

Romans 11:1-36
“Irresistible Goodness”

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I. Intro

The 11th chapter deals with Israel and its relationship to the Church. Historically these two haven't always gotten along throughout the centuries and their disagreement has led to outright persecution. It is unfortunate that the Church didn't spend time reading the 11th chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans as it gives us a great perspective of how we should live with our friend and older brother Israel. In the 29th verse of this chapter as Paul spoke on the subject of Israel's rejection and what that meant with regards to God's future plans for them, he wrote that "*The gifts and callings of God are irrevocable.*" This fact amazes me from two different perspectives:

- a. ***From man's perspective:*** God doesn't say, "*Take a chance on me you might hit the jack pot.*" No, He promises that if we come to him with our burdens He will give us rest. There is no gamble, no uncertainty, **just an unwavering promise made to wavering people!**
- b. ***From Gods perspective:*** As an all knowing being with the ability to see the end from the beginning I'm taken aback by **His continue faithfulness in spite of my fickleness.**

II. Vs. 1-6 Saving the unworthy and the unlikely

Vs. 1a Twice in this passage (verses 1 and 11) Paul asks if God has permanently rejected His people Israel and both times he answers, "***certainly not***". That should have put an end to the false teaching by many Christians throughout history that God was done with Israel; that now the Church is "*spiritual Israel*". Amazingly they teach that the Church has inherited the blessings of the "Old Covenant" but give all the curses and punishments to Israel.

Vs. 1b-2a To make sure we understand what he means; Paul has given himself as the example. Paul asks, “*If God was done with the Jews how can you explain me; a self-proclaimed murder of Jewish Christians?*” In his letter to the church in Galatia Paul says that God’s election was done while he was still in his mother’s womb. His conversion is recorded three separate times in the book of Acts alone and in 1 Cor. 15:8 he spoke of himself as “*One born out of due time*”. In 1 Tim. 1:16 he stated that God saved him that, “*in him first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering as a pattern to them who would hereafter believe on Jesus to everlasting life.*” **Paul’s life illustrated His words: “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew”**. God has never and will never set aside any individual with respect to salvation when they come to God through faith in Christ.

Vs. 2b-6 ***The fact that most of the nation had rejected Jesus as their messiah was no proof that God was finished with His people.*** As example of this Paul recalls Elijah who had thought he alone was left after his encounter with the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18. Queen Jezebel set out to destroy all the true prophets of God as Elijah held up in cave and cried out to the Lord saying that he alone remained. **Elijah made three mistakes with regards to his view of things as God told him that there remained 7000 just like him:**

- a. **Elijah forgot that he had limited knowledge!** Things rarely are as bad or good as they seem. The reason is we don’t know everyone’s heart we can’t see the multitude of folks who remain faithful and true.
- b. **Elijah forgot God’s unlimited power!** The situation or circumstances are never as bad as they may seem because God is not as weak and impotent as we make Him out to be. God is so powerful that He can and does use the opposition of His enemy to bring about His plans and purposes. He alone is the One who wins when He wins and wins when He loses.
- c. **Elijah forgot the principals of God!** Salvation is by grace not works and if one attempts to earn God’s favor by works then grace is off the table. Grace is God’s work, and He will not allow us to mix the two together.

By mentioning Paul then Elijah as witnesses for the future hope of Israel we see that:

- A. **Like Paul:** No matter how hard and unlikely a person might seem from human perspective to be saved that this doesn't hinder God.
- B. **Like Elijah:** No matter how few in number there might be who will be saved there is always a remnant which is more than we realize.

II. Vs. 7-10 Three things we forget

Vs. 7-10 To Israel **Religion had gotten in their way to seeing and hearing God.** What a powerful reminder this is that in our pursuit for God! Be careful as the very implements we use to worship Him can become the objects of worship and actually hinder our worship. Most of Israel is blinded today but there is a remnant, God grants those eyes to be blinded that want to be blinded. I believe *that God's goodness is so completely irresistible that if He was not to blind the eyes that wanted to be blinded then the people who didn't want to know Him or walk with Him would be overwhelmed by His goodness and be forced against their free will to receive Him. The common denominator for every religious Jew that has been saved is that they had totally abandoned their hope in Israel's goodness for the Hope of Jesus Christ's goodness!* The great thing for Israel to realize is that if they are to be saved then they are to be saved the same exact way of the Gentiles through God's abounding grace seen in Jesus Christ. **Friend's mankind's only work is to completely trust in God's work which is grace! Nothing can harden our hearts quicker than when we trust in our own special privilege, without fellowship with the God who alone gives it.**

III. Vs. 11-24 Saving the unknown

Vs. 11-15 Paul takes up the 2nd question: "*Is their fall beyond recovery?*" Reading through the book of Acts causes us to see Paul's plan was always the same as he traveled into a community he always went first to the Jews then upon their rejection of the gospel to the Gentiles to provoke the Jews to jealousy. We ought to be so alive and vibrant in our Christian practice as to cause folks to want to ask, "*What do you have that I don't?*" Three things happened to Israel as a result of their rejection:

- a. Vs. 11 They stumbled
- b. Vs. 12 They failed
- c. Vs. 15 They were cast away

But none of those three things is permanent or irreversible. In the Old Testament the promises to the Gentiles were always attached to Israel entering into her promises. But history records not Israel's rise but rather her fall, which brought about Gentile salvation through the gospel first given then rejected by Israel. At the present time we are in the time frame of being blessed to provoke Israel to jealousy but their yet remains a time when we will be further blessed when Israel does enter into their inheritance during the millennial period. Paul's argument is that if Israel's rejection has led to such a blessing than what will their acceptance lead to?

Paul reminds them of **two illustrations:**

- a. Vs. 16 ***A lump of dough:*** This reference is to Num. 15:17-21 and speaks to the offering of a portion which meant that all of it belonged to the Lord. When God accepts part He sets apart the whole. Paul uses Abraham as an example of "*firstfruits*". Since Abraham was accepted before God by faith that would mean that the reason God accepted (the dough) would be accepted as well.
- b. Vs. 17-21 ***The olive tree:*** This is a symbol of the nation of Israel and their place in the plan of God. The roots of the tree support the branches of the tree. "*When an old olive tree had lost its vigor, one remedy in antiquity was to cut away the failing branches and graft in some wild olive shoots. The result was said to be the invigoration of the failing tree.*" Such was the case of Ruth the Moabitess.

Vs. 22-24 As Paul explains the process of grafting he explains that ***God has done a miraculous work.*** You see normally if you graft something like a nectarine branch into a peach tree the branch still produces nectarines not peaches. So, as we were grafted in this wild withered worthless Gentile branch into this healthy olive tree you would have expected that what would have come out of our branch was worthless fruit but that isn't what happened. God produced wonderful fruit as He changes our fruit by His Spirit and if God can do that taking our bitter fruit and turning into good fruit think of what He can do with the natural branches.

IV. Vs. 25-36 Rebel without a cause

Vs. 25-29 Paul says that the Gentiles shouldn't be ignorant in Israel's blindness lest they become prideful. He calls their present "*blindness*" a mystery, but the word doesn't mean hard to understand but rather something brought about by supernatural means, something that God has done. But even in saying this Paul tells us two things about Israel's blindness:

1. Vs. 25a **Limited in scope**: Notice that Paul himself says that this is a "*blindness in part*". Not every Jew was blinded to the gospel after all the early church was founded by mainly Jews who clearly weren't blinded. And there have been countless millions who have seen and recognized Jesus as their Messiah. But still when compared to the billions who through the millenniums haven't seen Jesus, clearly there has been blindness.
2. Vs. 25b **Limited in duration**: Second Paul is very clear that this blindness will not exist forever instead it will end when the "*fullness of the gentiles has come in*". There is a yet future time when the Jews as a whole will no longer be blinded to Jesus as their Messiah and that future time has something to do with us Gentiles. The question is: "*What does this phrase refer too?*" There are two possibilities:
 - a. **Most interpret this phrase with numbers**: In fact, two popular translations even put the word "*number*" in this passage: NIV = "*Full number*", NLT = "*Complete number*". In this interpretation some say that there is a specific number of Gentiles that will be saved that Paul is referring to and when that number is reached then the blindness will be lifted. There is no doubt that there is a specific number known only to God of how many Gentiles will be saved but the question is: "*Is this number of Gentile converts tied to Israel's blindness?*"
 - b. The second interpretation (*and the one I favor*) **has nothing to do with quantity and everything to do with quality**: This is the 2nd time in chapter 11 that Paul has used the word "*fullness*" and both times in the Greek it is the same word that simply means, "*that which fills*" which can speak of quantity as well as quality. The first time it is used in verse 12 Paul uses it of the Jews and does so to contrast Israel's loss and the Gentile blessings to what Israel's blessings might bring. Paul was not using the word to describe numbers but rather greater satisfaction or encounter with the living God. I believe therefore that here in this verse **Paul is not talking about a number but rather a time when the Gentile believers will encounter a greater amount of their riches in Christ and will be just so alive with the Spirit of God that it will cause the Jews to say, "Man I want what they have!"** An awakening within the Church whereby we become so full of "*every spiritual blessing in heavenly places*" that we leak, and this becomes the catalyst of removing the blindness that now covers Israel's eyes.

Vs. 30-32 Paul says that unless we realize that we are disobedient in our heart than we cannot be saved. Those who refuse to see their need for mercy and grace will never be recipients of it. The

enemy of grace and mercy is self-righteousness and pride! It is only when we realize our need that we can receive what we are so desperate for, the love of God!

Vs. 33-36 Having said that Paul breaks into praise about how great God judgments and ways are above his understanding. Then he quotes Isa. 40:13, Jer. 23:18 and Job 41:11 and asks **three**

questions about God's wisdom:

1. Vs. 34a ***Who has known the mind of the Lord:*** Who has ever anticipated what God is going to do? I've tried to figure Him out especially when it comes to some situation in my life. I try to look at the options like Tevye on "*Fiddler on the Roof*" when he was trying to figure out what to do saying, "*On the one hand*". But try as I might I can never know the mind of the Lord unless I have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16)
2. Vs. 34b ***Or who has become His counselor:*** Who has ever thought of or suggested something that God had never thought of. Far too often I've looked at a situation and saw a clever way to work it all out then spoke to God about my way thinking that I was being really helpful to Him. But in the end His way is the better way as He alone saw the flaws of my idea and knew the best way and we went with that one.
3. Vs. 35 ***Or who has first given to Him that it should be repaid to Him:*** Who has ever put God in a position that He owes us one? Everything is His from the start so how can He ever owe us what is His already. God is the originator of all things as everything comes from Him and He is the sustainer of all things as all things depend upon Him. C.S. Lewis once quipped "*To argue with God is to argue with the very One that makes it possible to argue!*"

J.B. Phillips wrote: "*If God was small enough to figure out, He wouldn't be big enough to worship*". Friends, there are always going to be things about God that we can't figure out but there will always be more than enough things that we can understand to worship Him alone!

"*Who has become His counselor?*"