

Romans: The Hardening of Israel

Romans 11:6-10

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 11. As we continue with Paul in this great passage, you'll remember Paul has opened Romans 11 with a big question, and that question is, "Has God rejected Israel?" To put it more pointedly, has God failed in His promises to Israel? We've already seen him in verses 1 through 5 give an emphatic "No" in response to that. God has not rejected His people, He has not failed in His promise, and He presents exhibit "A" and exhibit "B" in Romans 11 verses 1 through 5. He says, first of all look at me, Paul. He's a Jewish Christian, he's the apostle to the Gentiles, he's of the tribe of Benjamin, he's a Hebrew of Hebrews, and yet he's a believer in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and so he says, "Of course God hasn't rejected His people, look at me. I'm one of His ancient people and I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and I have know the fulfillment of the promises of God to Abraham in my own life through Jesus Christ." Then he says, furthermore there is a remnant today just like there was in the old days in Israel. He says, look around you Roman Christians, there are Jewish Christians in the congregation, all over the world and every part of the Christian world. There are those from God's ancient people who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. So, no God has a remnant for Himself, He's not forgotten His promises, He's not forgotten His people.

Paul is going to continue on that argument right here in Romans 11 verses 6 through 10. Let me show you what he does. In verse 6 he pauses for a moment and he says, now I just told you about that remnant that God had saved by grace. I want to make it clear that that remnant is saved by grace and not by their works. That's what he says in verse 6.

Then in verse 7 he emphasizes again that the source of our salvation is in the grace of God. How is it that that remnant came to saving faith in God? Through the grace of God. He chose them and they obtained it. Then in verse 7, the second part of the verse, all the way down to verse 10, Paul piles up four Scripture passages in two Old Testament quotations to prove his case, and in the course of it he makes it clear that God's grace makes distinctions. With that as a word of introduction let's hear God's word in Romans 11 beginning in verse 6.

But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? That which Israel is seeking for, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT AND EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." And David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE AND A TRAP, AND A STUMBLING BLOCK AND A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, AND BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

Amen. This is God's word may He as His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord, I pray that you would blind not our eyes, but that You would open them, that we might see wonderful truth in Your word. Above all, grant that we would see Christ and His gospel, and embrace it and Him. In Jesus' name. Amen.

You're talking to a person who is a member of a church; a local congregation that believes that salvation is by God's grace, but also by our works. What do you say to them? Paul tells you here. You're struggling with your assurance because you look at your faith and it's weak, and you question the fullness and the sincerity and the comprehension of your repentance, and you wonder sometimes about your Christian walk. How do you respond? Paul tells you here. You're talking with someone who believes that God is love and because God is love believes that He will save everyone, or at least He'll give everyone a chance, even apart from Christ and apart from the gospel. How do you reply? Paul tells you here.

It's an amazing thing isn't it, that Paul is dealing with a big picture question. He is answering one of the hard questions of God's purposes in the history of redemption. He's asking, how do you deal with Israel? How do you deal with the reality that Israel has rejected Christ? And what do you say about God's promises to Israel in light of Israel's rejections of the Messiah?

But even while he's answering that big picture question, he's answering a whole host of smaller practical issues that face every single one of us in the Christian life. I'd like you to see two or three things this morning, which Paul says by way of application, which are very practical and indeed essential for us to understand. The first thing I want you to see is that Paul makes it clear that grace and work don't mix in salvation. Secondly, Paul makes it clear that God's grace is the soul source of salvation for believers. Thirdly, he makes it clear that the rejection of the gospel comes not from ignorance, not from the lack of opportunity, but the rejection of the gospel comes from a hardened heart and leads to further hardening. Those three things I'd like us to discover today.

I. We must emphatically distinguish and refuse to intermingle our works and God's grace in justification.

Let's begin in verse 6. Paul has just said that God has chosen, even this day, a remnant of His ancient people for and He emphasizes that He's done this by grace. Look at verse 5 if you want to refresh your memory. "In the same way there has also come to be present, to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice." He emphasizes that if there are believing Jewish Christians in his own day and in ours, it's because of the grace of God. And lest we missed that point, he pauses in verse 6 to drive it home one more time. He says, "but if it is by grace it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." In other words, he is saying, look, when you look out there in Israel and you see a believing remnant, and you see an unbelieving multitude, don't think that the difference between the believing remnant and the unbelieving multitude is to be found in the innate goodness of the believing remnant. Don't believe that some were inherently better than others. Don't believe that some have the ability to exercise faith and others didn't. Don't find the source of the distinction in themselves. Find it in the grace of God, because that is the only source of salvation. Paul is telling us here that we must emphatically distinguish God's grace from our works, and we must refuse to intermingle God's grace and our works with regard to our salvation because they do not mix. Paul is saying that God's grace to us is not contingent upon our works.

We'll see in a few moments that in fact, our works flow from God's grace, but God's grace is not caused by something that we do. Salvation is by grace alone and it is not caused by something in us or something that we do. When we stress salvation by grace alone we are not just engaging in a quibbling theological discussion, as far as Paul is concerned. Paul says we are right at the heart of the truth of the Christian faith when we assert that works and grace can not be mixed in the matter of our right standing before God, in the matter of our justification, in the matter of our salvation.

Why? Well, for a couple of reasons, first of all, to mix works and grace is to misunderstand the necessity of God's divine favor. If we include works as a source of our salvation, if we include works as a means of our salvation, if we include works, even as a part of our salvation, we are robbing God of His glory and shifting the emphasis from what God has done to what we have done, and we're suggesting that God loves us because we first loved Him, that God has shown us grace because we first reached out to Him, and of course that is the exact opposite message of the Scriptures. God, while we were yet ungodly sent His son to die, to draw us in. We love Him, John says, because He first loved us. So, mixing works and grace in salvation undercuts this consistent Biblical emphasis on the grace of God. We are going to see it tonight when we look at Exodus chapter 14 and 15, how God emphasizes that He alone saves His people.

Then in the second instance, salvation by grace can not be met, mixed with works because of the perfection of Christ's work. We are saved by God's grace

and Jesus' work in life and in death. For us to say that we need to mix our works in order to be saved is actually to suggest that Jesus' work was not good enough, that Jesus' work was insufficient, that Jesus' work lacked perfection, and of course that is something highly offensive to say to the heavenly Father. Do you remember the Father's words about the Lord Jesus? "This is My son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him." And when we suggest that our works need to be added to Jesus' work in order to be right before God, we are denigrating the work of Jesus Christ, and so we must emphatically refuse to mix grace and works in salvation.

II. When we contemplate our salvation we must ascribe its source and means to God alone.

Secondly, if you look at the first part of verse 7, Paul emphasizes this, salvation flows from the choice of God. We must remember that salvation finds its source and its means in God alone. God's grace is the soul source of the salvation of believers. Here you might have expected Paul to emphasize that the difference between unbelieving Israel and believing Israel, the difference between Jewish Christians and those Jews who have rejected Christ was to be found in their faith. He had made something of that distinction in Romans chapter 10, but that's not what he says. Notice what he says in verse 7. "What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it." Paul is locating the source of the salvation of believing Israel in the choice of God.

We often talk about making a decision, but as far as Paul is concerned, that decision in which we must indeed make is itself a result of a prior decision God has made. It is the divine decision that is most important, and if we do not understand that we will lack assurance.

As a young boy and into my early teenage years I greatly struggled with assurance of salvation, and the reason was I was a closet Arminian. I had been reared in a Presbyterian Church, I had been taught the *Shorter Catechism*, I had forgotten it once and started memorizing it again, and yet I didn't realize the grace of God in salvation. I thought that my faith and my repentance caused the grace of God to be effective for me. I thought that my grace and my repentance conditioned God's grace, and so consequently when I looked at my faith, and I looked at my repentance, and I saw their imperfections I lacked assurance. I struggled. I struggled so mightily that I decided the safest thing to do would be to accept Christ many times, just to make sure I covered my bases and did it right. So, sometimes I would repent first and then have faith, and then other times I would have faith first and then repent because I thought that the quality of my faith and the quality of my repentance conditioned and assured God's grace. Then suddenly in a youth conference I heard a minister preaching on Ephesians 1. It dawned on me for the first time that my faith and my repentance did not cause God's grace, or secure God's grace for me, but my very desire to have

faith and to repent was the result of God's prior grace towards me. Suddenly I realized that it is God's grace that is productive of every impulse to relationship with Him. It is not my impulse of faith that coaxes Him into a relationship with me, but it is His prior grace for me, which produces in me, the slightest desire to trust in Him or to repent of my sins.

Isn't it interesting how the Bible's application works? Paul is in the middle of a discussion which may seem remote and theoretical about why Israel rejected God, and whether God's promises had failed, and in the middle of that discussion, which might sound theoretical, or remote, or impractical to you, in the middle of that discussion he has just taught you a doctrine of enormous practical importance for your Christian life. He has taught you that God's sovereign grace is the source of your salvation, and if you understand that correctly you will not lack assurance. So, even in the midst of this great, this tremendous question he has practical truths for you and me to learn. So in verse 7 he makes it clear that God's grace is the soul source of our salvation.

III. When we contemplate God's sovereignty in the hardening of Israel, we must remember the He is just.

Then he goes on at the end of that verse and all the way down through verse 10 to make one more point, and that is that the rejection of the gospel reflects a hardened heart and leads to a further hardening of heart. Paul is going to give us scriptural proof in that the rest of Israel refused to believe, because of their hardness of heart, and as a result they were hardened further in unbelief. Paul's point of course is not to excuse them for not believing. His point is to bring out the seriousness of their plight and the fact that God is at work in their punishment.

You know, there are all sorts of people today, and you hear them talking all the time saying, "Jesus is not necessary for salvation, the gospel is not necessary for salvation." But Paul is saying right here that the very rejection of Christ in the gospel, any attempt to go around Christ or the gospel in the fellowship with God itself reflects a hardened heart. You see, the people who do that may seem nice, and moral and upstanding, and possess numerous qualities that we admire, but their very rejection of the gospel and of the Lord Jesus Christ is a reflection of a hardened heart. The frightening thing is, it will inevitably lead to further hardening. Those who refuse the gospel steel themselves more and more to the overtures of God's grace.

My friends, that's why it's so important for us as Christians not to stand by and say, "Look, you don't have to embrace Christ, you don't have to embrace the gospel, all roads lead up the mountain." My friends when we do that we are assisting in the hardening of a sinner's heart. A sinner's heart doesn't need any help. You yourself know that. It took divine grace to open your eyes. Don't

contribute to the darkening of a sinner's heart by giving him or her hope in nothing. Paul says, a person's response to the gospel, a person's response to Christ is a gauge of the heart, and the frightening thing is, when we are disobedient God hardens the heart further. Isn't that the message of Pharaoh? Pharaoh was a man with a hard heart, he was also a man whose heart had been hardened by God, and as he hardened his own heart, God hardened his heart as well. Even though Pharaoh was on a course of action that was going to lead him to destruction that became increasingly apparent to everyone around him, precisely because of the hardness of his heart, he continued down that path.

My friends, Paul is saying, you see, that hardness of heart is reflective of a rejection of the overtures of God's grace and in fact the punishment for the rejection of the overtures of God's grace. God's grace makes distinctions. God's grace is sovereign, and we should never trifle with the invitations of the gospel. They are sovereign and free, and we can never put God off. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. We don't know what the rest of this day will bring. So, Paul's overture to us is this, embrace Christ and embrace the gospel. He is the only hope of salvation. Then having embraced Him, realize the only reason you embraced Him in the first place is because of the initiative of His grace. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God we bow before You and we thank You for the grace that has been shown to us in Jesus Christ. Grant that we would acknowledge Your sovereignty in it, the freeness of Your grace and take comfort in assurance. In Jesus name. Amen.

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