

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 11:1-10 – God Is Still In Control

Sermon Notes



Introduction

There are a number of spiritual truths that Paul is teaching in **Romans 11:1-10**. Let's look for each one as we go over this passage:

1. God does not reject or desert any of His children whom He has chosen.
2. Don't let circumstances control your feelings, let faith control them.
3. God wants us to keep our focus on Him, not on ourselves.
4. Our salvation is either by grace or by works. It can't be both.
5. God chooses some and hardens the rest.
6. Keep your focus on the eternal future, not on the temporary present.

Romans 11:1-4

I say then, has God rejected His people? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life." But what does the divine response say to him? "I have left for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

To a Christian Jew living in Rome reading through this letter (or listening to someone read it to them), up to this point it may have appeared that Paul was teaching that God had rejected the Jews. But this would seem preposterous since God had chosen them as His covenant people. So, in order to clarify what he means, Paul anticipates the objection and states it as a rhetorical question, "has God rejected His people?"

He follows it up with his familiar *me genoito*, "No way!" As proof that God has not rejected all Jews, Paul demonstrates that he, himself, is an Israelite and not a converted one, but a natural born Israelite, a direct descendent of Abraham. The Israelites took great pride in

knowing the tribe and sometimes even the family of Israel of which they descended. So Paul states that he is of the tribe of Benjamin.

He now gives more clarification. He says that God absolutely did not reject His people. He says they are those, “whom He foreknew.” You may recall that in **Romans 8:29** Paul said:

Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers;

In other words, these are the elect, the chosen ones of God. Paul is saying that, **1) - God does not reject or desert His people whom he foreknew and chose as His children.** In fact - as Paul stated - God can't reject those whom He has chosen, which Paul pointed out in the earlier chapters of this book.

But - God did not choose all of the Jews to be saved, just some of them. And even though He will turn from Israel as a nation, He will not turn away from those Israelites whom He has chosen. And - God does not change! Let me repeat that, God does not change!

For his proof, Paul now focuses on the prophet Elijah. Elijah had killed the prophets of ba'al, having shown them to be false prophets and having just proved that Yahweh is the true God (see **1 Kings 18:20-40**). But, because these false prophets were favored by the evil queen Jezebel, she threatened to kill Elijah in retaliation. So, even though Elijah should have been emboldened by his great spiritual victory and Yahweh's miracle against these prophets, he reacted in fear from Jezebel's threats against him. He prayed,

“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.”

This is a paraphrase of **1 Kings 19:10**, but it expresses the gist of what Elijah said to God. The surprising thing is that Elijah said it in a cave to which he had fled from Jezebel. At a time when Elijah should have been strongest and most confident (after such a great spiritual victory), he was weak. Even after God had performed a miracle by sending fire from heaven to consume not only Elijah's soaking wet sacrifice but the entire altar as well, Elijah was now afraid. In the heat of the victory, Elijah had boldly commanded the people to kill all of the false prophets of Jezebel. But, when she threatened retaliation, including Elijah's life, instead of standing up to her in the name of Yahweh, Elijah fled south, heading into the wilderness until he came to a cave in Mount Horeb (the same mountain where God met with Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments). It was here that Elijah, one of the greatest of God's prophets, having been filled with fear and doubt, poured out his lament before God. But God wanted Elijah (and us) to learn: **2) - don't let circumstances control your feelings, let faith control them.**

Using a broken Elijah humbled before God, Paul is demonstrating God's willingness and ability to choose a few to be faithful to His name out of many who are not. When Elijah lamented to God that all Israel had forsaken Yahweh and that he alone remained of the faithful. God responded with this, “I have reserved for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to ba'al.” In other words, even though Elijah thought that he alone was still faithful, God warned him not to think so selfishly; there were seven thousand others who were also still faithful to God. Now, when compared to the hundreds of thousands, or even millions of Israelites in the land at that time, seven thousand doesn't sound like very many. But compared to Elijah's lament, “I am left alone,” seven thousand

is a pretty big number. It's simply a matter of perspective and God's perspective is always the correct one.

The point is that God set apart a remnant of Israel who were still faithful to Him. You will notice that God did not say that there are seven thousand who have proven themselves to be faithful by their actions and deeds. He said that *He* had “reserved” to Himself these seven thousand men. Here is God's message to Elijah, “My dear son, I have not left you alone, there are seven thousand others that I have set-apart to Myself. Like you, they have not bowed the knee to ba'al; they bow to Me.”

Do you see the impact of what God says? **He** is the active agent in the process. He chose them, they did not choose Him! Therefore, learn this: especially when things seem to be going bad, **3) - God wants us to keep our focus on Him, not on ourselves.**

Romans 11:5-6

In this way then, at the present time, a remnant according to God's gracious choice has also come to be. But if it is by grace, it is no longer of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.

Paul now brings his readers back to the present (meaning both the present at the time this letter was written and the present time today). He says that it is just the same right now, that a remnant exists. The remnant he refers to is a concept that Jews well understood. God promised the Jews that He would preserve a remnant out of Israel who would be saved. They have always believed that the salvation of the remnant refers to them being saved from the ravages of their oppressors and that the remnant would finally inherit the land and reign with the Messiah. Paul's point, however, is that the remnant in his day was composed of those whom God has chosen “a remnant according to God's gracious choice.”

I know that election (God's choosing those of us who are to be saved independent of any act or action on our part) is a difficult doctrine for many Christians to grasp. However, Paul states it so clearly and so often that, if you believe the Bible is truth, it is more difficult to deny it than to believe it. Paul believed in and taught election as a fact. Therefore, we should simply accept it as truth, even if we don't completely understand it.

Paul calls it “God's gracious choice” because he understands that election is not by our choice, it's an undeserved gift from God. We don't choose to be saved. We don't simply decide that we will get saved and then say the sinner's prayer. Before the foundation of the earth, God chose those who would be saved. It involves the sovereign hand of God which removes the blindfold from the eyes of the elect. Only then can we see, and understand, the truth of the gospel so that we might become saved. It is all God's work, and it is all by grace (totally undeserved by those who receive it) so God is the only one who can receive the glory for it.

The point that Paul is making is that God's choosing, His election, is by grace. It is done by God's benevolent choice. We did nothing at all to earn it or to deserve it! He now says that if this election is by grace, then it is not the result of works, otherwise it would cease to be by grace. He has gone to great lengths to show that God chooses whom he wants to save (whether in the Old Testament dispensation or in the church age), and he chooses strictly based on His choice, not based on anything we have done or will do.

As I have said before, there are a lot of well meaning, committed Christians who claim that God foreknew who would believe and, as a result, chose them. But even believing in the truth of the gospel is an action on our part. It is a deed, a work, and Paul says that if we are saved by a deed, then it is not by God's grace. He says we are not saved by works but by grace. It is God's choice, not ours!

The "remnant in the present time" that Paul is talking about in these verses refers to the people saved during the church age. He is comparing us to the remnant of Israel that God promised Elijah were set-apart in his day. It also refers to the remnant of Israel who will be saved when the Messiah returns. Paul tells us that each of these groups is chosen by God's choice, not based on their works (their faithfulness or any other of their actions) but by His gift of grace.

Look, the bottom line is that we are either saved by works (by what we do) just like the Jews believe, or we are saved by grace (by God's independent choosing) as Paul teaches: it's one or the other, but not both. So – 4) - **our salvation is either by grace or by works, it can't be both.**

Romans 11:7-10

What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but the chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day." And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, and bend their backs forever."

Paul is now drawing a conclusion regarding the statements that he has just made. That is, God has not abandoned His people, but neither has Israel obtained the righteousness that they tried to obtain for themselves. Those whom God has chosen have obtained this righteousness (because God chose them) but the rest, those who are not chosen, were hardened.

We see here, then, two things at work with regards to the righteousness of the elect. The first is that it is not earned. There is no amount of works that will save us. There is absolutely no single thing or combination of things that can be done which will save us and give us the righteousness of God. It is, as Paul says in [Ephesians 1:5](#), "according to the good pleasure of His will" that we were chosen.

The second thing that we see here regarding election, and the righteousness that comes with it, is that those who were not chosen were hardened. But the obvious question is, "Who is responsible for this hardness or blindness?" Let's see what Jesus, Isaiah, and Paul have to say about it:

Jesus - He (God, the Father) has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and return and I heal them. ([John 12:40](#))

Isaiah - For Yahweh has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep; He has shut your eyes, the prophets; And He has covered your heads, the seers. ([Isaiah 29:10](#))

Paul - So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ([Romans 9:18](#))

It is God who chooses, and it is also God (through various means) who blinds or hardens those whom He has not chosen, so that they cannot believe. In other words, **5) - God chooses some and hardens the rest.** And even now I can imagine that some of you are thinking, “But that’s not fair!”

Paul now quotes from King David to show that he expressed a similar sentiment. Here, Paul makes a very curious quotation from a psalm of King David. This quotation (though not exact) is from **Psalms 69:22, 23** which reads:

May their table before them become a snare; And when they are in peace, may it become a trap. May their eyes darken so that they cannot see, And make their loins quake continually.

But notice also the verse that comes just before that:

They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
(**Psalms 69:21**)

This passage is talking about the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, while he was hanging on the cross paying the penalty for all of our sins. While He was hanging there, they were enjoying the blessings He had provided for them as God’s chosen people. But in the midst of their enjoyment of the benefits of God’s blessing, they were blinded by their appetites regarding the truth that was right in front of them. They were so busy enjoying the temporary, physical blessings which God had provided for them, they totally missed the eternal, spiritual blessings they should have received if they had only believed in the One they were killing. They were ensnared by their appetites, resulting in the penalty which they justly deserved. They were living in ease and luxury while they crucified Jesus as a common criminal.

This is an imprecatory declaration by David. That is, he is calling down evil on these proud and ignorant Jews. David was asking God to blind them from the truth as retribution for their lack of faith. In other words, David is saying, “Lord, because they refuse to believe, don’t let them see the truth.” Because they gave Him vinegar to drink while they ate richly from the blessings that were being provided by the very One whom they were torturing, God has responded to David’s request and has blinded them from any future faith. And that is precisely what Paul is saying that God has done to the non-elect today.

While these few verses are specifically talking about the Jews, Paul will make the point that God deals the same way with the Gentiles, which makes this a warning that we all will be held accountable for our decisions regarding the Savior. Paul will show us that it was primarily because of this blindness of the Jews that the gospel message has come to the Gentiles, but he also warns us not to take this message lightly. Basically, Paul says, **6) - Keep your focus on the eternal future, not on the temporary present.**

So What?

Paul has just explained that many people have been blinded from seeing the truth. However, that does not excuse us from preaching the gospel even to those who cannot see the truth. It is not our responsibility to determine who will believe. It is simply our responsibility to preach the gospel truth. The rest is up to God.

If God did not reject his chosen ones from the Old Testament dispensation, He is not going to reject those whom He has chosen in the church age. That means that no amount of grieving the Spirit or willfully sinning against God is going to cause you to lose your salvation. Remember that you did not do anything to get it in the first place (God chose you), so there's nothing you can possibly do to lose it (God won't reject you).

Next - even in the aftermath of spiritual victory we sometimes feel weak and vulnerable. But as Elijah discovered, it is not our feelings that God is concerned about, it is our faith. Faith in our all-powerful God is what enables us to reach out in prayer, not seeking our own glory, but giving the glory to Him.

When we are under spiritual attack, it sometimes feels like all is falling down around us and we are all alone with no one to turn to. But even if it were true that everyone else had forsaken us, we can always turn to God. He will never forsake those whom He has chosen. Keep your focus on Him, not yourself. Remember, we are not the ones in control – He is.

I don't know how Paul could have made this any clearer. We are saved, not because of what we have done, but because of what He has done. I don't deserve this salvation any more than you do and none of us did anything to earn it. We are saved by God's grace because He chose us. Period!

Now, we have a commission to spread the Gospel truth to all people throughout the world. We do not know who God has chosen and who He has stupefied. That's not up to us. We are simply to continue proclaiming the message of salvation and leave it up to God to give understanding or blindness. We may be called fools by the very people we witness to, but God sees us as beautiful flowers every time we proclaim the truth of Christ, the Lamb of God. Given the choice of being admired by the world or being called a fool by the world and admired by God, which would you choose? Which **do** you choose?

Finally, this is a warning to all of us not to take God's blessings for granted. All of the temporal things that we have, our health, our welfare, our possessions, our freedom, our peace, are direct gifts from God and He can take away any or all of them at any moment. So, instead of taking them for granted, let's stop right now and thank our Heavenly Father for them. Let's release the right to have them to the One who truly owns them and then trust in His care and provision for us.

When we look around us and see unsaved people enjoying the riches of this world, we are prone to think they are enjoying the blessings of God in spite of their overt sinfulness. However, because of their blindness to the truth, one day they will bow before their Judge as He condemns them to eternal torment. Likewise, we see many Christians prospering in spite of their unwillingness to submit to God as their Lord and Master. One day they, too, will stand before their Savior and watch as all their deeds go up in smoke, while the faithful few receive rewards for their humble obedient service.

As saved Christians we need to recognize that God is our Lord and Master, so we need to be bowing to Him, submitting our will to His, not the other way around.

Let's pray