

“I HAVE KEPT FOR MYSELF A REMNANT.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 11:1-10

Introduction.

We are still dealing with the question raised by Paul at the beginning of chapter nine. If nothing can separate us from the love of God and if God foreknew and predestined and called, then why isn't Israel in the church, why aren't God's people receiving the Gospel?

The scandal of NT church was the absence of the Jews. Why aren't God's people among God's people? Add to this scandal who is present, the filthy Gentiles. That is how chapter 10 ended.

Romans 10:20-21 “I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.” 21 But of Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

At the beginning of chapter 11 Paul asks the question again, that is on the minds of early Christians, “Has God rejected His people?” Has God failed to keep His promises to the Jews?

If the Jews rejected Jesus, how is this not a failure on God's part? And the next question is more personal and relevant, if God failed His own chosen people, then what is to say He might not or won't fail us? If God cannot be trusted to keep His promises, then the world is in deep trouble and so are we.

“Has God rejected His people?” vss. 1-6.

By no means. Paul gives three reasons why there can be unbelief among the people of God and God can still be faithful to His promises.

The Paul reason, vs. 1.

The Elijah reason, vss. 2-4.

The Grace reason, vss. 5-6.

The Paul reason, vs. 1.

Paul starts with the most unlikely example and proof God hasn't rejected His people. Paul is exhibit A. If God had forsaken His people in Israel, how do you explain Paul's salvation?

If God can bring a hostile, violent, murdering, hardened Jew into His true people, then God can certainly bring the hardened Jews. God hunted Paul down, knocked him off his horse, and committed a sweet violence in his soul, to rescue and redeem him for God's own glory.

If a blood-thirsty hater of the church can be saved, don't give up on anyone. You don't know the end of the story, so don't give up, don't stop praying.

Never give up on God's sovereign grace and goodness, it is the same yesterday, today and forever, it is always at work, bringing to completion the good work He has begun.

Grace is stronger than sin. Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more. It was grace alone.

The Elijah reason, vss. 2-4.

The time of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel was a particularly low point in Israel. Elijah was a godly prophet in an evil time. Jezebel was the most wicked woman in Bible. She killed the prophets of God and made Baalism the state religion. She had 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah on the government payroll (they ate at Jezebel's table).

You remember what happened on Mt. Carmel when Elijah challenged all the prophets of Baal to a big BBQ, but God had to be the one to light the grill. Baal never showed up, and God showed up Baal. The only true God sent down fire consuming the offering and altar. Then Elijah killed all the prophets of Baal.

But Jezebel put out a death warrant and Elijah was afraid and ran for his life to the desert and wanted to die, believing he was the last faithful Israelite standing in Israel.

But what was God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Who were these seven thousand, where did they come from? They are according to the free, sovereign will and determination of God, according to His foreknowledge.

Paul was saved solely by the grace of God. The remnant in Israel was kept by God Himself. The promises of God are kept through the remnant. It is sovereign grace alone.

The Grace reason, vss. 5-6.

Romans 11:5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Just as God had a remnant in the time of Elijah, God also had a remnant in the time of Paul. It was true a thousand years before Paul in the time of Elijah, it was true in the time of Paul and it is still true today. And the remnant is a remnant according to God's gracious choice. God always has a remnant, it is always His doing.

God always has a remnant whether it is in a nation or in the church or in families.

Not all Israel is Israel.

Not all hearing is hearing. Not all believing is believing.

Not all the church is the church. Not all baptism is baptism.

Not all who say "Lord, Lord," have Jesus as Lord.

Today God's people are a remnant of God's people.

Among God's people, God's people are only a remnant.

Even where there is widespread unbelief, God saves for Himself by grace, a remnant.

Romans 11:6 If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

How many times has Paul made this point? How many times does Paul repeat himself? Why does he have to repeat himself so often?

Why do parents have to repeat themselves so many times? Because our kids are sinful and rebellious, because our kids have a hard time hearing the first time, because they forget so often.

God's kids are hardheaded, hardhearted, stubborn, forgetful. Because our default setting is pride, we want to contribute something, we don't want to be seen as utterly and desperately dependent on God for His grace and mercy.

If someone hears the truth over and over again and continues to resist or deny it, the time comes when they are no longer able to hear.

May we always be prepared and ready to respond to God's Word wherever and whenever we hear it read or preached. May we always say with David in the Psalms as I say every time I prepare to study a Scripture text: "Lord, open my eyes to see wondrous things in your Word" (Psalm 119:18).

Ask God to forgive your dullness, your insensitivity, your lukewarmness, your coldness, your inattentiveness, your disinterest, your shallowness, your apathy.

Those who have not bowed the knee to Baal.

I am struck by that little phrase, "those who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Most of Israel in the time of Elijah had given into the temptations of the culture, to the idolatry around them. They had fallen into syncretism.

Syncretism is any mixing of the pure worship, doctrine, and life taught in Scripture with foreign, worldly, or idolatrous practices. Israel constantly mixed with Canaanite religion despite God's strong warnings.

We live in a culture that is like Israel, our culture is full of idolatry and syncretism. How has the world crept into our Christian beliefs and practice? How is what we believe, say and do influenced by the world? Can you think of any ways? If you can't you need to pray for more discernment or you will be in danger of falling into syncretism.

Every Christian faces the temptation of syncretism. In our desire to be "with it" we yield to the temptation of being conformed to the patterns of this world. What does bowing the knee look like for us?

Many Christians reshape biblical love (which includes truth, correction, and discipline) into a worldly idea of blanket affirmation and tolerance. Grace is preached at the expense of obedience. Scripture warns us: "Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

Christianity in America has become politically syncretistic, as if the kingdom of God can be achieved through earthly politics. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36).

We have become consumeristic and materialistic, bowing to the love of money. We have caved in on sexual immorality, viewing porn on our phones and computers and TVs and movies. That is bowing the knee. Being silent about sexual immorality around us. Giving our children over to sexualized social media, music and videos.

Worship services that feel like concerts or corporate promotional events, putting emotional experience and personal preferences or comfort over reverence for God and His holiness and glory. Worship services are shaped by what seems to “work” or draw crowds, often at the expense of biblical patterns.

Preaching today is mixed with pop-psychology, “God wants you to be happy, feel good about yourself, and succeed.” We want our religion to feel good and make us happy, instead of preaching the holiness of God, our need for Christ’s atonement, and the call to repentance.

The issue comes down to worship. What do we worship, what do we value, what do we prioritize? What do we bow the knee to, what do we kiss in the culture?

Christians in America have compromised on so many fronts, trying to not be too different from our culture, from our neighbors, from those we want to respect us.

We must pray and seek the Spirit and the Word of God in how to be in the world but not of the world, how to be distinct from the culture without being completely detached from it. How to engage without compromise. We must constantly confess and repent and die to our sinful bowing of the knee. May we be part of the faithful remnant who have not bowed.

Romans 11:7-10, Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.

Romans 11:7 Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened.

This is a terrible truth, the truth of the hardening of hearts. The scary reality of religious unbelievers, believers in name only.

Paul quotes from Isaiah, Moses and David showing how hearts were hardened.

It is purely of God's free will to have mercy on some and to harden some. Yet it is also just as true that those who are hardened are truly guilty and truly deserving of judgment for their own rebellious hearts. Their own consciences will justly and fairly condemn them. They will perish from their own real sin and guilt.

The mystery is true, but it remains a mystery how God freely hardens and yet preserves human responsibility and accountability.

The same thing happens right here. Some of you hear the Word of God in a way that makes your heart soft, that makes you humble, that makes you want to submit to God and love His Word and will. Others hear the Word of God and it lands like seed on a hard path. It doesn't penetrate, you resist it, you doubt it, maybe you go so far as to hate it.

You don't want to humble yourself and submit to the Word of God. You want to keep going your own way and keep seeking after your own kind of righteousness, a righteousness by works, by your own effort.

The danger and the warning here is that God gives you what you want, God lets you have what you are seeking, but it isn't salvation. God lets you eat your own cooking, but it won't be satisfying or life-sustaining in the end. Be careful in what you go after, because you might just end up with it.

How God does this is a mystery, we are not told. That God does this is told over and over. The perplexing providence of God humbles us again and again. God is infinite and we are finite. God knows how to govern His universe in a way that gives Him total and absolute control, and in a way that never forces someone to go to hell against their will.

Everyone who desires to be saved and calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.

Let their table become a snare.

If you were to pick one image, one physical object to represent all of God's grace and goodness and provision and blessing poured out to you, what tangible object or symbol would you pick?

What is this table? What does the table symbolize or represent in our homes?

It is the symbol of all our blessings. The table is where we see God's abundant and abounding grace. It is the center of our homes, where we gather the most. Several times a day our tables are heaped with good food to sustain our bodies. Around our tables there are the blessings of family, children and grandchildren.

Our tables reflect the grace of God in faithfully providing our daily bread, providing for all our earthly and temporal needs. He has heaped up riches far beyond our deserving to all of us. Our tables reflect God's provision of employment and meeting our financial needs year after year. Our tables reflect how God has sustained our health over the decades.

It is a symbol of great blessing. And it can become a symbol of a snare, a trap, a stumbling block, when our love for the good things of life pushes aside our love for God. When the pleasure we get from earthly and temporal things replaces the pleasure we should have in God. When our physical appetites for food, drink, sex, money, family deaden our spiritual appetite and we lose our desire for spiritual things, for worship and God.

And it isn't just our nation. It is the church in America. So blessed, so much abundance, so much grace, and we are lukewarm, we are proud, we are selfish, we can't even part with ten percent of all His generosity to us.

Has there been a more blessed and prosperous nation on earth, and has there been a nation who has forgotten God and His grace, a nation who is more disobedient and obstinate and contrary to God?

Take care that you don't love the things of the world more than God. Take care that your heart doesn't become hardened by your blessings and you forget God's grace the way Israel did.

And here you thought this chapter wasn't relevant to us and our day.

Implications and application.

God is God. God has not and will not reject His people whom He foreknew from before the foundation of the earth. He has a remnant that He has chosen purely by His sovereign grace. He has kept them and He ensures that His elect receive His righteousness and salvation.

Do you tremble before such a holy God. The foreknowing electing grace of God is revealed to us so we would have reverence for Him and His ways.

But it is also revealed to us who believe so we might rejoice in being chosen, adopted, given a name written in the book of life, and have God as our Father, the Father of all compassion and mercy and grace.

I Peter 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice.

As those who have received so much undeserved grace, “we should be the humblest, most patient, kind, loving, tenderhearted, forgiving, courageous people on the earth. God has made us his own, and it was grace and grace alone that did it” (John Piper).

And this is cause for worship and faith and obedience and trust.