

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 11, Verses 25-36
Notes from Tuesday March 8, 2011
Last Revised on March 10, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we finished reading and discussing through Verse 24 of Chapter 11

Tonight we will begin reading at Verse 25,

and I expect to finish Chapter 11.

But first let's review a little.

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is the **gospel**,

which he sets forth and expounds in the **first eight (8) chapters** of this letter.

In the next section of this letter, consisting of **Chapters 9 through 11**,

Paul examines the sad situation of those **Jews** who are **cut off from Christ**.

This is the **section** of Paul's letter which we have been examining recently,

and which we will finally finish this evening.

Please turn with me now to the very beginning of Chapter 9,

and follow along as I briefly **review** what we have covered so far in this section.

In **Chapter 9, Verses 1-5**, Paul expresses genuine **sadness** for his fellow Jews, almost all of whom have continued to **reject** Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

But this does not signal the **failure** of God's word, as Paul reminds us in **Verses 6-13 of Chapter 9**.

God has **always** preserved his relationship with the children of Abraham, through a small **remnant**.

This is **not** because the chosen **remnant** is good, or because those who are **not** chosen are especially bad.

It is because **God** is good!

And because God has a **plan**!

And because this is **how** God's plan for saving the world plays out.

Nevertheless some may foolishly accuse God of **injustice**, because not all men receive the **same** favors from Him,

but in **Verses 14-18 of Chapter 9**, Paul challenges his readers to see how this is a faulty way of **thinking** about God,

whose every action, always and everywhere, is surprisingly **gracious**,

even when for the benefit of some men, he **hardens** the hearts of others

be it the **Pharaoh** of Egypt or the majority of **Jews** who now reject Christ.

God knows **precisely** what he is doing!

He is working out his perfect eternal **plan** for Mankind,

even if **we** can not understand it.

But if everything has been foreordained by **God** in Christ,

including **even** the hardening of certain men,

then why does God find **fault** with men?

 And how can we **possibly** resist his will?

 These are the questions to which Paul turns in **Verses 19-29 of Chapter 9.**

 In doing so, Paul is **posing** as the “Devil’s Advocate.”

 These are **diabolical** questions, which **no** person of faith would ever raise!

 With the eyes of faith, we look inside ourselves, and we know full well that it is **not** God who causes us to sin, but our own character, which **apart** from God is utterly wicked.

 And we know that **obedience** is something of which we **ourselves** are totally **incapable**.

 We know that God **alone** can save us from the destruction which we manifestly deserve,

 and conform us to the likeness of his Son, so that we may live with him eternally.

 And that is what he **will** do for all who put their trust in Him.

Faith knows all of this, and **finds** it in Christ.

 However as Paul summarizes in the **last four verses of Chapter 9 and first four verses of Chapter 10,** most of the Jews have **not** been given such faith,

 Whether by **inheritance** or **merit** or **achievement** or **knowledge** or **religious practice** or by some other means,

 the Jews **zealously** pursue a righteousness before God which they can call their **own**,

 and therefore reject **Christ** and the righteousness that comes from Him alone through **faith**,

 This point is further developed in **Verses 5-13 of Chapter 10.**

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,

 whether **Jew** or **Gentile**,

 provided only that the mouth is confessing what the heart truly **believes**.

Such **belief** comes from **hearing** the **word** of **Christ**,

as Paul explains in **Verses 14-17 of Chapter 10**.

All the world has heard it, Paul says in **Verse 18 of Chapter 10**, quoting Psalm 19.

But in all the world, the word of Christ has been spoken most clearly to Israel.

Yet they have **refused** this word, because they have not yet **understood** it properly.

God has not **given** them such an understanding.

There is always a **remnant** in Israel which God preserves

and this remnant is **larger** than what may appear,

as we are reminded in the **first six verses of Chapter 11**.

But the rest have been **hardened** to the word of Christ.

They have been given a **spirit of stupor**.

Their **eyes** have been **darkened**.

Their ears, hearing, will not **hear**.

as we read in **Verses 7 - 10 of Chapter 11**.

In **Verses 11 and 12 of Chapter 11**, Paul goes on more hopefully to explain

that the hardening of Israel is neither **permanent** nor is it an end in **itself**.

Rather the transgression of the **Jews** is an instrument of salvation for **Gentiles**,

and this, in turn, so as to make **Israel** jealous,

so that Israel **too** may be saved.

This whole mysterious and amazing **process** is gracious from beginning to end!

The whole **world** is fallen into sin,

But God uses Israel to **redeem** the world,

and then God uses the redeemed world to save **Israel**.

In **Verses 13-24** Paul **cautions** the Gentiles against **arrogance**.

We gentile believers must **never** forget that the Jews were hardened in order to saved **us**,

or that we were saved in order that the **Jews** might finally be saved.

It is one **connected** thing, in which only God deserves any glory.

So ends our review.

Does anyone have any comments or questions?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 25-27

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 25-27, in Japanese.

Thank you. Will someone please read those same verses in English.

25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

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."

Thank you.

This continues some of the thoughts present in the preceding paragraph,

about the olive tree and its branches,

and I think Paul is **still** speaking specifically to the Gentile believers in Rome,

although it occurs to me that what he is saying here might **also** be beneficial to some of the

Jewish Christians as well.

It is a warning against Christian **conceit**,

of thinking that we are **wise** in comparison with those who have **not** accepted Christ,

particularly those **Jews** who have not accepted Christ.

Verse 25 begins

(Verse 25a)

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers:

The word here translated “*mystery*” appears 20 or 21 times in Paul’s letters.

It is rarely if ever used to describe things known only to Christians,

or which must not be disclosed to non-Christians.

Instead it usually describes something which can be known only by **revelation** from God,

and which once was **not** known because not yet revealed,

but which now **has** been revealed in Christ and therefore **can** be known,

and **should** be known, and well understood, by Christian believers.

Here Paul explains a revelation of God which Christian believers should understand,

not so they can be puffed up by their understanding,

but just the opposite: so they will not be **conceited**.

Q. And what **is** this mystery which, properly understood, will keep us humble?

A. Verse 25 continues:

(Verse 25b)

[that] a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

We understand from what has already been said, that the “*hardening*” spoken of here,

is the **inability** or **unwillingness** of the Jews to respond in faith,

to the gospel of Jesus Christ,

which **has** been proclaimed among them,

and in some imperfect sense **heard** by them,

but which has not been properly **understood** by them,

and has therefore been **rejected...disobeyed** by them

such a hardening has come upon Israel,

but it is not a **complete** and **permanent** hardening.

but a “*partial*” hardening

Q. In what sense is this hardening “**partial**?”

A. it is “partial” in the sense that it is **temporary**...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

A. it is “partial” in the sense that **not all** have been hardened: a remnant has been spared.

A. it may be “partial” in **other**, qualitative, ways as well,

In any case this partial hardening is **not** such that Israel is **completely** and **permanently** done away,

and this partial hardening is finally **removed** by the coming in of the “*fullness of the Gentiles*”:

Q. What is “*the fullness of the Gentiles*?”

A. Probably the meaning includes all of the Gentiles who will be saved.

A. Maybe this also has the collective sense of “Gentiles generally” (i.e. all the nations, the Gentile world)

In any case, it is when **God’s** work among the **Gentiles** has been completed,

 that the partial hardening of **Israel** will come to an end.

 Verse 26 begins

(Verse 26a)

And in this way all Israel will be saved,

as we discussed last week, in connection with Verse 12 where reference is made to the “*full inclusion of Israel*”

 here in Verse 26 “*all Israel*” should probably be taken to include the nation of Israel as a whole, as God Himself conceives of it, and everyone in Israel whom the Lord foreknew, but not necessarily every individual in what the world might reckon Israel to be.

 some (e.g. Calvin) have also understood “*all Israel*” to include gentile Christians,

 in the sense of Galatians 3:29

 but others insist that here Paul is speaking of elect Jews **proper**,

 in particular to those who have heretofore been subject to partial **hardening**.

 When the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, these partially hardened Jews will be saved,

 Verse 26 continues

(Verse 26 b)

as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";

and Verse 27 adds

(Verse 27)

"and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

This passage (i.e. the latter part of Verse 26 and Verse 27 of Romans, Chapter 11) is probably a paraphrase of Isaiah 59, Verses 20 and 21.

 It is almost certainly **apocalyptic** looking toward the last days,

 when the fullness of the Gentiles **has** come in,

 and the partial hardening of Israel **is** removed,

 and Christ shall return to rule his kingdom.

 Here I think Paul's main point is that the restoration of all of Israel shall happen **after** God's work among the Gentiles has been completed,

 and we might be making a mistake to look here for details regarding the parousia.

 Questions? Comments?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 28-32

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 28-32, in Japanese.

 Thank you. Will someone please read those same verses in English.

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God 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.

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.

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

Thank you.

 Here I think we are speaking of the "**present age**"

 meaning the age in which we **ourselves** live,

 framed as it is by the **first** and the **second** coming of Christ,

 during which this partial **hardening** of the Jews shall continue

During this period, we read in Verse 28:

(Verse 28)

As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

Surely the Jews are totally unique among all the peoples of the world.

Their history is the history of God's self revelation to man.

For the sake of the patriarchs and prophets, they are special and beloved by God.

Yet these are the very people who have also killed God's prophets,

and rejected and handed over for death God's only begotten son,

and who have steadfastly refused his gospel, until this day.

Yet they **cannot** erase themselves! God will not **allow** it.

Verse 29 reads:

(Verse 29)

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here I think Paul is not thinking of the calling of individual **men**,

but of the will of God with respect to the **nation** of Israel,

from which came the **patriarchs** and **prophets**

and from and to which came the **Redeemer**.

Before the **world** was made, in the mind of God

Christ had been appointed Messiah of **Israel**

and God foreknew **all** in Israel whom he promised to Abraham as descendants.

Nothing can change any of **that**.

God will certainly **not** forsake that which he himself has foreordained.

In short, Israel is **not** lost, no matter what may appear to be the case.

Verse 30 continues

(Verse 30)

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,

In other words, the way in which God in Christ redeemed the world **required** the disobedience of the Jews,

and now **through** the redeemed world, the Jews **themselves** shall receive mercy.

That is the sense of Verse 31, which reads:

(Verse 31)

so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

The word “*also*” in verse 31 makes it plain that God’s purpose throughout is **mercy**.

The present hardening of the Jews is **merciful**,

not **just** to the Gentiles,

but to the Jews **also**.

Verse 32 reads:

(Verse 32)

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

Q. How shall we understand this verse?

A. Certainly we would not want to take it out of context; the first word, “for,” signals a connectedness with what went before. And what went before certainly and primarily includes the idea that **both** Gentiles **and** Jews (that is all human beings) have been consigned

to disobedience in order that God may have mercy on them. In other words, God has been no more merciful or less merciful to Jews than to Gentiles, even though his dealings with them have been markedly different.

Q. Are there any individual exceptions to the first part of this statement --- i.e. are there any men or women who have **not** been disobedient?

A. Jesus Christ is the only exception. Otherwise **all** have sinned.

Q. Are there any individual exceptions to the second part of this statement --- i.e. are there any men or women on whom God has not had and will not have **mercy**?

A. The answer to the question as stated must be "**no**" --- i.e. we must, I think, hold that God has been merciful to all men and women who have ever lived, without exception, and that he will continue to be so.

Q. But what does this **mean**?

A. It is very difficult to be more clear on this point without risking blasphemy in one direction or another.

I believe that this is why Paul ends this section of the letter in the way that he does.

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 33-36

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 11, Verses 33-36, in Japanese.

Thank you. Will someone please read those same verses in English.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Thank You.

Remember that, in **Verse 32**, Paul has just said that God has consigned **all** to disobedience that he might have **mercy** on all.

It seems very unlikely that there are any exceptions to this statement, yet it is difficult to comprehend all of the the implications of the latter part of the verse --- i.e. that God has mercy on all.

Surely it is impossible to think that anyone ever could pass beyond God's capacity for mercy and, yet, we must not ignore any of what the Bible has to say about Hell and damnation,

all of which is said for our benefit and is yet another manifestation of God's mercy.

We have at this point bumped up against the limit of what man can clearly say and know,

and it is better that we not try to know more or be more clear at this point.

Here we must simply trust God.

And worship Him.

Paul writes in Verse 33

(Verse 33)

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Here Paul is bowing before the fact of Gods invisibility and utter transcendence.

We cannot see God. We cannot interrogate God. We cannot manipulate God.

We cannot know anything about God, or about God's judgments, or his ways,

except for what God expressly reveals to us,

and enables us to know and to understand.

In Verse 34 Paul adds

(Verse 34)

"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

The answer, of course, is that nobody has ever been God's counselor.

And nobody has ever known the mind of the Lord,

except for such revelations as God Himself has made possible.

God's ultimate revelation of Himself, his Judgments and his Ways is found in Christ.

but even these things we can understand only insofar as God has revealed them to us,

which he does through the Bible, and the Holy Spirit.

We can discover nothing at all beyond God's revelation.

Nor can we ever force God to reveal anything to us.

Verse 35 continues

(Verse 35)

"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

Indeed. And this, I think, is a clue to all questions concerning God's mercy.

Since God owes nothing to anyone, his relationship with everyone is gracious.

And we must be content with such things as God chooses to reveal to us.

Verse 36 concludes

(Verse 36)

**For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.
Amen.**

We must finally lose ourselves in contemplation of God at this point,

because nothing can exist apart from him, neither in time nor eternity.

There is finally only God's way

and no other way.

Questions? Comments?

Closing Prayer