concerning the state of the Jews where he is touching on the position of the Gentiles.

"Olive tree." Paul compares the remnant in Israel to a noble olive tree (v. 17b), some of whose branches have been broken off (unbelieving Jews who had rejected Christ – v. 17a). He compares the Gentiles to branches from a wild olive tree, grafted into the parent stock (v. 17), thus benefiting from the root and the fatness of the olive (v. 17b). The Gentiles become inheritors of the blessings originally promised Abraham (the root), and passed on to Israel. They have also become children of Abraham because of faith (see Gal. 3:9, 14, 27).

The grafting of a branch from a wild tree into the stock of a cultivated tree is a process that is normally never performed. The normal procedure is to graft a tame shoot into a wild stock, like they do here in CA with the walnut trees. English walnuts are typically grafted onto the roots of the native California black walnut.

This practice imbues disease resistance to the trees and makes them better-adapted to native soils. In v. 24, Paul states that the grafting of the Gentiles into the stock of Israel was “contrary to nature” just as the call and conversion of the Gentiles was contrary to Jewish expectation.

Applications: God’s ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He does what we wouldn’t expect and performs those things we are not capable of performing on our own. If He wants to save someone you would least expect, He can and He will (He has and still does).

Also, we graft to mend the tree; but God grafts to mend the branch. The grafting of the wild branches into the good olive could be likened to conversion. We must be cut off from the old stock (the old life, the old man of sin), and be brought into a saving union with a new root, Jesus Christ, receiving of His fullness.

John 15:5: “Am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bear much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. “

“Do not boast.” It would be wrong to assume that God cast away some of His people for the sole and direct purpose of bringing the blessings of salvation to the Gentiles, as if they were of more value than the Jews. The Gentiles had been accepted because of their faith, but the Jews had been rejected because of their unbelief. This understanding would leave no room for any Gentile Christian to boast lest they too become separated from the tree (vv. 18-24).

Application: “No believer should boast of his or her own goodness or feel any superiority over his or her fellow human beings. Our salvation was not earned; it was a gift. Before the cross...we all are equal—sinners in need of divine grace, sinners in need of a holiness that can be ours only through grace. We have nothing of ourselves to boast about.”

Wednesday – All Israel Shall Be Saved

Romans 11:25-27

Romans 11:25-27. The mystery that Paul is referring to here is the purpose of God to save both Jew and Gentile. And he warns the Gentiles lest they become conceited by supposing that their acceptance of what the Jews had rejected was in some way due to their own merits. There was no reason for the believing Gentiles to despise the unbelieving Jews.

To the end of time hardness “in part” will be the spiritual state of the Jews. The two key phrases in this passage are “the fullness of the Gentiles” and “all Israel.” If Paul is referring to all of the Gentile population and the Jewish race then he would be teaching universal salvation – that all will be saved at last. But Paul is clear in other places that this is not so (Rom. 1:18, 32; 2:1-11). God forces salvation upon no one.

If individuals choose to harden their hearts against the gospel God doesn't interfere with their choice. However, God will save those who choose to meet the conditions of salvation.

"All Israel." Here Paul is referring to spiritual Israel. He's completing his illustration of the olive tree. He has shown how the branches representing the unbelieving Jews have been broken off, and the wild olive shoots, representing the Gentiles, have been grafted in. He has also shown how several branches could be reunited with the parent stock. By grafting in these branches the tree represents spiritual Israel, and one day it will be made whole, representing the totality of the saved, both Jew and Gentile.

Thursday – The Salvation Of Sinners

Romans 11:28-36

Romans 11:28-36. "Although a contrast is made between Jews and Gentiles, one point stands clear: God's mercy and love and grace are poured out upon sinners. From even before the foundation of the world God's plan was to save humanity and to use other human beings, nations even, as instruments in His hands to fulfill His divine will.

"What important point should we take from Rom. 11:31 about our witness, not just to Jews but to all people with whom we come in contact?" No doubt, through the centuries, had the Christian church treated the Jews better, many more might have come to their Messiah. The great falling away in the early centuries after Christ, and the extreme paganization of Christianity—including the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday—certainly didn't make it any easier on a Jew who might have been drawn to Jesus. How crucial, then, that all Christians, realizing the mercy that has been given to them in Jesus, display that mercy to others. We cannot be Christians if we do not (see Matt. 18:23-35)."