

# Romans Part 37 – Chapter 11

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## Review

In part 36 we looked at 1 John 4 where the Apostle John explores the depth of God's love for us. Then in Romans 11 we have seen Paul continue his explanation that started with the statement from chapter 10 verse 21 "*I HAVE SPREAD OUT MY HANDS ALL DAY LONG TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.*" We then took the time to cover 8 reasons why we are to be obedient to God. Then Paul explains that "*there has also come to be at the present time a **remnant** according to God's gracious choice*" and informs us in Romans 11:11 that "*through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.*"

## Romans 11:12-24

*Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!*

*13 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry 14 in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. 15 For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? 16 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches.*

*17 But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, 18 do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.*

*19 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." 20 That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.*

In the flow of this passage, the "root" is likely the patriarchs of Israel who received God's promises. Those roots, and the trunk which now grows from it are what supports these new Gentile Christians. They, the grafted-in branches, do not give life to the rest of the tree. Humility about Israel's special and ongoing relationship with God is the only response that makes sense for non-Jewish believers.

*22 Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen (rejection of Christ), but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.*

Remember the explanation of the purpose of God's kindness all the way back in **Romans 2:4**: *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

*23 And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.*

*24 For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.*

God has rejected Israel only for now. His temporary rejection is due to her refusal to believe in Christ as the way to be righteous before God. However, He will receive her back when and if her people stop refusing to have faith in Christ.

Paul seems to be eager for Gentile Christians to reach two goals. First, to understand that this re-grafting is possible. Second, to look forward to it themselves. After all, God could cut them from the wild olive tree—the unspiritual religions of the world—and graft them into His own cultivated tree through faith in Christ. Therefore, God can graft back into His tree the branches that grew there in the first place.

Grafting wild olive tree branches into cultivated trees is not the natural way to raise olive trees. Symbolically speaking, it was not "natural" for God to do this in order to offer salvation to the Gentiles, though it is exactly what He has done. Paul's point is to highlight the way a Gentile Christian ought to look at the potential salvation of the Jewish people. What could be more natural than for God to welcome the Jewish people back into His family, as they begin to trust in Christ for their salvation?

*25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.*

Most Israelites have been hardened to faith in Christ by God, keeping them from receiving God's righteousness. Why has God done this? As Paul has made clear, it was to make room for the non-Jewish people of the world to come into relationship with God through faith in Christ.

However, Paul now states outright that this is a temporary season. Israel's hardening will end when the "fullness" of the Gentiles has come to God through faith in Christ. Does this mean that God is waiting for all Gentiles to believe in Jesus? That's not likely, nor does it fit the words used here. The "fullness of the Gentiles" means "as many as will believe," or "the complete number." When that mysterious point has been reached, the Jewish people will no longer be hardened in their unbelief in Christ. This does not mean, necessarily, that every Israelite will come to faith in Christ, but perhaps that a representative proportion of living Israelites will do so. Nor does it mean that no Jewish person, prior to then, can come to faith—but most will not.

*26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,*

*“The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;*

*27 “and this will be my covenant with them  
when I take away their sins.”*

Some have read this to mean that every Israelite who has ever lived will be saved in the end. This does not seem to fit with Paul's teaching in Romans that salvation comes only by God's grace through faith in Christ. Clearly, some Jewish people—as is the case in any culture—had thoroughly and totally rejected God. God is not extending salvation to those who actively hated Him, merely based on their ethnicity.

Some read this to be an account of specific events during the end times when Israel, under great persecution, will be saved from further earthly harm by the "Deliverer." "Salvation" and "deliverance," in an Old Testament sense, are closely related. This interpretation does not take Paul to mean eternal salvation in this verse, though the context seems to be about salvation from sin. Paul likely refers to the end times, the last days of history, when Isaiah's prophecies about a Deliverer from Zion banishing Israel's ungodliness will be fulfilled (Isaiah 59:20). Most Bible teachers understand Paul to be describing the second coming of Christ.

*28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*

Paul agrees that Israel has become an enemy of the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul should know. He has suffered great persecution at the hands of the Jewish religious leaders for preaching the gospel. This makes what he says about the Jewish people next even more significant. His words here clarify that anti-Jewish sentiments are not only foreign to the Bible's depiction of Jews, they are contradictory to the character of God.

Paul describes the Jewish people as "beloved," meaning that they are still loved and cherished by God. This is in regard to "election," Paul writes, meaning that God has destined that Israel will return to close relationship with Him as her people come to faith in Christ at some point in the future (Romans 11:25–27).

Why has God elected the people of Israel—meaning a representative number, not necessarily every single Israelite—to return to Him at this future time? It is for the sake of their forefathers, the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God's promises to Israel's founding fathers were unconditional and irrevocable, as verse 29 declares.

*30 For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.*

Does that mean that the Gentile Christians should be done with Israel? Should they mock Israel? Paul insists that they do not. Israel is in a season of disobedience to the gospel of Christ now, just as the Gentiles were—and for the most part still are—in a season of rejection of God. One day, however, Israel's people will see the mercy shown to the disobedient Gentiles, believe in Christ, and turn to receive mercy from God, as well.

*32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

This verse is a profound declaration of truth, but it must be understood in the narrow context of this specific passage. Paul is not teaching that every single person, of all time, will receive God's mercy. This idea, known as universalism, would contradict what Paul has written previously: that the only way to be saved is by accepting Christ (Romans 10:9–10). Paul has made abundantly clear that the opportunity to receive God's mercy, instead of the deserved payment for our sin (Romans 6:23), is something accessible only through Jesus Christ.

Instead, the word "all" should be understood in reference to the two people groups Paul has been discussing throughout this chapter: the Jews and the Gentiles. God has turned both groups—"all"—

over to their disobedience for a time so that people from both groups may receive mercy from Him in the right time through faith in Christ.

Mercy on them all – Taken out of context, this might seem to teach universalism. But in chapters 1-4 Paul has presented a careful argument that all people are subject to God's judgment and that salvation is received only through faith. In context, Paul is referring, not to 'all' without exception, but to 'all' without distinction (i.e. to Jews and Gentiles alike).

'Here at length the full meaning of Paul's 'double predestination' is revealed. God has predestinated all men to wrath and he has predestinated all men to mercy. If they were not predestinated to the former they could not be predestinated to the latter. It is true that the stress here does not lie on the 'all men' but on the 'disobedience' and the 'mercy'; Paul does not intend to make a definite pronouncement about the ultimate destiny of each individual man. But the hope of mankind is more, not less, secure because it is rooted in the truth about God, rather than in a truth about man himself.' (Barrett)

What does it mean that God consigned each group to disobedience? In Romans 1, Paul described God's reaction to the sinful unbelief of the Gentiles. He gave them up or turned them over to their own sinful desires (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). In a similar way, God is described as having hardened the Israelites in their initial unbelief in Christ for a season (Romans 11:25).

In the end, though, God will show mercy to people in both groups— to "all"—by His grace and through their faith in Christ.

But if we are "consigned to disobedience" could that mean that even in God's sovereignty we are given a proclivity or weakness to a specific sin? Does a gluttonous believer mock a fellow believer who struggles with a gambling addiction or vice versa? If so, would this make it even more obviously helpful that we should "*confess our sins to one another?*"

**James 5:16-20:** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. 18 Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.*

*19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

**Matthew 18:7:** *"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"*

Jesus adds that such temptations are necessary. He does not mean by this that God is directly causing His little ones to experience temptation to sin. He seems to be saying that temptation to sin is part of living in a world that is full of sin. Facing temptation may be unavoidable for Christians, but those who lead them into sin will face God's painful judgment.

Two other things Jesus is **not** saying here: He is not saying it is necessary for Christians to give in to temptation. Temptation to sin may be a fact of life for believers but giving in to it is always avoidable (1 Corinthians 10:13). Second, Jesus is not saying that believers who sin, who stumble, are lost to Him. They can get up and continue to follow after Him.