

• LESSON 17 (August 10) •

Romans 11:1-36

Lest You Be Wise in Your Own Sight

Romans 11 is a conclusive chapter of Paul's letter on two fronts. It is the last of three chapters wherein Paul specifically focuses in on what the revelation of the gospel now means for Israel. It is also the conclusion of eleven chapters worth of deep, rich, doctrinal material. Beginning in Romans 12 and continuing throughout the rest of the letter, Paul will provide a great deal of practical insight into how the gospel shapes everyday life. But first, the God-breathed concluding thoughts of Romans 11.

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. (11:1-6)

Hasn't that been one of Paul's most foundational points since Romans 3:20? It is a lesson that the descendants of Abraham must grasp, apply, and build their lives upon if they are to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. If they continue to refuse and insist on their own way...

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written,



What is Paul's point in reminding his readers of Elijah's words of despair and the LORD's response in 1 Kings 19:9-18?

"There is a remnant, chosen by grace." Who was this remnant and in what way were they "chosen by grace"?

What had Israel been seeking and why had they failed to obtain it?

“God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that would not see
and ears that would not hear,
down to this very day.”

And David says,

“Let their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs forever.”

So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! (11:7-12)

As a means of summarizing Paul’s entire diagnosis of the stumbling of so many Jews, remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 13:13-17.

“This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

‘You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.
For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

On the other hand, who are “the elect” and what had they obtained? How had they obtained it?

Why quote Elijah, Isaiah, Moses, and David? What is Paul doing?

Why does Paul bring up the possibility and potential of Israel becoming “jealous”? In what way could their jealousy develop into a good thing?

The terms of the gospel have been made known. The glory of the mystery has been revealed. Who will show that they have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts that are willing to turn?

Having clearly shown where the Jews stand in relation to reconciliation with God, Paul shifts his focus to summarize where the Gentiles stand.

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. (11:13-24)

It is not too late—for the Gentile or the Jew! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. We can be justified in the sight of our Creator. But the pathway has been defined by the

God had commanded in the law, "Of the first of your dough you shall present a loaf as a contribution" (Num 15:17-21). Why bring up dough and "the root" in this context?

In what way were the Gentiles comparable to "a wild olive shoot"?

How might the Gentiles grow to be "arrogant" toward the Jews? Is this still a potential pitfall? If so, in what way?

Why must we always remain sensitive to the kindness and the severity of God?

Creator, and if we are reconciled to him, we will have been reconciled on *his* terms, by his grace. Jews and Gentiles must recognize the folly of unmerited boasting.

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;
“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”

As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. (11:25-32)

The true Israel—those who are Jews inwardly—receive praise, not from man, but from God (Rom 2:28-29). This is the point Paul has been developing all along.

CLOSING THOUGHT:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. (11:33-36)

How would quoting
Isaiah 59:20-21 help
Gentiles guard against
being wise in their own
sight?

How would you
summarize the God-
breathed words in
Romans 11:28-32?

How is Romans 11:33-36
a very fitting summary to
the first 11 chapters of
this masterful letter?