

December 8

Romans 9-11

Hi, my name is Marty Barnhart and I appreciate you joining me today for our accelerator.

Today you read Romans 9-11. The most important item that I want you to take from chapters 9-11 is that it's not easy to explain the gospel to someone who rejects it. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (Romans 1.16) and he believes God had a purpose and plan for Israel.

For us today, who read the letter, chapters 9-11 seem like a big parenthesis in the argument of the book. It would be quite easy to move from the triumphant conclusion of chapter 8, directly to the application of chapters 12-16. But Paul can't do that. In spite of the fact that God had called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he was still a Jew.

He had to grapple with two difficulties. First, whether or not, because of their rejection of Christ, God was going to just write them off his own nation whom he loves.

The second difficulty is the real question of why, if Jesus was the Messiah, and why, if this radical concept of justification by faith really was a logical extension of Old Testament Judaism -- why, if all this is true, -- didn't the Jews accept it, recognize it and embrace it? IS there any answer to this dilemma? This is the "Jewish question" of Romans 9-11.

Paul's answer in short was, as you read, that this is all part of the sovereign plan of God who chooses to set His love upon some -- objects of His mercy -- but who has ordained the blindness and stupor of the larger part of Abraham's offspring, so that a new branch -- the Gentiles -- can be grafted into the olive tree, the tree of blessing. "When that purpose has been achieved," Paul says, "All Israel will be saved." He appears to mean (as he has right through the passage) physical Israel -- the Jewish nation.

What we have here is a brief glimpse into the future. At the end of the age -- as the time of the Gentiles draws to a close -- I believe, on the basis of this passage, that we can expect to see a vast spiritual harvest among Jewish people -- the scales falling from the eyes -- as God's Old Testament chosen people will at some point recognize "en masse" Christ their Messiah.

Now that we have covered the "big picture" of what is God doing with Israel, it behooves us to at least briefly consider the specific part of Paul's explanation that raises the issue of ELECTION. What we saw illustrated in our study of the book of Genesis is quite unambiguously proclaimed in Romans chapter 9.

"For reasons and purposes that are good and sufficient to Him," Paul says, "God chooses to set His love not only upon nations like Israel but upon specific individuals." If you are a Christian today, the ultimate cause of that reality is that God chose you. He set His love upon you and drew you to Himself. Now, before we go one step further with this, remember that you also read chapter 10 today, which makes it very clear that just as it is true that no one is saved who has not been elected or called by God, it is equally true that no one is saved without calling on the name of the Lord and putting their faith and trust in Christ. God calls and we respond. That is the pattern. No one responds unless He calls, no one is saved who does not personally respond. If we could simply leave it there we could probably not experience any great discomfort. But Paul doesn't leave it there. He forces us to examine the other side of the same truth, which is that just as God calls some to salvation, He also apparently passes over others.

Every objection -- starting with "that's not fair" -- that I can think of, is raised here -- and dealt with -- not always very neatly or gently. Paul reminds me in no uncertain terms that I am part of the realm of created things and that God as Creator has the absolute right to deal with all of creation exactly as He wills. Knowing that this passage will certainly have upset some of you, I want to just make a few comments to which I hope you will pay careful attention.

1) Truth is not amenable to my approval. That is, what I like or don't like has very little to do with what is true. I can't change the truth by refusing my approval of it. It will still be true.

2) Nothing in Romans 9 changes the truths that we discovered in chapters 1-3, which are that all people make choices and are responsible before God for the choices they have made. God's judgment of the unredeemed will always be consistent with choices they themselves have made. I do not fully understand (no one does) how God's sovereignty and man's responsibility come together, but the Bible clearly teaches both, so I will hold to both.)

3) Since chapter 10 clearly teaches that unless people hear the gospel they can't respond to it, we like Paul have an obligation to all men, both Jews and Greeks alike, to tell them all. God does elect men and women to salvation, but we are the instruments through whom that wonderful message of salvation comes to them.

4) The fact that from first to last salvation is all of grace -- the fact that before I could choose Christ, God first chose me -- is very humbling to me and very destructive of human pride. The New Testament says I believe because He chose me -- because He gave me the "gift" of faith -- because He called me. It is all of grace so that "no one can boast." (Eph. 2.8-9)

5) Finally, if you are still greatly troubled by all of this -- still angry at God and believing Him to be unjust and unfair -- may I suggest one more thing -- pray. Tell Him how you feel -- express your confusion -- and then leave it with Him. His ways are higher than ours -- let Him teach you His ways in His time. If this doctrine

disturbs you greatly, then it is probably a signal that you are not ready to handle it yet. Keep your focus on reading, learning, and loving Christ. We will all understand God's ways as we seek His insights. Blessings on you as you continue on to chapters 12-16, they will be a wonderful conclusion.