

ROMANS CHAPTER NINE : GOD'S CHOOSING

Read Romans chapter 9 in its entirety.

In Romans chapters 9-11, the apostle Paul turns his attention on God's plan for Israel. Paul also shares his own personal heart-feelings for the people of Israel, although he recognized that he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

Perhaps we should begin at the end of Chapter 11, where the apostle marvels at the unsearchable, unfathomable ways of God.

Romans 11:33-36

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

34 "FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR?"

35 "OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM AND IT SHALL BE REPAID TO HIM?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

The apostle Paul highlights that God's wisdom and knowledge are immeasurable. God's decisions and God's ways are beyond our own limited understanding. None of us can advise Him. All things are for Him and for His glory. We get a glimpse of this in how God is working out His purposes with both Jews and Gentiles, with Israel and the Church.

The Main Issue

The main issue being addressed in these 3 chapters is this - since salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and all, including Gentiles have access to this, what happens to the Jewish people? Paul helps us understand that while the Gospel is being preached and is being received by the Gentiles, God has not given up on the Jewish people. They are still very much a part of His plan. There are presently a remnant who have received the Gospel, and there will come a time, when God will move powerfully among the Jewish people to get them back in, through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

My Brethren, My Countrymen

Romans 9:1 I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit,

Romans 9:2 that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

Romans 9:4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises;

Romans 9:5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

Paul shares his heart for the Jewish people. He feels great sorrow and grief because they have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the righteousness that comes by grace through faith, which he has shared about in earlier chapters. In fact, he is willing to be eternally separated from Christ, if only they (the Jews) could come to Christ. Very similar to Moses (Exodus 32:31-32) who was willing to have his name blotted out of God's book so that Israel could be forgiven. Paul laments in one sense because Israel has received so much: "the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came". He refers to these later on as the "gifts and callings" (Romans 11:29).

vs 1, can also be rendered as 'my conscience also bearing me witness with the Holy Spirit' 'also bearing witness' = to testify jointly, to corroborate by evidence together
So within every believer there is the conscience, which is the voice of our own human spirit, and there is the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is wonderful when both these are in agreement, when my spirit is in complete agreement with the Holy Spirit, testifying jointly about something. This brings a strong conviction, complete assurance, and togetherness about a matter.

vs 2-3, Paul is deeply moved with great sorrow and grief because his own people have not welcomed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was willing to become accursed (Greek 'anathema') for the sake of his brethren. What a great passion for lost souls! Are we deeply moved for the lost? It is also interesting to note that although the apostle Paul had such great passion for the Jewish people and was extremely qualified to speak to them (being trained as a Pharisee), God sent him as an apostle to the Gentiles. Of course Paul has a great passion to see the Gentiles reached with the Gospel as well, as he mentioned in Romans 1:13-16

vs 4-5, referring to the Jews, Paul writes presents an elaborate list of blessings God has bestowed on them, to show that God has dealt with them in a very special way of His own choosing:
they are Israelites = descendants of Israel
to whom pertain the adoption = sonship, God's chosen people, chosen to be His own
the glory = God revealed His glory and caused His glory to rest upon them
the covenants = God gave them His covenants (agreements) through Abraham, Moses, David
the giving of the law = God gave them the Law through Moses
the service of God = the ministering to God in the Temple
the promises = many promises of blessing
of whom are the fathers = Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the patriarchs
from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came = most importantly Jesus Himself came through them.

vs 5 is a key Scripture where Paul refers to Jesus Christ as the One "who is over all, the eternally blessed God", showing us that Christ is God.

The Children of Promise - The True Seed

Romans 9:6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,
Romans 9:7 nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "IN ISAAC YOUR SEED SHALL BE CALLED."

Romans 9:8 That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Romans 9:9 For this is the word of promise: "AT THIS TIME I WILL COME AND SARAH SHALL HAVE A SON."

However, Paul assures us that God's Word has not failed. Because God's Word is fulfilled in "the children of promise" or "the children of God". Paul is referring here to the Jews who have believed in Christ at that time. Though these are a few people in Israel, yet God's Word is being fulfilled in them. He points to Isaac, as the seed of promise, using him as an example to refer to the few who have received the Gospel.

The Purpose of God According To Election

Romans 9:10 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac

Romans 9:11 (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),

Romans 9:12 it was said to her, "THE OLDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER."

Romans 9:13 As it is written, "JACOB I HAVE LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED."

Now Paul introduces us to a very important "mystery" that he is unveiling - the purpose of God that results in people being chosen (election, selection). This happened even before time, and it happened not because of our works, but because of God's choice. He points to Esau and Jacob, who were in Rebecca's womb, and even before they were born, God declared that the older shall serve the younger, and He love Jacob but hated (loved less, rejected) Esau (Genesis 25:21-23; Malachi 1:2-3).

vs 11, "...the purpose of God according to election..."

election Greek 'eklogay' = selection, chosen

purpose (plan), election (choosing), works (deeds), call

God's purposes unfold according to His choosing, not based on our works or deeds but based on Him, who calls.

vs 12, according to His purpose (plan), election (choosing) and calling God foretold that the older will serve the younger

Why did God reject Esau and love Jacob?

Esau, although being the firstborn represents someone who was flesh-ruled. He was willing to give up his spiritual blessing of the birthright, in order to gratify a momentary need of his flesh. Hence God despised this, as Hebrews 12, explains:

Hebrews 12:16-17

16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Jacob, on the other hand was not a perfect person. He cheated, ran away, etc. So it amazes us that God would "love" such a person. Yet the one thing that stood out about Jacob was that he pursued what was spiritual. He wanted the blessing of spiritual inheritance, the birthright. He engaged with God, as a prince, so that even God would call him, Israel. *"And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"* (Genesis 32:26). His spiritual pursuit of God was what touched God, in spite of his character flaws (Genesis 32:22-29; Hosea 12:3-6).

Does Election Mean God Is Unrighteous?

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

Romans 9:15 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE COMPASSION."

Romans 9:16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

Romans 9:17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I HAVE RAISED YOU UP, THAT I MAY SHOW MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MAY BE DECLARED IN ALL THE EARTH."

Romans 9:18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

So how do we understand this mystery about God's election (selection or choosing)? Does this make God unjust and unfair?

No. God is not being unfair. He is a God of mercy and compassion towards all.

Paul affirms that God's election happens not because of our will or our efforts (our running), but simply as an expression of God's mercy and compassion on those He chooses. These people become recipients of God's goodness. Paul then points to Pharaoh (Exodus 9:16) as an individual who was chosen by God to be someone who hardened his heart toward God, resisting God's purposes, in his day and time. Pharaoh became a recipient of God's judgment.

If God Elects, Why Does He Still Find Fault?

Romans 9:19 You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?"

Romans 9:20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?"

Romans 9:21 Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

Romans 9:22 What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

Romans 9:23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

Romans 9:24 even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

So in the case of someone like Pharaoh, why does God still find fault with Pharaoh, because in any case, none of us can dictate His will (choosing)? Paul points first to the sovereignty of God (Romans 9:20) using the illustration of the potter and clay, where the clay cannot question what the potter makes it into.

vs 22-24 should be read as one sentence, and is a statement and a question. God is the Sovereign potter and hence has the right to make some as vessels of wrath and some as vessels of mercy. God in the process of showing wrath and power, actually was very patient with those people who ended up receiving his wrath and destruction ("vessels of wrath"). Similarly, God also chose people beforehand to display His glory by pouring out His mercy on them ("vessels of mercy"). However, there is a difference between earthen vessels shaped by a potter and people, who are compared to earthen vessels. People have the ability to respond, earthen vessels are inanimate, non-living things. So God was very patient with the "vessels of wrath" before He showed His wrath and judgment and displayed His power. Although not stated in the passage, we can infer similarly that "vessels of mercy" responded to God's mercy and hence received His mercy.

But there was no partiality here, since He has called both Jews and Gentiles to be recipients of His mercy.

Pharaoh, an example of a "vessel of wrath"

So now how do we understand God's choosing of Pharaoh and causing his heart to be hardened. We see that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exodus 7:13,14,22; Exodus 8:15,19,32; Exodus 9:7). We also see that the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 9:12,34,35; Exodus 10:1,20,27; Exodus 11:10; Exodus 14:4,8). To harden the heart means to be stubborn and to be insensitive. We understand the term, the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, to mean that God allowed him go on become stubborn and insensitive, resisting what God was asking for through Moses. We observed this in Romans chapter 1, where God "gave them up" or "gave them over" to their own wickedness (Romans 1:24,26,28).

The Witness of Hosea and Isaiah

Romans 9:25 As He says also in Hosea: "I WILL CALL THEM MY PEOPLE, WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, AND HER BELOVED, WHO WAS NOT BELOVED."

Romans 9:26 "AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD."

Romans 9:27 Isaiah also cries out concerning Israel: "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL BE AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, THE REMNANT WILL BE SAVED."

Romans 9:28 FOR HE WILL FINISH THE WORK AND CUT IT SHORT IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE THE LORD WILL MAKE A SHORT WORK UPON THE EARTH."

Romans 9:29 And as Isaiah said before: "UNLESS THE LORD OF SABAOOTH HAD LEFT US A SEED, WE WOULD HAVE BECOME LIKE SODOM, AND WE WOULD HAVE BEEN MADE LIKE GOMORRAH."

Now Paul points to several references from Hosea and Isaiah where God would draw the Gentiles to Himself (Hosea 2:23, Hosea 1:10), and God will also have a remnant among Israel who will turn to Him (Isaiah 10:22-23; Isaiah 1:9; Isaiah 13:19).

They Did Not Seek It By Faith, So They Stumbled

Romans 9:30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;

Romans 9:31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Romans 9:32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

Romans 9:33 As it is written: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STUMBLING STONE AND ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME."

But how is it that the Gentiles respond better than the Jews and enjoy the righteousness that comes by faith? It is because, Israel still pursues obtaining righteousness by the works of the law, instead of seeking it by faith. Jesus Christ and His Gospel has become a stumbling stone at whom they stumble over (Isaiah 28:16). They stumbled at the message of the Cross and Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23, Galatians 5:11).

Reflection



Q1, Discuss God's purpose, election (choosing), our deeds (works) and His calling? How do these interplay in our lives?

Q2, God is sovereign and we are beings with a free-will and with the power to choose. God is merciful and compassionate, is very longsuffering and patient with all, and yet some become "vessels of mercy" (recipients of His mercy). and some end up becoming "vessels of wrath" (recipients of His wrath). This is brought out in Romans 9:22-23. Do the "vessels of mercy" and the "vessels of wrath" have no say at all in what happens to them, or do they actually have a choice and a part to play in what happens to them?

ROMANS CHAPTER TEN : ISRAEL

Read Romans chapter 10 in its entirety.

My Heart's Desire for Israel

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

Romans 10:2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

As Paul continues to discuss how God is dealing with the Jewish people, he once again shares his heart and passion for their salvation.

Paul's "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." They are zealous, but do not know the truth about God's righteousness freely given to us in Christ. Instead they are still working on establishing righteousness through the law. In Christ, there is an end to this approach (establishing righteousness through the law), to all who believe.

The Righteousness The Comes By Faith Speaks This Way

Romans 10:5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "THE MAN WHO DOES THOSE THINGS SHALL LIVE BY THEM."

Romans 10:6 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' " (that is, to bring Christ down from above)

Romans 10:7 or, " 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

Romans 10:8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART" (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

If we are to obtain righteousness by the law - the only way to do it is to keep the entire law.

However, the righteousness that comes to us through faith, comes simply by receiving the Word, believing it in our hearts and confessing with our mouths. This is expressing our faith.

Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 30:12-14 and applies this passage to Christ, His death and ascension.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14

11 "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off.

12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'

13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?'

14 But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

Romans 10:8-10 also teach us how faith operates. We receive the Word, believe with our heart and confess with our mouth. Believing with our heart puts us in right standing before God and in position to receive from God (righteousness). Confessing with our mouth brings salvation, causes us to possess salvation.

This is for Whoever

Romans 10:11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME."

Romans 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

Romans 10:13 For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED."

This Gospel of righteousness by faith is for everyone who believes, both Jew and Gentile. The Lord is rich to all who call upon Him.

Paul references the Old Testament to validate this.

Romans 10:11 (Isaiah 28:16)

Romans 10:13 (Joel 2:32)

The Word Needs To Be Preached

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Romans 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!"

Romans 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?"

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

People need to hear the preaching of the Gospel to believe. People need to be sent and they have been sent to bring the message. And yet, as has been foretold, the Jews did not obey the Gospel

Romans 10:15 (Isaiah 52:7)

Romans 10:16 (Isaiah 53:1)

They Heard But Refused To Know

Romans 10:18 But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "THEIR SOUND HAS GONE OUT TO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

Romans 10:19 But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I WILL PROVOKE YOU TO JEALOUSY BY THOSE WHO ARE NOT A NATION, I WILL MOVE YOU TO ANGER BY A FOOLISH NATION."

Romans 10:20 But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME; I WAS MADE MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."

Romans 10:21 But to Israel he says: "ALL DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND CONTRARY PEOPLE."

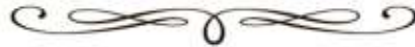
The Gospel has been preached to Israel, but they refused to turn to Jesus. And so God decided to reveal and release the Gospel to the Gentiles. All of this was foretold by the prophets. Paul quotes extensively from the Old Testament to show that what was happening with Israel rejecting the Gospel and the Gentiles responding to the Gospel, had been foretold.

Romans 10:18 (Psalm 19:4)

Romans 10:19 (Deuteronomy 32:21)

Romans 10:20-21 (Isaiah 65:1-2)

Reflection



Q1, Discuss God's instruction of having His Word in our heart and in our mouth. Given in the Old Testament and then repeated here in Romans 10, this is an important instruction. How is this connected to righteousness and salvation?

ROMANS CHAPTER ELEVEN : GOD'S PLAN FOR ISRAEL

Read Romans chapter 11 in its entirety.

A Remnant According To Election of Grace

Romans 11:1 I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Romans 11:2 God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying,

Romans 11:3 "LORD, THEY HAVE KILLED YOUR PROPHETS AND TORN DOWN YOUR ALTARS, AND I ALONE AM LEFT, AND THEY SEEK MY LIFE?"

Romans 11:4 But what does the divine response say to him? "I HAVE RESERVED FOR MYSELF SEVEN THOUSAND MEN WHO HAVE NOT BOWED THE KNEE TO BAAL."

Romans 11:5 Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace.

Romans 11:6 And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.

Now as we proceed through Romans 11, Paul continues to share further about God's dealings with Israel.

God has not abandoned Israel. Like Paul himself, there are a remnant who have been foreknown and chosen entirely by God's grace and not because of works (works of the law). These are those who, like Paul, have responded to the Gospel and received God's grace through faith in Christ.

Paul refers to the remnant of 7000 people who refused to bow to Baal and were reserved even during the apostasy of Elijah's time (1 Kings 19:10-18).

Chosen by grace

vs5-6, God's choosing is of grace and not based on works.

God does not compel us or predetermine for us the right and wrong we do. God through His foreknowledge knows what we will do and the choices we will make. In His grace He has chosen the ones whom He knew will choose to believe and not seek righteousness by the law. This is election by grace.

The Elect Have Obtained It, The Rest Were Blinded

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

Romans 11:8 Just as it is written: "GOD HAS GIVEN THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES THAT THEY SHOULD NOT SEE AND EARS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT HEAR, TO THIS VERY DAY."

Romans 11:9 And David says: "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RECOMPENSE TO THEM.

Romans 11:10 LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED, SO THAT THEY DO NOT SEE, AND BOW DOWN THEIR BACK ALWAYS."

There are some, a remnant, "the elect" (meaning those chosen) who have experienced God's grace and salvation. But the rest were blinded.

vs 8-9, Paul quotes here from Isaiah 29:10,13, Deuteronomy 29:3-4; Psalm 69:22-23

Overall, how do we understand passages that teach us that an evil spirit from God came upon someone or a people, or as in these verses, that God sent a spirit of stupor (slumber) that resulted in them being spiritually blinded? How do we understand situations that actually become a snare, trap, something that causes destruction? Verse 9 ends as "...a recompense to them", meaning this was done in judgment. Therefore in judgment God removes His providential (for people in general) or covenantal (for people in covenant) His protection exposing them both to the work of evil spirits as well as to calamities and destruction from men and natural elements. Hence, we understand that in judgment on their disobedience, God allowed a spirit of stupor to move on them causing spiritual blindness (1 Samuel 16:14; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

See the notes at the end on how we understand God's Election and Man's Decision.

Their Stumbling Is Not A Final Fall

Romans 11:11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.

Romans 11:12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry,

Romans 11:14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

Romans 11:15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

The Jews stumbled at the Chief Corner Stone. Paul is referring back to what he mentioned in Romans 9:33, where the Jews stumbled because they did not seek righteousness by faith. However, their stumbling is not final, it is not something that destroys them that they will never get back up again. Instead, salvation has now been made available to the Gentiles, so that they would be "provoked to jealousy" in a good way, and it would cause them to get into their fullness (their completeness through the Gospel). And even Paul as a minister to the Gentiles, wishes that his ministry would cause them to be saved - which would be a big blessing to the world!

The Olive Tree - The Root And The Branches

Romans 11:16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.
Romans 11:17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree,
Romans 11:18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.
Romans 11:19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in."
Romans 11:20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear.
Romans 11:21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either.
Romans 11:22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.
Romans 11:23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.
Romans 11:24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

The apostle Paul then uses the picture of the olive tree (representing Israel). It was a practice in Bible times, that if an old olive tree was failing, they would cut off the failing branches and graft in shoots from wild olive trees to reinvigorate the old olive tree. Because of unbelief the branches were broken off, so that those who did believe would be grafted in. We are in by faith. However, we must keep in mind the goodness and severity of God. The severity of God is towards all unbelief. So we need to continue in faith in His goodness. However, God is able to graft back even the branches that were once cut off, when they come to faith. This points to a later time when Jews will receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and they will be grafted back in because of faith.

The Mystery of Israel's Salvation

Romans 11:25 For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
Romans 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "THE DELIVERER WILL COME OUT OF ZION, AND HE WILL TURN AWAY UNGODLINESS FROM JACOB;
Romans 11:27 FOR THIS IS MY COVENANT WITH THEM, WHEN I TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS."
Romans 11:28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.
Romans 11:29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.
Romans 11:30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,
Romans 11:31 even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.
Romans 11:32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

God's plan is for all Israel to be saved through the Gospel. This is one of God's "mysteries" that are now revealed-that for a time when Israel is blinded, the Gentiles will come in to salvation. God's gifts and calling on Israel are irrevocable and He will have mercy on Israel as well. He has a time when Israel (the natural Jews) too will be saved through their acceptance of the Gospel. "all

Israel will be saved" does not mean that every individual Jew will be saved, but points to a time when Israel as a nation will know Jesus Christ as Messiah, and those who call upon Him will be saved (Zechariah 12:10)

When all predestined Gentiles have come in, all Israel will be saved. All Israel refers to those chosen by grace.

Isaiah 59:20-21

Isaiah 10:22-23

Isaiah 45:25

There is an "appointed time" when God will visit Zion and have compassion on His people.
Psalm 102:13-16; Isaiah 62:6-7

vs 32, God exposes the disobedience of both Jews and Gentiles, and then offers mercy to both, in a predetermined way. First to a remnant of the Jews, then to all Gentiles, and then He will move upon all the Jews.

The Unsearchable Unfathomable Ways of God

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

Romans 11:34 "FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD? OR WHO HAS BECOME HIS COUNSELOR?"

Romans 11:35 "OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM AND IT SHALL BE REPAYED TO HIM?"

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

All of these actions of God with the Jews and Gentiles, Israel and the Church, and how He unfolds His plans, just go to show that there are depths of His wisdom, knowledge, decisions and ways of workings that we do not know. But all things are of Him, for Him and to His glory.

We respond in worship of such a great God.

God reveals to us by His Spirit what we need to know

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

Reconciling God's Choosing (Election) And Man's Choice (Decision)

God's Election

All through the New Testament we see Scriptures indicating that God selected, God choose a people or individuals.

Election Greek "ekloge" (G1589) denotes "a picking out, selection"

Acts 9:15 Paul, a chosen vessel

Romans 9:11 "the purpose...according to election" or the purpose according to His choosing.
Romans 11:5,7 "remnant according to the election of grace" referring to believing Jews chosen by God's grace

Romans 11:28 "the election" meaning the act of choosing or being the chosen ones
1 Thessalonians 1:4, "your election by God", that is being chosen by God

Individual Decision

And yet we understand that believing is a choice we make, and as believers we are also instructed to hold fast to our faith till the end, to work out our salvation (Philippians 2:12) and to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10).

How do we reconcile the two?

The correct way to view this is by considering that these are two sides to the same coin. Both are equally important, and we do not have the complete coin, with just one side. Both can be viewed and understood separately, but both are required to make each other complete.

God's grace and God's own will is what causes an individual to be chosen (selected, elected, become the elect) and not because of our works (Romans 9:11; Romans 11:5). This has been done before time (Ephesians 1:4-5). Those chosen were foreknown and foreseen by God (Romans 8:29), were chosen for salvation (2 Thessalonians 2:13) and given by God the Father to Christ as the fruit of His death (John 17:6). God's foreknowing and foreseeing is not a predetermining of our actions or decisions. These are still our choices and actions. God by His grace chooses those who He foresees will believe in Him. This is the part of God's Election by grace. He predetermines what all of them will be developed into, which is Christ-likeness (Romans 8:29).

On the other side, Jesus Christ died to offer salvation as a free gift to every individual. Each individual can make a choice to seek the true and living God and receive His salvation by grace, through faith in Christ. It is those who make this decision, exercising their free-will and power to choose, who become the chosen (selected, elected, elect) of God. We become the chosen through faith. This is the part of Man's Decision. "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth" (2 Thessalonians 2:13). What each one goes through in order to move from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18) in order to become Christ-like during our earthly journey, will be a result of our cooperating with Him.

How about situations where evil is accomplished?

Did God select and harden Pharaoh's heart or did Pharaoh harden his heart himself?
Did God choose and cause Esau to sell his birthright or did Esau do it himself, causing him to be disregarded by God?
Did God select and cause Judas to betray Jesus or did Judas do it by his own choice?

Did God cause the Jews to become blind so that the Gospel could go to the Gentiles, or did the Jews willfully reject Jesus thereby causing the Gospel to be taken to the Gentiles? And like this we can consider many others like Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, etc.

The answer would be similar to what was stated earlier. God foreknew and foresaw that these individuals would be in those places at those specific times in human history. They made their choice out of their own free-will and power to choose. God worked His purposes in spite of and through their decisions.

You Are Chosen, Yet Make Sure You Don't Fall Short

John 15:16

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

chosen Greek 'eklegomai' to pick out, choose

2 Peter 1:10-11

10 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;

11 for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

election Greek 'eklogay' selection, chosen

sure = firm, stable, steadfast

fall = trip, stumble, err

The truth about being chosen and called according to His plan and purpose is a very important truth to understand and apply at a personal level. All that we are, all that we are becoming, and growing into is in many ways a work of God's grace as a result of His choosing. God's election (choosing) is a work entirely of His will, entirely of His grace, took place before we were even born, is not dependent on us, our efforts, our deeds or our involvement in any way. This causes us to praise, worship and thank Him for His mercies and compassions on us. We did not deserve this!

Yet, as we see in both these passages in John 15 and 2 Peter 1, we have a very important part to play in seeing what we were chose for and unto, being fulfilled. The fruit we bear in John 15, comes out of abiding in Him and through answered prayer. It is only as we are careful to add to our faith, virtue and other graces (2 Peter 1:7-9) that we can be diligent to ensure that what do not fall short from what we were called and chosen for.

Israel and the Church

We must understand that the Church does not replace natural Israel (the Jews), but God has a plan for the Church as well as natural Israel.

Israel in the Old Testament is type of the Church in some respects (1 Corinthians 10:1-11).

The Church can learn from God's dealings with Israel (Romans 15:1-3).

However, the Church does not replace Israel.

God's deals by election through grace with both Israel and to the Church. As believers we are a people who are chosen by grace to be saved (Ephesians 1:3-5).

Reflection



Q1, Try to summarize what Paul is communicating to us about God's plan for Israel and for the Gentiles, in bringing all to salvation through faith in Christ.

Q2, Try to summarize how we balance God's election and Man's free-will to choose. (This may be quite challenging, but do your best).