

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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Chapter 19 -

THE UNSEARCHABLE JUDGMENTS OF GOD

Romans 11

In the time of JESUS CHRIST, the idea was quite generally held by Jews and Gentiles alike that the promise GOD had made to Abraham was reserved for the Jews to the exclusion of all others. Even Peter had this difficulty, so much so that when the SPIRIT of GOD led him to go to a Gentile, it necessitated a special vision. There were Jews, of course, who understood that Abraham's promise was for all men. Simeon, for example, who came into the temple on that day when Joseph and Mary brought the infant JESUS to present him to the LORD; Simeon, a godly Jew, took the baby in his arms saying, "**mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.**"

Other Jews as well recognized that GOD's promise to Abraham included non-Jews, that in the MESSIAH were all the nations of the earth to be blessed; but most of them had narrowed it down, conceiving it as exclusively for Jews. Today the shoe is on the other foot and Gentiles exclude the Jews from the promise GOD made to Abraham and fulfilled in JESUS CHRIST. Paul, realizing this, writes this chapter with these Gentiles in mind as he wrestles with the apparent exclusion of the Jews from the covenant of grace in JESUS CHRIST.

In the 9th chapter Paul points out that Israel failed to respond to the love of GOD, to be sure; but this did not constitute the failure of GOD's promise to Abraham. That is, in the words of Paul, "**Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.**" In chapter 10 he shows that though Israel failed to obtain this promise, it was not because of GOD's election but because of Israel's rejection; though GOD is sovereign, man is responsible when he rejects the Lord JESUS CHRIST and is unsaved because he rejects the gift of grace through JESUS CHRIST in whom GOD's promise to Abraham was fulfilled. Now in Romans 11 Paul finalizes this matter of the apparent exclusion of Israel from the gift of grace in JESUS CHRIST. He begins with the question, "**Hath God cast away his people?**" It is as if Paul were thinking about all the remarkable promises in the Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel. What about these remarkable prophecies and promises, are they all in the past? Is Israel's day over? His answer is a categorical "no!" which he amplifies in the balance of the chapter.

Paul points out two things: first, GOD's rejection of Israel because of Israel's rejection of GOD,

is neither total nor final; it is only partial and temporary. In the first 10 verses he shows that Israel's rejection of GOD, or GOD's rejection of Israel, is not total, he himself being an illustration of this fact. He reminds his reader that he is a Jew in the covenant of grace; he has received the gift of eternal life through JESUS CHRIST the LORD, and he is an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin.

In this he is not alone; even now there is a remnant of Israel as there has always been a remnant who were faithful. Never was all of Israel faithful to GOD. This is a matter of Old Testament history; the Book of Judges, for example, is such a record. As his second illustration he selects a very familiar incident in the life of Elijah when he actually prayed to GOD against Israel. He prayed, **"Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life."** GOD's answer was, **"I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal"**

Parenthetically, two matters ought to be mentioned here which are peripheral to Paul's theme but very practical and relevant today. First, Christianity is in the minority, a fact which should be borne in mind in our attitude toward other minorities. Anti-Semitism, for example, is not only not in harmony with the Word of GOD but is contradictory to JESUS CHRIST and the Christian life. The Word of GOD declares quite clearly that salvation is of the Jew, and our SAVIOUR the LORD Himself was a Jew! It is completely unlike JESUS CHRIST to be anti-Semitic, unlike JESUS CHRIST to discriminate against any minority. We are a minority - always will be! "CHRIST has His thousands while the devil has his tens of thousands!"

A second very practical principle to be drawn from this is that it is a mistake to equate any culture or any civilization one hundred percent with GOD's way, as though, for example, the kingdom of GOD is identical to the American way of life. We are inclined to this thinking, especially in a period of history when our civilization is threatened within and without, that those who oppose us are one hundred percent wrong while we are one hundred percent right, and therefore we may expect GOD to protect us. In other words, our attitude is like Israel's in the Old Testament economy, and GOD had to discipline them again and again and again. What agent did GOD use to discipline Israel - a more godly nation? On the contrary, He used a godless nation to discipline His own people!. This too is a matter of history, and there is nothing so desperately needed in America today as humility and a repentant spirit before the LORD GOD. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord and ask His forgiveness for our pride, our self-seeking, our materialism, our idolatry!

Having used Elijah's despair as the illustration, Paul shows that Israel failed to receive the promise but the elect obtained it! The rest, says Paul, were hardened because they rejected GOD's truth, and he draws from Israel's prophecy and David's to document this. A psychological law is involved here. When men refuse the truth, their hearts are hardened to the truth. Refuse to obey the word which the SPIRIT of GOD speaks to your heart on a given Sunday morning, it will be easier to disobey the following Sunday morning, still easier the third Sunday morning, until you can hear the truth and remain utterly impervious to its penetrating, convicting, convincing power. It becomes possible to vegetate in a pew, and GOD knows this has happened to many who call themselves Christian. They do not even hear the truth any longer because, having hardened their own hearts, GOD hardens their hearts as well! Not to obey the truth of GOD bears serious consequences.

Another word about election, inasmuch as Paul says twice in this passage very clearly, "**Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it!**" This doctrine of election which is taught in the Word of GOD is not to discourage the unbeliever; it is not to give the idea that the covenant of grace is a very narrow and exclusive covenant, which, by and large, eliminates the majority of people. Nor do those outside of JESUS CHRIST ever think of it in this way; it is usually Christians who take this position.

To be sure, there are those outside of CHRIST who academically quarrel about the sovereignty of GOD, election and predestination, and use this as a reason to reject the whole Bible; but we need not take them too seriously. If they did not have this, they would find other ways to rationalize their rejection of Scripture. Excuses for rejecting truth are not difficult to find. But this doctrine is intended to encourage the believer, to show him the strength of his salvation, the absolute assurance and guarantee of it.

The finest statement we have of this is in Hebrews, the 6th chapter, beginning at the 13th verse. "**For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.**" And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. Men indeed swear by greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered." The author is simply insisting here that you who have received the Lord JESUS CHRIST have not done so by any merit of your own. You have been called of GOD, through the Gospel, to do so; to Him belongs all the glory, for it is not of works; it is of grace. You can be absolutely sure of your call because GOD guarantees it by two irrevocable things, His promise and His oath! *Therefore, entertain no doubt whatsoever concerning your eternal welfare when you trust in JESUS CHRIST and? His finished work on the cross of Calvary!*

In the second half of chapter 10, Paul demonstrates that GOD has a future plan for Israel. The first ten verses show Israel's rejection of GOD or GOD's rejection of Israel - not to be complete or total - but partial; there is a group of Israelites who have received the Gospel. In the second half of the chapter rejection is not final but temporary because GOD still has a plan for the nation Israel. Beginning at the 11th verse, he says that through Israel's rejection a way has been opened for salvation to be brought to the non-Jew. This too was part of the promise, "**In thee,**" said GOD to Abraham, "**shall all the nations be blessed.**" So Paul argues, if Israel's failure resulted in blessing and riches for the Gentile world, how much more will Israel's inclusion in grace mean to the whole world? If by their temporary and partial exclusion the whole world was blessed, how much more will the whole world be blessed when they are again included?

He uses two little analogies which make it sound rather complicated, but it really is not. He speaks of the dough and the lump, the dough being holy, the lump is holy. If you take a piece from a lump of good dough, the piece will be good; but if you have a piece of dough that is bad,

probably the whole lump of dough from which the piece was taken is bad. If the root is good, the branches will be good; or if the root is holy, the branches are holy. Israel is the dough, the lump. Israel is the root.

He is addressing his remarks, remember, to the Gentiles, not wishing them to be guilty of Israel's error, of which he himself was guilty when he persecuted the Church. Paul warns the Gentiles against the presumption that because the Jews have rejected CHRIST, GOD has rejected them. Paul urges Gentiles to be humble in their position because salvation is only by grace through faith in JESUS CHRIST; and GOD still has a plan for the Jews. GOD has used Gentile salvation to humble the Jew. Humility on the part of the Gentile is therefore becoming.

Finally, he holds out this hope for Israel. GOD has a plan, still future, which involves Israel. So he argues that if GOD will include the Gentiles, who were as a wild olive branch, and graft them on to a holy root; how much more will He take the good olive branch that has been broken off and graft it back in again. This logic is irresistible. He strengthens this argument with wonderful passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah, interpreting these in relation to this future plan of GOD for Israel. It needs to be said that in those passages it is not clear whether he refers to the first advent of the MESSIAH or the second advent of the MESSIAH, but one thing is very clear. GOD still has a plan for Israel. He is talking about the nation Israel, not every individual in it, any more than he means every individual Gentile when he refers to the "**fullness of the Gentiles.**"

The chapter closes with a glorious doxology, one of the most beautiful in the Book. "**O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of GOD! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been His counselor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things: to Whom be glory forever. Amen.**"

Paul's doxology is a testimony to the integrity of GOD, the fidelity of GOD, the faithfulness of GOD! What he is saying is that GOD's ways are incomprehensible, but they are to be trusted! Oh, how we need to realize that our faith rests in the integrity of GOD! This is what makes stable, poised Christians. This is what galvanizes a man into proper and effective action at the right time when storms come because he knows that GOD is on His throne, that GOD reigns, and he does not have to be afraid. Paul is speaking for the integrity of GOD, and so ought we speak for the integrity of GOD in these tumultuous days in human affairs.

There are three lessons in this chapter: First, salvation is by grace alone. Secondly, the saved are absolutely secure because their salvation rests upon the Divine call through the Gospel of GOD and His election, And finally, GOD's ways, though incomprehensible, are trustworthy. Depend on it!

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