

ROM. 9:1 – 11:36

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IV. The Problem of Israel (9:1 - 11:36)

A significant aspect of why Paul is writing this letter is to unite the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome around the truth of the gospel he preaches so that they may as one support his mission work in Spain.

In chapters 9-11, Paul addresses the issue posed by Israel's large-scale rejection of the gospel. If, as Paul's gospel declares, those who reject the gospel are under condemnation, then most Jews are under condemnation because most Jews rejected the gospel. But if most Jews are under condemnation, then it seems either that God has gone back on his word to bless the Jews or something is wrong with Paul's gospel.

A. Tension between God's promises and Israel's plight (9:1-5)

1. Paul stresses his sincerity and the truthfulness of his concern for Israel, probably because his position on the law and Gentiles had earned him a reputation of being anti-Jewish. He certainly is not anti-Jewish.

2. Paul has great sorrow that so many of his fellow Jews stand under condemnation. They are not receiving the blessings of the promise because they have refused to embrace the gospel of Christ. Paul loves the Jews so much that, were it permissible and efficacious for him to pray to be damned that they might be saved, he would pray such a prayer!

3. It is such a shame that so many Jews seemed doomed to hell given the many privileges and promises granted to Israel by God in the O.T. These include:

a. adoption as sons – Israel as a nation had been set aside by God from other peoples for blessing and service. God's adoption of Israel conveyed to the nation all the rights and privileges included within the old covenant.

b. the glory – Israel was blessed with the splendor of the divine presence; he was with his people in a special way.

c. the covenants – Israel was party to or beneficiary of various covenants mentioned throughout the O.T. (e.g., Abraham, the people of Israel at Sinai, David).

d. giving of the law – God gave the law to Israel.

e. the [Temple] service – The whole sacrificial and priestly system had been prescribed by God.

f. the promises – The promises of blessing given to Abraham and to the other patriarchs.

g. the fathers – The great men of faith in Israel's history.

h. from them is the Christ – From a strictly human perspective, the Messiah comes from the Israelites. But, of course, there is more to the Messiah's person than his physical descent from Israel. Though the punctuation (and thus meaning) is debatable, Paul most likely refers here to Christ as *God*.

B. Tension is only apparent (9:6-13)

1. The fact most Jews had rejected Christ and thus cut themselves off from God's blessings raised the question of whether God's O.T. promises to bless Israel had failed. If most Jews did not receive what was promised, then didn't God go back on his word?

2. Paul says absolutely not. Yes, God promised to bless "Israel," but "Israel" is not defined in terms of mere physical descent. God distinguishes between descendants from the same man – even between twins, those who descended from the same man *in the same act of intercourse* – according to his grace, not according to their merit. He decides on whom he will bestow favor, and the promise of blessing applied only to *believing* Israel. The others, Israel according to the flesh, were not the "true Israel" he had in mind.

3. This answer to the charge of unfaithfulness is very important to how one understands chapter 11. If the promises were not addressed to unbelieving Israel, and Paul says they were not, then God's faithfulness is unaffected by unbelieving Jews who do not inherit salvation. There is no need for all physical Jews to be blessed for God to maintain faithfulness. On the other hand, if the promises were addressed to all physical Israelites, regardless of their faith, then an end-time conversion of the last generation of Israelites would not answer the charge of unfaithfulness regarding all the preceding generations that were lost.

4. Note that the reference to God's gracious choice of Jacob over Esau as "love vs. hate" is a Semitic idiom for preferring one over another. (See, Stein, *Playing By the Rules*, 118-120). The prophecy that Esau would serve Jacob was fulfilled in the nations that came from them, Edom and Israel.

C. Justice and God's gracious distinguishing (9:14-18)

1. The fact God blesses some undeserving Jews (the believers) but not others (the unbelievers) does not make him unjust. As he told Moses, the granting of mercy is not an issue of justice; it is solely a matter of his good will.

2. I think Jesus made the same point in the parable of the workers in the vineyard in Mat. 20:1-16. You'll recall that those who worked all day complained when the landowner gave them the same amount he gave to those who worked only part of the day, even though it was the amount they had agreed to work for. The landowner denied he was being unfair or unjust, saying, "I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

3. Mercy and compassion cannot, by determination or effort, be made a matter of right or entitlement; it is inherently a matter of God's gracious choice. And since every Jew recognized that God was not unjust in using (through "hardening") sinful and unbelieving Pharaoh to achieve his purposes, they should realize there is no basis for accusing God of injustice in doing the same with them. So God determines who gets mercy and who does not, who gets compassion and who gets hardened in their unbelief so as to serve his gracious purpose. Believing Israel, true Israel, received the former, and unbelieving Israel, Israel according to the flesh, received the latter (as is made clear in chapter 11).

4. As a footnote, though God foretold to Moses that he would harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:21, 7:3), he did do so only after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32).

a. "Hardening" is a judicial act, an abandoning of the rebel to his own stubbornness, much like God's wrath against the ungodly is expressed in chapter 1 by "giving them over" to their own depravity. It is a sealing of a situation arising from a creature's rejection of divine invitation.

b. How this hardening is accomplished is not spelled out. In some cases, it may be that God withholds pressures to change that he otherwise may have graciously provided. In some cases, it may be that God forces one to choose when he knows that the person will choose contrary to the good. In some cases, it may be that God presents the rebel with circumstances that embolden him in his rebellion.

D. God's use of unbelieving Israel doesn't make them blameless (9:19-23)

1. A Jewish objector will claim that if unbelieving Israel is serving God's purpose, then God is wrong to blame them because they're really doing what he wants them to do. Paul says "on the contrary" and then rebukes the objector's presumptuous attitude. Jack Cottrell, after noting that the potter and clay analogy is used in Jer. 18:5-6 with specific reference to the nation of Israel, summarizes Paul's rebuke as "Whoa! Let's not forget who we are, shall we? Remember: God is the potter; you (Israel) are just clay in his hands. Who do you think you are, to challenge the one who formed you in the first place?"

2. Just as a potter has the right to make from the same lump of clay one vessel for honor and another for dishonor, so God has the right to make from the same nation of Israel, the same lineage, one group for honor (true Israel) and another for dishonor (Israel of the flesh). He has

the right to distinguish between things created from the same source or ancestor. As Paul made clear in 9:6-8 and as he develops later in chapter 9 and in chapters 10 and 11, God has chosen to fashion the two vessels from the nation of Israel depending on the faith response of the individuals.

3. In vv. 22-23, Paul says, in essence, "So what if God, though wanting to pour out his wrath on unbelieving Israel, bore with them patiently in order to use them for his gracious purpose of bringing forth vessels of mercy, bringing to faith all who will respond (those foreknown, prepared beforehand for glory), so that he might make known the richness of his blessings upon them? Does this explain and excuse your sin? Does this shift responsibility for your condemnation to God? No!"

4. Cottrell concludes:

It is important to see that the ultimate purpose of God is not wrath, but mercy. He used vessels of wrath (unbelieving Israel) to accomplish this purpose, but the purpose itself is to make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy. And here is the most glorious truth of all: no unbelieving Jew – no individual vessel of wrath – needs to remain as such. Though the nation in general remains under God's curse because of unbelief, any individual Jew can respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and *become* a vessel of mercy! After all, the gospel is "first for the Jew" (1:16).

E. The composition of the predestined (9:24-33)

1. Having raised the matter of the predestined (those prepared beforehand for glory, those whose salvation was foreknown by God), Paul elaborates on the group's composition. Those predestined for this glory, the believers, were called by God (through the gospel), not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles, as God prefigured in Hosea (the church being the fulfillment of O.T. predictions of a renewed Israel).

2. Yet, as Isaiah foretold, only a remnant of Israel will be saved, and even that would have been wiped out but for God (in calling them to faith).

3. The fact of the matter is that Gentiles, who as a class were not seeking a righteous status before God, acquired the righteousness that is received through faith (through their acceptance of Christ). Jews (physical Israel), on the other hand, who pursued the Mosaic law that promised righteousness (to those who fully obey), did not attain the real blessing of that law (which was to prepare them for faith in Christ – Gal. 3:24) because they pursued it as though the commands were the basis of their relationship with God. The works of the law became the basis of inheritance, rather than a pointer to faith, which caused them to reject faith in Christ as the *exclusive* source of righteousness. Their exaltation of the Mosaic law hindered their acceptance of Christ as the end or culmination of the era of the Mosaic law. And this too was predicted in Scripture.

F. Israel's ignorance of the righteousness of God (10:1-4)

1. Paul's heartfelt desire and his prayer to God is that his fellow Jews might experience the salvation that has been made available in the gospel. They are lost because, though they have a praiseworthy devotion to God, that zeal is not driven by knowledge; it is misdirected.

2. Prov. 19:2 says "It is not good to have zeal without knowledge." As John Stott comments, "Sincerity is not enough, for we may be sincerely mistaken. The proper word for zeal without knowledge, commitment without reflection, or enthusiasm without understanding, is fanaticism. And fanaticism is a horrid and dangerous state to be in."

3. Their zeal was misdirected because they did not submit to God's righteousness, to his saving work of bestowing a righteous status on those who believe in Christ. They resisted that work not only because they did not recognize God's righteousness when it arrived in Christ but also because they were too narrowly focused on seeking a righteousness in connection with their obedience to the law.

4. The Jews' pursuit of righteousness on their own, based on the law, is wrong because with the coming of Christ the authority of the Mosaic law is, in some basic sense, at an end. Christ is the "goal" of the law, that which the law anticipated and pointed toward, and as such, his coming brings the era of the Mosaic law to a close. His inauguration of the new era was the consummation or culmination of the old.

a. After the coming of Christ, those who seek to relate to God under the Mosaic covenant must obey all the commands of that covenant because the sacrifices provided thereunder are no longer recognized. (Gal. 5:3 – And I testify again to every man who gets circumcised, that he is under an obligation to obey the whole law.) Jesus, the true sacrifice behind the sacrifices prescribed in the law, has now appeared and is the only sacrifice for sins available.

b. As I said some weeks ago, the "law," as the complete set of commands under the Mosaic covenant, is no longer in force, but the moral norms included among those commands have continuing validity and find full expression under the new covenant. That some commands included within the Mosaic law have ongoing validity while others do not is evident from 1 Cor. 7:19, where Paul says that circumcision is nothing but keeping God's commandments is everything.

c. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). Thus, the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, the set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in

that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law, centered in love, that is the "law of Christ." 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 (with 5:14).

5. By ending the era of the Mosaic law, during which time God was dealing mainly with Israel, Christ has made righteousness available for everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile. In other words, since his coming, one can be saved *as a Gentile*. The people of God are no longer marked by submission to the Mosaic law.

G. Contrasting ways of righteousness: law and gospel (10:5-13)

1. Paul elaborates on this righteousness that is by faith apart from law (see 3:21), this righteousness that is available for Jew and Gentile alike. The righteousness that is from the law is that right standing with God that is bound up with the law and one's own works (citing Lev. 18:5). It is the righteousness that Israel had pursued but not attained (9:31-32a, 10:3) and which Paul says in Phil. 3:9 he discarded in favor of the righteousness of God. Since law-based righteousness is work-based righteousness, it is illusory because no human renders perfect obedience.

2. In contrast, the righteousness based on faith warns people (it being personified as speaking through Scripture because of its close relationship to God) not to claim that the saving word about Christ is beyond their reach.

a. Receiving that word does not require one to ascend into heaven, because Christ already descended to earth; nor does it require one to descend into the abyss, because Christ already rose from the dead.

b. Just as God graciously made known to Israel the way of life under the old covenant (Paul refers to Deut. 30:11-14), so he has made known to Jew and Gentile alike the way of life under the new covenant – faith in Christ.

3. In contrast to what righteousness based on faith warns people *not* to say, it *positively* asserts that the message about the righteousness of faith, the message preached by Paul and the other apostles, is accessible and understandable, as is evident by its presence in the mouths and hearts of the people of God.

4. That message is in the hearts and mouths of the saints because righteousness/salvation is received through believing in the heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, which event bears witness to the efficacy of his death, and confessing with the mouth that Jesus is Lord.

a. Paul mentions only the belief and confession aspects of conversion because he is paralleling the use of mouth and heart in the quote from Deut. 30:14. He does not mean by this to exclude repentance or baptism. Conversion is a package, and sometimes one or more aspects are mentioned without the others. Paul has already made clear the significance of baptism in conversion in 6:1-11.

b. Indeed, as Baptist scholar G. R. Beasley-Murray notes, "It is universally acknowledged that 'Jesus is Lord' is the primitive confession of faith in Christ that was made at baptism."

5. As Scripture indicates, this salvation is available to all who believe on him, to all who call on his name, whether Jew or Gentile.

H. "Israel's" rejection of the gospel (10:14-21)

1. Picking up on the fact salvation is available to all who will call on the Lord, Paul says that people cannot call on him if they do not believe in him. They cannot believe in him if they do not hear the word that proclaims Christ, and that word will not be heard unless someone preaches it. And since a preacher is nothing more than a herald, one entrusted by another with a message, preaching cannot happen unless someone sends the preachers.

2. The importance of preaching is confirmed by the passage in Isaiah ("How beautiful are the feet of those proclaiming good news of good things!"), but this passage also implies (via "proclaiming good news") that those preaching the gospel are the messengers of God. They have already been sent out by him.

3. In v. 16 Paul focuses on the Jews, as is clear from the reference to "Israel" in v. 19. "Not all" is an understatement meaning "only a few." The fact of the matter, as confirmed by Isaiah, is that only a small number of Jews put their faith in Christ.

4. Having injected in v. 15b-16 a premature word about Israel's failure, Paul in v. 17 reconnects with v. 15a. Faith comes from a certain kind of hearing, and that kind of hearing comes only through the "word of Christ," the gospel message.

5. And the Jews did in fact hear the gospel message. Just like God's revelation in nature, Paul says the voices and words of Christian preachers have spread over the world. Paul says that hyperbolically to mean that the gospel had been preached so widely that Jews everywhere (not every Jew) had heard about it.

6. This Jewish "hearing" of the gospel was not the hearing of a message they could not understand. Not at all. As Moses and Isaiah indicated, the gospel was grasped by a non-nation, a senseless nation, by those who were not seeking or asking for God. The Jews therefore cannot justifiably plead lack of comprehension. Their lack of comprehension was willful – God appealed to them, but they were stubborn and obstinate. As Cranfield notes:

The excuse of ignorance cannot be sustained. But it is to be noted that Paul is not withdrawing what he has said in vv. 2-3. The truth is that in one sense they know and in another sense they do not know. They have been the recipients of God's special self-revelation, and yet they have been uncomprehending. . . . The ignorance

which is blameworthy has been characteristic of them; but the ignorance which would have constituted an excuse they cannot claim.

I. God's gracious selection of a remnant of Israel (11:1-10)

1. In reporting Israel's rejection of the gospel, Paul is not suggesting that God went back on his promise to bless Israel. Not at all. The rejection by Israel is not total. Some Jews, such as Paul, are among those receiving God's promised blessings in Jesus Christ.

2. God did not reject his people (whom he foreknew as faithful) because, as Paul said in 9:6-7, "Israel" is not defined by mere physical descent. "True Israel," the Israel of promise, is the remnant chosen by grace from among ethnic Israel (on the condition of faith, not works).

3. Israel as a whole, Israel of the flesh, did not obtain the righteous status it sought, but the elect, the faithful remnant, did obtain it. The rest, the unbelieving (non-elect in that state), were strengthened in their unbelief.

J. Unbelieving Jews are not beyond converting (11:11-16)

1. The purpose of God's hardening of unbelieving Israel was not to fix their fate by freezing them in their unbelief. God has not written them off. On the contrary, the hardening was intended ultimately to convert those Jews by promoting Gentile salvation and thereby provoking the Jews to faith through "jealousy."

2. It was God's evangelism strategy among the unbelieving Jews, his way of adding to the remnant. After all, if their trespass/failure/rejection meant riches/reconciliation for the world, then their fulfilling/acceptance will mean something even more, something beyond that; it will mean their salvation, their receiving life from the dead. Unbelieving Jews, therefore, cannot be ignored by the church.

a. Paul's use of the word *plērōma* translated "fullness" in v. 12 is important because it sheds light on the meaning of the word in v. 25. Many take it to mean "the full number" and thus to be a reference to "the full number" of Jews who are going to convert to Christ, but that does not seem to me to fit the context very well.

b. The contrast is between Jewish trespass, failure, and rejection of the gospel, which brings blessings to the non-Jewish world, and Jewish *plērōma* and acceptance of the gospel, which adds the blessing of an enlarged Jewish remnant. Since *plērōma* is contrasted to "trespass" and "failure" and is associated with "acceptance," it seems the meaning "fulfilling" is best. In other words, if the Jews' trespassing against the command to believe in Jesus (by rejecting the gospel) means blessings for the Gentiles, then their fulfilling that command (by accepting the gospel) will mean additional blessings (i.e., enlargement of the Jewish remnant on top of the Gentiles who have come to faith).

c. The meaning "fulfilling" is one of the options given in BDAG for this verse, and it has this nuance in 13:10.

3. If they become (by faith) part of the lump from which the holy firstfruits (probably the patriarchs) were taken, they also are holy. If they become (by faith) a branch of a tree with holy roots, they also are holy (see vv. 23-24).

K. Alienation of Jews does not mean Gentiles are a superior race in God's eyes (11:17-24)

1. It is true that some Jews were removed from the people of God and some Gentiles were added, but the Gentile must not consider his race superior in God's sight because of this. After all, the church is Jewish at its root.

2. Moreover, the differing circumstances of Jews and Gentiles is not about race but about faith. If the Gentile does not continue in belief, he will be cut off just as was the unbelieving Jew. If the unbelieving Jew does not continue in unbelief, he will be grafted back into the people of God (the elect).

L. Understanding God's plan precludes Gentile arrogance (11:25-32)

1. Many scholars see this as a reference to a large-scale turning of Jews to the Christian faith at the end time, but I do not believe that view is correct. As I said in relation to Rom. 9:6-13, if the promises were not addressed to unbelieving Israel, and Paul says they were not, then God's faithfulness is not called into question by unbelieving Jews who do not inherit salvation. And if the promises *were* addressed to all physical Israelites, regardless of faith, then an end-time conversion of the last generation of Israelites would not answer the charge of unfaithfulness to all the preceding generations that were lost.

2. Paul says that a hardening was upon part of Israel until (and so that) the Gentiles' "fulfilling" (their accepting of Christ) comes, and through this process "all Israel will be saved."

a. In other words, the three-step process of Jewish hardening, Gentile faith, and Jewish jealousy leads to the enlargement of the believing Jewish remnant, to the inclusion within "true Israel" of those Jews who were originally resistant but who were foreseen by God to believe, to be part of "true Israel."

b. Without this process, some would not have been included within Israel, and thus "all Israel," defined in terms of God's foreknowledge, would not have been saved. Of course, if God had not planned this three-step process, then those Jews would not have been foreseen by God to believe, but Paul is not looking at it that way.

c. This Gentile "fulfilling" means that the gospel had spread to the nations. The church had been established among the Gentiles to an extent great enough to produce Jewish

jealousy. That this was already in operation is suggested by the fact Paul says in v. 14 that he is hoping to save some Jews through jealousy, and by the fact v. 31 speaks of the Jews *now* receiving mercy (textual issue but most scholars think "now" is original).

3. With reference to the gospel, these hardened Jews who convert (via the "Gentile effect") are enemies for the benefit of Gentiles, but with reference to the election, they are beloved on account of the fathers – when God called the patriarchs he promised to bless them and their (faithful) descendants, and his gifts and call are irrevocable.

4. God handed both the groups, Jews and Gentiles, over to disobedience, meaning he hardened them or let them go their way, as part of his way of bestowing mercy on both groups. The disobedient Gentiles received mercy through the disobedience of the Jews, and this happened that the disobedient Jews might also receive mercy through the once disobedient Gentiles.

M. Doxology (11:33-36)

1. This wonder of God's working that has been revealed just blows Paul's mind. He breaks out in an emotional expression of praise and adoration.

2. God's wisdom and ways of working simply are beyond our comprehension. All we can do as creatures is to receive what he reveals and bow before him in awe. God is not on trial. To him be the glory forever, amen.