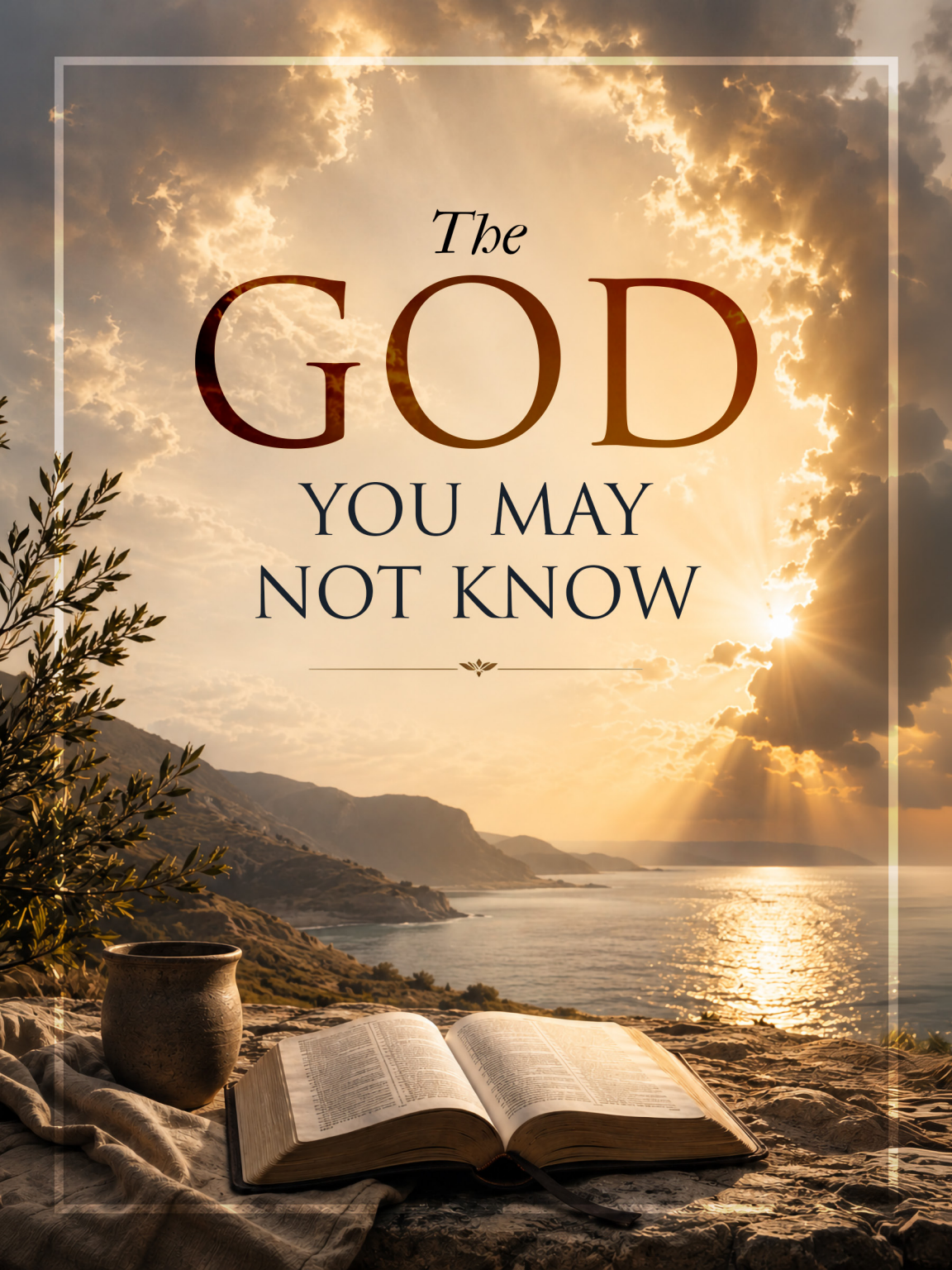


The
GOD

YOU MAY
NOT KNOW



FORWARD

After having presented what is arguably the most glorious and affirming revelation of the sure blessings the believer has in Christ, in the eighth chapter of his letter to the Romans, the inspired apostle Paul presented to his readers what is probably best described as a parenthetical thought designed to explain the basis of the wondrous promises he had just discussed. As the letter is divided into chapters, this parenthetical apology occurs in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of the Roman letter.

In all of the Pauline epistles, we can identify the masterful organization and careful presentation of Paul's mindset. Paul laid out the totality of a situation and then carefully gathered the pieces together in a cohesive argument that closed off any rebuttal and would satisfy the careful reader. In most of his letters written to churches, he addressed specific issues that needed attention, giving rebuke and criticism where needed and praise and commendation where deserved. However, whereas these problem-driven letters apply the schematics of God's eternal purpose, in the Roman letter, Paul defined them openly and clearly. He is not writing a letter of rebuke in response to some crisis; rather, he is writing to a relatively new church established in the capital city of Rome before Paul had ever personally visited the city. No one knows who established this congregation or when, and it was a mixed group made up of both Jews and Gentiles living in apparent harmony. The final chapter of the letter contains a personal greeting to many in that church including fellow Jews like Priscilla and Aquila and Paul's friend and companion, Timothy.

For the spring of 2026, Pastor Jim Bachmann proposed a series of presentations derived from these three chapters to a number of teachers in *Stephens Valley Church* in Nashville, Tennessee. Pastor Bachmann carefully divided the text into ten smaller texts, all of which carried an independent thought, each of which could be sub-divided into smaller concepts, usually by verses, and the totality then presenting the complete argument Paul was making to explain the basis of God's immense and wondrous scheme of human redemption, explaining the basis of the promise of assurance set forth in chapter eight. The teachers of these ten sessions have provided a summary of their presentations which, due to the importance and relevance of each of them individually and in totality, are presented in the following pages. The publication of this material is submitted as a result of the significance of the topic and the quality of the presentations.

They are in order:

1. *"God's Sovereign Election"* | Romans 9:1-13 – *Dr. King Counts*
2. *"The Justice of God"* | Romans 9:14-18 – *Dr. David Lawrence*
3. *"The Potter and the Clay"* | Romans 9:19-29 – *Pastor Jim Bachmann*
4. *"The Righteousness of God"* | Romans 9:30-10:4 – *Dr. David Lawrence*
5. *"Israel in God's Plan"* | Romans 10:5-13 – *Mr. Louis Joseph*
6. *"The Nations in God's Plan"* | Romans 10:14-21 – *Dr. David Lawrence*
7. *"God's Sovereign Plan for Israel"* | Romans 11:1-10 – *Mr. Louis Joseph*
8. *"Sovereign Righteousness"* | Romans 11:11-24 – *Dr. Danny Hale*
9. *"Lest You Be Wise in Your Own Sight"* | Romans 11:25-32 – *Mr. Travis Lamb*
10. *"The Glorious Conclusion"* | Romans 11:33-36 – *Dr. Dick Speece*

INTRODUCTION

THE STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT

In the eighth chapter of Romans, Paul set forth the most compelling, beautiful and assuring promise to believers of the great good news through the gospel, both for time and eternity. Then, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul was impelled to deal with the consequential questions that would arise from statements of such eternal dimensions. Thus, we have these three chapters, all carefully crafted in true Pauline style around a series of questions arising in his mind that would represent the reactions of his Roman readers. We might analyze Paul's remarks in this poignant and most significant section as a diagramming of Paul's argument.

His attention obviously reverted to his Jewish brethren. Some of them in Rome were now a part of the growing church there along with their Gentile brothers, but the vast majority of Hebrews elsewhere were aligned with the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, poised to oppose the Christian "heresy" with every fiber of their being. He begins his apology of the gospel with his own lament over the rejection of Christ by so many of his Jewish brothers, in spite of the advantages they enjoyed under the Mosaic covenant.

Then came Paul's first implied question: "Has the word of God given to Israel failed?" (9:6). He answers this supposed inquiry by going back to the election of Abraham out of paganism, the promise of a son, Isaac, who would convey the promise and the passing over of his elder brother Ishmael. He supplies his second example of God's sovereign election by noting that Isaac's younger

son, Jacob, was selected over the elder Esau. This topic introduced the study and was presented by Dr. King Counts as he covered 9:1-13.

Naturally, arising from the introduction of the topic of election or predestination would be the question, “is there then injustice with God:” surely it would be unjust to choose one and pass over another! His answer was that God can never be unjust and that His sovereign will transcends any willing or effort on the part of mankind. Paul always uses suitable examples, and, in this case, he uses Pharaoh of Egypt whose heart God hardened in the process of delivering His people from Egyptian bondage. The topic of the justice of God was addressed by Dr. David Lawrence in Romans 9:14-18.

Of course, a logical question arising from this topic would be the one of implied fatalism: “How could God find fault with anyone and how can anyone resist his will?” Paul dealt with this matter vehemently by stating straightforwardly that God may be likened to a potter who has power over the clay to make of it what he wants, an example he took from the prophet Isaiah. However, Paul pointed out that God always acts in accord with his purpose of manifesting His glory, even to the point of calling non-Jews to be His people. Pastor Bachmann taught this section based on 9:19-29.

The segue to Paul’s next topic would be an implied question about God’s calling non-Jews (non-nation, or Gentiles:) “What shall we say then?” How is it that Jews who pursued righteousness have not attained it, and Gentiles who did NOT pursue righteousness HAVE attained it? Paul’s answer is that the former pursued righteousness by works; i.e., by what they

did in response to law, and the latter did so by faith alone. He identifies the problem in that the Jews were ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to attain it by a righteousness which they identified with works. His conclusion is that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of the law to the believer, a truth that these Gentiles pursued to their salvation. This section, Romans 9:30-10:4, was presented by Dr. David Lawrence.

This discrepancy between Jew and Gentile response leads to an ultimate question concerning "how is one, then, saved?" Paul dealt with this issue by setting forth its essential simplicity: the word was not remote to them, but so present that it was in their mouths and hearts; for if one believes, he will be saved; none will be put to shame. There is no Jew-Gentile distinction before God who is the same Lord of all. Everyone then, Jew and/or Greek, who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved! Paul is in this way continuing to reduce the perplexing and confusing issues to ultimate simplicity. This message was presented by Mr. Louis Joseph from Romans 10:5-13.

Not to leave any matter without being addressed, Paul took this situation to the next logical step by anticipating the question of "How does the plan of salvation work?" And to answer this inclusive question, he breaks down the issue into steps often referred to as the *ordo salutis*, the order of God's divine decrees. How can one call on someone in whom he has not believed? And how can he believe in one of whom he has not heard? And how can he hear without a preacher? Finally, how can he hear this preacher unless the preacher is sent. Obviously, such a preacher would carry good news

(the gospel,) as Isaiah illustrated with the example of a watchman looking for a runner with flying feet. To emphasize the point, Paul asserts that indeed Israel has heard a voice gone out to all the world through nature and the prophets, and Israel has indeed understood. The problem and the breakdown in Paul's chain of decrees is unbelief. Israel was always disobedient to God, even as He reached out to them. This section in Romans 10:14-21 was addressed by Dr. David Lawrence.

In case his Roman readers became overly discouraged about the situation with Israel, Paul asks the next leading question: "has God rejected His people?" His answer is a straightforward NO! Paul then set forth a truth defined by prophets generally and found as well in the history of Israel; namely, while the majority of Israel would apostatize from God, He always has and always will preserve a remnant, like the seven thousand He preserved from Baal worship. However, such an act of preservation is but another example of God's grace: grace that would be nullified if it were by works.

With the Jew-Gentile dichotomy not fully resolved, Paul asks, "What then?" What happened to cause the majority of Jews to fail to reach its objective of attaining the righteousness of God, and instead to reject God and His plan while only a remnant was saved: a remnant Paul identifies as the elect, relating this phase of the argument back to his beginning point. His answer comes in the form of answers from of old, even from David and Isaiah: the eternal purpose of God! This topic was addressed by Mr. Louis Joseph, and is based on the text of Romans 11:1-10.

Of course, the next logical question would be, why would God do such a thing? Paul writes, “So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?” With obvious reference to his earlier discussion of the justice of God, Paul replies, “By no means!” Their destined falling was to give the Gentiles the opportunity to attain righteousness and thus salvation by means of the resultant jealousy of the Jews. And to remind his readers that he was by no means implying that God was abandoning His people, Israel, he asserts that when their return occurs, it would be tantamount to receiving them back from the dead. Israel was the original firstfruits, and thus became sacred dough that would sanctify the whole loaf or a sacred root that would sanctify the branches. Then, continuing his analogy, Paul points out that if some of these Jewish branches were broken off, and the Gentiles were savingly grafted into the sacred olive tree of Israel, the Gentiles should not be arrogant or boastful, but should realize that they have now become part of the ancient people of God through no goodness of their own. Those Jews who were broken off as a result of their unbelief should be a warning to these newly introduced Gentiles against such unbelief on their part. It should be, then, a warning against trivializing the decrees of God. Dr. Danny Hale taught this lesson from Romans 11:11-24.

All apologies and logical discourses, having set forth the arguments based on legitimate sources and argued in accord with laws of forensics, should have conclusions. Paul supplies his readers with two: both an immediate and an ultimate conclusion. The immediate conclusion reminds his readers, his Gentile brothers, to avoid conceit and arrogance; the ultimate conclusion is

gloriously transcendental. The immediate conclusion begins with: “Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers...” Paul then describes this “partial hardening” that has come upon Israel to provoke them to jealousy and to allow the fullness of the Gentiles to enter. It is in this way that all Israel (probably true, spiritual Israel) shall be saved. Paul documents this statement by references from Isaiah. Although he admits the Jews have become enemies to the Gentiles for their sake, they still are chosen by God, and God’s sovereign gifts and calling are irrevocable. The disobedience of the Jews has worked to the salvation of Gentiles, but God does not renege on His promises to any one person or any group! This conclusion was presented by Mr. Travis Lamb and is from the text of Romans 11:25-32.

The ultimate transcendent conclusion would be lessened in effect by any comment; thus, it is cited from Romans 11:33-36, and was taught by Dr. Dick Speece:

*“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

*‘For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?’*

*‘Or who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?’*

*For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be glory forever.*

Amen.”

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IN SALVATION (Romans 9:1-13)

Pastor King Counts
February 4, 2026

¹ I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. ⁹ For this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁰ And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, ¹¹ though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—¹² she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” ¹³ As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

– Romans 9:1-13

INTRODUCTION

Some 35 years ago, I was a young pastor possessed of a zeal that bordered on naïveté. Like so many eager ministers, newly entrusted with the care of

souls, I resolved to preach through the Epistle to the Romans: line upon line, precept upon precept, confident that God's Word would do its perfect work. For many weeks, all was well. Heads nodded approvingly as Paul unfolded justification by faith alone, peace with God, union with Christ and the glorious freedom of the Spirit in Romans 8. But then we came to Romans 9.

The atmosphere changed palpably. What had once been warm affirmation cooled into visible discomfort. Some could tolerate Paul's language so long as it seemed abstract, but now it pressed unavoidably upon the question of God's sovereign right to save whom He will. At this point, resistance emerged, not because Paul was unclear, but because he was *devastatingly* clear.

This occurrence is hardly a novel experience. Romans 9 stands as a theological Rubicon; once crossed, neutral ground disappears. As R.C. Sproul memorably declared, "If God is not sovereign, God is not God. Romans 9 is the Magna Carta of divine sovereignty." The chapter is neither an appendix nor a theological detour. It is the Apostle's Spirit-inspired response to one of the most urgent and emotionally-fraught questions of redemptive history: Has God failed His promises to Israel?

Before answering that question, however, Paul opens his heart, and in doing so, demonstrates that a robust doctrine of election never produces cold fatalism, but rather profound anguish and pastoral compassion.

HANDLING A HOLY MYSTERY WITH REVERENCE

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* wisely counsels:

“The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care...” (WCF 3.8)

The Confession does not urge silence, but sobriety. It does not recommend evasion, but reverence, lest minds grow speculative where God has spoken, or proud where grace alone reigns supreme. Loraine Boettner once observed that the doctrine of predestination humbles man and exalts God more than any other truth in Scripture. That is why it has always provoked such strong, and often visceral, reaction.

Yet Paul does not treat this doctrine as an abstract logical puzzle. He treats it as a personal sorrow. That alone should caution the preacher never to handle these truths with smugness or severity.

PAUL'S HEART FOR ISRAEL (ROMANS 9:1–5)

Paul begins not with decree, but with grief. “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” (vv. 1–2.)

This is covenantal anguish. Paul would, if it were possible, wish himself accursed for the sake of his kinsmen according to the flesh. Such language

shatters the caricature that belief in sovereign election extinguishes evangelistic zeal. On the contrary, Paul's confidence in God's sovereignty intensifies his burden.

R.C. Sproul once likened Paul's sorrow to that of a parent watching a prodigal child: one whose rebellion does not cancel love, but deepens sorrow. The Apostle knows that salvation belongs to the Lord, yet that same knowledge drives him to tears.

Israel possessed magnificent privileges: adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, promises, and most remarkably, the Messiah Himself according to the flesh. If external privilege guaranteed salvation, Israel would be invincible. But Paul insists that divine election operates on a deeper level than ethnicity or ceremony.

GOD'S WORD HAS NOT FAILED (ROMANS 9:6–9)

Paul now anticipates the objection before it is raised: has God's Word failed? His answer is as startling as it is definitive: "It is not as though the Word of God has failed."

Why? Because "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel."

Here Paul draws a distinction that reverberates throughout redemptive history: the distinction between the visible and invisible people of God. There is a physical Israel and a spiritual Israel, an outward covenant

community and an inward people known only to God.

This distinction mirrors the reality of the visible and invisible church. Not all who sit in pews are regenerate; not all who bear the covenant sign possess covenant faith. Augustine captured this with stark clarity: “Many sheep are without, and many wolves are within.” Paul grounds his argument in redemptive history. God’s promise advanced not through Ishmael, though he was Abraham’s firstborn, but through Isaac: the child of promise. Flesh gives rise to flesh, but promise gives rise to faith. God’s saving purpose has always operated according to sovereign choice, not natural descent.

JACOB AND ESAU: ELECTION DISPLAYED BEFORE WORKS (ROMANS 9:10–13)

Lest someone conclude that Isaac was chosen because of superior qualities or circumstances, Paul presses the issue further. Rebekah conceived twins, Jacob and Esau, sharing the same womb, the same parents, the same prenatal environment and the same birthday.

Every conceivable human variable is flattened. Before either child had done anything good or bad, before moral record or personal achievement entered the picture, God declared, “The older shall serve the younger.” Why? “In order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls.”

R.C. Sproul observed “The most difficult doctrine in Scripture is not predestination—it’s justice. Why does God save anyone?”

He once recounted a student indignant over divine election crying out, “That’s not fair!” Sproul’s reply was surgical: “You don’t want fair. Fair is hell.”

Verse 13 seals the argument: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” The language arrests us, but Scripture itself provides interpretive clarity. “Hate” here does not denote malice, but covenantal preference. Jesus employs identical language in Luke 14:26, calling disciples to “hate” father and mother, meaning to love less by comparison. Likewise, Genesis 29 describes Leah as “hated” in contrast to Rachel’s greater reception of Jacob’s love. Divine election is not arbitrary cruelty; it is selective mercy.

ADDRESSING COMMON OBJECTIONS

Opponents of sovereign election typically respond to Romans 9 in one of three ways.

First, some simply avoid the chapter altogether, preferring texts they deem more “pastoral.” Yet avoidance is not exegesis, and silence does not neutralize Scripture.

Second, others insist Paul refers only to national election, not individual salvation. But Paul’s argument collapses this distinction. Salvation rests not on corporate identity but on divine calling: “not because of works but

because of Him who calls.”

Third, many appeal to foreknowledge, claiming God merely elects those whom He foresees will believe. But foreknowledge in Scripture is relational, not reactive. God does not foresee faith independent of His decree; He ordains the faith He foreknows. As John MacArthur wisely observed, “Election is not a problem to solve but a truth to embrace—it magnifies grace.”

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS: REST, PRAYER, AND WORSHIP

For the believer, election is not meant to induce paralysis, but assurance. If salvation begins in God's eternal purpose, it cannot be undone by human frailty.

For evangelism, sovereignty fuels fervency. We pray, plead, reason, and proclaim, not because success rests in rhetoric, but because God uses means to accomplish His ends. And for worship, this doctrine silences boasting and awakens awe. When the soul finally grasps that nothing compelled God to set His love upon us except His own will, praise becomes inevitable.

The doctrine of election does not darken grace: it illumines it. It is not a wall that bars mercy, but the foundation that guarantees it.

CONCLUSION: A GOD WORTH TRUSTING

Romans 9 does not ask us whether we like divine sovereignty. It asks whether we will bow before it. The God revealed here is not anxious, reactive, or distributive according to human expectation. He is the Lord of mercy, free, wise, just, and unfailingly faithful; and that God, Paul insists, is worthy not only of our submission, but of our trust, our tears and our worship.

*“From Him and through Him and to Him are all things.
To Him be glory forever. Amen.”*

THE JUSTICE OF GOD (Romans 9:14-18)

Dr. David Lawrence

February 11, 2026

¹⁴ “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!
¹⁵ For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” ¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”
¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”

– Romans 9:14-18

King Counts, in his lecture showed how Paul discussed God’s sovereign election of some and passing over of others; thus, God’s purpose in calling: the pagan Abraham was effectively called from Ur; Isaac, Abraham’s promised son was chosen to be the progenitor of the Savior, and Ishmael, his older brother and son of Hagar, was passed over, while Isaac’s elder son, who should have been heir was passed over in favor of the younger son, before either had done good or evil. Here was simply, as Paul showed, an example of God’s sovereign choice.

In verse 14, Paul comes to the critical question of the Justice of God. Scripture teaches with definite clarity that God never gives injustice; but He does give non-justice, which is the only way we shall be saved – for to give anyone the justice he deserves would mean damnation!

And thus, Paul states the question that would be on his readers' minds: "Is there injustice with God?" And Paul's quick retort is "By no means!" Yet some people still object and protest that "It would be unfair" and "I would hold God to account!" Paul's answer is immediate and emphatic. If we examine the Greek grammar, we may note his response of $\mu\nu$ $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\iota\tau\omicron$ ("May it never be!") is a denial in the strongest of terms!

If we understand the expression: "If we miss the fall, we miss it all," we would know why there can be no injustice with God! While God must give us "non-justice" by applying to us the atonement of Christ, He does in no way render to us "in-justice!"

An anonymous online commentator writes (cited throughout this article), "If God were unjust, the entire biblical narrative would collapse. The God of Israel is defined by righteousness (Deut. 32:4) 'The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he'. Paul does not remove the tension, but he refuses the premise. Importantly, Paul does not redefine justice according to human expectations. Justice is not the standard by which God is measured; God is the standard by which justice is known." God's nature is righteousness; may it never be otherwise (injustice). No unrighteousness could possibly be involved. It is outrageous to think sinful man may sit in judgment on the holy God: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen.18:25). For people to resist and object is to deny the demonstration of God's love and mercy.

God does not explain the basis for showing mercy on some and withholding it from others. We may note five principles illustrating this truth:

1. He is sovereign and under no obligation to defend His choice.
2. He acts without reference to any claim of merit, because there is none.
3. He will do it to any extent, at any time, and any manner He pleases.
4. He has determined a definite number of the elect.
5. No one has a right to complain.

It is proof of His love and kindness that any are saved, where none have a claim and all deserve to die. God has a right to pardon whom He pleases. It should be a matter of joy that any are pardoned and saved, and not a basis for complaining and murmuring.

In verse 15, Paul examines more closely the concept of mercy, which is both free and sovereign: “For he says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” Paul quotes here Exodus 33:19, spoken after Israel’s sin with the golden calf, in a passage which refers clearly to the question of mercy! The context of this passage is crucial, because Israel had already broken the covenant. God was thus not obligated to continue with them; and yet God would contemplate extending mercy to these covenant breakers! Mercy, therefore, was something not owed – it was freely given. Mercy, by definition, is the withholding of wrath from one who deserves such wrath. It cannot be demanded. If it could, it would cease to be mercy. To further illustrate and

understand this critical situation, we may note Deut. chapters 7-9, passages that establish a foundational principle: Why did God show mercy to Israel? It was certainly not because of its large population, or strength, or goodness, but entirely because of God's love. God's mercy flows from God's will, not from human qualification. Works are thus excluded (Eph. 2:8-10). All humans deserve hell, not mercy – and certainly not grace. Why should God, then, not show mercy to all? In the example of Isaac's twin boys, why was not Esau chosen? Why not everyone? In response to the clear teaching of Holy Scripture, people often devise schemes to "get God off the hook:" schemes such as universalism (all will eventually be saved) and annihilation instead of eternal hell.

Then Paul comes to the matter of human will and effort in verse 15. Will and effort are effects of salvation, not causes: "So then it (salvation) depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." Unsaved people have no power to run or even to will. In this way, Paul strips away two common assumptions: First, human will: desire, intention, and moral resolve: "If you want to, you will be saved." In one sense, that would be true, except that the will comes from God, as Paul states in Phil. 2:13, "For it is God who is at work in you both to will..." and second, human effort: obedience, striving and religious performance. "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure." Both willing and doing are parts of salvation as effect, not causes. The difference between cause and effect is the difference between cause and choice, as St. Augustine taught in the example of the Stoics, who held to a doctrine of fatalism with no room

for choice, and Cicero, who believed in choice but left no room for God's foreknowledge. Man must always choose what he wants – he cannot do otherwise. Neither can he compel God's saving action. This situation does not deny the reality of human responsibility, which is always total.

“Salvation's source is not man reaching upward, but God reaching downward.” This verse stands at the heart of Pauline grace theology and anticipates Romans 11:6: “If by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works...” It does not mean that a saved person does not choose or is unwilling, for Psalm 110:3 states, “Your troops shall be made willing.” It is so very important to remember that both willing and striving are evidences of God's sovereign work (Phil. 2:13). Thus, a person is not compelled by being “dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom,” as opponents often assert. By nature, man resists the call of God (Rom. 1:10-12). “None is righteous, no, not one, no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Paul cites a well-known example of this truth in verse 17: that of Pharaoh and the display of God's power: “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’” Paul here cites Exodus 9:16. Pharaoh is not portrayed as morally neutral, but as a despotic monarch. Exodus repeatedly says Pharaoh hardened his own heart before God is said to have hardened it, meaning that God's action is judicial. “Raised you up”

does not mean God *created* evil in Pharaoh, but that He placed Pharaoh in a position of power and sustained him through multiple plagues, in order to reveal publicly His divine sovereignty. Pharaoh was incidental; God did not show His power in him personally, but used him in miracles in releasing His people, which Pharaoh freely, but reluctantly did. God's glory is revealed, not only in salvation, but also in judgment against man's determined rebellion. His purpose was to show God's glory to the ends of the earth. Jonathan Edwards said that God displays His glory through the use of it, as He did with Pharaoh.

Then in verse 18, Paul addresses head-on the difficult matter of God's hardening and how the matter of God's showing His mercy interfaces with the process of His hardening. "So then, he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills." This verse summarizes Paul's argument, and often unsettles readers, because it is one of the most extraordinary examples of hardening ever. "The purpose is to show that God has a right to pass by those to whom he does not choose to show mercy; and place them in circumstances where they shall develop their true character, and where, in fact, they shall become more hardened and be destroyed."

But what does "hardening" mean, and what does it not mean? It does not mean God creates unbelief in innocent people, because there are no innocent people. It refers to God's confirming a person in the path they have already chosen, and it is a form of judicial giving over—similar to Paul's remarks in Romans 1—that Paul gave over idolaters to pursue their already chosen path

of disobedience to further disobedience. Hardening is never arbitrary in Scripture; it is always connected to persistent resistance to God's revelation. God left Pharaoh alone in circumstances which would cause him to develop his true character. In all this, Pharaoh acted freely and did what he chose to do – he pursued his own course. He had free will in his scheming to oppress the Israelites. He had free will in his opposition to God. He had free will when he pursued the Israelites to the Red Sea. And in all his doings, he acted as he chose to do—and with his determined choice of evil—oblivious to the fear of judgment. Thus, it is said that he hardened his own heart.

Neither Pharaoh, nor any sinner can justly blame God for placing him in circumstances where he is free to develop his own character and show what he truly is. The sinner is not compelled to sin; nor is God under obligation to save him, contrary to the desires and wishes of the sinner himself. Man always has free will to do what he wants to do – what he chooses. God insists on it. He does not have free will to do what he doesn't want to do.

THE GOD YOU MAY NOT KNOW (Romans 9:19-29)

Pastor Jim Bachmann

February 25, 2026

¹⁹ “You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” ²⁰ But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” ²¹ Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? ²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, ²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— ²⁴ even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? ²⁵ As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

²⁶ “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’”

²⁷ And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: “Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved, ²⁸ for the Lord will carry out his sentence upon the earth fully and without delay.”

²⁹ And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left us offspring,
we would have been like Sodom
and become like Gomorrah.”

– Romans 9:19-29

This evening, we resume our study of Romans 9-11. I’m sorry I missed David Lawrence’s teaching two weeks ago, but we had to go out of town for a family funeral. Romans 9-11 are an important digression on Paul’s part.

He could have easily gone from chapter 8 straight to chapter 12. The 8th chapter has all of those glorious assurances about the certainty of salvation: “no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus... all things work together for our good...nothing will ever separate us from the love of Christ;” and so forth. It would have been very natural then for Paul to jump to chapter 12:1, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” That transition would have made perfect sense!

But instead, Paul realized a potential objection to all the happy news of chapter 8: what about the Jewish people who had rejected Christ? How could that happen if God’s election was so certain? They were the people of God, and they rejected Jesus Christ, and now they were cut off from salvation! Did God’s election fail? Was God’s election worth anything? Was there any hope for the Jewish people? Hence chapters 9-11.

One of the key things to understand is that there are two levels of election. Not every elect person is elect with a capital “E.” From the beginning, it was clear that a person could belong to the chosen people of God and not be a chosen person of God! Paul went back to the twins, Jacob and Esau, to prove his point. Before either were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose in election might stand, God said, “The elder will serve the younger.” And then Paul added God’s word from Malachi 1, “As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’”

This is the God we may not know. This is the God we may not like! We

want Him to love everyone and give everyone an equal opportunity. But it doesn't sound like Esau had any opportunity, does it? "Before he was born?" Before he had "done anything good or bad?" Wow! Did he have any chance at all? It doesn't sound like it! Then again, we have the same problem Erasmus had when Luther corrected him and said, "Erasmus, your thoughts of God are far too human!" So are our thoughts about an "equal opportunity God!" Paul says that God decides who gets mercy, and God decides who gets hardened.

Very quickly, someone will usually object and say, "That's not fair!" Which brings us to verse 19. Paul had people who said, "That's not fair!" He heard the same objections that we hear and answered with a thunderous, "By no means!" God is not unjust and cannot be unjust because God's election stands against the backdrop of human sin and depravity, which most certainly merits God's wrath. And yet, out of His mere free grace and love He chooses to elect some to everlasting life.

In verses 19-29, Paul declares unashamedly the sovereign election of God. Someone asked me why we seldom preach on election. I don't know, except to say that it is more implicit than explicit in the Bible. John Bradford, the English martyr, once said, "God does not send people to the university of election before they go to the grammar school of faith and repentance."

So in an attempt to keep this high doctrine of election at a grammar-school level, since that is where I am, I'm going to summarize these verses in a way you may remember a week from now – maybe even a month from now.

First, Paul says, “Shut up.” You can remember that can’t you? Actually, he was far more diplomatic, but that’s basically what he says in verses 19-20, “You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who can resist His will?’” Great question! Paul recognized if indeed God determines who gets mercy and who gets hardened, and determines it unconditionally, before we were even born, before the foundation of the world, then why is it anyone’s fault if they don’t believe? If God hardens my heart to the point I can’t believe and don’t want to believe, why does He blame me for that? Why would He send me to hell? I don’t have a chance!

And how does he answer his own question: “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” Being translated, roughly, he says, “Shut up!” Is God accountable to us? Is God on trial? C.S. Lewis wrote a book about that, *God in the Dock*. Job tried to put God on trial, until God answered him out of the whirlwind; and when the dust settled, poor Job’s mouth was stopped like every mouth will be stopped one day. And all he could say was, “I didn’t know what I was talking about!” Oh, I wonder how many people will say the same thing at the end of the age! Then he added, “And now I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes!”

Paul never really answers the question! He just says we don’t have a right to ask it! “Who are you, O man?” “Who are you, O woman?” You have a lot of nerve to demand that the One who created the world, and created you, and created all things, now run the world the way you want it run! Will the creature tell the Creator how to do His job? More to the point: will sinful

creatures tell sinless God how to do His job? Who do you think you are? Who do you think He is? He is King and Almighty God, and we are not.

Second, Paul admonishes us to grow up, verses 21-22, “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” These can be hard things to hear, especially the first time. But as we read and study the Scripture and grow, our thoughts of God become less human and more in line with Scripture. We learn that God is the Potter, and the Potter is not accountable to the clay. The Potter has the right to make one lump of clay for dishonorable use, a “vessel of wrath prepared for destruction!” He has the right to “show His wrath and make known His power,” verse 22. This is the God we may not like. We have no problem with a God who wants to show His love! But a God who wants to show His wrath and power is often problematic!

Have any of you ever heard of Dr. Gordon Clark? He was a professor at Covenant College back in the 1970’s. He was also an ordained Presbyterian minister. One day, he was teaching on this very subject of the Potter and the clay. A student accused him of using the doctrine to make men into mere puppets. He replied very calmly that the doctrine did not make men into puppets; it made them into lumps of clay! And lumps of clay don’t have much power!

Years ago, there was a church in town with a marquee on the front lawn that said, “Today, I remember how powerful I am.” Now let me ask you: how powerful are you? King Counts made this point at our Ash Wednesday

communion service: all flesh is as grass! When we are young, we think we are hot stuff, bullet proof, tough. But then we grow up and find out we have mortal ills: we can't cure our cancer, we can't move those mountains, we can't fix that relationship, etc. Paul didn't say we are powerful. He said God is powerful and we are just lumps of clay! One sign of growing up is the realization of our weakness and utter dependence on God for every breath we take!

So Paul tells us to shut up, grow up, and finally, rise up, verse 25, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.' And in the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people, there they will be called 'sons of the living God.'" Paul was quoting from Hosea 1, where God commanded Hosea to take a "wife of whoredom" to illustrate Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. So he took Gomer, and she had three children. Can anyone name them? I will give you an extra chocolate chip cookie if you can name the three children: Jezreel, No Mercy, and Not My People! That's as bad as a boy named Sue!

How would you like to be named 'No Mercy!' The names had spiritual significance because God would no longer have mercy on the house of Israel. But He would have mercy on Judah. So here again God made a distinction: hardening some and showing mercy to some others.

What is anticipated in Hosea, and in Romans 9, is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God. He will mention the Gentiles in verse 30 and then again with much more detail in chapter 11, where he calls the

Gentiles “wild branches” who have been “grafted in,” while the “natural branches,” unbelieving Jews, have been “broken off.” Paul characterized Gentiles as aliens and strangers, without God and without hope in the world, by nature children of wrath, until God, who is rich in mercy, quickened the Gentiles (us) and saved them by His grace.

And that is why we are to “rise up” in praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to God, with “head held high,” as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, because we are His beloved, His people, sons of the living God! We could have been like “No Mercy” and “Not My People,” or like Sodom and Gomorrah! The same God, who repeatedly humiliated the greatest king in the world, who toyed with Pharaoh and hardened his heart, could have made us a “vessel of wrath,” but instead, out of His mere free grace and love, chose to make us a “vessel of mercy!!” We didn’t have the power to do it!! Only He could do it and He did it!!! “It depends not on human will or exertion!” Let those words burn into your heart, if you want to know this God.

As King said on our first Wednesday, it is the greatest thing in the world, that God has had mercy on us, that He chose us and sent His only begotten Son to atone for all our sin, so that we who had no power, no hope, who were once not His people and aliens and strangers, far off from the kingdom of God, are now the beloved people of God!

This should make us humble and worshipful and deeply grateful. As the Westminster Divines expressed it so perfectly, “The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care,

that men attending the will of God revealed in His word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election.” That’s a beautiful sentence. Election and assurance are inseparable. It is God’s unconditional election that affords us blessed assurance! And then this closing sentence, equally beautiful: “So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the gospel.” Far from being a doctrine that makes us gnash our teeth, far from being a doctrine we are reluctant to preach and teach, far from being a doctrine that is the cause of bitter disputes, this truth, about this God so many do not know and do not like, should humble us all and make us rise up in praise, admiration, and reverence of Him!

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (Romans 9:30-10:4)

Dr. David Lawrence

March 4, 2026

³⁰ “What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” ¹ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

– Romans 9:30-10:4

Paul defines the ultimate problem with Israel as regards their apparent inability to accept Christ: they did not understand the righteousness of God and sought to stand acceptable before God based on their own concept of righteousness, which would be accomplished through works. In order for us to understand Paul’s argument and come to terms with the mystery of God’s righteousness, we can begin by posing a few questions:

1. What is righteousness?
2. What is the righteousness of man?
3. What is the righteousness of God?

4. What does it mean to pursue righteousness by works?
5. What does it mean to pursue righteousness by faith?
6. What is the place of works in God's righteousness?
7. And what really was the problem Israel had?

First, we ask what is righteousness? Righteousness is the state of being right in the sight of some authority. Righteousness is translated from the same Greek word as justification. Therefore, Biblically, to be righteous is to be justified. However, we have a need to stand acceptable before any number of authorities.

And that brings us to our second question. Righteousness for people may occur at any juncture where we are held to account by someone who has authority over us. For instance, a child in school is accountable to his teacher. When the child's deportment is acceptable as defined by the teacher, whether in his behavior or academic performance, the teacher would consider the child just or right as a student. The same process obtains for a person working for someone. If he performs according to his job description, his employer would consider him to be right. If a citizen of a country keeps the laws of that country or state or city, he is just in the sight of the law. Right, thus, is determined in relation to a given function as measured by expectations, determined by governing authorities in that context.

Third, we encounter another situation when we consider being right before

God. Whereas righteousness in human categories is fluid and relative, it is absolute in regard to God, who Himself is righteous. We usually think of righteousness before God in terms of morality: that we have lived a good life in His sight. But it is much more. Man thinks of morality as the state of being good. In our text, Paul recognized two very different forms of righteousness (10:3): the righteousness of God and the righteousness of man. When set alongside the righteousness of God, man's righteousness is revealed as woefully inadequate and defined as sinful. However, most people do not understand the concept of the righteousness of God.

May I cite an example I heard from a preacher? A little boy and his father went to a beach beside the ocean. The father gave the boy a little pail and a shovel, toys children often have at the beach with which to play in the sand. The boy waded out into the ocean far enough to scoop up water into the pail. He came running to his father crying, "Daddy, look! I have the ocean in my pail!" That pail contained water from the ocean, but certainly not the whole ocean. Thus, we often think we know the mind of God, but our little minds can no more encompass the vast mind of God than the little boy could contain the whole ocean in his pail. Therefore, how can we think we understand the righteousness of God so as to implement it in our lives by our own efforts? We can, however, believe God, and He has promised to count us justified (righteous) in His sight, by faith. Faith is the only way to attain to such pure, perfect, vast and incomprehensible righteousness.

If I may be allowed another example: Thomas Aquinas the great Medieval

scholar who produced the monumental *Summa Theologica*, walked into his lecture hall one day and announced to his students: “I can write no more; after what I have seen, all I have written seems like so much straw.” He had a vision the night before which included the apostles Peter and Paul; thus, he had a taste of the nature of God and realized his efforts were poor and puerile in comparison.

The great Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo left most of his works unfinished; the only finished works were from his early, immature period. As he continued his labors, he was always frustrated and stopped his work before finishing. Some scholars noted a reason, in that he was attempting to define the undefinable. That is what we do when we try to define the righteousness of God!

If we go to Holy Scripture with the intention of understanding God and find that the verbal descriptions, true though they may be, still fall short of conveying the mind and character of God to us adequately, we shall find a profitable experience in looking at the theophanies: manifestations of God, in the Bible. We may find them in Isaiah 6, Revelation 4, Zechariah 3, Exodus 3 and other places. Let’s look at the first of these theophanies mentioned: Isaiah 6:1-7: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said:

*“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!”*

And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

If we note the reaction people had when they experienced these theophanies, or, as with Paul, Christophany, they fell on their faces or in some way manifested being overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy and a painful realization of their own sin! The only remedy for this terrible situation was atonement. God in his ultimate otherness is a scary thing!

Paul told the august Athenian Areopagus council: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,

having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being,’ as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:22-31)

Paul further commented in Romans 11:34: “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

These examples of encounters with God should help us to understand that it is an exercise in futility for anyone to attempt to be righteous in God’s sight by his own “goodness,” of which he has none before God. The only way is to believe God and accept His gifts of atonement and subsequent righteousness.

Law reveals our sin, but does not forgive, because law has no remedial power. The knowledge of requirements of law produces awareness of sin, and a view of the holy produces fear and trembling. People who then

experience such views of law and of holiness are confronted with a terrible problem, as Paul was, and as all of us were. So also, Martin Luther faced this extreme difficulty. He writes: “I was aglow with the desire to understand Paul in his letter to the Romans, but the one expression in chapter 1 verse 17 concerning the righteousness of God blocks the way for me. For I hated the expression righteousness of God, since I have been instructed by the usage in custom of all teachers to understand according to scholastic philosophy as the formal or active righteousness in which God proves himself righteous by punishing sinners and the unjust. Finally, after days and nights of wrestling with the difficulty, God had mercy on me, and then I was able to note the connection of the words the ‘righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel’ and ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Then I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous lives by the gift of God, that is, through faith, and that the meaning is this: the gospel revealed the righteousness of God in a passive sense, that righteousness through which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written the just shall live by faith. Then I felt as if I had been completely reborn and had entered paradise through widely open doors. Instantly all scripture looked different to me... As intensely as I had formerly hated the expression righteousness of God I now loved and praised it as the sweetest of concepts; and so, this passage of Paul actually was the portal of paradise to me.”

Fourth, if we then ask what it means to pursue righteousness by works, we have the answer with Israel. This situation is exactly what Paul seeks to define most clearly in our text. Paul addresses the dilemma of Jews seeking

the righteousness of God by means of the righteousness of man, the utter futility of it for them or anyone. The law would have led them to righteousness by bringing them to faith because through the law comes the knowledge of sin, and thus the conviction of sin. Thus, Paul says Israel was ignorant of the righteousness of God and pursued their own righteousness – a concept people have had through the ages, and to this day! Salvation is of God; it is the gift of God: (Eph. 2:8-10) and is both sovereign and monergistic. These two systems are mutually self-exclusive: one gives glory to man; the other gives all glory to God.

Paul's example of an answer to our question 5, pursuit of righteousness by faith, is Abraham, who pursued neither law or works. He simply believed God, and God considered him to be righteous, a process we usually call imputation. (Gen. 15:6.) Abraham believed (trusted) the promises of God, was justified, and then obeyed God.

And that brings us to question 6, the frequently misunderstood matter of the place of works in God's righteousness. We read that James affirmed justification by works and not by faith alone: (James 2:24-26) "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead." If we look carefully at verse 26, we can note that the effect of works is to justify a living faith, whereas the absence of works indicates a dead faith. We see this truth more

clearly by backing up to verse 18: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” In the same way, Phil. 2:12 which says that we should work out our own salvation is explained by the following 13th verse: “For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to do His good pleasure.”

As noted above, the answer to our question 7, the problem Israel had, and the problem many have today, and have had thru the ages, is judging God’s righteousness by man’s standard and coupling this ignorance to our own inborn pride. The atonement for these sins has been met at the cross and intersects our lives in our new birth. As Jesus explained to Nicodemus, to see the kingdom, we require a constitutional change of nature, a new birth, a reorientation of our own wills: (John 3: 3-5.)

RCH Lenski commented: “law always demands something... law, merely demands and never gives. Its demands exceed our ability to meet them, not only in one or the other point, but in every point. All that law can do for sinners is to bring them sin’s realization, the conviction of utter failure to catch up with it... the fearful difference between faith and works is the fact of faith, being trust, relies in complete dependence on another, on God, on Christ, on the promise and the mercy, while works, repudiate such dependence, and rely on man’s own ability, attainment. Faith permits God to put it wholly and completely under obligation to himself; works not only repudiate this obligation to God, but insist on putting God under obligation

to the man who does the works, and the Jews tried to obligate God by means of even false works...”

Finally, Matthew Henry writes: “Christ is the end of the moral law in that he did what the law could not do, and secured the great end of it. The end of the law was to bring men to perfect obedience, and so to obtain justification. This is now become impossible, by reason of the power of sin and the corruption of nature; but Christ is the end of the law. The law is not destroyed, nor the intention of the lawgiver frustrated, but, full satisfaction being made by the death of Christ for our breach of the law, the end is attained, and we are put in another way of justification. Christ is thus the end of the law for righteousness, that is, for justification; but it is only to everyone that believes. Upon our believing, that is, our humble consent to the terms of the gospel, we become interested in Christ’s satisfaction, and so are justified through the redemption that is in Jesus.”

PURSUIT OF SALVATION (Romans 10:5-13)

*Mr. Louis Joseph
March 18, 2026*

⁵ “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law; that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

– Romans 10:5-13

The year is 57 A.D., and the Apostle Paul—formerly known as Saul and the chief persecutor of Christians—is writing from Greece, the Letter to the Romans. Under the careful guidance of the Holy Spirit, he pens what some call the greatest letter ever written, the “Constitution of Christianity.” He’s writing to a church he has never seen, visited, nor helped to found. It is the only letter of his 13 like this. It is a long and wonderful letter, full of solid theology, written to a church that we believe was founded by converted

Jews and newly believing Gentiles. Three years later, Paul visits the Roman church around 60 A.D., but when he comes, he is in chains. He effectively ministers from prison for two years. There is some debate about whether he was released for a short time, but we do know that he was executed for his faith in Rome around this time.

If you look at a poster from Chris Harrison, you'll see 63,779 cross references in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. It makes a beautiful rainbow, as Holy Scripture references Holy Scripture. Some call the Bible the first “hyperlinked” book, as God’s word is grounded in truth – perfect and inspired. Paul’s letter to the Romans is full of such quotes from the Old Testament. But why? Some believe it is because this likely majority Jewish church in Rome would respond favorably to the truths they knew from the Old Testament. But as we know, some Jews who’ve not responded to God’s Gospel truth have a wrong understanding of Old Testament scripture, as they wait in vain for a Messiah who has already come – the Lord Jesus Christ. In that way, the Gentile believers—former pagans—came to saving faith, unburdened by any misinterpretation of God’s word.

For tonight, the main message is this:

People pursuing salvation by trying to keep the law will be judged on the basis of that effort.

It is impossible for anyone to keep all of the law, all of the time.

Inevitable failure leads to eternal damnation and separation from God.

It's so interesting that Paul is quoting in our text Leviticus 18:5, Deuteronomy 30:1-6, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Joel 2:32, and even two passages in Isaiah 28 and 49, thus confirming for us that God's salvation message has been all about having faith, ever since the fall of Genesis 3.

As Christians, we know that we are saved by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to the Scriptures alone, to the Glory of God alone. God's law, though, is still in effect. John Calvin said that the law serves as a curb, a mirror, and a guide. The curb restrains violence and anarchy, while maintaining civil order. The mirror reveals our sinfulness and the need for God's grace. The guide instructs us in the way of righteousness.

The wording about ascending into heaven and descending into the abyss refers to the sheer impossibility of those works, or any works, saving us. The wording about "the word is near you" is a Hebrew idiom meaning "within your grasp." The word of faith is the Gospel message.

Now we come to the heart of the matter. And we need to not take this statement lightly. God's covenant of works was broken in the Garden of Eden with Adam's fall. He was our federal head. You may not have voted for him to represent you; but if we are honest, we would have sinned just as he did. Praise God that the Second Adam, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, was perfect, saving us by the new Covenant of Grace. I read that we are saved by the Third Person of the Trinity who opened our eyes and heart to believe the atoning sacrifice of the Second Person of the Trinity, who expertly executed

the perfect plan of the First Person of the Trinity. Praise God!

R.C. Sproul says we need three things to have a saving faith in Jesus Christ: we need the information, we need to assent to it, and then we need to believe it in our bones. We need a possession of faith, not just a profession of faith. Just saying we assent to the information only qualifies us to be a demon, since they shudder with the knowledge they have. Why do we trust our eternal souls to Jesus? It is because of the resurrection. The resurrection proves that His sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father. When we confess with our mouth, we had better mean it.

There is a U.S. Army enlistment form – DD4. If one goes down to the Armed Services Recruiting office and signs this form, he has joined the Army. He must show up the next day or officers will come to his house! You don't sign this form lightly. Pledging allegiance to Jesus Christ as Lord is the same: the change in our heart, mind, actions, and our thoughts should be immediate, courtesy of the Holy Spirit. Only a personal trust in no one else, a genuine affection for our King Jesus will save you.

Have you heard of a 3-way test to know if you're saved?

1. Do you love Jesus with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?
2. Do you love Jesus like you should?
3. Do you love Jesus at all?

We can only honestly answer in the affirmative for number 3. To love Jesus at

all, as imperfectly as we do, should be proof of our being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Proverbs states: “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

On your table is a one pager that shows the Ordo Salutis, Latin for the Order of Salvation. This is a Reformed list, starting with Election, moving up to Calling, Regeneration, Conversion, Justification and Adoption into God’s family. We currently are being Sanctified; and we are daily Persevering as Saints. In heaven, we will be Glorified. Praise God!

Let’s look quickly at some religions that are “works based” for comparison:

- Judaism has 613 commandments, zeal for God, but rejecting Jesus and His grace, doing good works within a communal framework.
- Islam has 5 pillars of trying to earn favor with Allah, an angry Moon god.
- Hinduism has Karma, works to purify the soul through reincarnation.
- Buddhism has an 8-fold path to eliminate desire and reach Nirvana.
- Mormonism teaches that salvation is a combination of grace and works.

Even among contemporary denominations, you shall find works-based performance: one example being the Roman Catholic Church with a focus on penance, saying the Rosary, repetitive prayers, “saints” for every condition, mortal/venial sins, praying to Mary, transubstantiation, and so forth.

In closing, for, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” carries eternal connotations of worship, adoration and praise of God’s

majesty, holiness and power. But remember that Jesus Himself says “in that day, many will say to me Lord, Lord...and I will say depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you.”

Do you know Him? Do we love Him? Do we serve Him?

We have so very much to be thankful for. Let us take this offer of God’s amazing grace and mercy seriously; and may we represent our King in an honorable manner, now and forever.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAEL (Romans 10:14-21)

Dr. David Lawrence

March 25, 2026

¹⁴ “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. ¹⁸ But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’ ¹⁹ But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry. ²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, ‘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.’”

– Romans 10:14-21

When Paul cited the passage from Joel 2:32 that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, the obvious inference to his Roman audience—and to all who would read this letter—was that ‘everyone’ meant not only Jews, but Gentiles. And, second, there would be at least an implicit inference that the word ‘Lord’ would now refer to the Christ, whom Paul was boldly proclaiming to all of his readers everywhere.

However, Paul never asserts without adequate documentation. He cites the best-known of prophets and Paul's primary source, Isaiah, who wrote in Isaiah 65:1: "I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am, here I am," to a nation (Hebrew for "nation" is 'goyim,' plural, or 'goy,' singular – that is, Gentiles) that was not called by my name. Then in Isaiah 66:18-21, "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands (gentiles) far away, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord, on horses and in chariots and in litters and on mules and on dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the Lord. And some of them (the brothers from the nations) also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the Lord." These two citations from the Prophet Isaiah should leave no doubt that it was the eternal plan of God to, at some time, bring Gentiles into covenant relationship to God as His people, and thus to the salvation offered in His Son. He even indicates that some of the brothers from these nations would serve as priests and Levites, positions heretofore allowed only by strict genealogical descent.

Paul then offered further prophetic documentation and clarification from the quotation in Isaiah 51:5-6, “My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands (Gentiles) hope for me, and for my arm they wait. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner; but my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.” Prophets other than Isaiah had also foretold of the inclusion of the Gentiles and mentioned that only a remnant would remain faithful while the majority of the people of Israel would fall away from God.

At verse 14 and 15, Paul asks a series of four questions that may well have anticipated concerns of the audience. While some commentators think he has set up an imaginary dialog with objectors to the idea of the inclusion of the Gentiles, I believe, based on what we know of the church in Rome, these questions probably anticipated their concern of how such a vast enterprise could occur; namely, the evangelization of the world. Thus, Paul’s questions become a kind of *Ordo Salutis*:

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? How are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’” They then would be pointing out that calling presupposes belief, so, how are they to believe? And as belief presupposes hearing the

gospel, how are they to hear? And as hearing presupposes a preacher, how are they to have a preacher unless they are sent, because a preacher presupposes a mission, or sending. From the Latin word for “to send” we have the word “mission” and “missionary;” and from the Greek από (away) and Στέλλα, (sent) we have “apostle,” and angel, αγγελος – one who has been sent and is thus a representative. Paul clearly establishes to his readers the answer to any questions likely to be posed by Jewish Christians in Rome regarding how we get to this point of calling on the name of the Lord.

However, there remains a problem, and a serious one: not all will obey, for they have not all obeyed the gospel. Again, he documents his comments from Isaiah in Romans 10:16: “For Isaiah says, (Isaiah 53) ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ Note that Isaiah uses the plural ‘us,’ which would include himself – Paul, and all preachers of the gospel. So, the problem in the chain of verses 14 and 15 is unbelief. But even if the majority fall away, from the remaining remnant, like the seven thousand who did not bow the knee to Baal and the remnant returning from Babylon, from such a remnant, God would build a great kingdom.

Israel indeed would continue, but the goyim would be added, and together they would become an everlasting kingdom, as prophesied in II Samuel 7. This kingdom of David, known as the kingdom or church of Jesus Christ, would essentially be the true, spiritual Israel extended in three dimensions: geographically to all the nations, temporally to the end of time and through eternity, and existentially by virtue of the miracle of regeneration as new people in Christ! John in his vision recorded in Revelation “for you were

slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10)

To make the point absolutely clear, Paul asks two more questions, “But I ask, have they not heard?” And he answers: Indeed, they have, for ‘Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.’ In that answer Paul quotes Psalm 19, which actually refers to nature’s declaring the glory of God, a point Paul makes in Romans 1:20. Nature acts in tandem and parallel to the word of God. In his second and final question, Paul continues: (vv. 19-21) “But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, ‘I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.’ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, ‘I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.’ But of Israel he says, ‘All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’ Paul answered his question: Did they not all understand? “They have understood,” of course they did, but they just didn’t believe what they heard!

Paul’s teaching reflects perfectly the glorious 53rd chapter of Isaiah: “Who has believed what he has heard from us? (What have they heard and did not believe?)” And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men;

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

Yet, Israel continues through the proclamation of the gospel. As Matthew Henry observes: “The great mass of the world of nations and of Israel also perish; but the seed and name of Israel, that is, Israel as a people with the same ancestors and an independent name, continues forever, like the new heaven and new earth...” “The former fencing off of Israel from other nations comes to an end, and the qualification for priesthood and Levitical office in the temple of God is no longer merely natural descent, but inward nobility.”

GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN FOR ISRAEL (Romans 11:1-10)

Mr. Louis Joseph

April 8, 2026

¹ “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. ² 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? ³ ‘Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.’ ⁴ But what is God’s reply to him? ‘I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ ⁵ So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace. ⁷ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ 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.’ ⁹ And David says, ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; ¹⁰ let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever.’”

– Romans 11:1-10

It’s 57 A.D., and the Apostle Paul is writing from Corinth in Greece, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He is writing the New Testament’s longest letter: the most structured and detailed description of Christian theology in our Bible. He had not been to Rome to visit this church, but he did visit in 60 A.D., as a prisoner in chains. He had not planted this church, nor had he been involved in its growth. He had no strong personal relationships with

the people there as best as we can tell. He approached this congregation of new Christians, a mix of Jewish and Gentile believers, as an attorney presenting a case in a courtroom. He asks rhetorical questions, wisely anticipating objections and preemptively answering them with overwhelming and creative evidence and arguments. He is passionate in his positions and speaks directly, presenting strong arguments in a very convincing, clear manner. After studying Romans, Paul presents in one sense as “God’s attorney.”

So, the question we explore in Romans 11 tonight is: What about Israel? Has God abandoned His chosen people? Let’s review Israel’s original role in God’s plan, their mandate and planned destiny: to be a blessing to the world, to teach Gentiles, to be a nation of priests, prophets and missionaries and to point all people to the Messiah.

But much of Israel is disloyal to God’s covenant, resulting in His punishment falling on their nation. They are punished because of their unbelief, but His rejection is not permanent, for the Gospel is proclaimed to the Gentiles, the Elect Gentiles are saved, and God uses the inclusion of these Elect Gentiles to provoke Elect Jews (the remnant) to come to salvation. In the providence of God, the Jewish remnant accepts Jesus Christ as Messiah and is saved.

Paul starts his response to the question of whether God has abandoned Israel with a rhetorical question and immediately states that God has not rejected His people. Stating his credentials, as he did in Philippians, Paul presents himself as “Exhibit A” using the courtroom style: if God saved him, he is

arguably the most Jewish person who has ever lived. All of his statements regarding himself: being an Israelite, child of Abraham, and being from the tribe of Benjamin, make the point for him. The encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus makes it clear that God is at work among the Jews to bring some of them, the elect, to salvation.

Paul now moves to the story of Elijah at the height of apostasy in ancient Israel. Read First Kings 19 for a description of this incident. Three interesting things can be noted here: God KEPT a remnant through His power and choice; He did not disclose this information to Elijah (who thought he was the only believer alive), and it was 7,000 in number – an impressive amount of believers that had not followed Baal. Who was Baal? The supreme “god” in Canaan and Phoenicia, mentioned in Judges, 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The word Baal means lord, as he was the most powerful of the pagan gods, and he required human sacrifice. God warned Israel not to follow Baal, but they did anyway. As we know, Satan and his demons masquerade as gods and all idolatry in this case is really devil worship.

Regarding the remnant, the Bible gives many examples of remnants: Noah and his family, Lot and his daughters, Revelation 12, and the Babylonian exiles returning in Jeremiah 32. In this case, the remnant here are Elect Jews chosen by grace and grace alone. Oh grace! God's unmerited favor towards His children. Grace and works are mutually exclusive. Grace is free: it's not works, circumcision, trying to keep the law, merit or anything else.

Next, we see that Israel was hardened. The word used here is the same word used in Romans 9 to describe Pharaoh. That is sobering. I think of Jews today being zealous for God, but trying to curry favor with Him through a works-based system, trying to keep the law, full of tradition and ceremony, all the while being blind to who the Lord Jesus Christ is. They are waiting on a Savior who has already come in the flesh.

In Deuteronomy 29, Moses provides a scathing rebuke of apostasy. One cause of apostasy is stupor. There are at least seven mentions of stupor in the Bible. It describes a mental numbness, an apathy towards God, a deadness and profound spiritual insensitivity.

Unbelief is a major cause of apostasy. Unbelief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is our default setting from birth as humans, thanks to the fall described in Genesis 3, because of the failure of Adam, our Federal head.

Please know that Jesus did not die to make our salvation a possibility, but rather to make it a certainty. Praise His Holy name!

We close this section with a quote from King David found in Psalm 69. This psalm is an imprecatory prayer. We do not talk about imprecatory prayers much in church these days, but this psalm is an example of what David prayed would happen to his enemies, the enemies of God. Imprecatory prayers are very serious matters having eternal ramifications.

In closing, God hardened Israel and grafted the Gentiles in to make the Jews jealous. He will, gracefully, remove their hardening of unbelief and

graft them back into the figurative Olive Tree, His family. His promises are irrevocable; He shows mercy to all who come to Him; His ways are a mystery to us who are limited, created people and God works through mysteries as they are revealed. God deserves all our worship and praise, now and forever more.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 11:11-24)

Dr. Danny Hale

April 15, 2026

¹¹ “So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! ¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. In as much then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”

– Romans 11:11-24

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for coming out this evening. It is always a blessing and a privilege to study the Word of God with you. We are rapidly approaching the conclusion of this rather ambitious study on God's sovereignty, as described by Paul in Romans 9-11, and although I am confident we have all been blessed by the study, some of what Paul says in these chapters has also proven to be quite challenging. The apostle Peter commented on Paul by saying: "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures." I don't know specifically which of Paul's writings Peter found to be particularly difficult, but these three chapters certainly qualify, and their difficulty increases, beginning in chapter 11:11-36. So, we have Peter's word of caution, this evening, as we address our text, Romans 11:11-24.

Paul's words here stretch our minds even beyond what he has said already in chapters 9 through the first part of chapter 11. The enigmatic nature of these verses is due to Paul's abrupt change in his perspective on God's sovereignty. He moves from defending the righteousness of God's sovereign activity to explaining the sovereignty of God's righteous activity. "Righteous sovereignty," Paul's focus up to now, is sovereignty that is righteous, but sovereign righteousness, beginning with our text, is righteousness that is sovereign.

This change in perspective brings Paul to consider the whole of redemptive

history, interpreting it for us, and then turning toward the future, where in vague and metaphoric language he speaks of the future of Israel. Of course, as we have seen thus far in our study, Paul uses the term Israel in multiple ways, making it an ever-present interpretive difficulty. But now, that interpretive difficulty becomes the central focus as we look to that obscure time, near the end of the latter days in which we live.

As I prepared for this lesson, I read verses 11-24 many times, trying to follow Paul's always-linear thought, attempting to understand how this section fits into the logical flow of his overall message, not only chapters 9-11, but throughout the whole letter. I kept coming back to Winston Churchill's famous remark, made after the Second Battle of El Alamein, "this is not the end, not even the beginning of the end, but, perhaps, it is the end of the beginning." When applied to this text, there is a double meaning here: these verses explain in broad terms the purpose of God and describe the conclusion of the beginning, that will lead to a far greater blessing for God's people. Paul looks to the future, to the end of the beginning, and describes what God allows him to see, and his language becomes decidedly vague. He makes sensational statements that leave us asking for more definitive information concerning the end of all things; yet, he does not provide it. That has led to much extrapolation from this text; in fact, when it is set alongside Daniel 9, Matthew 24, and Revelation 19-20, it forms a foundation on which all forms of premillennialism appeal as their Scriptural basis to the point that, for some, they become the lens through which all Scripture is interpreted.

Our text is relatively brief, only 14 verses, with only 26 in the remainder of chapter 11. Perhaps that situation should provide us a note of caution, that, given the brevity of this section, we should be careful not to develop conclusions the text itself will not support. A cautious approach is in order, one in which we take this text as Paul presents it: broadly, generally, contextually, trying to ascertain God's purpose as he reveals it through Paul, but not deriving too much of what is not there: the specifics of how God will accomplish his purpose.

In the first five verses of our text, Paul continues to speak of ethnic Israel, and I would ask you to hear them in the context of the previous lessons in this series and ask yourself the fundamental question: "What is God's sovereign righteousness?"

ROMANS 11:11-15: GOD'S PURPOSE IN ISRAEL'S STUMBLING

Romans 11:11–15 (ESV) ¹¹ "So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. ¹² Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! ¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴ in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world,

what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”

What stands behind God's dealing with ethnic Israel? Up to now it has been his righteous sovereignty, but now it turns to his sovereign righteousness. These three chapters of Paul's letter, 9 through 11, are often characterized as an appendix to Paul's central point. He wrote at length about salvation, and now, prompted by his conclusion in chapter 8, he explains God's sovereignty in salvation: Romans 8:35 (ESV) ³⁵ “Who shall separate [the elect] from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

There is a question associated with God's sovereignty, is there not? Were the Jews not the elect people of God? Were they not graciously granted his presence in the Tabernacle and Temple? Did he not display his glory before them unlike any other nation of their time? How can God reject the people whom he loved and called?

Moses records these words of God: Deuteronomy 7:6, 9 (ESV) ⁶ “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁹ Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations,” and again, Paul

in Romans 8:28 (ESV) “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

There is certainly a “Jewish question” to consider, but it will not do to treat these chapters as though that was their primary intent. They are far deeper than that, because they take us into the very nature of God and his purpose in all creation. This point is easily overlooked, but Paul actually opened his letter with that concept: Romans 1:16–17 (ESV) — ¹⁶“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

In my experience, the righteousness of God is his most widely misunderstood attribute. Most people, intuitively, understand it to mean “God doing the right thing,” but few stop to ask “who determines what right is?” Yet, even in its ambiguity or vagueness, God’s righteousness is the overarching theme that ties this entire letter together, making chapters 9–11 not an appendix but a glorious end to the beginning. His righteousness is actually tied to a verse critical to our text, found in 9:6, where, speaking of “his kinsmen according to the flesh,” the Jewish people, Paul writes: Romans 9:6–7 (ESV) ⁶“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. ⁷For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel.”

Paul introduces the reality of two related “Israels.” Not all ethnic Israelites are part of Israel, a people he ties back to the Abrahamic Promise to show that

God has sovereignly chosen some of his descendants to fulfill that promise, while he rejected others, for instance: Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau.

Paul says specifically, God's word has not failed. His word has not failed, because it is still accomplishing his promise, according to his purpose. God's promises have recipients, but his Word creates what he promises. Paul writes in Romans 4:17, in speaking of the promise, God "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

God speaks and nothing becomes something. His promises stand upon the effectual Word, which is his expressive means of accomplishing his will. Critically then, God's promise was not made "to a group of people" but was made "of a group of people." His Word, according to his promise, i.e., his revealed will, would create a people to be called Israel, for his purpose, and not all Abraham's offspring would be part of Israel. Isaiah 43:6b-7 (ESV) ^{6b} "I will say [...] bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

There is God's righteousness. It is his zeal for his holiness, i.e., his zeal to manifest all his attributes. When his holiness is perceived, it is his glory. Because he is righteous, he displays his holiness; when he expresses his righteousness, he does so sovereignly, and we perceive it as his glory. God is righteous in his sovereignty, but, in the outworking of his eternal decree, he is sovereign in his righteousness. Is it not clear, then, that the concepts of purpose and promise are inextricably bound to his righteousness, his zeal to

display his holiness?

Romans 9:15 (ESV) ¹⁵ “For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” His righteousness is not restricted to a display of his transcendent power. It is his display of his holiness, all of his attributes. Chapter nine did not contrast an all-powerful God with lowly humanity, but rather the holy Creator with his creation. His mercy is at the forefront, as it is magnified by the exercise of his holy justice. “Why does he save anyone?” — because he is righteous. “Why, then, does God not save everyone?” — because he is righteous.

God is righteous, and he seeks to display his holiness... but in doing so, is he just? That is the question of chapter 10. Chapter nine addressed God's holy zeal for his holiness, expressed sovereignly in mercy, justice, and faithfulness. Chapter 10 defends his justice: acting according to the standard He has established for His creatures. He has already noted all the blessings and advantages Israel received.

Romans 9:4–5 (ESV) ⁴ “They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.” The gospel was presented to them, yet, even though “all who call on the name of the Lord would be saved,” they rejected the righteousness of God in Christ, and chose to seek their own. The reason anyone is saved is the mercy of God; the

reason anyone is condemned is their own stubborn rebellion and sinfulness. To some he shows justice, to others he shows mercy, such that their justice is satisfied in Christ to manifest his holiness.

Romans 10 affirms that God's sovereignty does not negate human responsibility, but grounds it. Sovereignty is not fatalism; it is the arena in which moral creatures genuinely respond to God's revealed will. Sovereignty establishes responsibility; it does not eliminate it. In fatalism, human actions are irrelevant, outcomes are impersonal, and history is mechanical. In biblical sovereignty, human actions are meaningful, outcomes are personal, and history is purposeful. Israel made meaningful, moral decisions, and they are responsible for rejecting Christ.

Chapter 11 then asks the question: Does this mean then that God has sovereignly chosen to deny mercy to all Israel, to reject them completely and finally? Paul answers unequivocally No, and Paul gives two reasons for his answer: first, a remnant even now has been chosen by grace and has been, is, and will be, shown mercy. Second, in verse 11 in our text, God's eternal purpose, God's eternal righteousness is being played out in their present, collective rejection: "did Israel stumble in order that they might fall?" Is that the end of God's purpose for Israel? Is it God's purpose that their stumbling be complete and end in their spiritual ruin?

Paul explains that covenantal or ethnic Israel collectively, not individually, are stumbling in spiritual darkness, rejecting Christ, but their stumbling had and continues to have a place in God's plan: it brought blessings to the

Gentiles, collectively. But, do not think that God is finished in his directing creation to its appointed end. God still has plans for ethnic Israel, for their full, collective inclusion will be an even greater blessing for the world. He does not define what fullness means, but we can deduce into what they will be included: Israel! And, their inclusion will bring life from the dead. Much debate surrounds this verse, but scholars I trust see it as a reference to the general resurrection and the blessed life in glory that will follow at the end of the age.

Israel's trespass and rejection triggered a stage of salvation history in which Gentiles are blessed, and Israel's fullness, acceptance, and inclusion will trigger the beginning of the climactic end of all things, leading to the Second Coming and judgement. Upon what is this turn of events based? Israel is holy: set apart for God's purpose, the display of his holiness, driven by his righteousness and seen as his glory.

ROMANS 11:16-24: GOD'S OLIVE TREE

Paul's reasoning, and his use of Israel with a double meaning can be quite confusing, and he realizes that. So, he describes what he has said metaphorically, using the very familiar olive tree: ¹⁶ "If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the

branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.”

Paul’s metaphorical tree has three components: a root system, a central trunk and its branches. The tree is alive; it is growing; and, it is holy, i.e., it is set apart for God’s righteousness. Clearly, the branches represent peoples: Gentile branches which have been grafted onto the tree, on which there are now a few natural branches remaining: ethnic Israelites. Most of the natural branches have been pruned off because they rejected the Messiah, while the Gentiles remain attached by faith in Israel’s Christ. But, Paul offers a sober warning: observe what happened to the natural branches when they displayed a lack of faith. The same pruning could happen to them, just as Israel can be re-grafted if they come to faith.

To make sense of Paul’s metaphor, theologically, we must carefully identify the trunk that provides spiritual life and the root that is the source of

nourishment. The root is found in Genesis 12, with the call of an individual who is neither Israelite nor Gentile. Genesis 12:1–3 (ESV) “Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’”

He was promised land, descendants, and an obscure blessing, one he would transmit to all nations. A few chapters later, in chapter 15, the blessing gains some clarity:

Genesis 15:3–6 (ESV) ³ “And Abram said, ‘Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ ⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” The promise would come through a single Heir, and, in a seemingly tangential remark, Abraham was considered righteous by God through faith. Paul gives us much needed insight into this doctrine in his Galatian letter, when he identifies the blessing as God’s presence, a presence lost in the fall of Genesis 3, and through him Gentiles would be counted righteous as well. Critically, Paul tells us the promise was made to Abraham and his one Offspring: the

coming Christ. It was not made to a multitude, but it was made to bring into existence a multitude in the Offspring.

Later in the chapter, in typical ancient Near Eastern custom, God and Abraham “cut a covenant” to seal the promise. Animals were killed and divided, their halves spread such that an individual could walk between the carcass pieces. Walking among them would, in all other circumstances, seal an oath: “If I am not faithful to my covenant, may this, the covenant curse happen to me.”

This oath-sealing ceremony is not like man's covenants. God reaffirmed the promise of land and many descendants. The physical blessing would logically be a conduit for the spiritual blessing to come. While Abraham was in a deep sleep, a theophany, a smoking pot and torch passed between the animal parts. God took the self-maledictory oath, saying, “Not I, if I am unfaithful, I will bear the covenantal curse,” but rather, “I will bear the curse because you are unfaithful.” The single Heir of promise would bear the covenant curse of death in order to restore God's presence, that is, life to Abraham and the nations.

The covenant ceremony marked the beginning of two concentric, inseparable but distinguishable lines of fulfillment of the promise: an outer, visible, historical, and typological line of people that carries the promise forward through time, and a faithful inner reality, through whom the spiritual promise actually was realized, both converging in the one promised Offspring of Abraham. This is Israel.

This entity is the trunk of Paul's olive tree, those intertwined streams of the Abrahamic promise that spring from the root, the recipients of the promise: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the covenantal structure that carries the promise of redemption. The Mosaic Covenant formalized God's relationship to the transmitters, and within that group would be those of faith: the Israel of promise.

There are then two types of branches: faithful and unfaithful until the Gentiles are grafted in, after Christ fulfilled all the types of the Mosaic Covenant and God's pruning begins. Most Israelites reject the righteousness of God in Christ and seek to establish their own; thus, they are broken off because of unbelief. God does not tolerate being robbed of his glory.

Although Paul speaks of peoples and not individuals, the promise of Abraham is applied individually, as Jesus explained: John 15:1–6 (ESV) ¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”

The concept of abiding is more than continuance in the relationship; it

speaks to its very nature. There are those who are nominally connected to Christ but never have a saving relationship to him through faith, meaning that they have believed in Christ, as did the Jews of John 8, but they have never believed into him. So, while in Romans 11, Paul describes God's overarching plan of redemptive history and how He moves peoples in and out of covenantal privilege to accomplish his purpose. In John 15 Jesus describes how individuals experience, or fail to experience, vital union with Christ by believing into him. The Olive tree is corporate covenantal structure, while the Vine relates to individual spiritual life.

So, what is Paul saying? God's Word has not failed, because true Israel is quite well! It continues to manifest his holiness through his sovereign righteousness. Ethnic Israel was and remains holy, an integral part of God's plan, and there will come a time near the end of the age when his dynamic olive tree reaches near-full maturity and when God will turn his saving mercy toward Israel. Paul is absolutely silent about how this will be done.

I do not know the specifics of how God's plan will develop in the future, but I do know that it will be to his glory and to the blessing of his elect, that they might experience his holiness in its resplendent glory in the New Creation. Until then, I can say with Paul: Romans 11:33–36 (ESV) ³³ “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? ³⁵ Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

LEST YOU BE WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS (Romans 11:25-32)

*Mr. Travis Lamb**

April 22, 2026

²⁵ “Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob’; ²⁷ ‘and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’ ²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all”

– Romans 11:25-32

Paul's letter was written to Christians in Rome which included Jewish Christians as well as Gentiles. There was a thriving church there of both Jews and Gentiles which preceded Paul's letter and his later journey to Rome. Much of the text we have examined in this study was directed to the great truth that the gospel has now been extended beyond Israel to people heretofore regarded as unclean degenerate people who were excluded from the covenants of God. Now comes the good news that the partition wall has been broken down at the cross.

But while the Gentiles have gained admission to the saving presence of Almighty God, Jews have fallen into abject apostasy and are on the verge of losing their beautiful capital city and being dispersed from Israel. The blessings of the Gentiles seem to occur at the expense of God's people, Israel. As Paul closes his doctrinal teaching of this letter, he concludes with a warning to the very people who have received this glorious news of inclusion into the ranks of God's people: "don't get carried away with this glorious blessing to the point of boasting!"

Paul has revealed much of the great mystery of salvation in the Roman letter and certainly in these three significant explanatory chapters. "Yes, it is true that the Jews have become hardened against Christ and the very gospel which brings such joy to the Gentiles, but don't think your wisdom has had anything to do with it!" Paul strongly admonishes them not to be "wise in their own sight," because the wisdom is God's, and they need to look to him rather than themselves. A part of this now-revealed mystery is that the hardening of the Jews is a plan of God from all eternity; and it is temporary, designed to provoke them to jealousy and lead them to repentance. In other words, if they are jealous about their exalted position with Yahweh being shared by the Gentiles, they should know what they can do about it! Let it become the incentive that drives them to the cross! In that way, Paul says, all Israel shall be saved.

The question as to whether Paul here speaks of Israel as a political entity or Israel as the people of God; that is, nationally or ethnically, is debatable.

The context would suggest true spiritual Israel, a reality discussed by the prophets but not fully understood by the nation of Israel in Paul's day. The purpose in Paul's writing these words to the Gentiles is simply to disavow them of any notion that what is happening is the result of their doing – of their wisdom. Thus, Paul quotes relevant passages from Isaiah and the Psalms to document his assertion that “The Deliverer will come from Zion; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins.” (Isaiah 59:20-21, 27:9, Psalms 14:7, 53:6).

Then Paul explained to them in a kind and paternal way that they, the Gentiles, need to understand that God never intended to reject His people, Israel who held such advantageous gifts as the law, the covenants, and the promise of Messiah coming from among them. It is true that the Jews have now become your enemies, but enemies for your sake, while they remain blessed because of God's election of them from the time of Abraham and your forefathers. Why? When God gives gifts, and when God calls people, such are irrevocable!

He admonishes these Gentile Christians not to forget that at one time they were disobedient, horribly disobedient, but now through the disobedience of the Jews, you have received the mercy of God, favor granted to you while you actually deserved God's eternal wrath! Just as you who once deserved wrath of God have now received the mercy of God, so shall it be with God's people, Israel.

Let's face the irrefutable facts: we are all fallen sinners; as Paul clearly stated, "for God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all."

*Summarized by Dr. David Lawrence

THE GLORIOUS CONCLUSION (Romans 11:33-36)

Dr. Dick Speece

April 29, 2026

³³ *“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

³⁴ *‘For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?’*

³⁵ *Or ‘who has given a gift to him
that he might be repaid?’*

³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*

– Romans 11:33-36

These four verses are beyond any question one of the most glorious, wonderful, and exalted statements, which are to be found anywhere in the Bible, according to Martyn Lloyd Jones. Paul has been reviewing the attributes, the works of God, the heart of God and has concluded that Christ is so wonderfully wise; he knows everything; he owns everything. He is the source of everything, vastly deserving of glory for everything. He does not fall into any category mere words can express.

Someone may say to me, “light travels 7,800,000,000,000 miles in a year; and the distance to the center of our galaxy is 26,000 light years away.” (By the way, it is estimated that our little galaxy is only one of between 200 billion to 2 trillion galaxies in the observable universe. Also, it takes light

only 15 minutes to travel to earth from the sun, which is 90,000,000 miles away. And the farthest galaxy we can probe is 13,400,000,000 lightyears away; and that is not the edge of the universe, as it is endless.)

What is even bigger than an infinitely large universe? Only the one who created it is bigger. One might ask, “Would you please comment on that?” I would say a feeble: OH! And this would be my way of saying that everything you just said is beyond the realm of my capacity to comprehend, let alone to explain.

ROMANS 11: 33 “OH, THE DEPTH!”

Paul has been hearing God’s revelation, which seems so incomprehensive to human thinking that it is almost like a foreign language. Paul is about to tell us his response, as he has already been shown the mind-numbing problem which God is creating. Now keep in mind that this is God the Creator, talking to a human; and Paul is keenly aware of this fact. He realizes that this is the holy, holy, holy God—the creator of the universe—revealing his thoughts to him. And God is revealing to him a secret that has never been revealed in all of history. And that secret is that God is going to solve this problem of sinful human beings (the Jews) by first making it much worse than it already is. It seems the operating principle is that no one gets much glory by solving small problems. So, I will make the problem much worse, so I will get much more glory. If you thought the Jews were bad, you haven’t seen anything, until you take a look at how bad these worse-than

Jews (Gentiles) are. We Jews choose to consider them to be dogs, not even in the category of humans, unwashed, filthy, God-forsaken people. They contaminate everything they touch. We won't even go into their houses or shake their hands.

So why would God choose to make a terrible problem even worse, such as waiting for a very sick Lazarus to die? (This is not how we practice modern medicine: "Doctor, my husband is very sick." "OK, wait until he dies, then bring him in, and I will take care of him.")

Romans 11:32: "For God has bound everyone over to disobedience that he may have mercy on them all." Human thinking cannot conceive of the creator of the universe, with the vast size of the universe, wanting to have mercy on all who are such insignificant, minuscule objects. But he does. Jonathan Edwards wrote: "The great end of God's works, which is so variously expressed in scripture, is indeed, but one, and this one end is most properly and comprehensively called the glory of God: the magnification of his glory and name."

And God is saying to Paul, "I am going to open the door for these awful people—the Gentiles—to take away not just their shameful, sinful nature and then say, 'get out of my sight,' but actually to invite them into my presence to share my glory. The price I am willing to pay is unbelievably incomprehensible. I am going to have my own, dear Son killed, so that these wretches may share my life. And I am not going just to replace these few million awful Jews with these awful Gentiles, one for one. I am going to

open the door to billions of these awful people, the Gentiles, and I am not just going to open the door to them, I am going to compel them to come into my house.”

So, Paul has to process now, who is this God and how could he be so good? Someone has said: “Paul is contemplating the preciousness, the glory, and the privilege that God has given him. God is too wise, too precious, too wonderful, too kind, too inclusive, and too beyond the capacity of humans to understand.” Who is this son whose blood is so sufficient that it can cleanse away the sin of billions of people? Paul has to take in this dilemma. How could we be so fortunate as to have such a God, when the logical thing would be for him to send us all to hell forever?

Then, what is the perfection of the solution which God comes up with? It is incomprehensible! What a terrible price that God is required to pay to stoop so low as to raise us so high, so that we can share his glory! Never was a higher price paid for such worthless objects so that they might become his sons and actually live in his house. Understandably, Paul is having trouble comprehending this price, and he indicates it by saying OH: “OH the depths of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God!” Who could ever possibly conceive of such a glorious solution to such an awful problem? (Who has ever known that this is the way God thinks?) Who are these godforsaken, hell-deserving, awful people?

As Pogo would say, “we have met the enemy, and he is us.” That’s us: the people in this room! That is who we were! That’s how God has treated us.

What do we have to say about being the most privileged people on earth? When we get a tiny glimpse of such a God, we're so stunned about that, all we can say is "OH!"

When Job finally got a little glimpse of this incomprehensible God, he stopped talking and started worshiping.

Considering the infinite distance between God and his creation, it is not surprising that none of his works and ways can be understood by his creatures, as John Owen noted.

ROMANS 11: 33 THE RICHES AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

That God has an unlimited supply of wisdom and knowledge should be a huge encouragement to us Christians, because as God has this unlimited supply of wisdom and knowledge, the Christian surely realizes that God knows everything, and he knows unfailingly how to use that wisdom and knowledge, so that the Christian is never a victim of chance. He is always in this environment in which God knows everything and is continually manifesting his wisdom for our benefit. So then, our security is such because of the fact that God knows everything.

I like this hymn: "I know not what may soon betide or how my wants shall be supplied, but Jesus knows and will provide."

Let us take a look at God's wisdom and knowledge and how different it is from man's wisdom and knowledge: 2 Peter 1: 3 to 5: "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature." Romans 10:2: "I can assure you that they are deeply devoted to God; but their devotion is not based on true knowledge."

First of all, let us consider that not all knowledge is true: 1 Timothy 6:20: "Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge." For man, the knowledge does not have to be true; all that is necessary is that he believe it.

Proverbs 4:23: "Be careful how you think: your life is shaped by your thoughts." Our thinking determines our future, and our thinking is based on our knowledge; but our knowledge can be true or false and thus be reflected in our thinking. For years I have wondered "what did God have against knowledge regarding Adam and Eve?" I thought all knowledge was good and neutral. Then I read the Bible. And God says "NO!" Some knowledge is so toxic that it is deadly. Genesis 2:17: "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." There are things men should not know, and the list includes far more than pornography.

Let us take a look at some of the implications of this situation: Proverbs 9:10: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Thus, on the basis of this verse, wisdom is the fear of the Lord, and knowledge of the holy one is understanding. Then, let us take a freshman who enters college, who may have a limited supply of the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. However, on the day he graduates, is it possible—and I am proposing it is even probable—that he may have less wisdom and knowledge (fear of God and understanding of God) as a graduate than he had as a freshman.

Now think about this: people spend considerable money to have someone extract what little wisdom and knowledge they may have had, and sometimes it may actually be the case that the higher the tuition, the better job of extracting their meager wisdom and knowledge. What an awful thing to do, because getting wisdom is the most important thing that they can do, according to Proverbs 4:7. Can you imagine the tragedy: they actually pay someone \$100,000 to \$200,000 to take away their most important possession? The White House Dinner shooter was a Cal Tech graduate who was recently named “*Teacher of the Month*.”

Even non-Christians realize there are some things that are so toxic and corrupting that we should not even expose our minds to them. One philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, complained about the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in what he called “the stupefying influence of Hegel’s sham wisdom.” No one under the age of 40, he thought, should

read Hegel: the danger of intellectual corruption was too great and toxic.

Then, let us take an example of how our thinking changes from being based on true knowledge to thinking based on false knowledge: 2 Corinthians 4:17: “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” That is a fantastic offer! If our financial planner offered the same deal that for every \$2000 you entrust to him for two months, you will get back \$200,000 for the rest of your life. If our financial planner offers us such a plan, we would say that this is a great deal. But God himself offers us a much better deal, something weighty, if we will give up something light, and something eternal if we will bear a little hardship momentarily. However, if we start thinking based on false knowledge and become like Esau and say that we don’t care about our future, we only care about our present comfort, then we become more stupid than Esau, because our future is 100 times more important than our present!

ROMANS 11: 33: UNSEARCHABLE/INSCRUTABLE

There is a continual conflict. God considers believing as the highest goal. Humans often consider understanding as the highest goal. It is not an innocent pastime trying to search out what God calls unsearchable. John Calvin said: “Let us then learn to make no searchings respecting the Lord, except as far as he has revealed himself in the Scriptures; for otherwise we shall enter a labyrinth, from which the retreat is not easy.”

God wants us to believe; to have faith as the highest goal, not to understand everything. What did God consider so great about Abraham, Joseph or Daniel? Was it that they understood what was going on? Or that they believed that God understood what was going on? Humans say, “I will believe if I know.” God’s thought is that you will know if you believe. Why does God allow what He does that is so illogical to humans?

Though Satan, then, is the god of this world, yet God is glorified in all the evil that Satan has introduced. In every part of scripture, Jehovah is seen to be glorified: in his judgment, as well as in his grace, in his wrath, as well as in his mercy, in those who are lost, as well as those who are saved. However disagreeable this may be to the mind of natural men, it is truly reasonable, as the British scientist J.B.S. Haldane argued.

“How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” His judgments: what are they? How can we understand God? Look at what God allows. He has allowed evil. You and I would never have allowed evil? Why has God allowed evil? If God is God, and God is perfect, as you say, well then, why did he ever allow evil to come in; why did he not make this a perfect world and leave it at that? Why did he ever allow it? But he has done so. We cannot understand it. And I am not fool enough to try to understand it. I know that his judgments are unsearchable. He decided to allow it. It is a standing mystery, and we will only know the answer when we get to glory, according to Martyn Lloyd Jones.

Ephesians 1:11 “According to the purpose of Him who works all things in

accordance with the plan of his will...” This truth is all we need to know and understand! Notice that our thinking leads to the exact opposite of God’s thinking; and therefore, we know that the end result of our searching a topic that God said is unsearchable is guaranteed to be wrong. “Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter and He will make it plain.” Do you want to embark on an exercise that is guaranteed to fail? Try to understand something God says is unsearchable. Don’t go there, it is unsearchable.

We look at the cross and it seems everything is going wrong for God, until we understand that our Lord Jesus Christ was accomplishing the purpose and pleasure of God the Father, as Sinclair Ferguson noted. Erasmus was not the only one whose thoughts of God are too human. The story is told of a teacher who noticed a little third grader drawing a picture. So, she asked him what he was drawing. He responded by saying, “I’m drawing a picture of God”. The teacher said to the little boy, “No one knows what God looks like.” The little boy responded, “They will when I get through”. Unfortunately, this is often how adults think. I can make God any way I like. No, He is unsearchable.

ROMANS 11: 34 “FOR WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE
LORD, OR WHO HAS BEEN HIS COUNSELOR?”

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who is the only one who knows what God is thinking – God! And God has written down in the Bible everything

that he wants men to know that is necessary for life and godliness. Thus, every human thought about God that is not based on the Bible is wrong.

And every time we try to understand what God says is unsearchable, we will come to a human conclusion that is wrong, the exact opposite of God's thinking. No human thinking can ever lead to God's thinking. It is a fool's errand to try to understand God or heaven by man's philosophy. Furthermore, some human thinking about unsearchable things can actually result in the corrupting of our human nature; it is toxic and can actually be deadly. The Bible, and the Bible alone, contains all the knowledge we need to know about God.

ISAIAH 55:8-9: "MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS"

"The real trouble with man is his ignorance, his ignorance of God, his ignorance of the being of God. He would not speak about him as he does, were he not so utterly ignorant of him: he would not express his confident, pompous, blasphemous opinions if he knew anything. And he is ignorant of himself in the same way – he is ignorant of his true nature. He is ignorant of his condition, he is ignorant of his need. But if a man has not got the mind of Christ, he knows nothing." (Martyn Lloyd Jones)

John Piper said: "One thing we can never give to God is advice." Why? Because He knows everything. Guess what is the most common thing we give to God? Quite often however, our why questions and complaints are

just a cover for giving him advice we think he has not considered.

ROMANS 11: 35 “OR WHO HAS GIVEN A GIFT
TO HIM THAT HE MIGHT BE REPAID?”

Deuteronomy 10:14: “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.” Thus, God owns the earth and all that is in it, including us. In other words, nothing exists outside of God that is not God’s. He owns it, and, as his possession, he may do with it as he pleases. Why can’t we give anything to God? Because God owns everything; everything comes from Him; nothing can be given to Him. But humans have a tendency to believe that after God gives them a gift, the gift then belongs to them. Then, if God should take away one of the gifts that he has given us, our thinking becomes “Hey, that’s mine. You can’t take it.”

Job seemed to understand profoundly God’s ways when he said, “the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”

ROMANS 11: 36: “FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND
TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN.”

Jonathan Edwards wrote: “The great end of God’s works...the magnification of his glory and name.” Edwards argues that the supreme end of all creation is not the happiness of man, nor the fulfillment of history, but the

exaltation and manifestation of God's own glory. John Calvin observed: "for how unreasonable would it be for creatures, whom he has formed and whom he sustains, to live for any other purpose than for making his glory known? God justly claims for himself absolute supremacy, and that in the condition of mankind and of the whole world nothing is to be sought beyond his own glory." According to John Piper, the story of God is about the glory of God. There is one source for all things! God! There is one purpose/goal for all things: "to him be the glory!" The beginning of everything is God. The end of everything is the glory of God!

*"We limit not the truth of God
To our poor reach of mind,
By notions of our day and sect,
Crude, partial and confined.
Now let a new and better hope
Within our hearts be stirred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
To break forth from His Word."*