



God's Ways are Merciful and Unfathomable Romans 11:11-36

Introduction

In Romans 9 through 11:10, Paul has been explaining that the doctrines of the gospel of God, which he has been teaching throughout the letter, do not invalidate God's promises to Israel. Paul has been confirming his teaching about justification by faith: salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The fact that Israel, as a whole, rejected the righteousness based on faith, did not mean that God had totally rejected his people. Paul has shown from Israel's history that even when the nation had fallen into idolatry, God had graciously preserved a faithful remnant. So now, in spite of the fact that Israel had rejected the gospel, a remnant was being saved by God's grace. Although the number was small, Jews were being saved. God had not rejected His people.

The culmination of Paul's argument is in Romans 11:11-36. Yes, Israel stumbled but for a purpose—to bring salvation to the Gentiles. Paul shows that God has a profound purpose which is being worked out through His dealings with both Jews and Gentiles. God's ways are far beyond our understanding, but we can be assured that His way is the way of mercy!

Outline of Romans 11:11-36

- I. Israel Did Not Stumble So as to Fall - Romans 11:11-16
- II. Gentiles Have No Reason for Arrogance - Romans 11:17-24
- III. God's Plan Is to Show Mercy to All - Romans 11:25-32
- IV. God's Ways Are Beyond Human Comprehension - Romans 11:33-36

I. Israel Did Not Stumble So as to Fall - Romans 11:11-16

Having shown that God has preserved a remnant out of unbelieving Israel, Paul brings up a question concerning Israel as a whole, ethnic Israel; *have they stumbled that they should fall?* (Romans 11:11). In the Greek, the question is worded to demand a negative answer. Paul's negative answer is, *Certainly not!* The Jews will not be totally excluded from God's mercy.

- A. Israel's fall brought salvation to the Gentiles - Romans 11:11

Jewish unbelief opened the way to salvation for the

Gentiles. This is illustrated clearly in the Book of Acts where it is recorded that on his missionary journeys, Paul always went first to the synagogue to preach the gospel message to the Jews. As his message was rejected time and again, he turned to the Gentiles who eagerly believed. Paul's final words recorded in the Book of Acts are to the Jews. *Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it* (Acts 28:28).

- B. The Gentiles' salvation was to provoke Israel to jealousy - Romans 11:11

The Jews did not stumble to be cast away completely or forever. The gospel went to the Gentiles in order that Israel's eyes might be opened to the blessings they had despised and rejected. The salvation of the Gentiles would cause Israel to be jealous and move them to seek salvation by faith as well. They would be provoked to jealousy just as Moses had predicted in Deuteronomy 32:21 (Romans 10:19).

- C. If Israel's fall brings blessing, *how much more their fullness* - Romans 11:12

If Israel's fall means *riches for the world* now, how much greater will the blessing be when Jews are reconciled to God through belief in Jesus Christ!

- D. Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is magnified by salvation of some Jews - Romans 11:13-14

Paul turns to speak directly to the Gentiles, *I speak to you Gentiles* (11:13). He had been called by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Romans 1:5, Acts 9:15), and he was faithful to that ministry. Many Gentiles were saved as Paul traveled throughout Asia Minor, Europe, and Greece preaching the gospel. But there was an additional benefit to the success of Paul's ministry. As Gentiles came to faith, some Jews might be provoked to jealousy (11:11) and thus be saved.

- E. Israel's acceptance is *life from the dead* - Romans 11:15

If Israel being cast away meant that Gentiles (the world) would be reconciled to God, what would their acceptance mean but life from the dead? This comparison is similar to the one in verse 12, but stated in a more powerful way. The acceptance of a people who were virtually dead (spiritually) will bring indescribable blessing. see John 5:24.

F. The Jews are a sanctified people - Romans 11:16

The Jews had been set apart by God to be a *peculiar people unto Himself* (Deuteronomy 14:2, KJV). Paul will show that they are still a consecrated people, in spite of their present disobedience. To affirm this, Paul uses two metaphors: the relationship between the firstfruits and the whole and the relationship of the root to the branches.

1. *If the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy* - 11:16

The firstfruit is a reference to Numbers 15:20-21 where the first of the dough (or ground meal) was offered to the Lord as a pledge of the full harvest. The principle was that the first part of the harvest consecrated the whole. Most scholars see the firstfruits as referring to Abraham and the lump as the Jews who are sanctified through the blessings promised to him.

2. *If the root is holy, so are the branches* - 11:16

The *root* refers to the patriarchs--Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were set apart, chosen by God, and this affected their descendants. The Jews are God's people and special because of their heritage. They continue to fulfill His purposes even in their rebellion. *For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth* (Deuteronomy 7:6). *The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day* (Deuteronomy 10:15). *The Lord will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you His people* (1 Samuel 12:22).

II. Gentiles Have No Reason for Arrogance - Romans 11:17-24

Paul continues his exhortation to the Gentiles. Because they are enjoying the blessings of salvation, and Israel is not, is no reason for feeling superior. The Gentile believers are to respect the Jewish people through whom faith was made available. The root of Christianity is Jewish. There is no room for Gentile pride.

- A. Israel is the *olive tree*, but some branches were broken off - Romans 11:17

Paul pictures Israel as a *cultivated olive tree* (Romans 11:24, Jeremiah 11:16-17, Hosea 14:6). The ancient root stock of the tree (Abraham and the patriarchs) was good, but some branches had become rotten and unfruitful through disobedience. These were broken off.

B. Gentiles are the *wild olive tree*, grafted in - Romans 11:17-20

The Gentiles, being a *wild olive tree*, were by nature unfruitful. It was by God's grace, and totally contrary to nature (11:24), that they were grafted into the people of God. By God's grace they became partakers of the blessings from the root, just as if they were natural branches. The root of Christianity is Judaism.

1. No room for boasting - 11:17-18

"The ingrafted shoot, deriving all its vigour and fruitfulness from the stock of another tree, ought not to boast against the broken branches" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes). Branches cannot survive without nourishment from the root; they will wither and die. Therefore, Gentiles have no reason for boasting. They do not support the root. The root supports them. The means of all blessing is in the root! "The roots are in Abraham, in Isaac, and in Jacob, down through David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos. They are our forefathers. Even though their blood is not in our veins, their truth and their heritage are in our hearts. Salvation comes from Israel" (The Gospel of God, Romans, R.C. Sproul). There is no room for anti-semitism in Christianity!

2. *Do not be haughty, but fear* - 11:19-20

Some might argue that God had broken off the branches for the sole purpose of grafting in the Gentiles. Paul's answer is that they were broken off because of unbelief. It was not because of their race or ethnicity, but a judgment on their unbelief. On the other hand, the Gentiles were grafted in because of God's mercy, by His grace. It was by faith, and not because they were better in any way. The contrast is between unbelief and faith. "Salvation is ever and always by faith alone" (Romans 1:16, 17; Ephesians 2:8-9) (The MacArthur Study Bible, John MacArthur).

Because salvation is by faith, there is no reason to be *haughty*. Rather than becoming haughty, a Christian should *fear*. This does not mean to be "afraid", but is the opposite of boasting and haughtiness. It implies an awe and reverence of what God has done, which naturally leads to humility and guarding against unbelief.

- C. *Consider the goodness and severity of God* - Romans 11:21-24

This is a warning not to presume upon God's mercy. Christians should be aware of God's purposes in His dealings with mankind and learn lessons from the past in order to stand firm in faith. God will certainly not *cut off* (11:22) His elect whom He has chosen. *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable* (11:29).

But we all stand in need of warning so as to remain humble and obedient to the gospel. Warnings such as this are one of God's means of preserving those whom He has chosen.

1. If God cut off the natural branches, He can cut off the Gentile branches too - 11:21-22

If God broke off the Jews for unbelief and they were the natural branches, this should be a warning to Gentile believers not to waver in unbelief or drift from the teachings of the gospel. *Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away* (Hebrews 2:1).

God has shown His *goodness* toward you who believe. In Romans 2:4, Paul wrote, *The goodness of God leads you to repentance*. On the other hand, God is severe in judging unbelief. He has shown his *severity* (a word which means "cutting off," in the Greek) in cutting off the Jews. Paul says, *consider this and continue in His goodness* (11:22).

2. God can graft Israel in again - 11:23-24

God has the power to restore those who have a change of heart and turn and believe. He has not *cast away* (11:1) His people unconditionally.

The Gentiles were cut out of a wild olive tree and were *grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree* (11:24). As a *wild olive tree*, they were far removed from God. They were the *uncircumcision...without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world* (Ephesians 2:11-12). On the other hand, the Jews were God's privileged people, *Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came* (Romans 9:4-5). If God grafted wild olive branches into the cultivated olive tree, how much more likely would it be for Him to graft the restored natural branches back into their own tree?

III. God's Plan Is to Show Mercy to All - Romans 11:25-32

Paul will now reveal a *mystery* to his readers because he does not want us to be ignorant or become wise in our own opinions. It is not a mystery because it is hard to understand, but because it is something God had not revealed before. It is therefore something we cannot figure out by ourselves and it needs to be announced publicly.

- A. *Blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.* - Romans 11:25

That is the mystery. God's sovereign plan involved blindness for a portion of Israel. Romans 11:7 confirms this. It is obvious that the majority of Israel had been blinded in Paul's day, having not submitted to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). During this time of Israel's blindness, God is showing mercy to the Gentiles, until the full number of Gentiles have come into the family of God.

1. And in this manner all Israel will be saved - 11:26

The mystery Paul has revealed in verse 25 is God's plan for the salvation of all Israel, a term that does not need to mean every single Israelite, but perhaps the majority.

There are different views as to what Paul means by Israel in verse 26. Some think he is referring to the nation of Israel as a whole, all ethnic descendants of Abraham. Others believe it is a reference to the remnant Paul spoke of in 11:5, all elect Israelites who have returned to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Still others believe that it refers to the Christian church, being convinced that the church, consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles, has become the new Israel, spiritual Israel, and that ethnic Israel has no more place in God's plan. If the olive tree of Romans 11:17-24 represents Israel, perhaps this gives a hint of Paul's meaning when he refers to all Israel.

2. *The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My Covenant with them, when I take away their sins* - 11:26-27

Paul paraphrases Isaiah 59:20 and 27:9 to confirm the means of Israel's salvation. The passages reveal that Israel's salvation will be through saving faith in Jesus Christ, their Deliverer who will take away their sins.

- B. *All Israel are enemies for your sake but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers* - Romans 11:28

There was a purpose in Israel's rejection of the gospel. Israel was estranged from God for the sake of the Gentiles, to bring salvation to them. But even so, Israel (*all Israel*, 11:26) is still *beloved* because of the fathers (the holy root of 11:16). God had chosen Abraham and made His covenant with him. God had confirmed the covenant promises with Abraham's descendants. God is intent upon fulfilling His promises and carrying out His purposes according to His perfect plan.

C. *For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable*
- Romans 11:29

God does not change His purpose. What He has promised, He will do. "As He made promises to the fathers, He will not repent of them and will not depart from them; they shall all be fulfilled; and thus it was certain that the ancient people of God, though many of them had become rebellious, and had been cast off, should not be forgotten and abandoned" (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

D. God's mercy for both Jews and Gentiles -
Romans 11:30-32

These verses show that *all have sinned* (Romans 3:23), both Jew and Gentile. God has mercy on both (Romans 1:16).

1. Disobedience of the Gentiles - 11:30

Paul describes the former state of the Gentile believers in Ephesians 2:1-2. *You....were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.* They were dead and disobedient. But the Gentiles obtained mercy through the Jews' disobedience.

2. Disobedience of the Jews - 11:31

The Jews were disobedient in order that God might show mercy to the Gentiles and that through them the Jews might also obtain mercy. The long-term effect of Israel's disobedience and the Gentiles receiving mercy will be mercy for Israel again.

3. *God has committed all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all* - 11:32

The word *committed* is the Greek word used of guilty men confined as prisoners. The fact that God has *committed them all to disobedience* means that God has declared all guilty of their disobedience. It does not mean that He has compelled anyone to be disobedient. People have done that all by themselves. All people, both Jews and Gentiles, are prisoners of their own disobedience. Furthermore, all who are saved, both Jews and Gentiles, are saved only by the mercy of God. We all receive salvation in the same way, by God's mercy, because we are all guilty, unbelieving sinners.

IV. God's Ways Are Beyond Human Comprehension - Romans 11:33-36

Having revealed the marvelous plan of God to bring both Jews and Gentiles to salvation through His infinite mercy and grace, Paul bursts into praise.

A. *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!* - Romans 11:33 (ESV)

In light of God's magnificent plan, Paul can only stand in awe of the vastness and incomprehensibility of His riches, wisdom, and knowledge. The *riches* of God are the abundant blessings and mercies which come through His gospel. His *wisdom* refers to the perfection of His ways which are grace and mercy. His *knowledge* is His omniscience. God knows all things.

B. *How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out* - Romans 11:33

God's *judgments* and His *ways* cannot be fully understood by the human mind. They are simply too far beyond us and too deep for us to fathom.

C. *For who has known the mind of the Lord?* -
Romans 11:34

Paul's quote from Isaiah 40:13 confirms the infinite wisdom and knowledge of God. No one could possibly teach God anything, presume to give Him counsel, or offer Him advice.

D. *Who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid him?* - Romans 11:35

Paul uses passages from Job to confirm that God is under obligation to no one.

E. *For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.* -
Romans 11:36

All things are *of Him*, meaning that all things were created by God according to His sovereign will. As the original source of all things, all things come from Him. All things are *through Him*: everything exists and is held together by means of His sovereign activity and power. He is the primary cause of all things. All things are *to Him*: everything that exists, exists for Him and for His sovereign glory. All things were made for God and for His glory and honor, to show forth His praise. *Amen.*

Application

1. In Romans 11:25, Paul revealed a *mystery* to the Roman believers. They needed to know what God was doing so they would not err in ignorance and become arrogant. Knowledge of God's word leads to humility. How knowledgeable are you of God's word? How can you make more time to read and study to become grounded in the truth?

2. Will you memorize Romans 11:34-36 to share as a blessing for your group.

QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

Day One: Read all notes and references.

1. a. What did you learn about the relationship of Judaism and Christianity?
- b. ♥ (Heart Question) How can you apply this in some way in your life?
2. Why is God worthy of all glory forever?

Day Two: Read Romans 12:1-2.

3. a. What does Paul beseech his readers to do in verse 1?
- b. Why should we even consider doing this? Give as many reasons as you can find in verse 1.
- c. What does it mean to you to *present your bodies a living sacrifice*?
- d. How do the following passages describe various aspects of presenting your body as a living sacrifice?
Matthew 5:13-16

Luke 9:23

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Colossians 3:2
4. a. Give one positive and one negative command from Romans 12:2.
- b. For what reason should these commands be obeyed?
5. a. How do 1 Peter 1:14-15 and 1 John 2:15-16 help explain what it means to *not be conformed to this world*?
- b. Rather than being *conformed*, how does Paul say you are to be *transformed*?

- c. From Colossians 3:16a and Titus 3:5b, how might this be facilitated?

Day Three: Read Romans 12:3-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26.

6. To whom is Paul addressing his remarks in verse 3?
7. How does Paul say we are to judge our own worth?
8. a. What analogy does Paul use to describe the body of Christ and how are the two comparable? (See 1 Corinthians passage also.)
- b. Use the 1 Corinthians passage and Ephesians 4:16 to help explain what Paul means when he says we are *individually members of one another*.

Day Four: Read Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, and Ephesians 4:11-12.

9. a. Using the above passages, what subject is Paul discussing.
- b. What is the purpose of the gifts given by God? Give Scripture references.
- c. Through whom do believers receive these gifts?
- d. Why is there no reason for taking pride in one's gift (or gifts)?
10. a. What particular gifts does Paul list in Romans 12? What does he say about each?
- b. ♥ (Heart Question) How are you using the gift (or gifts) you have been given to build up the body of Christ?

Day Five: Read Romans 12:9-13.

11. a. In this passage, Paul gives a series of exhortations. What does he say about love?
- b. How do the following passages help explain what Paul means by this?
- 1 Timothy 1:5
- 1 Peter 1:22
- 1 John 3:18

12. How are believers to relate to good and evil? Give some practical examples of this if you can.
13. Using both verses 10 and 13, tell how Christians are to treat one another and give some practical examples.
14. a. Who are Christians to serve and in what manner are we to do so?
15. Which of Paul's exhortations would be helpful in times of personal trouble?

Day Six: Read Romans 12:14-21.

16. a. As a Christian, how are you to treat those who persecute you? Give verses.
- b. From the following Scripture passages, give Biblical examples and explain how they are examples.
Luke 23:33-36
- Acts 7:59-60
- 1 Corinthians 4:11-13
17. How are believers to show empathy?
18. What does Paul say about the mind? How would you apply this in practical terms?
19. If someone does evil to you, how should you respond? Why?
20. a. How does this passage teach us to *live peaceably with all men*? Write down some of Paul's statements with verses.
- b. What two qualifying statements does Paul make when he exhorts us to *live peaceably with all men*?
- c. Give some instances where it might not be possible to live peaceably with others.