

Sermons through

Romans

Beloved, Elect Enemies?

Romans 11:28-32

With Study Questions

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Beloved, Elect Enemies?

Romans 11:28-32

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. ³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all (Romans 11:28-32).

Introduction

Years ago my family took a trip from Los Angeles to New York by car. While driving through the heartland of America I remember seeing huge fields of vegetation. My dad said these were farms and we were looking at corn and wheat. But there didn't appear to be any rhyme or reason to these plants – they seemed like wild and random bushes.

As we drove, our car finally reached a point in the road where I could see that the fields were very orderly and meticulously planted; there were perfect rows. The vantage point made all the difference. From one perspective the farm didn't look like it made any sense at all, from another perspective it made perfect sense.

As we mentioned earlier, there is a principle in Bible interpretation which requires we interpret the unclear by the clear. The passages in the Scriptures which are difficult to understand should always be read in light of the passage which are easily understood.

In light of the passage (chapter) before us, this principle becomes very important. The Bible, from cover to cover, teaches that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. Any passage which, at first blush, might appear to teach otherwise must be read more carefully. The Bible also teaches that there are some who will be saved and others not. Any passage which sounds as if every last single person on earth will be saved (the way some might read Romans 11:32, **“that He might have mercy on all”**) must also be read more carefully.

So when we get to a passage like the one before us, what is the vantage point which helps us make sense of what Paul is teaching in light

of the clearer teaching of Scripture? Where must we drive our car in order for this passage to display the highest level of orderliness?

Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (Romans 11:28).

Beloved, Elect Enemies?

Who are these people Paul describes as those who are “**enemies**” *echthroio*, yet at the same time the “**elect**” *eklogen*—or more specifically “**concerning election beloved for the sake of the fathers**”? One thing we learn from this very passage is that whoever these people are, they will not remain enemies of the gospel—verse 31 teaches us that they will “**obtain mercy.**” That cannot be said of every person on earth, nor can it be said of every Jew in Israel.

I think we will find the passage makes the most sense when we realize that Paul is speaking of a specific group of people within the Jewish community—those who are currently in a state of disbelief but will come to faith. We see this peppered throughout the chapter when he writes of those who are currently in a state of darkness but will know “**fullness**” (Romans 11:12); those currently “**cast away**” but will later find “**acceptance**” and “**life from the dead**” (Romans 11:15); branches that were cut off but that God is “**able to graft...in again**” (Romans 11:23); those who were currently “**disobedient**” but will eventually “**obtain mercy**” (Romans 11:31).

These are people who are within that community who, although they had “**stumbled,**” they had not “**stumbled that they should fall**” (Romans 11:11). “**For the sake of the fathers**” Paul conveys, this community had not reached a point of no return in their rejection of Christ. They were not a Sodom or Gomorrah (Romans 9:29).

It has been rightly said that God has no grandchildren; that is, we’re not saved or regenerate by virtue of the faith of our parents—there is no second generation faith. Yet there is a general promise we see in the Ten Commandments where God visits the...

...iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands (Or to the thousandth generation) of those who love me and keep my commandments (Exodus 20:5, 6).

All this to say that it shouldn't be shocking to note that God would exercise forbearance in His judgment upon apostate Israel because of the love and obedience of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or His love for them.

The interesting dynamic here is that Paul is informing the predominantly gentile Christian community that among the very people who are currently making their lives miserable (enemies of the gospel) they will find their future brothers and sisters in Christ.

I recall when I was courting my wife-to-be, being evaluated by her family. I was encountered with a variety of methods by her family members. But a subtext of all of these encounters was the realization that I might be around for a while. So as scrutinizing as they might be, they were careful to avoid bridge-burning – or at least burning the entire bridge.

Paul is warning Christians not to be **“boastful” (Romans 11:20)** or **“wise in their own opinion” (Romans 11:25)**. Boastful, self-inflated attitudes create a variety of problems, not the least of which is the difficulty of fellowship when a person with whom we had a haughty encounter, comes to faith, and all of the sudden we're sitting across from them in church. I think it should be a goal of ours that when/if we were bump into someone at church, there would not be a “what in the world are you doing here” look on their face – no matter where we know that person from.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

A Faithful God

In this verse Paul is summarizing what he has been writing for the entire chapter in his treatise on the faithfulness of God (Romans 9:6). **“The gifts *charismata* and the calling *klesis* of God are irrevocable *ametameleta*.”** The gifts may be looking back to Romans 9:4, 5 **“adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, promises, etc”** or looking forward to Romans 12:6, 7 to spiritual gifts **“prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, etc.”** The calling is likely referring to God's effective call to salvation (Romans 8:30).

But the point here is that God doesn't second-guess Himself and the passages which sound like He does are merely literary devices to emphasize His dismay or disfavor (Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14). No, the totality of God's covenant promises and its attending grace, mercy and

election are **“irrevocable”** *ametameleta* a strong, legal term **“indicating the unbreakable nature of God’s gifts and calling.”**¹

God is a promise-making, promise-keeping God. He is the constant and it is the fickle, unstable, finite and dubious heart of man that is the variable. And as much as we desire to evaluate Him and measure His character, integrity and faithfulness, it is He who the **“discerner” of the “reflections and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).**

The bottom line here is that God is faithful – we can be assured of that. But are we faithful? Because God’s faithfulness is a two-edged sword:

The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;¹³ if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

God is faithful in His mercy and He is faithful in His justice. And the grand and glorious demonstration of both His mercy and justice are found in Christ. It is because of Jesus that God is both faithful and just when He forgives us and cleanses us **“from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9)**. He is not a God who ignores sin or pretends it didn’t happen. There are consequences for sin – wages – and those wages are paid by Christ. God therefore maintains both His justice while being merciful.

Back to the text, what Paul will now show is how we’re all in the same boat.

For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience,³¹ even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy.³² For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all (Romans 11:30-32).

Disobedience and Mercy

He restates what he has been explaining regarding how God has chosen to unfold His plan of redemption. The Israelite rejected the Messiah (John 1:11) and so the message went out to the highways and byways

¹ Schreiner, T. R. (1998). *Romans* (Vol. 6, p. 626). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

(Matthew 22:9) of the gentiles (the international New Covenant). Then, through the mercy shown to the gentiles the Jews, through a jealousy (Romans 11:14) would be provoked and find salvation.

Paul's effort to encourage humility rather than haughtiness, is seen in the his rather universal declaration of human disobedience – the gentile was in a state of disobedience and now the Jew is in a state of disobedience. As Paul taught elsewhere:

But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe (Galatians 3:22).

There is nothing in any man that makes him preferable to God. This should excite us in our worship – for truly we are saved by grace through faith alone – all glory to God! But it is also a source of great hope for others. If we have emerged from our rebellion by the grace of God, He is certainly capable of achieving that great victory in the hearts of others – even the most hardened sinner, like Paul himself.

Before we conclude, let us note that Paul is about to burst forth into a beautiful doxology: **“Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Romans 11:33)!** And the springboard which launches Paul into this glorious outburst is the same thing which angers the natural mind and even some regenerate minds – that all who are in a state of disobedience and all who are in a state of grace and mercy are precisely where they are because God has **“committed”** *synekleisen* them to it.

The history we all experience, redemptive or otherwise, is not left to chance or the forces of mindless fate. There is a God in heaven who is truly God, governing whatsoever comes to pass – as Paul wrote elsewhere...

...according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Ephesians 1:11).

Questions for Study

1. How can our perspective affect the way we read Scripture? What is one of the more important principles in Bible interpretation and why is it so critical (pages 2, 3)?
2. Who are the “beloved, elect enemies” of which Paul writes? Why are they beloved? Does God have spiritual grandchildren? Explain (pages 3, 4).
3. Have you ever felt awkward seeing someone in church because of the way you treated them outside of the church? What should a goal of ours be when we bump into someone at church (page 4)?
4. What are the “gifts” and “calling” of God? Does God second-guess Himself, why or why not? What does it mean that God’s gifts and calling are “irrevocable”? What are the implications of this (pages 4, 5)?
5. How do Romans 11:30, 31 put everyone, so to speak, in the same boat (pages 5, 6)?
6. Discuss Romans 11:32 and how it leads some to grumble but the Apostle Paul to a doxology (page 6).