

The Gospel in Romans: Romans 11:1-10

INTRODUCTION

1. John Stott sets the stage very well for this chapter in his work entitled *The Message of Romans*:
“Paul began these three chapters with the tragic paradox of Israel’s condition, uniquely privileged by God and yet entrenched in unbelief (9:1ff.). This was not to be attributed to either unfaithfulness or injustice on the part of God (9:6ff.), but rather both to his own ‘purpose in election’ (9:11) and also to Israel’s stumbling over Christ (9:32), and her obstinate rejection of God’s persistent advances (10:21).” (p.291)
2. In view of Israel’s persistent unbelief and disobedience to the gospel of Christ, Paul asks and answers two questions.
 - First, has God rejected His people? (11:1-10) Second, have they stumbled beyond ever recovering? (11:11-32)
 - In both cases, the apostle’s resounding answer will be ‘No!’ Nevertheless, God’s sovereignty will be upheld.
3. The Jews’ accursed state is due to two facts: God’s sovereignty in election and Israel’s unbelief and stubbornness.
 - Now in chapter 11 Paul will dig down into the very heart of the issue: how does “Israel” relate to “God’s Israel”?
 - This chapter is among the richest and most challenging in the letter. Pay careful attention as you read it.

I. GOD’S ELECTION IS ENDURING (1-5)

A. Has God Forsaken His People? (1a)

1. One of the great difficulties in this conversation is recognizing the different expectations each party has.
 - For many people, if “Israel” as a nation is elect and in covenant, it must assure their salvation.
 - Many argue, “The Jews are God’s people!” Well...yes, they certainly were in an important way.
 - But ethnicity was never a promise of salvation or an indication of unconditional acceptance by God.
 - Paul uses Israel in, at least, two ways: a corporate, ethnic group and a spiritually elect body.
 - There is “Israel,” i.e. ethnic Jews and a nation, and there is also the “Israel of God,” i.e. the Church.
 - God has been faithful to His promises toward both, but they are not the same group or promises.
2. Has God forsaken His people? Certainly not. But we must be careful to define what we are talking about.
 - God made specific promises to the nation of Israel, promises He has faithfully fulfilled. **Jos. 21:43-45**
 - But not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. Not every Jew is a child of God. **Jn. 8:44**
 - God never promised to save or accept every Jew. That is a demand the Bible nowhere promises.

B. Four Arguments Defending God’s Faithfulness to Israel (1b-5)

1. THE PERSONAL ARGUMENT (1B)
 - Paul is a Jew; therefore, his faith and salvation in Christ demonstrates God’s continuing faithfulness.
 - Some of Paul’s critics can think only in national and ethnic terms, much like many Christians today!
 - It is either all or nothing, so they think; either God promises to save the entire nation or none!
 - It is not as though God once accepted all of the Jews for being such but now is opposed to them.
 - God is no more opposed to saving Jews today than He was to saving Gentiles in the OT.
 - Paul is a Jew, yet God chose him for salvation before he was born, as well as many others.
 - Therefore, Paul’s experience clearly proves God has not completely cast away every Israelite.
2. THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (2A)
 - God cannot and will not cast away those whom He foreknew. To do so would violate His character.
 - As we saw in 8:29, *foreknow* is more than just *foresaw*; it indicates *fore-loved* and *chosen* by God.
 - God’s foreknowledge is personal (people, not merely facts; Gal. 4:9), covenantal (relational, not merely informational; 8:29), and proactive (He chose, not just observed; Acts 2:23).
 - The question is who did God foreknow? Is Paul speaking of the nation of Israel as a national group?
 - If so, then Paul’s critics are justified in complaining that so many remain unsaved.
 - But if Paul is referring to those God foreknew in Christ (i.e. those He chose and called to be saints), then both the faithfulness of God and His sovereignty is vindicated and maintained. **9:24; 1Co. 1:24**
3. THE BIBLICAL ARGUMENT (2B-4)
 - Now Paul turns to the Hebrew Scriptures to support his argument from 1 Kings 18-19.
 - The argument being made has always been true; in other words, the elect were always a remnant.
 - Elijah’s experience demonstrates God’s true people have always been smaller than the nation.
 - In both Elijah’s day and in Paul’s the majority of national Israel was apostate.
 - Critics focus on God’s failure to save all; Scripture focuses on God graciousness in saving many.
 - 7,000 was not a large number relative to the nation as a whole, but it is a lot more than 1 prophet!
 - Should we criticize God’s grace because of our expectations? Did 7K deserve to be saved? Did any?

4. THE OBSERVATIONAL ARGUMENT (5)

- Even in Paul's day when most Jews rejected Christ, thousands had already believed in Him. **Ac. 21:20**
 - This believing remnant of Jews did not satisfy Paul's critics who wanted national acceptance for all.
 - But this is judging God's work on the basis of our presuppositions. Shouldn't we be judged by His?
- The reason people accuse God of failing to keep His promises is because they misunderstand:
 - (1) What He promised, (2) To whom He promised it, and (3) On what condition He promised it.

"The existence of a remnant of believing Jews is not ultimately ascribed to their greater wisdom or nobility, or to their free will, or to their spiritual perception. The inclusion of the remnant in God's people is due to his electing grace." –T. Schreiner, *Romans*, 582

Brief Excursus: Covenant Theology is NOT Replacement Theology

Many people ignorantly and inaccurately criticize "covenant theology" as "replacement theology."

a. But Paul is not saying that God accepts Gentiles INSTEAD of Jews.

b. He is saying God never promised to save EVERY ethnic Israelite, but that ALL of (true, spiritual) Israel will be saved.

II. GOD'S ELECTION IS GRACIOUS (6)

A. *The Remnant was Chosen by Grace*

1. This point is perhaps the most hated, offensive, and contested truth in the entire Bible.
 - God chose before the foundation of the world some to save, but not all. **Jn. 6:37; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 17:8**

-Every orthodox Christian has this problem, even those who deny unconditional election.
-Why did God choose to create millions of people He knew would never choose Him and be saved?
-The Arminian has only one answer: freewill. But God was not obligated to create only to condemn.
-Reformed theology has another answer: God is most glorified by electing some but not all. **9:22-24**

- We recoil at that truth, we wrestle against it. But why? Because we want to protect our freedom.
2. Don't you see that unless God had chosen you first you never, ever would have chosen Him? **Rom. 8:7-8**
 - Unconditional election does not mean you are a robot; it doesn't deny you make real decisions.
 - It means God loved you so much He came and got you; you only came to Him because He chose you.
 - It also means there was no reason in you that He should save; you're no better than anyone else.
 3. We fight this truth because we want to be masters, want to believe we are better; we want to be god.
 - But our initial, sinful revulsion does not make it less true. You can't trust your gut on this. **Jer. 17:9**
 - Why do you fight against and deny God's goodness? It is the only reason any of us are saved.

B. *If It is On the Basis of Grace, It Cannot Be Because of Works*

1. If election is based on grace, then it cannot be based on works. Do you understand what this means?
 - It cannot be based on the fact God knew beforehand you would believe.
 - It cannot be based on the fact God knew beforehand you would trust in Christ and obey Him.
2. I once asked a Christian scholar whether God chose those He knew who believe but then fall away.
 - He answered, "No, God only chose those He knew beforehand would persevere and be saved."
 - This directly contradicts 2Tim. 1:9. We are saved according to His purpose, not foreseen faithfulness.
3. People will object, "But if election works this way, it is God's fault many are not saved!"
 - No, it is our fault that we are lost. We were already sinful, rebellious, and condemned.
 - But it is not to our glory that we are saved. The difference does not lie in us; it lies in God's mercy.

III. GOD'S ELECTION IS EXCLUSIVE (7-10)

A. *The Elect Obtained, but (National) Israel Did Not*

1. Israel, considered as a corporate, national body, failed to obtain the righteousness they sought. **9:31-33**
 - Remember *why* they failed to obtain it: (1) they sought it by works and (2) they rejected Christ.
 - God did not reject national Israel; He kept His promises to them, but He never promised to save all.
2. Nevertheless, in terms of righteousness and eternal salvation, the elect did obtain it by grace.
 - This elect group includes both Jews (like Paul) and Gentiles; it is the "Israel of God." **Gal. 6:16**
 - This is not a matter of *replacement* because salvation has always been on this basis of grace.
3. Why did the elect obtain eternal life? Because they are elect. Because salvation is the work of God.
 - It never was, never would, and never could be on the basis of one's nation, family, or race.
 - God was faithful to Israel, but the only way any Israelites would be saved is to believe in Christ.

B. The Gospel Both Saves and Condemns

1. The last part of this paragraph is shocking, but it contains truth we need to hear and believe.
 - Election is exclusive in the sense that all of the elect will be saved but only the elect will be.
 - The rest will not be condemned because they are not elect; they were already condemned in sin.
 - Election is the reason for salvation; human rebellion against God is the reason for condemnation.
2. You will either believe in Christ and be saved or you will be hardened in your unbelief and be lost.
 - That is a frightening truth, but that doesn't make it any less true. There is no middle ground.
 - There is no mediate category of "Nice People Who Are Neither Christians nor Axe Murderers."
 - That doesn't mean every unbeliever will become an axe murderer; but all *are* enemies of God.
3. The gospel is a double-edged sword, a message of salvation to the elect and condemnation to the rest.
 - The same declaration of redemption in Christ is grace to some and judgment to others. **2Co. 2:15-16**
 - When Moses announced liberty for Israel in Egypt, the same words hardened Pharaoh's heart.
 - You are becoming more like Christ or less like Him every day. **Matt. 23:32-33; 1Th. 2:16; Rev. 22:11**

IV. APPLICATION

A. We Must Think Rightly About God's Corporate Promises

1. God made promises to national Israel which He fully kept, but some promises assumed were not given.
2. Similarly, God has made certain promises to households today.
 - A believer has a sanctifying influence on an unbelieving spouse and their children. **1Co. 7:14**
-The children of even one believer are counted as *holy* in a covenantal sense!
 - God promised to be God to Abraham and to his children. **Gen. 17:7** (cf. Acts 16:15, 31, 34; 18:8)
-We are heirs of that promise today. (cf. Gal. 3:29; Luke 1:17; 18:16; Acts 2:38-39; Eph. 6:1-4)
-God's covenant promises extend for a thousand generations. **Deut. 7:9; 1Chr. 16:15; Psalms. 105:8**
3. God has made special promises to our families, but that does not mean our kids are automatically saved.
 - We mustn't presume upon the grace of God simply because the Lord promises to bless our children.
 - Not every child born within the covenant community is elect, just as was the case in Israel.
 - Our children are not saved by God's corporate promises; they are saved by grace through faith.

B. We Must Think Rightly About Our State of Grace

1. What is the consequence of denying unconditional election? We unwittingly make room for pride.
 - "God saved me because I believed or because He foresaw I would or because I had a good heart."
 - None of these are biblical; none of them are true. I was saved when I believed, but not because I did.
2. I should marvel not that God chose not to save everyone, but that He chose to save me at all!

C. We Must Think Rightly About the World Among Whom We Live

1. We live in a dangerous world that is hostile to God and is full of those who hate and oppose Him.
 - This does not mean every unbeliever is an active enemy of the cross or should be treated as such.
 - We must be patient and gracious in dialogue, praying God to grant them repentance. **2Tim. 2:24-26**
2. But don't fool yourself about your environment; you are living in enemy territory, on dangerous ground.

For further study:

For Calvinism by Michael Horton is a very gracious and helpful little book which answers many objections and misrepresentations of God's sovereignty in election and salvation.

PRAYER OF REFLECTION

Our Father in Heaven, it is an awesome thing to consider that we are saved, not because of our own goodness or work, but because of Your goodness and because of Your great work. Even now, Lord, our hearts are inclined to think that salvation is something we did, but we know that is not true. "Salvation is of the Lord," and we confess and give thanks that this is so. Thank you for loving us when we were unlovable. Thank you for choosing us when we wanted nothing to do with You. Thank you for saving us in Christ.

In His blessed name we pray. Amen.

Joshua 21:43-45 Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

1 Corinthians 1:24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Ephesians 1:4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love

Revelation 17:8 The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. And the dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will marvel to see the beast, because it was and is not and is to come.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

1 Corinthians 7:14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

Genesis 17:7 And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.