

Sabbath School Today
With the 1888 Message Dynamic

The Book of Romans
Lesson 11. The Elect

Paul, the God-appointed apostle to the Gentiles, has his heart set on the salvation of his fellow Jews (Rom. 10:1). It is good to be zealous in the work of God. The problem is, like so many today, a preacher wants to run off as fast as he can to the next appointment, and when he gets there, he has no good news from the Lord (vs. 2). And so the correct knowledge of God becomes a key theme throughout Romans 10 and 11.

The ignorance of the Jews centers on God's way of justification (vs. 3). The Jews have tried to make themselves morally right through their self-inspired law-keeping. However, they have taken a detour around Christ.

The vital knowledge necessary for being straightened out is by faith in Christ (vs. 4). The endless debates centering on the phrase "end of the law" are all futile in their efforts to abrogate the law of God. It is contrary to Christ who came to establish the law (Psalm 40:8; Matt. 5:17). The ultimate point or thing at which the law directs its view, the object intended to be reached or accomplished, is righteousness. Christ is the only righteous One having faced the incessant temptations of the flesh and defeating them. Ellet J. Waggoner, one of the 1888 messengers, writes:

"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.' [1 Tim. 1:5]. The word here rendered 'charity' is often rendered 'love,' and is so rendered in this place in the New Version [R.V]. In 1 John 5:3 we read: 'This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments;' and Paul himself says that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' Rom. 13:10. In both these texts the same word (*agape*) is used that occurs in 1 Tim. 1:5. ...

"God imputes to believers the righteousness of Christ, who was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, so that 'the righteousness of the law' might be fulfilled in their lives. And thus Christ is the end of the law." [1]

The law will not falsify the facts. It is a perfect description of righteousness. The law was given for life-giving purposes. Man sinned and he could not keep the law (Rom. 10:5). Any theory of justifying man's sin by a book transaction, which bypasses a change of heart and reconciliation to God and His law, is a legal fiction and rightly termed an anti-law gospel. It is the understanding which Christians have given to Moslems about how forgiveness of sins is obtained, and they consider it a fraud and hypocrisy.

God has not forgotten His purpose for the Jewish people (Rom. 11:1). The early Christian Church was formed with the nucleus of Jewish believers, Paul being prominent among them.

Again, Paul will cover the ground of chapter 9 regarding those who were “no people” (Rom. 10:19), yet included in the everlasting covenant (Rom. 11:2). Elijah stood a lone figure on Mount Carmel at the time of Israel’s well-nigh complete apostasy into Baal worship. Elijah pleaded with the Lord in despair (vs. 3). Alone in the crisis amidst the church of Israel was the cross experience for Elijah.

Just because you can’t see any visible means of encouragement and support doesn’t mean that there isn’t a true remnant (vs. 4). “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” Where were these seven thousand when Elijah needed them? Evidently they weren’t willing to step forward at the showdown on Mount Carmel. It took one man, Elijah, to bring about revival and reformation to Israel. It must be the cross uplifted in order for the hearts of Israel to be turned to God. And unless the preacher himself experienced the cross, his message would have been fruitless. Any “self” in Elijah would have suited Satan’s purposes, and muted Elijah’s message of the cross.

The purpose of Paul’s illustration of Elijah and the seven thousand is to frame the Gentiles as the “remnant according to the election of grace” (vs. 5). Grace is God’s favor to the most unfavorable. God’s foreknowledge elected the Gentiles to be saved in Christ as foreshadowed in the writings of Moses and the experience of Elijah.

If God’s grace were given on the basis of merit, then it would not be grace. But the mere fact that it is freely given to all, including the Gentiles, establishes the fact that grace is a gift (vs. 6). The Gentiles weren’t seeking after God, much less motivated to work for His favor, as were the Jews who were seeking to get their Father’s attention.

There is such enslaving blindness in the self-centered motivation of seeking after God for a reward that Christ is completely blocked out (vs. 7). “Israel hath not obtained that which he *seeketh* for.” Paul flat-out states what Israel’s problem is: Israel “*seeketh*.” There is the self-motivation of the old covenant.

The only miracle now that could prevent the complete and utter collapse of the Jews’ salvation is to see something that they have never seen before (vs. 11). What God believes will happen for the Jew is that they will see He loves them in such a selfless way as demonstrated at the cross, just as He loves the Gentiles and gives them salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice. Such divine love for the Gentiles will provoke the jealousy of His Israelites.

Paul is beside himself with the good news of much more abounding grace. He cannot contain himself (vs. 12). God’s purposes of salvation to all men is never diminished by the failure of the Jewish-based mission. Christ has broken the treasure chest of

heavenly riches for the Gentile-based mission and there is going to be a tsunami-like effect upon the Jews.

Paul may understand his apostolic office to be primarily for the Gentiles, but his fellow Jews are never far from his heart (vs. 13). Paul has a unique ministry to bridge the culture-gap that exists between Jew and Gentile. Mission impossible becomes mission possible only by uplifting the cross of Christ, which unites all peoples.

It would be a two-for-one success if Paul's Gentile mission could "provoke" the Jews to salvation. If they could witness the grace of God working in the lives of Gentiles, it might grab their attention (vs. 14). The shame and nakedness that comes from old covenant-inspired Jewish religion might be put in stark contrast with the sunlit new covenant grace and love that is saving the Gentiles.

Paul is living in tumultuous times for the church. How can he understand the church in perspective with the church of ancient Israel? His resolution is the continuity of both churches of the Old and the New Testaments, to view it as God's plan all along. Jewish unbelief in Christ frustrated that unstoppable grace. Because of their choice, of necessity, the progress of the gospel must not be hindered (vs. 15). The problem with Jewish unbelief in Christ is that it results in separation from God and ultimately death.

What is the remedy for spiritual death? The answer is found in the illustration of the good olive tree. Christ is the olive tree. Everything that is connected with Him who is the Root (the olives, the knob, the branches) is holy (vs. 16).

The Old Testament church was connected to Christ. However, some of its branches were broken off because of unbelief in Christ (vs. 17). Contrary to nature, a "wild olive tree" branch, the Gentiles, is grafted into the good olive tree. There it receives "of the root and fatness" of Christ.

Paul writes to the Gentiles, Don't ridicule the broken Jewish branches (vs. 18). Gentiles, you are not the load-bearing Stock of the tree. Christ is the Root of you. The broken branches were removed because the Arborist saw they were dead. You Gentiles may perceive it as God's purpose of making room for you to be grafted into Christ (vs. 19).

The real reason the branches died was because of unbelief (vs. 20). The reason you Gentiles were grafted in was because of faith motivated by Christ's *agape*. Don't revert to the default position of self-love, but continue in *agape*.

The law of pruning says, if something is no longer growing it is dead, remove it (vs. 21). Remember history. Don't let unbelief overtake you. Don't lose your first love.

God always makes something good out of a bad situation (vs. 22). Waggoner writes, "The Lord is goodness itself. He is love. He cannot at any time be any other than He is, and therefore He is just as good to one person as He is to another. He is equally good to everybody and just as good as He can be all the time. Therefore it is not because

they have not been drawn by the love of God, that some are destroyed. It is because they have despised that love. Having hardened their hearts against God's love, the more He manifested His love to them, the harder they became. It is a trite saying that the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." [2]

Paul envisions a re-grafting of the dead branches when the Jews believe in the Root (vs. 23). The unnatural process of grafting from a wild to a good olive tree is a miracle of God's grace to the Gentiles (vs. 24). Likewise, the re-grafting process of the dead branches again to the good olive tree, is a miracle of God's grace. The Gentile engraftment project is so that "all Israel shall be saved" (vs. 26).

"There you have the whole story. The coming in of the ful[ll]ness of the Gentiles, the filling up of the number of Israel, the conversion of both Jews and Gentiles. ... 'so all Israel shall be saved.' How shall all Israel be saved?—By the coming in of the Gentiles. Then will Israel be full, and the blindness will have passed away. Christ, the Deliverer, turns away ungodliness from Jacob, by saving Gentile sinners as well as sinners of the Jews." [3]

God's covenant is for all. The forgiveness of sins and Christ's righteousness to straighten us out contemplate the preparation to meet Him. "For this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (vs. 27).

—Paul E. Penno

Endnotes:

[1] E. J. Waggoner, "Christ the End of the Law," *The Bible Echo*, Feb. 15, 1892, p. 87.

[2] E. J. Waggoner, "Justice and Mercy," *The Present Truth*, Feb. 23, 1893, p. 54.

[3] E. J. Waggoner, "The Fullness of the Gentiles," *The Present Truth*, March 20, 1902, p. 180.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/7QLBZJEkWmU>

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