

A Study in Romans

Study Eleven

Romans 11:6-36

Day One

6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened,

8 as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day."

9 And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

10 May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

v. 6 – I had a seminary professor make a comment that I had never thought about. He stated that not only is the *content* of the Bible the inspired word of God, but the *order* of the books is inspired as well. This being true, the first issue to be addressed after the narrative of Acts was the issue of works versus grace. The book after Romans is Corinthians and the issue in Corinth was licentiousness.

Does this imply that there is an orderly opposition from Satan, our great enemy? If he can't push us into legalism, he will then attempt to have us drown in our "freedom"? I'm not sure we can draw that conclusion, but it is an interesting concept—legalism and looseness, the two great temptations for every believer. Where are you at in regards to the tension between these two lifestyles? Are you maintaining an appropriate tension between the two?

v. 7 – Israel did seek God earnestly, but their paradigm was wrong. When they were confronted with a new paradigm, they refused to accept it, thus perpetuating to this day their misguided approach to God. God's chosen, who were willing to approach God through faith, did find access to God.

v. 8 – This is a recurrent theme throughout Isaiah's and Jesus' ministry. God closed the eyes of those who were pursuing Him by means of the Law so that they could not find Him. If anyone could find any part of God through his or her own efforts, it would render faith absolutely useless. So God had to shut up those who chose to walk by Law so that those who chose faith would be shown as having made the correct choice.

v. 9 – Paul quoted the prophet David from Psalm 69:22-23 here. This shows that those who choose legalism over faith have made a terrible choice and are worthy of God's judgment. In Psalm 69, David was praying against his enemies and Paul, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, applied those verses to his fellow Jews who had rejected faith and held onto Law. That means that they weren't just misguided innocents; they were

God's enemies. It may be hard to see how someone who was sincerely serving God as the Jews were could be wrong. But you can be sincere and sincerely wrong. After Jesus, the Jews who rejected Him were subject to the effects of David's prophetic prayer.

Day Two

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! 13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. 15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

v. 11 – Paul once again mentioned that part of the purpose for the Gentiles finding grace was to make Israel envious. We cannot attribute evil intentions or judge this in light of how a human would do something to make someone else jealous or envious. God is perfect and His actions are perfect. There is no “shadow of turning” in Him. This action is one based in love and is in the best interests not only of the Gentiles, but of the Jews.

God is reaching out to the Jews, but they must come to God on His terms. He is not going to “cut them some slack” because of the Old Testament covenants.

You may even judge that this strategy of stirring envy among the Jews isn't working. Since the first century, there has not been any significant evangelism among Jews. Yes, some Jews have come to know Jesus, but not like in the first century after Jesus' ascension. But we cannot judge God's actions in those terms. God is sovereign and His mercy and love are perfect. Enough said.

v. 12 – The Jewish loss opened the door for countless millions of Gentiles to come to faith since Paul's ministry. And that is a glorious thing. How much more glorious will the final outpouring of God's grace when Israel sees their Messiah! Oh what a day that will be! And it will happen, but only as the Jews call on the name of Jesus. There is no other way.

vs. 13&14 – Paul knew his purpose and that was to go and preach to the Gentiles. Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament and never once mentioned he was a tent maker. That was his occupation, not his purpose. Paul started his ministry in every city with a visit to a synagogue (if there was one). Yet he had very little fruit among Jews. His purpose and God's pleasure was revealed when Paul went to the Gentiles. It was what he

was created to do and when he went, God went with him. What do you do that when you do it, God goes with you?

v. 15 – Paul reiterated how glorious it will be when his people come to know Jesus.

As a byproduct of his ministry, Paul was hoping that some of his own people would say, “Hey, what about us? How can we get in on this action?” and turn to the Lord in faith. I can thank God that He opened the door for a non-Jew like me to know Him because the Jews decided they didn’t want to know Him like I do. Yet I cannot look down on the Jews or see myself as superior. They are God’s people who are estranged right now. But God loves them and I must work toward their ultimate reconciliation. I owe the Jews for they maintained the things of God until the door opened for the Gentiles.

v. 16 – The topic of firstfruits is an interesting one. It seems like an offering of firstfruits was a sign of faith, in that the believer offered the firstfruits as recognition that the harvest was God’s blessing. The one offering was making a statement that the God who began the harvest will also allow the one offering to finish the harvest.

According to Paul’s insight, when firstfruits were offered, it rendered the rest of the harvest as holy, in the sense that the harvest was set apart for God’s purposes. Of course, God is not interested in beans and carrots; He is interested in mankind. In this context firstfruits referred to the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—who were the root of God’s covenant with Israel. God has not forgotten His people and will remember His covenant with them but only if they respond in faith and put aside their works.

Day Three

17 If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root,

18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.”

20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

vs.17-21 – While it was and is important for the Gentiles to realize the riches they have in Christ, they must not be proud as if they earned these new blessings. The Gentiles are only a part of God’s family because God introduced Himself to humanity, for the most part, through Abraham and his descendants.

God sets the rules, so to speak, and without faith, it is impossible to please Him. Those who rejected faith as a means *to* God were rejected *by* God, and a new people who accepted the terms of faith were grafted into God’s tree. But the new branches must not look down on the Jews, lest God reject them.

Jesus said:

Freely you have received, freely give (Matthew 10:8).

No one can boast about anything they have in or from God, for it is God's grace that made it possible. With that in mind, we are to give away what we have for we are not the source in the first place.

And Paul wrote:

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? (1 Corinthians 4:6-7).

I cannot look down on Israel from my faith perch, for I may fall from my perch! God resists the proud but I must fear, seeing what God did to those who had once served Him but now refused His overtures.

Are you arrogant about anything God has given you? Do you think that somehow you have earned God's grace? If so, you need a change of perspective; you need to repent. Don't ever get lulled into thinking that what you have is because you earned it. You have what you have in God because He made it possible in Jesus. With that attitude, you can do great things for Him.

Day Four

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.

24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

v. 22 – It is a fact that you determine how God treats you. Now you may be confused as to whether that is consistent with what I just wrote yesterday. Yesterday I said what you have is by grace; that is still true. But you can reject God's grace, or have a bad attitude that affects how God relates to you. Jesus taught: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy (Matthew 5:6-7).

If you want God, you must hunger for Him. If you want mercy, you must first sow mercy and then reap it. The Psalmist wrote:

The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight. To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd (Psalm 18:24-26).

Paul wrote that God was kind initially to the Gentiles, but if they wanted to remain in the covering of that kindness, they would have to continue to meet the requirements.

If you aren't happy with some aspect of your walk with the Lord at this point in your life, then maybe you need to examine how you are approaching God and whether your attitude isn't affecting how God is relating to you.

v. 23 – The door is open for the Jews to come to God, but it can only be by faith. There can be no other way.

v. 24 – But if and when the Jews return to God, they will be grafted back into their own covenant heritage and great will be the rejoicing and the fruit!

Day Five

25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

v. 25 – I am continually amazed at Paul's insight and his courage to communicate what he saw. Paul was a devout Jew, but he saw God's purpose and His purpose was to include many others besides the Jews in His family. Paul did not defend his people or their "position" in God. He freely spoke of God's "mystery" and the open door to and for the Gentiles. For this, many of Paul's people, even believing Jews, did not like or trust him. Yet he persevered in his message.

Do you have courage to declare God's will for your life, even if family or friends oppose you? Are you willing to take a stand for Him? I have walked with the Lord for 30 years and I still struggle with this issue.

vs. 26&27 – Paul has stressed faith to the point that we must accept that "all Israel will be saved" cannot happen apart from faith. If and when Israel cries out in faith, then Isaiah 59:20, quoted here, will be fulfilled. But until then, there is a fullness of Gentile conversions that must come into the Church. We must all work to see that this Gentile harvest is maximized without neglecting and having great tolerance for the Jewish "root" out of which the Gentile church has sprung.

Day Six

28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,
29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.
30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience,
31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you.
32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

vs. 28&29 – You know, I'm almost finished with this subject. Paul spent a lot of time on this topic. That means that this must be a major issue, so I must press on to learn what it is that God wants me to learn. The Jews are a loved people; that hasn't changed. But God will not wink or look the other way in regards to their unbelief and stubbornness. Neither should anyone else.

vs. 30&31- Just as the Gentiles found God through God's mercy, so the Jews can eventually find Him through the same mercy. The situation is not hopeless, but there can be no shortcuts. The Jews will come to God in the same way that the Gentiles did and do—through faith in Christ!

v. 32 – God has locked up both parties, Jews and Gentiles, so that their escape can only come through His grace and mercy, and not through their own efforts.

We need to hear this message. What we have, what we are, what we will be is not due to our efforts, although our efforts open the door for them to happen. Yes, that's it. God rings the doorbell, we open the door and then He comes in! And when He comes in, He redecorates our house while we cooperate by not opposing His efforts.

Dear reader, there is nothing you can do to earn God's mercy. It is never about you and me. It's always about Him! Read what Isaiah said:

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away (Isaiah 64:6).

I have counseled many people who are working hard to spit polish the efforts of their lives so as to present something to God that is acceptable to Him. It will never happen. Rest in His love and mercy! Receive what He wants to do for you without your efforts, but with your cooperation.

I am thinking of two other passages at this point that speak to this matter.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:12-13).

So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty (Zechariah 4:6).

Discover how you can apply the truth in these and other related passages to your life today.

Day Seven

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!
34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"
35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?"
36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Vs. 33-36 – With an Amen, Paul ended his discussion of faith and works, Jews and Gentiles. And what a discussion it was. Paul championed the Gentile cause and we can never fully appreciate the work that God did in Paul's life that caused him to see this "mystery."

It is interesting that Paul's great insight and revelation led to one thing: worship! While others were judging and debating what God was or wasn't doing among the Gentiles, Paul saw it, cooperated with God's plan and then marveled at God's wisdom and ways.

Dear reader, while we all endeavor to understand what God is doing in the earth, we must be content at times to understand that we will never quite understand! God's motives and wisdom are beyond our ability to comprehend. We can only see them and give Him glory!

Isaiah wrote:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:8-11).

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It doesn't surprise me, nor should it surprise you, that an infinite God would do things that His finite creatures just cannot fathom. At that point, we must just accept our position as a creature and worship the Creator!

Seek God for insight, but realize that the insight you will receive will "blow your circuits." We are not to try and bring God down to our level, reducing Him to something and someone who is more "manageable." We are to ascend to His level, as much as possible in this lifetime. I want to know Him as He is, not as I want Him to be. I want to recognize what He is doing and cooperate with that, not try to make God do what I think He should. We are not to make God like us, but rather we are to become like Him.

I want to submit afresh to the will of God for my life, not second guessing Him or complaining. I want to go and do, seek and save, preach and teach. I want to fulfill my purpose, which He assigned to me before the foundation of the world. I want to go with His flow and be an agent of His will. How about you?