

Things Aren't as They Appear

Romans 11:1-10

September 12th, 2010



We are beginning the last chapter of the doctrinal section of the book of Romans. We will get into the application section when we get to Romans 12. Remember, you behave what you believe; so remember that doctrine is important to the Church. Once you ever start believing wrong, you will eventually behave wrong. In order to behave right, we must have right beliefs.

Romans chapter 11 naturally divides into three sections. So we will look at verses 1-10 in this lesson, verses 11-24 in the next lesson, and then verses 25-36 in the following lesson.

Scripture

"I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of

works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."

Things aren't always as they appear. At one time or another, we have all experienced things that appeared one way, and later discovered they were not actually the way they appeared at all.

My wife, my daughter, and I were watching a movie this weekend. In the opening scene, it was obvious that a girl who loved her work had been badly hurt by her ex-boyfriend. In her mind, she would never love another man unless she loved him more than her work. Now, she has to fly to another country for the wedding of her sister, and sure enough, she meets the best man of the groom at the wedding. In a few hours, he has her laughing. He is flirting with her, and then he comes to her rescue. You can tell that she begins to let her guard down. He goes outside of the building where the wedding reception is being held, and a few minutes later she follows him. She is going to let him know that she is interested in him, and about the time she gets outside and starts to call out to him, a young, beautiful woman in a red dress appears. She grabs him, turns him around, and lays one of those mouth to mouth kisses on him. She grabs him by the arm and wheels him back into the wedding reception. As the camera moves back to her, her face drops. She feels like she has been made a fool of again; this guy already has a girlfriend. How dare he flirt with her! How dare she begin to let her heart move toward another man! The wedding gets over and they fly back home. He happens to be from America too and he got her number from her sister. He begins to call her, but once she

discovers his number, she will not answer the phone. They finally meet though, and she blurts out, "How dare you call me when you have a girlfriend!" He said, "What?" She said, "Don't play that game with me! You know, the girl in the red dress who kissed you?" He begins to laugh. She said, "Why are you laughing?" Then he told her that it was the groom's cousin, and he tells her how she is very aggressive; not just to him, but to all men. Then she begins to realize that things were not as they appeared.

Sometimes you just can't trust what you see. Sometimes you can't trust the observation you are making. Have you noticed when you are in your vehicle that you can trust what you see in your left mirror, but you can't trust what you see in your right mirror? They even have those little words on that right mirror, "**Things are closer than they appear.**" Have you ever learned that lesson the hard way?

Has God Rejected Israel?

As we turn our attention to Romans 11, I promise you, things are not as they appear theologically, or spiritually. Paul knows that and he is now going to set the record straight. Remember that Paul is talking about the salvation of the nation of Israel beginning with chapter 9, and on through chapter 11. How can the nation that brought about the birth of the Messiah, the nation with the covenant, the nation that had the Law and Prophets, not come to faith in Christ? Paul made it clear that it isn't God's fault. God stretched out His arms all day long to a nation of disobedient and contrary people. Paul knows that in the church at Rome, and probably among all churches at large, there is the thought that the Jews are not being saved because God has rejected His people. We think that is fair because if the nation has rejected God, then it is fair for God to get tired, lose patience, and finally reject His own people. So Paul begins with that question, "*...has God rejected his people?*" In other words, is the reason that Israel is not coming to salvation because God has rejected His people? Paul immediately says absolutely not! Paul uses a word for 'reject' that is a strong word in the Greek language. It literally means, 'to thrust aside, to

push away.' So the thought is; has God thrust aside, has God pushed Israel away from Himself so that now they cannot be saved? The answer is absolutely not! Paul will give an example of himself. He basically said, hey church, wake up! If God has rejected the nation of Israel and it cannot be saved, then how I am writing this letter to you? Then he reminds them that he was an Israelite.

There were three primary ways the Jews identified themselves during the time of Christ: Israelite, Hebrew, or Jew. Paul doesn't call himself a Hebrew or a Jew, he calls himself an Israelite. This is the very name that God gave Jacob when He made him aware that a Messiah would come from him in the plan of redemption. Therefore, God changed his name from Jacob (trickster) to Israel. Paul said I am also a seed of Abraham; I can trace my lineage back to Abraham. He said I am from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was one of the small tribes, but during the civil war, the tribe of Benjamin stayed with the tribe of Judah. The ten tribes of the north rebelled, but not Benjamin. Benjamin stood beside Judah. Benjamin had the place called Jerusalem. From the tribe of Benjamin came the first king of Israel. There is no doubt who Paul was named after when they gave him the name Saul.

God Saves Those He Foreknew

So Paul said absolutely not; don't ever think that God has rejected Israel! If God had rejected Israel, he wouldn't have been saved. Then in verse 2, he reiterates an important point. When you are preaching verse by verse and the Bible reiterates something, you have to reiterate it. Paul said, "*God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.*" Paul will not let us forget that there is a nation of people whom God foreknew. He sets the record straight that God has never, nor will ever, reject the people He foreknew. The word, "*foreknew*", literally means that God set His covenant love upon a people before the foundation of the world. It doesn't mean to know facts about. It means to know the person, themselves, in an intimate, personal

way. The thought with Paul is that God would never thrust aside those people He foreknew.

- **God Chose Israel**

The Church has trouble with God being God. We are finite and He is infinite. It is hard not to think like man, and to try and think like God. I think if we surveyed the Church that the majority wants to believe the reason God chose people before the foundation of the world is because He knew what they were going to do and how they would respond to different situations, and that's why He made His decision. That seems fair and just for us, but Deuteronomy 7 blows that out of the water. God is sharing, through Moses, why He chose Israel among all of the nations of the earth. He said He didn't choose them because they were large in number. He said that He set His love on them and chose them because He loved them. Do you get what He is saying? It wasn't based on anything in Israel; it was because of Him and His love for them. Wow!

- **God will not Forsake Israel**

That is hard for us to imagine because most of us have been raised in a way in which we earn someone's love. We actually have young girls who try to get young guys to fall in love with them. This love, being rooted in the lover and not in the love is foreign to humans. But that is what God is telling Israel, and He made a covenant with them. As a matter of fact, if you remember in 1 Samuel 12:22, Israel had told God that they didn't want Him to be their King anymore. They wanted a king like the nations around them. They wanted a king to protect and fight for them. God told them what would happen if they chose this king, but they wanted one anyway. So God told Samuel to let them have one and to anoint Saul. They anointed him, and then Israel realizes they have messed up. They feel like God is going to reject them, and Samuel reminds them of the truth that God would never forsake them.

In Psalms 94:14, the psalmist again reassures the nation of Israel that God would not forsake them. Listen to me, God has not forsaken Israel. It may look and appear to the world that because Israel rejected God, God rejected them. I know of people who teach that all of the horrible things that have happened to the Jewish people in history are because they have rejected God, and He has rejected them. Therefore, some people feel that all is fair in what you do to Israel because they are a forsaken people. This says that is not true! God will never forsake His people who He set His covenant love upon before the foundation of the world.

God has Reserved a Remnant

But hold it, if God hasn't rejected them, then why are so few coming to faith in Christ? The majority of the Jews don't believe! Now Paul reminds the Church of the truth. He goes from himself being an example to Elijah being an example. He quotes what Elijah said to the Lord, "*Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left...*" In preaching circles, we call this the Elijah Syndrome. Preachers deal with it all of the time. I have had a disgruntled church member in my office, and I am thinking whoa, you must have had a high, holy day a couple of weeks ago, and now you are in the valley because you are thinking just like Elijah! I have had someone in my office, and to hear them talk, they are the only believer in the world. They are the only one who loves God and cares about people. They are the only one who witnesses and knows the truth. They are the only one who serves and worships. Some of you have felt that way; be honest. You've looked around, thought things were a certain way, and you were the only one left! How in the world could Elijah have gotten in that shape? Well, 1 Kings 18 said that it hadn't rained in a while. God was going to let it rain again and tells Elijah to go call Ahab and tell him it's going to rain. Ahab and his wife Jezebel have been feeding about 850 prophets, so he has to know who the Lord is. Elijah summons the prophets of Baal. He gathers all of the people together and they make an altar. They want to see which god is real, and Elijah lets them go first and ask their god to consume the wood on the altar. They

call on Baal to show himself as god, and nothing happens. After several hours, Elijah starts taunting them. He said hey, maybe he is taking a nap! Maybe he is in the bathroom! Maybe he went on vacation! Finally, Elijah steps forward and calls on God. God sends down fire and consumes the wood and the altar! Elijah has the 850 false prophets killed. Ahab sends word to Jezebel and she hears that Elijah personally had her prophets killed and she tells him, I will do to you what you have done to them! This man, who stood up to 850 false prophets, runs with all of his might as far as he can run. There is something wrong with that picture; a man of God who will stand up to 850 other men, but won't stand up to one woman! Don't laugh; there isn't a man around that hasn't bowed down to a woman at one time or another (me included)! He runs, and finally there is nothing to eat or drink and God miraculously feeds him. God tells him he needs to eat more because he has a long journey ahead. He goes on a forty day trip to Mount Horeb, and when he gets there, God asks him why he is there. Elijah said it was because he was the only one left. He said, I am the only one in Israel who is worshipping you! They have all forsaken you God! The Bible says that God passed by and a great wind blew, but He wasn't in the blowing of the wind. After that, an earthquake came, but God wasn't in that either. A fire came next, but God wasn't in the fire. Then, Elijah heard a small, still whisper, and fear and trembling came over him. He cloaked himself and realized that he was in the presence of a holy God. God asked him a second time; why are you here? Elijah said the same thing; I am the only one left. Then in Romans, Paul quotes God's answer to him: *"I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."* Elijah believes he is the only one; he is just better than everyone else. There is something within him causing him to be different. But God tells him that he isn't the only one left; He has reserved 7000 for Himself! He didn't tell Elijah that there are 7000 other people just like you who haven't bowed to Baal. He said, at this present time, when it looks like the nation of Israel is turning their back on Me, I want you to know that I am personally working in the lives of 7000 other people. I have reserved them for Myself, and they are just like you. You have not done this on your own;

you have done it because I have stepped into your life and made it so! Wow...God just takes a machete to our human pride! He lines up the rifle and pulls the trigger on our human arrogance that wants to believe there is something in us that makes us different rather than attributing our salvation to God.

- **Chosen by Grace**

Then Paul says, "*So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.*" He continues to say that if it is by grace, then it isn't by works; and if according to works, then grace isn't grace. When you see this verse in context, there is only one way to understand it. Paul is telling the church at Rome that just as in the day of Elijah when it appeared that no one was worshiping God among His chosen people, it appears that no one among His people in Paul's day was worshiping God either. But things aren't as they appear, because among the Jewish people in Paul's day, as well as today, there is a "*remnant.*"

The word, "*remnant*", comes right out of our homes; it is 'a scrap or fragment of material, a small portion of a whole.' My Mamaw sewed, and she had a remnant box that she put her leftover material in after she finished a project. I remember that she would occasionally work with the material from the remnant box instead of buying new material. It was called a remnant quilt, meaning the quilt was made from leftovers from a project.

It is kind of humbling isn't it? In Elijah's day, there was a remnant; a small group of the whole that was different. Paul said that while the Roman church was primarily made up of Gentiles, there was still a remnant; a small group of Jews who believe in Jesus as the Messiah. The reason there was, and will always be, a remnant from the nation of Israel who believes in Jesus as the Messiah is because God will never reject His people that He foreknew! God has guaranteed that at all times on this planet, there will be a group of Jews who will believe in Jesus Christ because that group has been chosen by grace, and not according to works! Please see this.

The word, "*chosen*", comes from a root word that means 'to select out from among, to pick out.' It is just a common, ordinary word, but it makes people very angry. It causes people to want to tone it down. It is a word that means when you go shopping, you select something, but you have other choices; you aren't confined to one choice. The Greek dictionary says this word means 'to give preference to, and to select out of because of many other choices possible.' This remnant of Jews was chosen out from among other Jews to be the remnant. The basis on which God chose them was not from works or something from within them, it was something solely within Himself; that is why it's called grace. If grace is ever deserved, earned, or obligated, it ceases to be grace. Paul is teaching that God has not rejected His people, and is still calling believers who will believe in Jesus as the Messiah out from among the nation of Israel. It isn't left solely up to them; it is ultimately left up to Him, and He chooses based on His grace.

In this passage, Paul doesn't say that He chose them based on faith. Many times in his letters, Paul contrasts faith with works. Faith is how we receive God's gift of eternal life; it is our response to what God has done. But you can't interpret this that way. If Paul believed the reason you are chosen is because of the response you make, he would have said faith, not works, and I would have been in 100 percent agreement. But he isn't contrasting a right response and a wrong response. He is contrasting salvation (the remnant) being of God, or of man; and it is of God, not according to works. It isn't based on any initiative of man, but totally on the initiative of God. This is tough, but it is what Paul believed to be the truth. If Paul believed it to be the truth, who are you and I to debate and question it?

God Hardens Sinners

The next verse tells us that Israel didn't obtain what it was seeking, but the minority found it. The remnant, that small group within the big group, got it. God hardened the group that didn't get it. The word, "*hardened*", is where we get our English word, *petrify*. When something is petrified, it is

insensitive. It cannot react anymore; it has lost all sensitivity. It is kind of like what happens to a man as he grows older. The chin is a part of our body that petrifies first. That part of the body starts becoming insensitive. You can be eating and have something on your lip, and you feel it there. But how many times has your wife had to reach across the table and wipe your chin? You didn't feel it! Your kid's try to signal you because you have no idea that you have a big hunk of meat hanging on your chin! After a while, that part of the face becomes petrified; it just starts losing its sensitivity. It just cannot react to touch anymore.

That is the picture here of the nation of Israel, and it absolutely makes man mad. He wants to shake his fist at God at the thought of God hardening Pharaoh and other people's hearts! Let me first say that when the Bible talks about God hardening sinners, He is always hardening sinners. He is never hardening innocent people; it is always sinners. God is never responsible for someone's unbelief. He is never responsible for us being sinners; we are responsible ourselves. When you read the Bible in context of people who God has hardened, those people will not believe. There comes a time where God chooses to make them where they cannot believe. The reason they can't is because they won't; it's not that they won't because they can't. The elect obtained a right relationship with God among the Jewish nation, and God hardened the rest of the Jews.

Beginning in verse 8, Paul quotes the Old Testament: "...*as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."* If you have a reference Bible, you will notice that it has no reference for that quote because that isn't a quote right out of one Scripture. This is where Paul has taken several Scriptures and put them together.

But the next verse in Romans is Psalms 69, "*And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."* In Psalms 69, you discover that David has some enemies

that don't like him and is pursuing him. He is praying that God let their table to become a snare. The word, "*stumbling block*", is talking about a trigger in a trap. Once that trigger is released, the trap catches and eventually brings death. Boy, David was pretty cruel in his praying! Jesus taught us to pray for our enemies, and David told God to sic 'em! We call these 'Imprecatory Psalms.' You don't have the right to pray Imprecatory Psalms today; we are on this side of the cross! When David asked that their table become a death trap, you have to understand that in the biblical world when a man sat down at his table, he was secure. Even in times of war, there was peace and security when the generals and soldiers sat down at the table. David was praying that their place of safety and protection become a death trap to them!

A Blessing Can Become a Curse

That is what is happening to Israel. Israel had the covenants, the Prophets, the Law, the promise of the Messiah, and God as their Father, and they refused to trust Him. But, they believed they were good enough to earn a right relationship with Him. Isn't it amazing when what can be a blessing becomes a curse to us?

I never knew why the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor early on a Sunday morning until I read about it recently; specifically on the Sunday morning that they did. When the Japanese surrendered to General MacArthur, the US government was wise in that we took all of the war archives of the Japanese government. For years, we filtered through all of their intelligence and discovered the reason they attacked on a Sunday morning. After observing us for months, they decided that the best time to attack would be on a Sunday morning after a Friday when all in the Army and Navy had been paid. That would be the moment when we would be the least secure as a nation. They knew that Sunday was our day of rest as a Christian nation. But when the Army and Navy get paid on Friday of the month, they act differently than they do on the weekends they aren't paid. They discovered that when our military was paid on Friday, they would be

hung over on Sunday, and so they attacked us. A blessing of being a capitalistic country with a Christian heritage that honors the day of rest became a death trap to the United States of America.

That is exactly what happens to the majority of the nation of Israel. Don't ever think that they don't know; they absolutely know what they are doing when they reject Jesus as the Messiah. But thanks be to God that He made a covenant with them that will not be broken! He never promised to save all of Israel, but He promised to save all of Israel that He foreknew. Why is that important to us? It's because He never promised to save all people. He has made salvation available to all people, but He has only promised to save those He foreknew.