

II. Romans 10-11



Romans 10:1-4

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For the Messiah is the goal of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Once again Paul gives expression to his deep love for his fellow Jews (see 9:1-3). On the whole they continue to reject their Messiah, but Paul continues longing and praying for their salvation.

Paul draws on his own experience as a Pharisee to define what he sees as the main reason for the failure of Jews to believe. They are genuinely zealous for God, but they do not see the way in which God has revealed God's righteousness righteousness in Jesus.

Paul insists that all our striving has only one goal, and that is to be with Jesus living in the intimacy of divine communion. Ultimately, this is the purpose of the law itself, for it is through the gift of Jesus' own Spirit that we become righteous, sharing with him the righteousness of God.

This is the way for the Gentiles. It is also the way for the Jews. God has revealed his righteousness through the gift of Jesus and it is through communion with him that there will be '**righteousness for everyone who believes**'. As Paul wrote when first setting down the theme of his letter: '**The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek**' (Romans 1:16).

Romans 10:5-7

Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that 'the person who does these things will live by them' (Leviticus 18:5). But the righteousness that comes from faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (Deuteronomy 30:12) (that is, to bring the Messiah down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (Psalm 107:26) (that is, to bring the Messiah up from the dead).

This passage enlarges upon the statement Paul has just made that Jesus is the goal of the law. It is true, as Leviticus says, that obeying God's will as expressed in the Law would mean life for those who were faithful to the covenant ('righteous') in this way. The problem is that the law does not provide the power to enable a person to be faithful. In spite of the law, people remain under the dominion of sin. Now, however, God promises life through communion with Jesus. This divine love-communion is the right relationship ('righteousness') that God wills everyone to enjoy. The welcoming of this gift is what Paul means by 'faith'.

Romans 10:8-13

What does the Law say? ‘The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart’ (Deuteronomy 30:14) (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame’ (Isaiah 28:16). For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, ‘every one who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved’ (Joel 2:32).

The problem was never with God's word. As the text from Deuteronomy insists, God's word was always near and accessible. This is especially so now that God's word has been expressed in Jesus and proclaimed in the gospel which Paul is commissioned to preach. The Jews did not have to cross the seas, scale the heights or plumb the depths to discover God's will for themselves. This is even more true now that the Torah has reached its goal in Jesus. Paul applies the text from Deuteronomy to the Christian acknowledgment from the heart that 'Jesus is Lord', having been raised to life from the dead by God.

The universality of God's offer of justification and salvation in Christ is emphasised from scripture (Isaiah 28:16 is quoted also in 9:33). God's offer is made to all without distinction (see 3:22): 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved' (compare Acts 2:21). Paul's words here help us appreciate the depth of meaning in his address to the Corinthians: 'To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours' (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Romans 10:14-16

But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' (Isaiah 52:7). But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' (Isaiah 53:1) and contrary people' (Isaiah 65:2).

Paul is disposing of possible excusing causes for the Jews who have not believed in Christ. Of course there were Jews living in various parts of the sprawling Empire who had not yet heard the gospel proclaimed. Paul is not speculating about them. He is speaking of those in Palestine, in Rome and in the various cities visited by Paul himself who have heard. The problem is that, as in the case of those criticised by Isaiah, they have failed to listen; they have failed to obey.

Romans 10:17-20

So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ. But I say: Surely, they have not heard! Indeed they have; for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world' (Psalm 19:4). But I say: Surely, Israel did 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' (Deuteronomy 32:21). 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' (Isaiah 65:1).

Paul quotes Psalm 19:4 to support his claim that Jews who reject the gospel cannot be excused on the grounds that they have not heard it. Nor can they excuse themselves on the grounds that 'the word of Christ' was beyond their comprehension. If the Gentiles could embrace the good news, as indicated in the texts from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, there is no excuse for the Jews.

Romans 10:21

But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people' (Isaiah 65:2).

The final quotation makes the point that in rejecting Jesus the Jews are continuing the disobedience spoken of by Isaiah. Indeed, they are without excuse (see 1:20). It also accents the fact that God's mercy is without end, and that, in spite of their rejection 'all day long I have held out my hands' to them. It is this steadfast love of God that gives grounds for the hope that Paul holds out for his people – a hope that emerges as the central theme of the following chapter.

Romans 11:1-6

¹I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ²God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? ³'Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life' (1 Kings 19:10,14,18). ⁴But what is the divine reply to him? 'I have kept for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal' (1 Kings 19:18). ⁵So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

'The Lord will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage' (Psalm 94:14).

Romans 11:7-10

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking? The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, ‘God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day’ (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 29:10). And David says, ‘Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them; let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and keep their backs continually bent’ (Psalm 69:22-23).

In verse seven, he looks beyond the sphere of human choice to that of divine providence and design. Without God’s presence and action there would be no hope. By taking us to this higher plane, Paul is preparing us for what God, who has not rejected his people, will do. It is in God’s action that we find our source of hope.

Romans 11:11-15

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!

If the rejection of the gospel by Israel has, in the providence of God, meant the reconciling of the Gentile world to God (see 2 Corinthians 5:19), their acceptance of it will be for Israel like a coming from death to a whole new life.

Romans 11:16-18

If the part of the dough offered as first fruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; and if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.

Paul seems to be referring to the faithful remnant of Israel, whose faith in Christ affects all Israel. Because the first portion of the communion sacrifice was set aside for the Lord, this made the whole meal something holy, fitting to be consumed by God's holy people. So, those Jews who have welcomed the gospel and joined themselves to the people of the new covenant hold out a promise of communion for all.

Romans 11:19-24

You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in'. That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, perhaps he will not spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been 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 natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Romans 11:25-32

²⁵So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, 'Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob. ²⁷And this will be my covenant with them, when I take away their sins' (Isaiah 59:20-21; 27:9). ²⁸As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

History can be examined on the human plane where it is a story of reception or rejection of grace. Here, in a truly magnificent conclusion to these three chapters, Paul transcends the human plane and all considerations of human guilt, to reveal the divine plan. He refers to what he is about to say as a ‘**mystery**’ (μυστήριον), that is to say, a truth that lies beyond human comprehension, but which has been revealed in Christ. It is a revelation of God’s absolute fidelity: ‘**For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable**’. It is a revelation of God’s mercy: ‘that he may be merciful to all’.

At the time of Paul’s writing, the Jews, on the whole, are rejecting the gospel, and so ‘**as regards the gospel they are enemies of God**’. This rejection, however, in the providence of God, has provided an opportunity for the Gentiles to embrace the gospel in a way that would not have been possible had the Jews accepted it. Their rejection, Paul reminds the Gentile Christians, is ‘for your sake’.

As regards the election', that is to say, from the point of view of God's choice of Israel, 'they are beloved'. 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable'. Paul is confident that, once the gospel has achieved its goal among the Gentiles, his people will embrace it, 'and so all Israel will be saved'. Everyone, Jew and Gentile, has been disobedient. Paul looks at this disobedience from the higher plane of divine providence and design, and he is confident that God will use even this disobedience to show his mercy.

This is the climax of Paul's thesis concerning the 'righteousness of God' that has been 'revealed' (see 1:17). It is the climax of his explanation of the nature of the gospel which he has been commissioned to preach: the gospel which is 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek' (1:16).

Romans 11:33-36

o 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 counsellor?’ (Isaiah 40:13). ‘Or who has given a gift to him to receive a gift in return?’ (Job 41:3) For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Paul concludes with a hymn of praise to God, which demonstrates the absolute monotheism which is at the base of his profound conviction concerning the universality of the scope of the gospel.

All things are ‘**from him**’. The whole of creation, and every human being, Jew or Gentile, has its source in the God of mercy who has revealed his righteousness in Jesus.

All things are ‘**to him**’. All have their goal in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus the Messiah.

All things are ‘**through him**’. All things are brought into being, sustained in being, graced, drawn to repentance and forgiven, justified and saved by the one God who, through all the vagaries of human infidelity, wills to ‘have mercy on all’ (II:32).

Without the revelation of the mystery (II:25) - a revelation made on the cross - we could never have known God’s wonderful and totally unmerited gift. ‘**To him be glory forever. Amen**’.