

Romans 11

By: Charles Stanley

From: On the Epistle to the Romans

“I say then, hath God cast away His people? God forbid.” Paul himself was a proof of this, for he was an Israelite. “God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew.” It is not God who has rejected His ancient people: “He saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.” It is important to see this side of the truth — the perfect readiness of God that Israel — no, that all men — should be saved. It is man that is the rebel, the breaker of the law, and now the rejecter of the mercy of God.

Verse 3: But then there is the other side also. When Israel had so rebelled against God, that Elijah said, he alone was left, he said: “Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.” Here we have the deep, universal rejection and hatred of man against God. This is man in the full exercise of his own will. But has God left all men to their own free choice and wicked course? “But what saith the answer of God unto him? I HAVE RESERVED to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

God does not say they have reserved, or preserved, themselves; no, He says, “I have reserved.” Just as we have seen in chapter 9, if God had not done this, they would all have been as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Verse 5: “Even so, then, at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” Yes, at that very time none could deny that the nation, as such, was mad in its hatred and rejection of Christ. Saul himself was a proof of the exceeding madness of the Israelites against Christ. But, just as in the days of Elijah, there was then an election of grace, of free, unmerited favor of God. Dear young believer, you will be greatly tempted to reject this abounding, electing, free favor of God. In this day few heartily believe it. We would have you embrace it with your whole soul. Is it not

evident that both Israel and we Gentiles are so bad, such utter rejecters of the grace of God, that, if it had not been for His election, in free favor, grace, none would have been saved — all, all would have been like Sodom. Yes, the total ruin of man, and the election of God, stand or fall together. You cannot truly hold the one, and reject the other.

Mark, these scriptures show there is no unwillingness on God’s part, but man will not have the grace of God. When this is seen, how precious to the believer is the blessed truth of the election of grace! “And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (vs. 6). This is self-evident. Salvation by works, of whatever kind, must set aside the free favor of God. Do you stand in the free, full, everlasting favor of God; or are you seeking to attain to it by works?

This is just what Israel were doing, but “Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for.” With all their hatred of God, as revealed in Christ, they were, at the same time, zealous of the law, and seeking righteousness by works. Rejecting the free favor of God, they never would obtain it by works. On this very account their city was destroyed, and they were scattered or slain. “But the election hath obtained it,” that is, the free favor of God in which they stood. And, as to the rest, the rejecters of free, unmerited favor, they “were blinded.” And the scriptures are abundantly quoted, to prove that this would be so, in verses 8-10.

Now here are two facts. The prophets have foretold that these rejecters would be given up to judicial blindness, and this has really been so for long centuries. If a self-conceited rejecter of the truth of the election of grace should read this, oh, beware lest He give you up also to blindness and hardness of heart. How long has God held out His hands ready to receive you? And are you still a rejecter, like self-righteous Israel? God may, in righteous judgment, give you up to hardness of heart, and to the darkness fast setting in.

But will the present rejection of the grace of God by Israel, and their consequent blindness, ultimately alter the purpose and promise of God? We must now look carefully at the dispensational bearing of this question. God had overruled their fall for great blessing to the Gentiles. And, if this be the case, how much greater will be the blessing of their fullness? The Gentile world had been given up to gross idolatry, as stated in Romans 1. But now, if the casting away of Israel as a nation has been “the reconciling of the world,” what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead? The apostle is not here speaking of the calling, or heavenly privileges, of the church, but of earthly privileges.

When God called out Abraham, and separated him from the nations, he became the olive-tree of blessing and promise on earth. His seed became that tree of privilege, of which he was the root. It is not a question, then, of being branches in Christ but branches of the olive-tree of promise, or privilege. Relative holiness, too, or separation from the world. Some of the natural branches were broken off — not all Israel, but some. And, to carry out the figure, Gentiles had been grafted into this olive-tree of privilege.

Let not the Gentile boast, however: he says, “Thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.” And mark, it was because of unbelief they were broken off. It was not because God willed to break them off, but because of their own unbelief. And the Gentile stands by faith. “Be not high-minded, but fear.” There was judgment, severity, towards Israel, which fell through unbelief; but toward the Gentiles goodness; “If thou continue in His goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” God is also able to graft Israel in again.

It is also utterly contrary to nature to graft the wild olive into the good. In all nature, the good olive or apple, is grafted into the wild. But God had taken the poor wild Gentile, and grafted him into the good Abrahamic tree of privilege. And, further, the apostle would not have them ignorant of this dispensational truth, “that blindness, in part, is happened to Israel, until

the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written.” (vss. 25-26). Thus the time of “no difference” shall come to a close;* the purpose of God in gathering out of the Gentiles shall be accomplished; then all Israel shall be saved, as it is written. Then shall every promise to them be fulfilled. The whole then spared nation of Israel shall be gathered to their own land, and then be born of God, as it is written. Such is the purpose of God, though they are the bitterest enemies now; God elects so to do.

(*The writer evidently means that the present epoch of no distinction between Jew and Gentile will come to a close. It is true that the distinction between saved Jews and Gentiles will be in force in the millennium. However, what is meant by the “no difference” teaching in Romans 3 is that Jew and Gentile are alike guilty before God. *That* will not, cannot, change. Gentile blessing and Israel’s distinctive blessings in the millennium will be by sovereign grace. See Romans 11:25.)

Verse 29: “For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. He never changes. Not one jot or tittle of His word can fail. The literal translation of verses 30-31 is important. For as indeed ye [also] once have not believed in God, but now have been objects of mercy, through the unbelief of these; so these also have now not believed in your mercy, in order that they also may be objects of mercy.” This is very wonderful, and shows out the principle—He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy.

The Gentiles had no claim to salvation; they were dead in sins, in unbelief. God showed them pure mercy. Israel would not believe such mercy, and forfeited all their privileges through unbelief, that so God might at last save them as a whole nation, but as objects of mercy. “For God hath shut up together all in unbelief, in order that he might show mercy to all.” “O the depth of the riches.” Not one shall be found in the church above, or in the future kingdom of God on earth, but what has been saved as an object of mercy. The free favor of God in both cases thus reigns triumphant.

One word before we close this chapter on the solemn warning, that if Gentile Christendom does not abide in His goodness, it, too, will be cut off. Was there ever a time when the goodness, the free favor, of God were more distinctly rejected than the present moment? Never, since the days of the apostles, has the full, free grace of God been so preached, and therefore never so rejected.

We lately visited a large town, where an excellent large room had been built, for the preaching of the pure gospel of the grace of God. It was closed. Another very large building was occupied by those who are, like Israel of old, seeking to attain to righteousness by works, and ritual, and the barely concealed Mass. Standing and sitting room was crowded. Will God bear this forever? Surely the end is near. The Gentile branches must be cut off. Thus has the Spirit of God explained this period of “no difference,” in these three chapters 9-11. After its close there will come the dispensation of the kingdom of Christ, as foretold in all the prophets. And at that time all Israel will be saved, as objects of His mercy. “To whom be glory forever. Amen.”

This closes the doctrinal part of this most wonderful revelation of the righteousness of

God, in His dealings with man, the reading of which will profit us nothing, unless made good in our souls by the Holy Spirit. Has He, as we have passed along its wondrous pages, thus used His own word? Have we truly owned ourselves as ruined, ungodly sinners? Have we learned that there neither has been, nor can be, any good in the flesh? Have we believed God, who has raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offenses? Have we individually gone over those offenses, and seen that they were transferred to our holy Substitute? Can we say He was raised from the dead for MY justification? Surely, then, we are justified by faith, and have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, standing in this abounding free favor of God, what should be our walk? Yes, further, being made free, and having the Spirit of life, what should be the fruit? The remaining chapters give the answer to these questions.

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