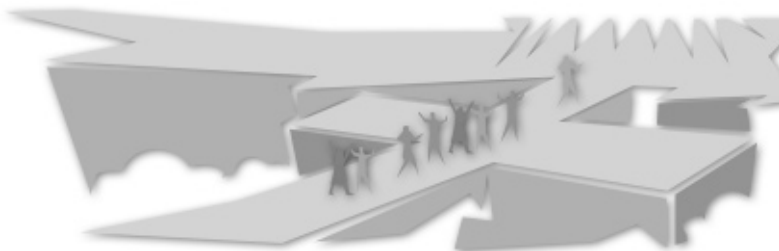


The Election of Grace



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Romans 10, 11.*

Memory Text: “I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (*Romans 11:1*).

This week's lesson covers Romans 10 and 11, with a focus especially on chapter 11. It's important to read both chapters in their entirety in order to continue to follow Paul's line of thinking.

These two chapters have been, and remain, the focal point of much discussion. One point, however, comes clear through them all, and that is God's love for humanity and His great desire to see all humanity saved. There is no corporate rejection of anyone for salvation. Romans 10 makes it very clear that “there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek” (*Rom. 10:12*)—all are sinners and all need God's grace as given to the world through Jesus Christ. This grace comes to all—not by nationality, not by birth, and not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus, who died as the Substitute for sinners everywhere. Roles may change, but the basic plan of salvation never does.

Paul continues with this theme in chapter 11. Here, too, as stated earlier, it's important to understand that when Paul talks about election and calling, the issue isn't one of salvation but one of the role in God's plan for reaching the world. No one group has been rejected for salvation; that was never the issue. Instead, after the Cross, and after the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles, particularly through Paul, the early movement of believers—both Jew and Gentile—took on the mantle of evangelizing the world.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 11.*

The End of the Law

Read Romans 10:1–4. Keeping in mind all that came before, what’s the message here? How could we, today, be in danger of seeking to establish our “own righteousness”?

Legalism can come in many forms, some more subtle than others. Those who look to themselves, to their good deeds, to their diet, to how strictly they keep the Sabbath, to all the bad things they don’t do, or to the good things that they have achieved—even with the best of intentions—are falling into the trap of legalism. We must every moment of our lives keep before us the holiness of God in contrast to our sinfulness; that’s the surest way to protect ourselves from the kind of thinking that leads folk into seeking their “own righteousness,” which is contrary to the righteousness of Christ.

Romans 10:4 is an important text that catches the essence of Paul’s entire message to the Romans. First, we need to know the context. Many Jews were “going about to establish their own righteousness” (*Rom. 10:3*) and seeking “the righteousness which is of the law” (*Rom. 10:5*). But with the coming of the Messiah, the true way of righteousness was presented. Righteousness was offered to all who would fix their faith in Christ. He was the one to whom the ancient ceremonial system had pointed.

Even if one includes in the definition of law here the Ten Commandments, this doesn’t mean that the Ten Commandments were done away with. The moral law points out our sins, our faults, and our shortcomings and thus leads us to our need of a Savior, our need of forgiveness, our need of righteousness, all of which are found only in Jesus. In that sense, Christ is the “end” of the law, in that the law leads us to Him and His righteousness. The Greek word for “end” here is *teloes*, which also can be translated “goal” or “purpose.” Christ is the final purpose of the law, in that the law is to lead us to Jesus.

To see this text as teaching that the Ten Commandments—or specifically the fourth (what folk really mean)—are now nullified is to draw a conclusion that goes against so much else of what Paul and the New Testament teach.

Do you ever find yourself proud about how good you are, especially in contrast to others? Maybe you are “better,” but so what? Compare yourself to Christ, and then think about how “good” you really are.

The Election of Grace

Read Romans 11:1–7. What common teaching does this passage clearly and irrevocably deny?

In the first part of his answer to the question, “Hath God cast away his people?” Paul points to a remnant, an election of grace, as proof that God has not cast away His people. Salvation is open for all who accept it, Jew and Gentile alike.

It should be remembered that the early converts to Christianity were all Jews—for example, the group that was converted on the Day of Pentecost. It took a special vision and miracle to convince Peter that the Gentiles had equal access to the grace of Christ (*Acts 10*; compare *Acts 15:7–9*) and that the gospel was to be carried to them, as well.

Read Romans 11:7–10. Is Paul saying that God purposely blinded to salvation the part of Israel that rejected Jesus? What’s wrong with that idea?

In these verses, Paul quotes from the Old Testament, which the Jews accepted as authoritative. The passages that Paul cites represent God as giving to Israel a spirit of slumber, preventing their seeing and hearing. Does God blind people’s eyes to prevent them from seeing light that would lead them to salvation? Never! These passages must be understood in the light of our explanation of Romans 9. Paul is not talking of individual salvation, for God rejects no one group *en masse* for salvation. The issue here, instead, as it has been all along, deals with the role that these folk play in His work.

What is so wrong with the idea that God has rejected *en masse* any group of people in terms of salvation? Why is that counter to the whole teaching of the gospel, which at the core shows that Christ died to save all human beings? How, for example, in the case of the Jews, has this idea led to tragic results?

The Grafted Branch

Read Romans 11:11–15. What great hope does Paul present in these verses?

In these verses, we find two parallel expressions: (1) “their [the Israelites’] fulness” (*vs. 12*), and (2) “the receiving of them [the Israelites]” (*vs. 15*). Paul envisioned the diminishing and the casting away to be only temporary and to be followed by fullness and reception. This is Paul’s second answer to the question raised at the beginning of this chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” What appears to be a casting away, he says, is only a temporary situation.

Read Romans 11:16–24. What is Paul saying to us here?

Paul likens the faithful remnant in Israel to a noble olive tree, some of whose branches have been broken off (the unbelieving ones)—an illustration he used to prove that “God hath not cast away his people” (*vs. 2*). The root and trunk are still there.

Into this tree the believing Gentiles have been grafted. But they are drawing their sap and vitality from the root and trunk, which represent believing Israel.

What happened to those who rejected Jesus could happen also to the believing Gentiles. The Bible teaches no doctrine of “once saved, always saved.” Just as salvation is freely offered, it freely can be rejected. Though we have to be careful of thinking that every time we fall we are out of salvation, or that unless we are perfect we aren’t saved, we need to avoid the opposite ditch as well—the idea that once God’s grace covers us, there is nothing we can do, no choices we can make, that will take the provision of salvation away from us. In the end, only those who “continue in his goodness” (*vs. 22*) will be saved.

No believer should boast of his or her own goodness or feel any superiority over his or her fellow human beings. Our salvation was not earned; it is a gift. Before the Cross, before the standard of God’s holiness, we all are equal: sinners in need of divine grace, sinners in need of a holiness that can be ours only through grace. We have nothing of ourselves to boast about; our boasting should be only in Jesus and what He has done for us by coming into this world in human flesh, suffering our woes, dying for our sins, offering us a model for how we are to live, and promising us the power to live that life. In it all, we are completely dependent upon Him, for without Him we would have no hope beyond what this world itself offers.

A Mystery Revealed

Read Romans 11:25–27. What great events is Paul predicting here?

Christians have been discussing and debating these few verses for centuries now. A few points, however, are clear. For starters, the whole tenor here is that of God reaching out to the Jews. What Paul is saying comes in reply to the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, “Hath God cast away his people?” His answer, of course, is no, and his explanation is (1) that the blindness (Greek *porosis*, “hardness”) is only “in part,” and (2) that it is only temporary, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”

What does “the fulness of the Gentiles” mean? Many see this phrase as a way of expressing the fulfillment of the gospel commission, in which all the world hears the gospel. “The fulness of the Gentiles” has come in when the gospel has been preached everywhere. The faith of Israel, manifested in Christ, is universalized. The gospel has been preached to all the world. The coming of Jesus is near. At this point, then, many Jews start coming to Jesus.

Another difficult point is the meaning of “all Israel shall be saved” (vs. 26). This must not be construed to mean every Jew will by some divine decree have salvation in the end time. Nowhere do the Scriptures preach universalism, either for the entire human race or for a particular segment. Paul was hoping to save “some of them” (vs. 14). Some accepted the Messiah, some rejected Him, as it is with all people groups.

Commenting on Romans 11, Ellen White speaks of a time “in the closing proclamation of the gospel” when “many of the Jews . . . will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

“There is a mighty work to be done in our world. The Lord has declared that the Gentiles shall be gathered in, and not the Gentiles only, but the Jews. There are among the Jews many who will be converted, and through whom we shall see the salvation of God go forth as a lamp that burneth. There are Jews everywhere, and to them the light of present truth is to be brought. There are among them many who will come to the light, and who will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power.”—Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 578.

Take some time to think about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. How could a selective study of the Jewish religion help you better understand your Christian faith?

The Salvation of Sinners

Paul's love for his own people is clearly apparent in these verses. How hard it must have been for him to have some of his countrymen fight against him and against the truth of the gospel. And yet, amid it all, he still believed that many would see Jesus as the Messiah.

Read Romans 11:28–36. How does Paul show God's love, not just for the Jews but for all humanity? How does he here express the amazing and mysterious power of God's grace?

All through these verses, though a contrast is made between Jews and Gentiles, one point stands clear: God's mercy and love and grace are poured out upon sinners. From even before the foundation of the world, God's plan was to save humanity and to use other human beings, nations even, as instruments in His hands to fulfill His divine will.

Read carefully and prayerfully verse 31. What important point should we take from this text about our witness, not just to Jews but to all people with whom we come in contact?

No doubt, through the centuries, had the Christian church treated the Jews better, many more might have come to their Messiah. The great falling away in the early centuries after Christ, and the extreme paganization of Christianity—including the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of Sunday—certainly didn't make it any easier on a Jew who might have been drawn to Jesus.

How crucial, then, that all Christians, realizing the mercy that has been given to them in Jesus, display that mercy to others. We can't be Christians if we don't (*see Matt. 18:23–36*).

Is there someone to whom you need to show mercy, who perhaps doesn't deserve it? Why not show this person that mercy, no matter how hard that might be? Isn't that what Jesus has done for us?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Before the Sanhedrin,” pp. 77–79; “From Persecutor to Disciple,” pp. 112–114; “Written From Rome,” pp. 474, 475, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “Reaching Catholics,” pp. 573–577, in *Evangelism*; “What to Preach and Not to Preach,” pp. 155, 156, in *Selected Messages*, book 1.

“Notwithstanding Israel’s failure as a nation, there remained among them a goodly remnant of such as should be saved. At the time of the Saviour’s advent there were faithful men and women who had received with gladness the message of John the Baptist, and had thus been led to study anew the prophecies concerning the Messiah. When the early Christian church was founded, it was composed of these faithful Jews who recognized Jesus of Nazareth as the one for whose advent they had been longing.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 376, 377.

“Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God. . . . As His servants labor in faith for those who have long been neglected and despised, His salvation will be revealed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

“In the closing proclamation of the gospel, when special work is to be done for classes of people hitherto neglected, God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. As the Old Testament Scriptures are blended with the New in an explanation of Jehovah’s eternal purpose, this will be to many of the Jews as the dawn of a new creation, the resurrection of the soul. As they see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. Many will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In the last days, as God’s law and especially the Sabbath come into sharp focus, is it not reasonable to think that the Jews—many of them as serious about the Ten Commandments as Adventists are—will have a role in helping to clarify some issues before the world? Discuss.
- 2** Why should, of all churches, the Adventist Church be the one most successful in reaching out to Jews? What can you or your local church do in seeking to reach Jews in your community, if any?
- 3** What can we learn from the mistakes of many in ancient Israel? How can we avoid doing the same things today?

Hearing God's Voice

by ERICKA SAUNIER

I've often heard people testify that God had spoken to them, led them, and guided them. I thought that I'd never heard the Holy Spirit's voice and wished I could have this experience.

I preferred to help with the younger children's Sabbath School rather than attend my own. When I was in Primary, I helped in Cradle Roll. When I was a teenager, we moved to another church, and I didn't want to go. My father insisted, so I asked the Cradle Roll teacher to let me help. But she didn't need help. However, the Primary class needed someone, and I volunteered. I became a Primary class leader and eventually took the job of director of children's ministries.

When I heard the pastor appeal for children to have their own small groups, I couldn't get his call out of my mind. When I told my mom this, she said, "The Holy Spirit is talking to you." Her comment shocked me. Was I really hearing the Holy Spirit and didn't even know it?

I asked the conference children's ministries leader how to start a children's small group. She told me what I needed, and I bought the material. I asked two people to help me. One was a man who was not yet baptized. I chose to work with children ages 4 to 11, and we decided to meet on Wednesday evening while the adults were in prayer meeting.

The small group was so successful that attendance at prayer meeting increased when children begged their parents to go! The man who was helping me was a teacher, so he helped teach the Bible story. Then the children did the related activities in their workbooks. We had great fun, and even some older children wanted to join the group.

The program lasted a year, and then we started over again. The man who helped me was baptized and now teaches an adult Sabbath School class.

I now realize that the Holy Spirit was guiding me all along. He asked me to use the gifts He had given me—working with children. I now understand that God asks us to do things that we are naturally inclined to do, and usually it's something we enjoy. I'm so glad God has called me and can use me to lead others to His feet.

Your mission offerings help provide programs such as the small group ministries of the South American Division.



Ericka Saunier shares her faith in Manaus, Brazil.